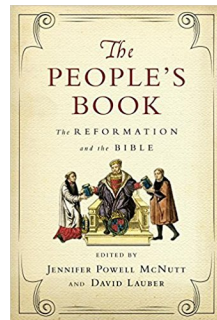


***The People's Book: The Reformation and the Bible*, edited by Jennifer Powell McNutt and David Lauber**

Wheaton Theology Conference Series | IVP Academic: Downers Grove, 2017 | 250 pages | ISBN: 978-0-8308-5163-8 (softcover) \$25.00



“Of the making of Reformation Anniversary celebration observation books there is no end” may be a line that Qoheleth would proffer were he alive today. The market has been flooded with volumes focusing on Reformation themes since scholars remembered the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther’s reformatory efforts would fall in 2017. The present volume is one of them.

In *The People's Book: The Reformation and the Bible*, McNutt and Lauber collect a series of essays which were originally delivered at the 2016 Wheaton Theology Conference and offer them to a wider audience than that which first heard them orally. Both the venue and the publisher are clues to readers as to the contents of the book since Wheaton is a conservative Christian institution and IVP Academic is a conservative Christian publisher. Accordingly, we already know that the book in hand will be a work of conservative Christian scholarship.

That fact is neither a word of praise nor a statement of condemnation. Instead, it is a cue to the reader that the tome will not be breaking new ground but rather it will assemble in a readable form the *status questionis*. Preconceptions will be confirmed and buttressed and both the Bible and the Reformers who handled it and taught it will be honored in due measure.

The work is made up of twelve chapters in four parts:

Part One: Access and Readership. 1) "Teaching the Church: Protestant Latin Bibles and their Readers," Bruce Gordon; 2) "Scripture, the Priesthood of All Believers, and Applications of 1 Corinthians 14," G. Sujin Pak; 3) "Learning to Read Scripture for Ourselves: The Guidance of Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin," Randall Zachman; 4) "The Reformation and Vernacular Culture: Wales as a Case Study," D. Densil Morgan.

Part Two: Transmission and Worship. 5) "The Reformation as Media Event," Read Mercer Schuhardt; 6) "The Interplay of Catechesis and Liturgy in The Sixteenth Century: Examples from the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions," John D. Witvliet; 7) "Word and Sacrament: The Gordian Knot of Reformation Worship," Jennifer Powell McNutt.

Part Three: Protestant-Catholic Dialogue. 8) "John Calvin's Commentary on the Council of Trent," Michael Horton; 9) "The Bible and the Italian Reformation," Christopher Castaldo; 10) "Reading the Reformation after Newman," Carl Trueman.

Part Four: The People's Book Yesterday and Today. 11) "From the Spirit to the Sovereign to Sapiential Reason: A Brief History of Sola Scriptura," Paul C.H. Lim; 12) "Perspicuity and the People's Book," Mark Labberton.

The volume also includes acknowledgements, an introduction, a list of contributors, an author index, a subject index, and a scripture index. The present review, I must hasten to say, is based on a pre-publication copy in soft cover which is absent the final edition's paginations and indices. Consequently, I will not be able to provide page numbers for the extracts I cite, for which I apologize.

Our editors describe their vision for the volume in the introduction, writing,

This volume examines many facets of the Bible as the people's book during the Reformation by reflecting on matters pertaining to access, readership, media, culture, diffusion, and authority as well as its place in the worship context, as the arbiter of theological interpretation, and as a contributor to unity and division within Christianity.

Immediately following this summary they briefly describe the contents and purposes of the various enclosed essays. Each essay has its own special merit but in the view of the present reviewer that by Bruce Gordon is extraordinarily meritorious. As he suggests,

My purpose ... is to broaden our understanding of Protestant biblical culture in the sixteenth century by posing a series of questions that will lead to the heart of what the Reformers sought in restoring the Word to the church.

He succeeds, masterfully. There is not a single paragraph in the essay which does not effuse learning and deep familiarity with the primary sources and the secondary literature. Erasmus, Jerome, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and even Münster all make appearances and the story of the Latin Bible, which few would associate with the Reformation at all, has its story told vividly and intelligently.

Much of what appears in Gordon's essay in terms of his discussion of Zwingli and Zurich and the Latin Bible can be supplemented by interested readers who consult the same author's essay in the 2014 edition of *Zwingliana*, pp. 1–33, titled "Remembering Jerome and Forgetting Zwingli: The Zurich Latin Bible of 1543 and the Establishment of Heinrich Bullinger's Church" (see n. 28 in Gordon's essay for this and further citations).

Gordon remarks a bit further on:

The Latin Bibles produced by the Protestants in the Sixteenth Century provide a narrative for the Reformation itself. They were a revolutionary creation in which the Hebrew and Greek texts formed the basis for the Bible that shaped the churches of the Reformation.

And he concludes with this utterly fantastic quote from Konrad Pellikan, the greatest Hebraist after Johann Reuchlin of the sixteenth century: “With the vernacular Bible we teach the people. With the Latin we defend the Church.”

Gordon’s essay is placed, I assert, at the beginning of the volume because it is the best of the volume. But others are exceptionally noteworthy as well. “The Reformation as Media Event” by Schuchardt is also extraordinary. Here too learning is on full display. For instance, did you know that “... Gutenberg Bibles were not the first items to be printed? The first items to be printed were in fact medieval Catholic indulgences.” And that

[t]oday’s Catholics cannot acquire a printed letter of indulgence; instead, they receive indulgences that are verbal, acoustic, and spiritual in that the indulgence is itself an invisible thing that one “receives” in exchange for some act or service. Pope Benedict offered indulgences for downloading the Catholic app. Pope Francis granted indulgences to Catholic faithful who follow his Twitter feed in 2013

What readers have, then, in this book, is a series of essays which open windows on the history of the Reformation which when opened shed more light than previously available.

Yet not all is well. The essay by Horton on Calvin’s commentary on Trent is regrettable for its shortsightedness. That is, at the conclusion of his contribution Horton opines, “Yet as this examination of the Antidote reveals, for Calvin the central issue is *solo Christo*—Christ alone ‘as he is clothed in the Gospel.’” As experts in Calvin and his thought will immediately recognize, it is simply impossible to boil Calvin down to a “central issue.” Calvin’s theology is far too broad for such narrow-fying strictures. To say that Calvin was operating from the basis of a “central issue” is the same as saying that the Bible has “one concern.” That too is a flattening. Calvin had his eyes on many things all at once. Horton has poked out most of those concerns in order to form a Calvin in his own mind who fits his own ideology. But Calvin is too big for that. Calvin cannot be made in the image of Horton. He cannot even be recognized in that image.

But rather than end the present review with a negative, allow me to return to the positives of the volume. And one of them is the final essay, that by Labberton, on the perspicuity of the Bible. After cleverly noting that the

perspicuity of the Bible is hardly perspicuous he goes on to make the salient observation that

the priesthood of all believers did not mean the equality of all readers.... Luther and Calvin could only imagine Bible reading occurring in the context of Christian community and not by isolated readers on their iPhones between dumbbell sets at a twenty-four hour fitness club.

True words, contained in a volume filled to the brim with truthful examination (for the most part—the essay by Horton being the singular exception) of the Reformation’s use and view of the Bible. The Bible truly is the people’s book—so long as and insofar as those people are members of the community of faith—the Church.

Consequently, I conclude by assuming the heavenly voice heard by Augustine in the garden as his Bible fell open to Romans and urge readers of this review to “Tolle, lege!” the book by McNutt and Lauber.

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