



# Luther: Man Between God and the Devil

*Heiko A. Oberman , Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Translation)*

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**Luther: Man Between God and the Devil** Heiko A. Oberman , Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Translation)

Written by one of the world's greatest authorities on Martin Luther, this is the definitive biography of the central figure of the Protestant Reformation.

“A brilliant account of Luther’s evolution as a man, a thinker, and a Christian ... Every person interested in Christianity should put this on his or her reading list.”—Lawrence Cunningham, *Commonweal*

“This is *the* biography of Luther for our time by the world’s foremost authority.”—Steven Ozment, Harvard University

“If the world is to gain from Luther it must turn to the real Luther—furious, violent, foul-mouthed, passionately concerned. Him it will find in Oberman’s book, a labour of love.”—G. R. Elton, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*

## Luther: Man Between God and the Devil Details

Date : Published March 11th 2006 by Yale University Press (first published 1982)

ISBN : 9780300103137

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Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Religion, Church, Church History, Nonfiction, Theology, Christian

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# From Reader Review **Luther: Man Between God and the Devil** for online ebook

## **Jennifer Bell** says

I had to read this for uni and do have an interest in Luther. Whilst it was interesting, Oberman jumped around in his life instead of going through each event chronologically. I did and don't like this as I already know about the main points in his life, it was nice to learn more in depth about his marriage and background. However jumping to different points did confuse me slightly. I wouldn't have picked this up out of choice but for a uni book it was certainly readable without any pain.

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## **Tom** says

I cannot praise this book highly enough. Oberman knows Luther through and through and presents a marvelous biography of the Reformer. One of my theology professors often said with a twinkle in his eye - "beg, borrow or steal my books." Well by all means beg, borrow or buy this book. You will not be disappointed. Baiton's "Here I Stand" was great, this is excellent.

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## **Stan Lanier** says

If one goes into the ocean, one experiences a vast body of water as opposed to an even more vast collection of individual droplets. On this second reading of Oberman's biography of Martin Luther, I was, at first, dumbfounded to formulate a conceptual framework to mediate my experience of reading this book. I was overwhelmed by all the "droplets" comprising what must have been Professor Oberman's knowledge of Martin Luther and his life and times. Only when I turned to one of the goals of hermeneutics, to render what a text could have meant for its own time and contemporaries, could I begin to swim in the "vast body of water" that is the knowledge Professor Oberman had of Luther. Oberman presents as the key to understanding Luther the concept of a life lived between the theological entities God and Devil. Oberman places Luther in his time and interprets his life, personality, and historical actions by way of the tension of living between the framework of God and the Devil.

Is there another scholar, accessible in English, who knew as much about the life and times of Martin Luther? For those who suffer from the lack of primary language source material, any serious encounter or accounting of Luther, in my estimation, must read Oberman's book. If Oberman presents, and masterfully so, an appraisal of Luther in his context, another recent book, *Luther Renegade and Prophet* by Lyndal Roper (a student of Oberman) could be said to provide a sense of what Luther might mean for us today. Roper's account does not seem as fluid in knowledge of Reformation theology (and she acknowledges the mastery of Oberman), she, nonetheless, presents an astoundingly vivid portrait of Luther as a person by which we today can lay hold of his personality, and, in this way, we can gain an aspect of what Luther might mean for us today, fulfilling the second task of hermeneutics. While Oberman's book may take a little more work for the adventurous lay person, reading these two volumes will provide an admirably adequate, non-specialist's account of this man and historically important figure.

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## **Rachael says**

Luther is such a fascinating character- an almost prophetic like passion for his focus on salvation by grace alone as he read Paul. This book explores Luther's very real belief in the efficacy of the Devil as a part of his passion.

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## **Justin Orman says**

A good book - especially helpful in grasping the background to the Reformation. Oberman includes details and information that might be lacking in other basic biographies.

I wouldn't recommend this as an introductory work on Luther. The way the material is organized is only loosely chronological. It would be quite difficult to follow for anyone with little prior knowledge of Luther, but it's a fairly solid follow up to any of the other basic introductions to Luther.

Final note: It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who knows much about Luther, but there is occasional coarse language in some quotations of Luther. It is less than what many people here in an average day and no doubt a fairly mild representation of Luther's own use of language, but it's something to be aware of.

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## **Wilhelm Weber says**

Although this book was written around that other great Luther anniversary in our life (1983), this is still very much worth getting into. Mark Loest recommended it some months back and now going to Wittenberg gave me the opportunity to read it myself. I like his style and way of putting things into context, even if I'd give recent biographies of Thomas Kaufmann or Heinz Schilling first choice. They're not just more up to date, but really do address some of the tough issues like Luther's dark side somewhat more clearly and effectively. So, when thinking, which of the copies to give my son Matt in Austria, I went for Kaufmann's "Spiegel Bestseller" and not this "alten Schicken". Still, if you can get this copy in some Antiquariat go for it . You might like it as much as I did. Remember, it is translated into English too.

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## **David says**

A must read!

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## **AJW says**

I've read about a dozen biographies on the German reformer, Martin Luther, and this is one of the best ones.

Having said this, I would not recommend it as a first biography to read on Martin Luther as Heiko Oberman

is not a neutral writer. The best biography IMO is Brecht's 3 volume monument, and Brecht lets Luther and his contemporaries speak for themselves with copious quotes from primary sources. However, it is Oberman's opinions and judgements than made me particularly enjoy this biography. I would recommend this as a second or third biography on Luther to read.

