

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Lamport, Mark A., ed. Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation

Johannes Wolfart

Volume 41, Number 3, Summer 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085711ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i3.31617>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Wolfart, J. (2018). Review of [Lamport, Mark A., ed. Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(3), 240–242. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i3.31617>

© 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, 2018

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/>

Lampton, Mark A., ed.

Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. 2 vols. Pp. xxix, 941. ISBN 978-14422-7158-6 (hardcover) US\$250.

According to the editor, these two volumes contain 475 entries by 180 contributors from twenty-five countries. Certainly, the *Encyclopedia* presents a wealth of information on both Martin Luther and the historical processes associated with him, for which the short-hand here is “the Reformation.” Indeed, chronological coverage extends well beyond the limits of even the longest of long reformations, to consider theological issues of enduring significance to living church communities and to represent Lutheran cultures or sub-cultures as they have developed in various locales over the course of the last five centuries. For example, here one can read up on the development of various aspects of Lutheranism in Finland in no fewer than six distinct entries. Or, one can consult a “Timeline of Luther, the Reformation, and the Growth of Global Lutheranism,” including such key moments as the establishment, in 1845, of the Lutheran mission at Frankenmuth, Michigan. Taken altogether, therefore, what one finds in these two volumes is both much more—e.g., smart and informed entries on Adiaphoristic Controversy, Beer, Crypto-Calvinism ... Zwingli—and considerably less than what the title advertises, because it is too idiosyncratic for a reference encyclopedia. Nevertheless, as an “album of Lutheranism,” it is consistently interesting and engaging.

Ultimately, the main virtue of the *Encyclopedia* is its wide range of contributions and contributors, including entries by university-based scholars in disciplines long associated with Reformation Studies (e.g., history and theology), but also many by scholars whose primary vocations are non-academic. Some contributors are well-known senior scholars of the Reformation in various national contexts; many more are at early stages of both academic and non-academic careers; some are still on their career launching pads. Although nearly all contributors represent a confessional viewpoint, the sheer diversity of both topics and perspectives here is truly remarkable. The *Encyclopedia* really serves to document the diversity of so-called confessional Lutheranism as it has evolved over the centuries; therefore, the work also confounds some very durable opinions concerning the cultural homogeneity of confessional religion. Indeed, even seasoned veterans of the so-called “confessionalization debates”

in recent decades may be surprised by the range of interests and concerns on display. Frankly, I learned much—including about my own preconceptions—from reading in these two volumes.

To fully appreciate the *Encyclopedia*, however, one must “get” its strong perspective. Ultimately, these volumes are most functional as an expression of a particular Lutheran sub-cultural identity. Interestingly, that identity is neither transatlantic (though the project was sponsored by organizations on both side of the pond), nor generically American. Actually, its epicentre can be located with some precision in the state of Michigan (i.e., not Wisconsin or Missouri, both more usually associated with strong Lutheran identities). Thus, one finds a particular sense of place expressed in the several fine entries concerning historical relations and boundary frictions between Lutherans and Calvinists (Dutch Calvinist identities are very important in western lower Michigan, where Calvin College and Hope College are located); it is there in a startling entry on Lutheran-Adventist dialogue (the southwest of the state is also home to Andrews University, the flagship institution of that world-wide movement); it is there in the concern with Finnish Lutheranism (Michigan’s Upper Peninsula is home to the greatest concentration of Finnish-Americans, as well as to Finlandia University, America’s only Finnish-Lutheran post-secondary institution); and it is there in the claim for the world historical importance of Frankenmuth, MI. Of course, the overall coverage remains very broad. For example, I found myself surprised—in a good way!—to learn of the existence of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tamil Nadu, or that there are nearly twice as many Lutherans in Ethiopia as there are in the United States. The entry “Lutheran Revivalism as the Root of Nordic Democracy” was also surprising, but in a different way.

Will this encyclopedia appeal to a core *Renaissance and Reformation* readership? Possibly—but not in the ways one might expect. First, it is not really about the Reformation era but about what came later (there are whole editorial sub-sections dedicated to “Luther’s Legacies” and “Why the Reformation Matters”). Second, and as already stated, the coverage is too peculiar for the *Encyclopedia* to be useful for general reference. For example, while volume 1 contains an entry on family life and volume 2 contains two further entries on the theology of marriage and family, as well as on Luther’s marriage, a key concept such as *communicatio idiomatum* receives no entry, though it is mentioned in several entries I surveyed. Finally, the technical production is uneven. For

example, the list of images opens with “Lucas Cranach the Elder signing and selling indulgences, *Passional Christi und Antichristi ...*” On its own, one might simply find this particular editorial glitch amusing. I was disappointed that the postage-stamp-sized reproduction of Cranach’s woodcut renders all details invisible; furthermore, I was irritated by the lack of a cross reference—surprisingly for such a work, there are no cross-references at all—linking the entry in which it appears (“Antichrist”) to the entry on Cranach, which also refers to this print, albeit this time as “*Passion of Christ and Antichrist.*” In a reference work, such inconsistency is more than an aesthetic flaw. Rather, it undermines scholarly utility. Simply put, there are other, better scholarly reference works out there.

On the other hand, as evidence of historical continuities between early modernity and our current age, the *Encyclopedia* is fascinating. Sixteenth-century Lutherans were already terrific collectors of textual artifacts and compilers of compendia bearing witness to their religious identities. Some say it all began with Melanchthon; others credit Matthias Flacius or Johannes Sleidanus. From another perspective altogether, the practice was actually fostered by countless obscure Reformation-era people who collected materials—borrowed, stolen, sometimes even authored—in volumes commonly called *Chroniken*, objects roughly comparable to the English “miscellanies.” These manuscripts usually remained unpublished but were widely shared within extended families or communities. Anybody who has worked on such objects will see many of their characteristics reflected in the *Encyclopedia*. Indeed, one might even speculate that the target market here is in communities other than academic or scholarly ones. In any case, my own university library has recently abolished its entire reference section, citing a trend in comparable institutions as reason enough. Therefore, and on balance, I regret that my students and colleagues will likely not have ready access to the *Encyclopedia*.

JOHANNES WOLFART

Carleton University