

ON THE BOOKSHELF

“RENEGADE: Martin Luther—The Graphic Biography”

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This is a perfect example of how a graphic book can bring an historical character to vivid life. The boldness and richness of the papal appearance is strikingly contrasted to the earthiness and humility of the “Father of the Reformation”. The book is a magnificent introduction about the history of the Reformation for people who don’t know much about it.

The details of his life have been explored in numerous books released for the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, but let’s review. Martin was born in a time of great fear in Europe. Plagues killed tens of thousands, while famines and constant warfare added more to the piles of corpses. The Church taught that no one was worthy of God but not that Christ had paid the price for our sins; instead, peasants were commanded to good works to earn God’s favor, to observe spurious “relics” from Christian history, and pay for indulgences to free loved ones from Purgatory or even insure their own souls were safe.

Along came the young, brilliant German monk, priest, and Bible professor Martin Luther. He was furious that the Church was allowing hucksters to take the precious funds of his poor parishioners through the biblically-unfounded practices of indulgences. To argue against it, on Oct. 31, 1517, he nailed 95 arguments in Latin to the door of the Wittenberg church to start a debate.

Instead he started a revolution that divided the Catholic church and eventually started new churches based on Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sole Fide, Sola Christos, and Sole Deo Gloria. Rome insisted that popes and councils have sole authority. Luther insisted that councils and popes had been wrong, but the Bible never was.

At the Diet of Worms in 1521 he stood up for the Bible and Jesus’ atoning work on the cross. Political considerations intervened to rescue Luther from immolation. A mock kidnapping by his German prince elector saved Luther

and bought him time to translate the Bible in German. The printing press made it available to all. Luther introduced congregational singing and considered music "next to the Gospel, the greatest gift of God."

Luther's faith, courage and fidelity to his wife, the ex-nun Katarina von Bora, and his beloved children served as a model for Protestant leaders and disciples. Late in life, he grew frustrated at the Jews' continued denial of the divinity of Christ, and he urged violence against them. Earlier he had castigated the leaders of the Peasant's Revolt for their anarchy. Luther was not perfect, but he was the man God used to change the Christian church.

This book brings the major players of the Protestant Reformation to life, warts and all.