Martin Luther (1483–1546) stands as one of the giant figures in history. His activities, writings, and legacy have had a huge effect on the Western world. This *Cambridge Companion* provides an accessible introduction to Martin Luther for students of theology and history and for others interested in the life, work, and thought of the first great Protestant reformer. The book contains eighteen chapters by an international array of major Luther scholars. Historians and theologians join here to present a full picture of Luther’s contexts, the major themes in his writings, and the ways in which his ideas spread and have continuing importance today. Each chapter serves as a guide to its topic and provides further reading for additional study. The Companion will assist those with little or no background in Luther studies, while teachers and Luther specialists will find this accessible volume an invaluable aid to their work.

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Dedicated to

Richard E. Brown
Respected friend and valued colleague
With gratitude
Contents

Notes on contributors  page xi  
Preface  xv  
Chronology  xvii  
List of abbreviations  xviii  

Part I  Luther’s life and context  
1 Luther’s life  3  
ALBRECHT BEUTEL  
TRANSLATED BY KATHARINA GUSTAVS  
2 Luther’s Wittenberg  20  
HELMAR JUNGHANS  
TRANSLATED BY KATHARINA GUSTAVS  

Part II  Luther’s work  
3 Luther’s writings  39  
TIMOTHY F. LULL  
4 Luther as Bible translator  62  
ERIC W. GRITSCH  
5 Luther as an interpreter of Holy Scripture  73  
OSWALD BAYER  
TRANSLATED BY MARK MATTES  
6 Luther’s theology  86  
MARKUS WRIEDE  
TRANSLATED BY KATHARINA GUSTAVS  
7 Luther’s moral theology  120  
BERND WANNENWETSCH  
8 Luther as preacher of the Word of God  136  
FRED W. MEUSER  
9 Luther’s spiritual journey  149  
JANE E. STROHL
x Contents

10 Luther’s struggle with social-ethical issues 165
   CARTER LINDBERG

11 Luther’s political encounters 179
   DAVID M. WHITFORD

12 Luther’s polemical controversies 192
   MARK U. EDWARDS, JR.

Part III After Luther

13 Luther’s function in an age of confessionalization 209
   ROBERT KOLB

14 The legacy of Martin Luther 227
   HANS J. HILLERBRAND

15 Approaching Luther 240
   JAMES ARNE NESTINGEN

Part IV Luther today

16 Luther and modern church history 259
   JAMES M. KITTELSON

17 Luther’s contemporary theological significance 272
   ROBERT W. JENSON

18 Luther in the worldwide church today 289
   GÜNTHER GASSMANN

Select bibliography 304
Index 313
Notes on contributors

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The name Martin Luther evokes many reactions. Known primarily as the initiator of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century, Luther through the centuries has had his advocates and detractors. But his influence has been immense. The essays that follow display the far-reaching importance of his words and deeds as well as the significance of Luther’s life and thought – an impact that continues today.

This *Companion* is written to introduce the life and work of Martin Luther (1483–1546). All the writers are experts on the aspects of Luther on which they write. Scholars will mine much from this treasury but beginning students even more.

The two opening essays in the collection set Luther’s life and context in terms of the main events he experienced and the city where he spent most of his time. These elements are important for becoming acquainted with Luther’s struggles, triumphs, joys, and sorrows.

Luther’s wide-ranging work is considered in Part II of this book. Here we encounter the vastness of his writings and work in translating and interpreting Holy Scripture. We consider the main themes in his developing theology, a theology that took shape in light of the issues with which Luther dealt. Luther’s views on theological topics had their counterparts in his moral theology or ethics. He spent his life as a professor and preacher who proclaimed the Word of God, undergirded by the spiritual resources of his understandings of Scripture and his own religious experience. Luther’s struggle with social-ethical issues emerged as he encountered the concerns of his culture and the church. His responses took shape in the political contexts of his setting in Germany. In establishing the reform movement that became associated with Luther’s name, he found himself engaged in numerous polemical controversies in which he sought to set forth his understanding of the Word and will of God in light of opponents who were equally vehement.

Those who followed Luther and built on his views appropriated his work in various ways. The essays in Part III describe ways in which Luther’s image and insights were developed by his followers and the legacy that his
person, theology, and ecclesiastical influence have engendered. Luther has been variously interpreted and approaches to the magisterial reformer have changed and developed in the centuries since his death.

The final part of this Companion presents assessments of Martin Luther’s relation to modern church history, his contemporary theological significance, and his importance in the worldwide church today. These topics point to Luther’s enduring legacy and his towering importance for Christian life and thought.

Among the countless comments made about Luther during his life and in the centuries since, one of the most affecting was made by John Calvin (1509–1564). Calvin, along with Luther, was one of the most eminent of the Protestant reformers. Though they never met, Calvin summed up his understanding of Luther in a single sentence: “We regard him as a remarkable apostle of Christ, through whose work and ministry, most of all, the purity of the Gospel has been restored in our time.”1

Thanks are due to those who provided key help in bringing this volume to completion. Kevin Taylor of Cambridge University Press has aided this venture from the very start with excellent suggestions and continuing support and advice. I value our friendship. Kevin has been ably assisted by Gillian Dadd who has splendidly contributed her competence and geniality to this project as well. In addition, I would like to thank all the contributors who here provide their expertise to introduce us to the multi-faceted Luther. Katharina Gustavs and Mark Mattes have rendered superb English translations, both stepping into the breach to provide their skills for this work. As always, I thank my wonderful family, LindaJo, Stephen, and Karl McKim, for constant care and support. Their love means more to me than I can express.

This volume is dedicated with gratitude to Richard E. Brown, my esteemed former colleague and firm friend. Richard has always supported my scholarship and has been unfailingly kind in numerous ways. I deeply respect who he is and truly appreciate all he has done for me.

Note

Chronology of Martin Luther

1483 Born November 10, in Eisleben, Germany
1501 Enters University of Erfurt to study liberal arts
1502 Receives Baccalaureate degree
1505 Receives Master’s degree and makes decision to enter monastery
1506 Ordination and monastic vows as Augustinian monk
1509 Receives Bachelor of Theology degree
1511 Transfer to Wittenberg
1512 Receives Doctor of Theology degree in Wittenberg
1513 Begins first set of lectures on the Psalms
1515 Lectures on Romans
1516 Lectures on Galatians
1517 Posting of Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg
1518 Heidelberg Disputation and initial trial at Rome
1519 Leipzig Debate with Johannes Eck
1520 Publishes The Babylonian Captivity of the Church and burns Papal Bull of excommunication
1521 Diet of Worms and seclusion at Wartburg
1522 Returns to Wittenberg and New Testament translation in German appears
1524 Writings on the Lord’s Supper against Karlstadt
1525 Writes against Peasants; publishes Bondage of the Will
1525 Marries Katharina von Bora
1529 Small Catechism published; attends Marburg Colloquy
1530 Presentation of the Augsburg Confession
1534 Publication of the complete German Bible
1535 Lectures on Genesis begin and continue to 1545
1536 Formulates the Schmalkald Articles
1537 Serious illness
1538 Writes On the Councils and the Church
1543 Publishes On the Jews and Their Lies
1546 Dies at Eisleben on February 18; buried in the Castle Church in Wittenberg
Abbreviations


LCC  Library of Christian Classics


ZThK  Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche