

I suspect that my personal likes and dislikes on many of these questions conform to Massing's. Martin Luther, as we all now know, was a notoriously difficult man to like at times (particularly during his execrable late life anti-Semitic ravings). But, like all of us, he was a complex individual, as was Erasmus, as were their contemporaries. One might argue that he was as accomplished a humanist as Erasmus, who could himself be as viperous and unforgiving (and scripturally fundamentalist) as the Wittenberg Reformer. Or, as progressives of a different generation, we could cast Luther as the brave pioneer of modern individualism and Erasmus as the faint-hearted defender of Catholic orthodoxy (since he never repudiated Rome). Both men were also deeply spiritual, an experiential reality too often obscured in an account more concerned with their cultural impact and legacy. Most importantly, they were not us, at least not in the form of highly idealized progenitors of two fundamentally different ways of thinking. There were many paths to modernity, and there is no reason to privilege this dialectical one, itself deeply problematic. (There were also many varieties of sixteenth-century Christians, but their place in Massing's schema—except for the reactionary Catholics—is far from clear.)

One might argue that a book like this benefits from a literary sweet spot: few academics will read it, and most non-academics will not notice or care that much about the book's thesis, as opposed to its engaging narrative. Indeed, other reviews and blurbs have likened the book to a long (over eight hundred pages) Great Lectures class, glossing over the arguments of the introduction and conclusion. But there is a real cost to indulging our own prejudices—and again I probably share many of his—by caricaturing individuals from the past to serve our purposes. Pedestals have always been precarious places for would-be heroes, and historians are rightly skeptical about what Luther and Erasmus alike would call idolatry. It might be tempting to think about “the Western mind” in these terms, but it is neither intellectually rigorous nor edifying.

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The Dynamics of the Early Reformation in Their Reformed Augustinian Context.
Robert J. Christman.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 256 pp. €99.99.

Recent Reformation scholarship has deepened our grasp of the influence of medieval Scholasticism on Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues, particularly through Heiko Oberman's research, and of monastic-mystical strains of medieval piety that shaped their thinking, especially through Bernd Hamm's work. Robert Christman places Luther and his associates squarely in the context of the reform efforts and ecclesiastical-political maneuvering of one monastic order in the German-speaking lands, led by Johannes von Staupitz and his fellow friars in the Lower German province of the

German Reformed Congregation of the Augustinian Observants. Christman also argues for attention to “historical events as shapers of opinion and stimulators of change,” alongside the recent focus on the Reformation as *Sprachereignis* and the sociopolitical processes of “confessionalization” (223). In analyzing the background and impact of the burning of the first two martyrs executed for adherence to Luther’s views, Hendrik Vos and Johann van den Esschen, Christman demonstrates how the Netherlandish Augustinians influenced and were influenced by their extensive contacts with the University of Wittenberg and the circle constructed there by Staupitz as he pursued his own plans for reform. The book unfolds how the executions became a matter of European-wide concern, a propaganda tool put to public use by both those sympathetic to Luther and those who praised the executions as God’s righteous judgment on heresy. This single event enriched Luther’s thinking and furthered development of the pursuit of heresy by Emperor Charles V and Pope Adrian VI and his successors.

Ten focused examinations illuminate how Vos and van den Esschen represented the fruits of Staupitz’s reform initiatives that gained momentum and impetus from the cloisters he had founded or furthered in Lower German lands. Christman explains how representatives of these cloisters, especially Antwerp, had been educated in Wittenberg, and how Luther and his associates found new insights in the concern for reform in late medieval Lower Germany and in the sacrifice of the two martyrs. Christman further makes clear how their earlier experiences in Lower Germany shaped Charles’s and Adrian’s promotion of and reactions to the burnings as part of larger policy decisions. The interchange of ideas and concerns between these cloisters in the Low Countries and Wittenberg reveals how significant the influence of other people and places were on the Wittenberg theological team, as well as how their influence impacted and directed others. For example, the Antwerp friars proclaimed Luther’s understanding of justification by faith, and many found it attractive. But the wrath of the Leuven professor Adrian Floriszoon, later Pope Adrian VI, was initially directed, in the early 1510s, at the Antwerp Augustinians for reasons of order in the church; soteriology was at best a secondary concern. His energies were dedicated to reform of church and morals, not of doctrine. Therefore, Luther believed that his maneuvering to execute Vos and van den Esschen proved that Adrian’s call for reform was hypocritical; the two understood the need for reform in radically different ways.

In a brilliant, text-sensitive analysis of Luther’s ballad celebrating God’s victory through his gift of martyrdom to the two “young boys,” as he calls them, Christman shows that beyond the traditional observations of the use of the story of the martyrdom and its musical genre, “The New Song” reveals Luther’s skillful employment of Psalms 96 and 98 to proclaim God’s triumph over Satan through their deaths, reflecting his *theologia crucis*. An illuminating chapter examines how critique of medieval Marian piety particularly irritated ecclesiastical officials and how, in contrast to Luther, the opponents loyal to the old faith believed that Mary’s mercy toward the church and/or anger at evangelical demotion of her brought about the deaths.

Christman's study serves as a model for broadly focused explorations of the background and impact of individual events of the Reformation. His carefully honed examinations of the individual aspects of this event, its background and impact, offer fresh insights and syntheses of vital aspects of the culture that surface through it. This book serves both those new to the study of the Reformation and seasoned scholars.

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Friedrich Myconius (1490–1546): Vom Franziskaner zum Reformator.

Daniel Gehrt and Kathrin Paasch, eds.

Gothaer Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit 15. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2020. 392 pp. €66.

Often the lesser-known Reformers are the most important. History, after all, has a tendency to pay more attention to the celebrity and not the scholar; the star and not the changemaker. That is clearly true in the case of Myconius, who was one of the most significant early Reformers and yet is today widely unknown except among specialists. Thankfully, the present volume seeks to redress that wrong. Part 1, with essays by Petera Wiegel and Johannes Karl Schlageter, provides an overview of Myconius as a Franciscan. The life of Myconius, as explained in the first part, was both interesting and influential. The essays help readers to a deeper understanding of that life and provide details about his training as a Franciscan, generally lacking among modern readers. There is little doubt, as Weigel and Schlageter so ably show, that Myconius was who he was in no small part because he was a Franciscan. Part 2 treats the Reformation network, with contributions by Christine Mundhenk and Daniel Gehrt, and highlights Myconius's transformation from Franciscan to Reformer. The authors paint an extraordinary picture of a man deeply affected by his colleagues. This may be the most important part of the volume, as it helps readers comprehend more clearly how it was that Myconius became the figure we ultimately recognize.

Part 3, dealing with Thuringia, contains essays by Dagmar Blaha, Andreas Dietmann, Stefan Michel, and Friedemann Witting. From Franciscan to Reformer to theological investigator: the road that Myconius traveled on his intellectual and spiritual journey to become one of Thuringia's most influential thinkers is the focus of this part of the volume. Blaha's essay in particular raises the profile of Myconius in terms of theological importance for the budding Lutheran movement. Part 4 contains essays by Johannes Hund, Armin Kohnle, and Michael Beyer that detail Myconius's activities in foreign relations on behalf of the Saxon government. This is the section in which we discover that Myconius had larger concerns than theology. In that regard he was very much like Luther, who was also deputed to represent the wishes of the government as their emissary and their spokesman.