

PREFACE

Nobody studies Luther alone, especially if they are Lutherans like myself. The footnotes in this book just begin to hint at my numerous intellectual debts in understanding the first Reformer. Add to that the hundreds, no thousands of conversations I have had about this Reformation Father for over 50 years with Luther scholars from across the globe, Lutheran theologians of most every stripe, and even colleagues in Lutheran ministry who love his heritage. This book is a “thank-you” for all I’ve learned. One of its main messages is that these colleagues are pretty much correct. Martin Luther really taught what almost all of them said he did. His thought is so rich that most interpretations of the Reformer are correct, at least in part about him. Most everybody is right about Luther—in part—because the other interpreters are right about him too.

What Philip Schaff wrote over a century ago about Augustine (Luther’s great influence) applies to the Reformer: “In great men, and only great men, great opposites and apparently antagonistic truths live together. Small minds cannot hold them.”¹

What Schaff said about Augustine as being such a person can apply to Luther, that he may still hold a mediating place between the great traditions of Christendom, the prospect of a future reconciliation in a higher (more pastorally sensitive) unity.² Letting Luther teach us about the diversity in his thought and its pastoral implications, an invitation to learn more about him from most of Luther’s interpreters, is in large part what this book is about.

My song of praise to my fellow-students of Luther in this Preface would be woefully incomplete if I failed to mention the one who has been with me most every year, through most every new insight I've had about the Reformer in all the years I have known him. I refer Betsey, the one I live with, who has been with me in all my journeys—the ones with Luther and all the other journeys of life as well. As we talked about this book we considered some other book dedications I want to write sometime, like to a couple of beloved newer spouses of two of our children not to mention some grandchildren we love a whole lot. They deserve some books too someday, if I don't run out of gas. But there was no way I was going to let a book on the theologian I so dearly love, the man whose writings have helped make my life so sweet, without this book being for the one who has been with me in these journeys, through all the ups and downs of a life in ministry, and who when talking about them together has made what Luther taught me even better and a lot more fun. Now you know why this book is for Betsey, even though I've had a lot of other helpers.

Mark Ellingsen

NOTES

1. Philip Schaff, "Prologomena: St. Augustine's Life and Work," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.1 (1886; reprint ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Martin Luther's Legacy

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