Oberman knows his stuff and I appreciated him sifting through the endless material there is on Luther to give expert qualified judgement calls on Luther's life & work. Oberman works hard at getting you to see Luther in the context of his times instead of looking at Luther with modern post-enlightenment mindset. This is the particular strength of this biography. And too many Luther biographies only look at the Reformation from a theological viewpoint, missing out the massive political, social and economic changes that were happening in the 15th & 16th centuries. Heiko Oberman gives the best overview and contextual understanding of this era that I have read in a Luther biography.

Like nearly all Luther biographies, the bulk of the book focuses on pivotal years of Luther making his theological breakthroughs as a monk, then as a professor of theology at Wittenburg, followed by his clashes with the Rome power base and papal advocates. The chapters are thematic rather than chronological (another reason to read Brecht first), though a timeline is provided at the back.

It was a joy to read this biography, after reading so many over the last decade, and still gain so many new insights. Warmly recommended.

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## **Kevin Godinho says**

"Health is God's domain; death the Devil's intent." Luther would often gain strength in battle by specifically focusing on defying the Devil and refusing to allow him any victories. This is often where Luther gained strength in order to continue fighting his constant physical ailments, as well as was able to enjoy the beautiful things in life, such as a rose. By persevering through physical pain and stopping to admire God's creation, Luther was spitting in the Devil's face.

A few quotes from the book..

"God is so far above us that we can never grasp more than a part of His truth; for the truly pious, that is enough."

"... justification by faith alone (sola fide), the preaching of God's word alone (sola scriptura), and Trust in God's grace alone (sola gratia)."

"The thrilled expectation of discovering God's Word in the Scriptures could become reality only through the interpreter's inner dedication in prayer and meditation combined with intensive scholarly work on the text."

"Whoever wants to read the Bible must make sure he is not wrong, for the Scriptures can easily be stretched and guided, but no one should guide them according to his emotions; he should lead them to the well, that is to the cross of Christ, then he will certainly be right and cannot fail."

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## Jonah Kunisch says

Just coincidence that I finished this book on the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses... Best (modern) book I've ever read, hands down. I picked up this book looking for a fair assessment of Luther as a man, and the subtitle "Man between God and the Devil" gave me hope for such an assessment. And it didn't disappoint, though I'm surprised at how much admiration for Luther was evoked in me through the reading of the book.

I believe Oberman is still overly-praising and under-critical of Luther at times, but makes up for it with brutal honesty about Luther's biggest shortcomings (an approval of bigamy he failed to denounce though, glaringly).

Almost every page caused me to pause, think, write down a quote, look up a word...truly intriguing writing. Masterful, genius even. I'd recommend this book to anyone, but I warn you: it's completion and understanding is a chore, and after all "we are beggars--that is true!"

### Ahmad Sharabiani says

Luther: man between God and the devil, Heiko Augustinus Oberman

Luther: Man Between God And The Devil is the definitive biography of the central figure of the Protestant Reformation. Published in 1982 in Germany to great acclaim, the book portrays the controversial reformer in the context of his own time. Oberman argues that Luther is more the medieval monk than history has usually regarded him. Haunted by the devil, Luther saw the world, Oberman claims, as a cosmic battleground between God and Satan. It is this battle with the devil that provides the key to understanding the man. This is a classic in biography and an indispensable work for all interested in one of the greatest figures of Western history.

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## **Scott says**

Fantastic. Sets the context—particularly the late Medieval background—for understanding Luther and his theology. In addition to being a help in interpreting Luther, it is also brilliantly written.

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## **Ed Smiley says**

I have to admit that I found Luther a bit tiresome as an individual, although a man of admirable courage. The author's thesis is that Luther's viewpoint was fundamentally medieval and that he saw the Devil as a profound and direct presence in the world.

I think that this foreign viewpoint (as well as his considerable anti-Semitism and virulent anger) were the main reasons that I was turned off by him.

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## **Larry says**

A translation from the German original that reads quite well in English. This is an in depth biography of the man who launched Protestantism based on his 95 Theses or Protests. His mission to set Christianity free from the orthodoxy of the Roman Church has succeeded beyond his wildest expectations as there are, at last count, over 30,000 Protestant denominations in the United States alone. The book reveals little new material regarding Luther's life other than the joy he found in sex late in life. But Luther is such a seminal character in the course of the history of the Christian world that knowledge of his life is useful in understanding later events. A man of monumental intellect it would be an interesting to speculate on what he would make of today's religious conflicts and controversies.

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## **Joel Zartman says**

This is a book to be read with careful attention. It is not ordered strictly chronologically. Rather, it is structured around certain strands of the story Oberman wishes to emphasize. The main events of Luther's life have several layers, and by treating individually, Oberman can give a greater sense of the complexity of the whole. The result is a deeper take on a familiar figure.

If you look at the table of contents you will see three parts. The first explains the events in which Luther figured as German, Medieval and elemental. For example, the reformation as a German event is a look at the politics of the situation. The reformation as a Medieval event is a look at the continuities with the past--that from which this new thing arose. In the second section Oberman goes into Luther's influences more, and shows how his thought changed over time. The third section deals with the problems facing Luther once the break was made and there was no return. He still deals with individual issues diachronically, such as Luther and marriage, a most interesting chapter. And in the end he evaluates the reformer.

It is hard to think how any biography of Luther can be more readable (a good English translation), more intelligently ordered to provide the facts a maximum of meaning, or, curiously enough, better illustrated. Rather than include a section of glossy paintings and woodcuts in the center of the book, the illustrations are lavishly scattered at the point of the text with which they have to do. It dampens the effect of some of the

paintings, but since most of the illustrations are woodcuts and frontispieces, it works.

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