Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka (Eds.)


For both learned scholars and novices in Luther studies, this handbook may be the best introduction to Luther’s theology available. The three editors, all with great competence in their fields, have made clear editorial decisions which have improved the result well beyond that of comparable volumes: there is a consistent focus on Luther’s thinking, both senior scholars and young upcoming researchers are included, and the global Luther has been taken seriously—although a Northern hemisphere domination still seems unavoidable. The approaches to Luther are therefore manifold, but in a way that strengthens the impression of deep scholarly soundness. The organising of the book reflects the thematic focus in current research. Generally, the chapters offer very fine introductions to their topics, situating their themes in the history of both theology and research. This makes the book a treasure chest of information for anyone interested in Luther’s thinking. After a fine introduction to Luther’s life in twenty pages by C. Methuen, the rest of the 47 chapters deal with individual topics in six main parts. Part II contains seven chapters covering Luther’s relation to medieval thinking following the contemporary trend of seeing Luther in continuation of preceding philosophy (T. Dieter) and theology (E. Hermann), piety (V. Leppin), and general cultural tendencies like reform movements (M. Wernisch) and humanism (R. Rosin). V. Leppin rightly emphasises the central position of Bernhard and Bonaventure, whose thinking Luther transformed. Themes subject to intense discussion are dealt with in a double way. Here G. Müller and V. Leppin cover the complex of continuities and discontinuities from different angles.

Part III focuses on the hermeneutical principles, God and history (M. Thom- son), language (J. von Lüpke), *theologia crucis* (V. Westhelle) and Luther’s hermeneutics of distinctions (R. Kolb). Kolb’s chapter is a very fine introduction to Luther’s fundamental binary thinking, making it a good place to start.

Part IV contains twelve chapters dealing with Luther’s theology in a *loci*-organised manner, giving a comprehensive introduction to Luther’s theology. If the ‘loci-oriented’ model is understood correctly, it is a method for understanding the whole of theology, and in general this model functions very well in J. Schwanke’s piece on creation, N. Slenzcka’s on anthropology, D.P. Daniel’s on the Church and J.E. Strohl’s on eschatology. However, the treatment of Luther’s use of sacraments is a little disappointing. J. Trigg could have paid just a little attention to the claim that Luther’s understanding of infant faith constitutes a natural continuation of his doctrine of justification (as argued by E. Huovinen).
At least the claim is worth a discussion. G.A. Jensen's article on the Lord’s Supper neglects the recent discussion between W. Simon and D. Wendebourg on the role of sacrifice in Luther’s theology of the Lord’s Supper, and his presentation of Luther’s defence of real presence focuses solely on the isolated arguments, without explaining the importance of the presence of Christ’s human nature for his concept of God. Luther’s rejection of Zwingli’s God plays a central role in much contemporary Lutheran theology and should have had its own section (for this topic one has to look in the chapter on Christ instead). An elaborated treatment of Luther’s view on sacraments would have corresponded nicely with J.G. Silcock’s chapter on the Holy Spirit, and S. Paulson’s on the doctrine of God, focusing rightly on Luther’s emphasis on the giving God. The Finnish Luther research is, however, discussed in several of the other chapters, and as a consequence justification is covered by two authors. R. Saarinen writes about the view of the Mannermaa School, and M. Mattes about justification as forensic and effective. While Saarinen shows how the Mannermaa School has succeeded in developing the original approach and inspiring others, Mattes explains why forensic and effective justification should not be understood as alternatives: in Luther justification is both. Quoting Kolb, Mattes concludes that Luther’s teaching on justification becomes more “effective,” when it becomes more “forensic.” In Mattes’s understanding of forensic justification formed by the distinction of divine favor as the objectivity of the cross and God’s gift as the proclamation to sinners as a benefit, it becomes clear that Luther research still has an issue in understanding the relation between the forensic dimension of justification and Luther’s understanding of divine (self-)giving. The chapter on Christ is naturally an extensive one, and M. Arnold does a good job in presenting the multifaceted character of Luther’s Christ-oriented theology. Building primarily on the works of M. Lienhard and U. Rieske-Braun, Arnold ultimately opts for a Christology of the resurrection as a necessary balance to the preferred theology of the cross.

Part V deals with Luther’s view on sanctified life in all earthly spheres: J.E. Strohl writes about the Christian’s calling and about marriage sexuality and the family; R. Rieth deals with economic life, and E. Wolgast with political life. C. Lindberg covers piety, G. Miller the complex theme of Jews and Turks, and J.P. Rajashekar discusses Luther as resource for contemporary dialogue. All in all, they show Luther’s actual and possible impact on the shaping of societal life.

Part VI tries to grasp the relation between genre and theological content. Without belittling the other parts of the book, this part could be quite important for future research. Here questions are raised about how genres shaped Luther’s theology, although they are only answered in a preliminary fashion.