

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Luther, Martin. On the Freedom of a Christian: With Related Texts. Ed., trans., and intro. Tryntje Helfferich

Dennis Ngien

Volume 39, Number 2, Spring 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086561ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26871>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ngien, D. (2016). Review of [Luther, Martin. On the Freedom of a Christian: With Related Texts. Ed., trans., and intro. Tryntje Helfferich]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 39(2), 200–201.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26871>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2016

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

devotion is marked by antiabsorption, might earlier post-Reformation poetry also have risen to this challenge with its own rich and diverse set of strategies?

DAVID B. GOLDSTEIN

York University

Luther, Martin.

***On the Freedom of a Christian: With Related Texts.* Ed., trans., and intro. Tryntje Helfferich.**

Indianapolis: Hacker Publishing, 2013. Pp. xxviii, 132. ISBN 978-0-87220-768-4 (paperback) \$10.

Written in 1520, *On the Freedom of a Christian* is one of Luther's major tracts and perhaps the most influential. Its significance lies in its comprehensiveness: the whole of Christian life is contained in a brief form. The ongoing conflict between the gospel and its enemies forms the context for Luther's defence of Christian freedom. At the heart of such freedom are the antithetical words of Paul: "I am free in all things and have made myself a servant of everyone" (I Cor. 9:19). Luther explores this antithesis carefully and thoroughly in thirty theses, in such a manner that does not obscure the Word of God; the latter must reign above all human agencies and accretions. Throughout, Luther shows no personal animosity towards Pope Leo X. What was at stake for him was the truth of gospel, and on that basis he remains adamant. One particular opponent of this gospel is Johann Eck, whom Luther considers "a special enemy of Christ and the truth" (10).

In this volume, Helfferich extends beyond Luther and the mainstream Reformation to include the primary writings of Catholic opponents of Luther and the Radical reformer. Their seminal texts are Eck's *Enchiridion or Handbook of Commonplaces and Articles against the New Teachings Currently Wafting About*, John Fisher's *Sermons against the Pernicious Doctrine of Martin Luther*, and Thomas Müntzer's *Highly Provoked Defence*. In so doing he helps the reader to identify the complex historical background against which Luther challenges the teachings and authority of the Old Church while concurrently supplying the blueprint for the new. On the one hand, these texts introduce readers to the key theological concepts taught by Luther, the Catholic theologians, and

the radical reformers. On the other hand, they disclose the social, cultural, and economic aspects—topics that are of paramount interest in recent Reformation scholarship.

The introductory essay in each section is crisp, clear, and concise. The success of this work is the ability to distill complicated theological controversies and divergent contents into nuances that are accessible to a wider audience—of both systematic and historical theology. Readers will also appreciate how Luther tried so hard to chart his narrow course, constantly facing challenges from all sides. However, in the heat of battle, Luther neither disdained tradition nor denied experience but put both under the scrutiny of the Bible. In short, he extolled the ontological priority of God's word. Thus, Helfferich writes accurately: "To Luther the Bible was clear, and thus the proper nature of the church and of Christian life is also clear, and it frustrated him to no end that not everyone saw it his way" (xxiv).

DENNIS NGIEN

Tyndale University College & Seminary

McCall, Timothy, Sean Roberts, and Giancarlo Fiorenza, eds.

Visual Cultures of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe.

Early Modern Studies 11. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2013. Pp. x, 238 + 73 ill. ISBN 1-61248-092-3 (paperback) \$49.95.

The Renaissance was a secretive era in the arts, thought, and culture. This book, as its introduction explains, seeks to investigate not so much the secrets of that time and their contents as the European "intellectual, visual, and social conditions" of secrecy from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (1). Much influenced by Karma Lochrie's *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (1999) and by Michel de Certeau's *Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1982), this collection seeks to ascertain the early modern "rhetorics of secrecy" in the sense of the performances of secrecy and their apparent rules. Thus it aims to distinguish itself from former inquiries into verbally and visually hidden meanings of the Renaissance by socially contextualizing the activities and means of creating and revealing secrets, and by treating these behaviours as significant topics of inquiry in themselves. Secrecy consists, then, in "operations,