

of which is in keeping with the accessible, laicised and prophetic methodology the book espouses.

In reprising Edward Farley's call to promote 'the hermeneutics of vocation' (albeit for a changed social, ecclesial and global landscape), Stoddart sets before Practical Theologians the task of helping Christian disciples grow in theological wisdom and fluency, equipping them with the tools to exercise a properly critical calling in the world as contributors to the common good. Those engaged in forming Scottish congregational leaders – in seminaries and the academy alike – should heed his passionately argued plea and seek creative ways of putting Stoddart's thesis into action before the wave of current opportunity crashes and fades on the shore. For it is only by fostering such an imaginative civic/global apologetics that Practical Theology will achieve its full, radical, potential and make a difference in God's world. Only then can the discipline be said to have 'advanced'.

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**Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation* (trans. Martin J. Lohrmann; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), pp. xix + 286, ISBN 9780802869241. £23.99**

Well written, well researched, and well argued, Berndt Hamm's latest installment in the Lutheran Quarterly Books series is a worthy addition. Professor Hamm has a long history of research in late medieval and Reformation theology, and it is all on display here in the English translation of his 2010 book, *Der frühe Luther*. Cutting against the grain of conventional wisdom, he argues that scholarship is wrong in trying to discern a moment where Luther makes the reformational turn. Instead, Luther's journey should be described as a slow albeit steady progress through a series of insights and transformations, gradually reassessing and reworking the tradition he had inherited. Described thusly, the entire debate about whether Luther is rightly considered

medieval or modern is revealed as a false binary, and Luther comes into view not as a radical but as a reformer of the monastic mystic tradition.

The book is essentially a series of essays loosely connected around demonstrating this historical account. Each chapter takes a theme central to Luther's corpus in order to examine how that theme is addressed in Luther's earliest writings, often taking texts pre-dating the Ninety-Five Theses, to demonstrate their essential continuity with writings dating from after the break with Rome. Using lectures on Psalms and Romans, sermons, and exhortations on death and dying, it becomes abundantly clear that the nexus of ideas that constitute the 'Reformation break' are circling one another well before 1518. Yet Hamm does not stop there. It is not merely about demonstrating that Luther's key insights have been in conversation with one another from an early stage. Rather, Hamm wants to acknowledge that these key insights are not even entirely Luther's own innovations. Hamm takes these themes back to the debates playing out between monastic theologians like Johannes von Staupitz and various academic theologians. He demonstrates that Luther is often adopting the vocabulary and basic conceptual framework of his own teachers, including Staupitz. True, these frameworks are often transformed and their transformation may, on occasion, lead to fundamental breaks with the work of Luther's predecessors. Perhaps the best examples of Luther's habit of adopting and transforming are the discussions that occur throughout the book on the centrality of love in monastic mysticism versus faith in Luther. Yet the extensive debt of Luther to his antecedents comes sharply into focus, and rightly so.

One might, of course, wish that the eighth chapter had been moved to the front of the book. This is where Hamm finally defines and describes the vein of mysticism he sees Luther continuing. That definition is not surprising, though, to those who have read up to that point – so clues exist along the way to indicate what is or is not mystical. These clues allow the reader to wait for Hamm's argument to flower in the fullness of time without the reader experiencing a bait and switch. And when the argument blooms, it does so with surprising alacrity and lucidity. It just might be that Luther ought to be regarded as a mystic of a certain, Augustinian kind; and all the while Hamm has

been skilled enough to weave in the criticisms Luther raises time and again against various other mystics.

Scotland is still largely a Protestant country and mysticism is still largely a bogey-word among Protestants. Hamm forces the conversation back open. And with the conversation open, a whole series of questions demand to be asked. If Luther was a mystic of a certain type, might that strain of the tradition warrant another, more sympathetic reading? And if that reading takes place, what impact might it have on the way Protestant traditions understand themselves and their relationship to the Roman Catholic traditions from which Protestantism sprang? Could ecumenical dialogue begin to take on the character of the 'pastoral care' Hamm describes in Chapter Seven? If Protestants are truly in so great a debt to monasticism, how might this revelation help them navigate the oft confusing encounters with new monastic communities forming in their midst? Might one be able to better see how these communities actually fulfill the Reformation vision in a way that church communities based solely around the horizontal relationship between humans and God do not? These are not Hamm's explicit questions, but they can and should be asked if Hamm's account of Luther's early theology has merit.

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**Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), pp. xii + 188, ISBN 9780802827388. £16.99**

Kilby's new book presents most Balthasarian scholars with an unfamiliar situation, namely by offering a (very) critical stance on Balthasar. As Kilby points out in the introduction, Balthasar is one of those theologians who stirs in their readers an overwhelming feeling of admiration, and leave little room for criticism. The lack of space for critical engagement is not just a consequence of the complexity or sheer length of Balthasar's work, Kilby claims, but also comes from