

A Reading List for Lutherans

Quality, Lay-Friendly Books That Will Stretch and Shape the Lutheran Mind

Easy reading: *

More challenging: **

Really challenging, but worth it: ***

prepared by Gene Edward Veith

BASIC LUTHERANISM

Gene Veith. *Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals*.* I wrote this one. It's the book that I wish I had found before I became a Lutheran. It explains the Lutheran distinctives and the richness of Lutheran spirituality in what I hope is a lucid and engaging way.

Scot A. Kinnaman, ed. *Lutheranism 101*.* A comprehensive, easy-to-read guide to Lutheranism, written in form of short articles, sound-bites, sidebars and illustrations.

J. T. Mueller. *Christian Dogmatics*.** A systematic survey of Lutheran doctrine, as understood by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with Bible verses to back up every point. This is a summary of Francis Pieper's four-volume *Christian Dogmatics*.

Steven D. Paulson. *Lutheran Theology*.*** Some may think Lutheranism is staid and respectable, but this book shows just how radical and mind-blowing Lutheranism — with its teachings about the Law and Gospel, the Word and Sacraments — really is.

THE CONFESSIONS

The Book of Concord. As the definitive authority in all things Lutheran, this book is in a category by itself. The creeds and the catechisms*; the Lutheran Confessions of faith (Augsburg, Smalcald Articles, Formula of Concord, Treatise on the Primacy of the Pope)**; the extended defenses of those Confessions (the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and the Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord***).

LUTHERAN CLASSICS

C. F. W. Walther. *Law & Gospel*.** The founder of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod explains to 19th-century seminary students how to properly distinguish the Law and the Gospel and how to preach them so as to bring sinners to Christ. This book offers both stimulating theology as it lays out the distinctive Lutheran approach to Scripture and comforting devotional reading as it plumbs the depths of what Christ has done for us.

Bo Giertz. *The Hammer of God*.* This is a novel by a Swedish bishop, depicting three generations of Lutheran pastors, who each have to deal with the religious fads of their day — pietism, rationalism, liberalism — ultimately finding in their ministries the strength of Lutheran orthodoxy.

Martin Chemnitz. *The Two Natures in Christ*.*** Chemnitz is second only to Luther among the great Lutheran theologians. His brilliant work on Christology — dealing with the incarnation, whereby Christ who is truly God and truly man atones for our sins and the “communication of the attributes,” whereby Christ's body and blood are truly present in Holy Communion — is a hallmark of Lutheran theology.

Charles Porterfield Krauth. *The Conservative Reformation*.** Written in 1871 by an American Lutheran scholar, this book is a masterpiece of historical theology, showing the differences between the conservative Reformation of the Lutherans and the more radical Reformation of the Calvinists and Anabaptists. Moreover, it shows how those differences remain important today.

WORKS BY MARTIN LUTHER

The Freedom of the Christian.** This early work by the Reformer proclaims the freedom we have in the Gospel. It also lays the groundwork for Luther's doctrine of vocation. This treatise sets forth the classic paradox of the Christian life: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” And it teaches how we are to be “little Christs to each other.”

Sermons.* Luther is among the most pastoral of theologians, and his many published sermons show him as a vivid expositor of God's Word and, for all of the polemical fury that sometimes breaks out, as a compassionate minister to troubled souls. In his sermons, we often see Luther's humor as well as his wisdom as he applies God's Word to the ordinary people of his time.

*Letters of Spiritual Counsel.** Here we see Luther's pastoral heart, as he offers spiritual counsel to ordinary Christians of his day who struggle with some of the same issues that we do today.

*Commentaries.*** Luther's theology is drawn from the Bible, so his Bible commentaries are some of his profoundest works. Two good places to start are his *Commentary on Galatians*, which is a sustained critique of works righteousness, and his *Commentary on Romans*, whose explanation of justification by grace through faith led to the conversion of John Bunyan and John Wesley. His commentaries on the Psalms make rich devotional reading and his multi-volume *Commentary on Genesis* contains, among other things, a thorough treatment of vocation and the Christian's life in the world.

*Bondage of the Will.**** This full-throated argument against the humanism of the Renaissance genius Erasmus is considered some of Luther's greatest theological writing, but it is not for the faint of heart.

BIOGRAPHIES OF MARTIN LUTHER

Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther.** This is an acknowledged masterpiece of the art of biography — compelling, easy-to-read and insightful into Luther's tumultuous life and times.

Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther.* 3 vols.** This exhaustive multi-volume treatment is the definitive scholarly biography of Luther.

