

Book Reviews



Thomas Kaufmann, *The Saved and the Damned: A History of the Reformation*, transl. Tony Crawford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 358. Hb, £35.00.

In 2017, many books were published to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's initial attack on the authority and theology of the Catholic Church. In the English-speaking world, for instance, no fewer than thirteen new biographies of Luther appeared, one after the other, along with many other books that contained the word "Reformation" in their title or subtitle. In Germany, as one might expect, the *Lutherjahr* was celebrated with keener intensity than anywhere else, and that fervor spilled over beyond publishing houses to the crafters and hawkers of all sorts of memorabilia, such as Playmobil's plastic figure of Luther—which, brandishing a Bible in one hand and a quill pen in the other—became the fastest- and best-selling item in the toy company's entire history.

Thomas Kaufmann's *Saved and the Damned* is one of the German books published during the quincentennial of Luther's Reformation, now available in a superb English translation. It is a brief survey history of this world-changing event, very scholarly, yet highly accessible to a broad range of non-experts, including students. As its title suggests, Kaufmann views the Reformation as a religious cataclysm caused by disagreements over the issue of salvation. The book's contents clearly suggest that it was written with a German audience in mind, so it is no surprise that much of it is devoted to the evolution of the Protestant Reformation in German-speaking lands during the sixteenth century. Its focus on this narrow slice of Protestant history is intentional and clearly reflected in its structure.

Kaufmann devotes two chapters to setting the stage for Luther's defiant entry into history, plus another to the emergence of Lutheranism, and, finally, one more to the spread of Protestantism to the world beyond Germany. Within this fourth chapter, which surveys all the various branches of the Protestant family tree, twelve pages are allotted to the Catholic Reformation, four of

which focus exclusively on the Jesuits. Some readers of this journal might be stunned or puzzled by such asymmetry, but when all is said and done, this book was not written for them. All the same, these readers will have to admit that Kaufmann's concise assessment of the Jesuits reflects his commitment to objectivity. "The fear of the Society of Jesus that Protestants expressed in fantastic tales of horror," he avers, "also reflects no doubt a secret admiration for their skill and their tenacity" (216).

Kaufmann is unapologetic about his intense focus on Martin Luther and the rise of Protestantism in German-speaking lands. Eschewing recent trends in historiography that emphasize a plurality of "Reformations" in the early modern era, Kaufmann prefers to stick with the term "Reformation" in the singular and to portray Luther as its central figure (7). Although he admits that "the Reformation was an international event from its very inception," he nonetheless insists that viewing the multi-national reach of "the Reformation" through developments in nations other than Germany is an "inaccurate and misleading" approach (3). And while also admitting that "the Reformation" had various leaders, took different forms, and depended on multiple factors, he reminds his readers that "Luther is the only person without whom the 'story' of the Reformation cannot be told at all" (9).

Emphasizing the towering significance of Luther, however, requires overlooking or diminishing much else. For instance, in his summary description of medieval piety, Kaufmann dismisses much of the social-scientific research carried out over the past five decades, which has proven the existence of a vast and sometimes bewildering variety of devotions. Kaufmann sees things differently, however. According to him, Luther's singular role in launching "the *one* Reformation" rests primarily on his attack on indulgences, because—as he says, contrary to well-documented evidence—"indulgence was the most characteristic and widespread element of late medieval devotion" (44) [emphasis mine].

The most distinctive feature of this *Lutherjahr* book is the content of its final two chapters. One of these assesses the modern reception of the Protestant Reformation, largely through a history of centennial Reformation jubilees in Germany from 1617 to 2017, and the other appraises the legacy of the Protestant Reformation in our own day, principally from a German perspective.

In that final chapter, Kauffman brings up the subject of Protestantism's role in the creation of modernity, especially as formulated by Max Weber in his "disenchantment of the world" thesis. Kaufmann approaches this issue subtly, arguing that Lutheranism continued to carry within it "a wealth of irrational impulses" that could be deemed "magical" or quasi-magical, especially when contrasted with the more extreme forms of *Entzauberung*,

or demagification of religion favored by Reformed Protestants. For him, this means that anyone who claims “a particular modernity” for all Protestants must rely on “a one-dimensional conception of Protestantism” (280). Similarly, Kaufmann concludes that “The Reformation did not produce modern Western civilization, neither by itself nor as a major influence, any more than any other factor.” But he remains convinced that without the transformations wrought by “the Reformation,” our world would be different (282).

Although this book was obviously aimed at a German audience, its translation into English is highly valuable, for it provides Anglophone readers with a succinct summation of the era of the Reformations by one of Germany’s most eminent historians. In the process, the book also reveals much about the Germanocentric perspective that shaped much of “Reformation” historiography in Protestant cultures for four and a half centuries. Kaufmann sums up the characteristics of this viewpoint eloquently and, simultaneously, also allows his readers to clearly discern the context of his approach and the significance of his masterful survey:

“In no other country has so much been written about the Reformation, so many controversial judgments made, so many authors’ own thoughts, desires, and beliefs emphatically identified with Luther’s person and projected on the event of the Reformation. The colorful and highly ambivalent reception history of Luther leaves little doubt: there has hardly been a more ‘German’ figure than he” (245).

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Andreas Holzem, *Christianity in Germany 1550–1850: Confessionalization, Enlightenment, Pluralization*, trans. Charlotte P. Kieslich and Ansgar Hastenpflug. 2 vols. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023. Pp. xviii + 1600. Hb, \$258.00.

Andreas Holzem’s *Christianity in Germany, 1550–1850* examines a topic both immensely important and strangely understudied. Tracing the course of Christianity’s religious change emerging from the Reformation over three centuries—through war, revolution, intellectual ferment, and secularization from the Peace Augsburg to the Revolution of 1848—is a daunting task but crucial to understanding the nature of modern European religion. Scholars have