Heiko Oberman. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil.**** A deep psychological and spiritual treatment of Luther.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Hermann Sasse. *We Confess Anthology.*** This German theologian defied Adolf Hitler and his attempts to Nazify the Christian Church. He later emigrated to Australia, where he served as a seminary professor and as a major influence on confessional Lutheranism around the world. This book collects a number of Sasse's works on Christ, the Sacraments and contemporary theological issues. See also the two volume collection of Sasse's letters and essays, *The Lonely Way*.

Francis Pieper, *Church Dogmatics.* 4 vols.** The definitive systematic theology for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, sketching out each topic in detail with full Scriptural evidence.

*Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics.*** An ongoing series of volumes — six so far with more to come — by different authors, updating Pieper's work and addressing contemporary theological issues.

Oswald Bayer. *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation.**** A distinguished contemporary theologian shows how Luther's theology addresses modern and postmodern thought in a sophisticated way.

Robert Kolb and Charles Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Theology for the Contemporary Church.** Two major LCMS scholars of the Lutheran Confessions show their relevance and that of Luther to contemporary issues in the Church.

VOCATION

Gene Veith. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life.** My book explores Luther's doctrine of vocation on a popular level.

Paul Althaus. *Ethics of Martin Luther.*** An important theological scholar explores Luther's teachings about life in the world, including both Luther's doctrine of vocation and his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.

Gustav Wingren. *Luther on Vocation.**** The key book on vocation with paradigm-shifting insights on every page.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Richard C. Eyer. *Pastoral Care under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering.** A hospital chaplain tells about how he applies Luther's theology of the cross — as opposed to the more common "theology of glory" — as he ministers to the sick, the suffering and the dying.

Alister E. McGrath. *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough.*** A prominent British theologian explores the centrality of the theology of the cross in Luther's life and thought.

Gerhard Forde. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518.**** A sometimes controversial theologian, an advocate of what he called "radical Lutheranism" explores some of Luther's most radical ideas. In addition to Forde's commentary, the book includes an edition of Luther's Heidelberg Theses, in which the reformer outlined his teachings about how God comes to us in suffering and weakness, rather than in success and power.

LUTHERANISM VS. OTHER OPTIONS

Jonathan Fisk. *Broken: 7 Christian Rules that Every Christian Ought to Break as Often as Possible*.^{*} A pastor known for his lively YouTube presence takes on the legalism that characterizes much of contemporary Christianity.

Harold Senkbeil. *Sanctification: Christ in Action*.^{*} A stimulating treatment of the contrast between evangelicalism and Lutheranism.

John Warwick Montgomery and Gene Veith, eds. *Where Christ Is Present: A Theology for All Seasons on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation*.^{**} I join with one of the foremost Christian apologists in editing a collection of essays by a number of prominent Lutheran thinkers, who make the case for Lutheranism and the Lutheran distinctives over against Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed and other religious options (forthcoming in 2015).

Adolf Köberle. *The Quest for Holiness*.^{***} A classic study of the attempts human beings make to find God through the ways of mysticism, moralism and intellectualism. Lutheranism teaches the ways God finds us: through His incarnation in Christ, His atonement on the cross and the gift of His Word.

DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS

John Kleinig. *Grace upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*.^{*} An exhilarating, paradigm-shifting book that can reinvigorate the reader's devotional life. It shows how prayer, Bible reading, meditation, worship, daily devotions and the Christian life are animated by the grace of God, the workings of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ.

Harold L. Senkbeil. *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*.^{*} This book explores the struggles of daily life in light of our fundamental problems of sin and death, but it goes on to show how life can be transformed by the forgiveness bestowed by Christ in His Word and Sacraments.

Scot Kinnaman, ed. *Treasury of Daily Prayer*.^{*} This superb resource for daily devotions includes for each day of the week a Psalm, an Old Testament Reading, a New Testament Reading, a writing by a prominent figure in the historical church, a hymn verse and a prayer. In addition, it includes the Daily Offices, the Small Catechism, an array of worship services, more prayers and other devotional helps.

Arthur A. Just. *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service*.^{**} This is a work of theological scholarship in showing the historical roots of Lutheran worship, but it is also of profound devotional significance, as it opens up the meaning, the beauty and the realities of what is happening in church every Sunday morning.

Johann Gerhard. *Meditations on Divine Mercy and Sacred Meditations*.^{***} This great 17th-century Lutheran author had the insights of a theologian, the sensitivity of a pastor and the words of a poet. These books, the first of which was translated by LCMS President Matthew Harrison, are a fine entry into the riches of the Lutheran devotional tradition.