



Renegade: Martin Luther, the Graphic Biography

Andrea Grosso Ciponte (Illustrator) , Dacia Palmerino (Text)

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The life of reformer Martin Luther in the graphic novel format.

Five hundred years ago a brash young monk single-handedly confronted the most powerful institutions of his day. His bold stand sparked the Protestant Reformation and marked one of the great turning points in history.

Martin Luther, a spiritual and historical giant, is loved and hated to this day--and for good reason. The anniversary of the revolution he helped start has produced a spate of doorstep-sized biographies. Luckily, today there exists a more accessible format that does justice to such a colorful, complex character and his tumultuous life and times - the graphic novel.

In a world of grinding poverty, plague, and religious superstitions, a child of laborers distinguishes himself at university - until a lightning-bolt conversion lands him in a monastery. There his personal battles with disillusionment and doubt culminate in a cry for freedom. The rest is the stuff of history and legend: Luther's revolt against Rome with the nailing of ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg; his time spent incognito at Wartburg Castle, where he famously throws an inkpot at the devil; his seditious translation and publication of the Bible in the language of the people; his scandalous marriage to former nun Katharina von Bora; and, in later years, his ugly tirades against peasants, Anabaptists, and Jews.

Each chapter of Luther's life comes vividly to life thanks to cutting-edge graphic techniques, meticulous historical research, and compelling writing. This could be the biggest breakthrough for Martin Luther since the Gutenberg press.

"With its splendid color and unvarnished narrative, this is surely the most successful graphic biography ever." --Georg Howahl, WAZ

Renegade: Martin Luther, the Graphic Biography Details

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ISBN : 9780874862072

Author : Andrea Grosso Ciponte (Illustrator) , Dacia Palmerino (Text)

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From Reader Review Renegade: Martin Luther, the Graphic Biography for online ebook

Deb says

3.5 stars, rounded up to 4.

Renegade : Martin Luther, the Graphic Biography is a Mighty Fortress of an introduction to Martin Luther.

Confession: I have not read graphic novels since the Betty and Veronica comics at my piano teachers' house decades ago. Reformation: Renegade challenged my brain to process information in new ways with it's graphic (re)formation. (Sorry I couldn't resist ;)

Graphic novels, by their very nature must be more condensed than a book which relies on many words. I felt like Renegade got the important parts down, however, I would have like to see more of how Martin Luther was 'progressive' with educating his children and valuing his wife. Alas, perhaps a follow-up opportunity.

The Graphic Part : -) Some of it was a little "Halloween" creepy: Burning at the stake, rats, hangings, but I think that would be appealing to today's generation. I'd recommend the book for anyone 10 to 80. I hope this type of book reaches new audiences who otherwise may be unfamiliar with Martin Luther and the struggles of his time.

Layouts were varied and interesting. The colors popped against historic photo type backgrounds. Darks dominated, representing turbulent times, infused with electric blues, reds, and some whites. (It was cumbersome to read an electronic version of the Advanced Reader Copy because I had to double click to enlarge each page, enlarge it to readable size, then shrink, close it and repeat for each page spread. I would be very interested to see what it looks like on a printed page!)

The drama of this true adventure story pulled me in. Martin Luther is an incredible historic figure. I especially like the full-page illustrations and the ones with a full modern type background to represent Luther's translations. It is art with feeling.

I did not add Renegade to my non-fiction shelf, as it was an artist's and a writer's perceptions of Luther's story, and while generally true, apparently more learned scholars than I could find some historical inaccuracies. Other reviewers compared it to lengthier non-fiction biographies they had read. I don't believe it is fair to compare this creative, artistic approach with a longer extensively researched tome. As I first stated, it is a Great Introduction to an important man who changed history.

Thank you to NetGalley, the author and publisher for granting access to an arc of this book for an honest review.

Debbie says

"Renegade" is a graphic novel biography of Martin Luther's life. I assume the intended audience is protestant Christians, so I was surprised by the gore and use of bad language. A couple bad guys say things like "D*mned stubborn idiots!" and even Luther says, "Who the h*ll does she want?"

I understand that life and war back then were pretty cruel, but I was surprised by the focus on gore when the graphic novel format limits how much information can be included. Why not focus more on what Luther did and said rather than panel after panel of scenes of people dying horribly or him being bored during a time when he was hiding? Some pages showed people impaled on a tree, a woman slowly burning to death, and rows of hanged people with broken necks. We even get three panels focusing on a severed head that's impaled on a large hook.

The novel started with Luther as a youth and followed him until he died. It also showed how other people used the sentiments that Luther stirred up in the peasants to start a war. There were several pages with Luther in old age preaching against the Jews and blaming them for his sickness, plus some scenes after his death. I'll accept that Luther's marriage might not have been a love match, but he's shown as not even respecting her even as he agrees to marry her. I don't know--maybe Luther wasn't such a great guy, but I would have liked more on what he preached and did that lasted. It's what lasted that I'm most interested in.

Update: After reading this book, I read two text-based biographies about Martin Luther. This is a case where a picture was not worth a thousand words. Some of the pictures in the graphic novel have meaning if you know Luther's story but meant little to me when I didn't. Also, the graphic novel didn't always accurately portray Luther. Sometimes it was due to pacing, like Luther bad mouthing Kate and considering marrying her within the same scene. Sometimes it was going with legend, like the inkpot and the devil before inkpots were used. Sometimes, it just wasn't accurate, like how he's shown as paranoid against the Jews. While he did write some unfortunate things regarding Jews, both text-based biographies said it was because he was frustrated that the Jews weren't converting to Christianity.

I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

Maureen says

I enjoyed reading (most of) this! I love the idea of a graphic novel of Martin Luther and appreciate the concise way that the book shared the story of the dark ages and consequent reformation brought about by Martin Luther. It would be great if the book ended there. I feel the book veers off track in the last couple chapters starting with the peasant wars. This portion of the book devoted to some of his ideas that are anti-Semitic or pro-peasant killing felt unnecessary and are honestly things that should never be spoken again. These opinions of his are given with little context or explanation and are confusing to the reader, as they promote the opposite of his feelings at the beginning of the book. Overall I think it is difficult to paint such a complicated character within the confines of a graphic novel, and I feel like simplicity of the genre does his story a disservice. So overall, great on facts, weak on thorough characterization.

Matt says

The life of Martin Luther, the man who sparked the Protestant Reformation, has been written about for centuries yet now it can not only be written about but visualized as well. *Renegade: Martin Luther, the Graphic Biography* by Andrea Grosso Ciponte and Dacia Palmerino is exactly what its title says about the man who sparked a change in history.

Depicting the life of Luther from his childhood to his death, the biography focuses on his time as a monk led

up to and through his break with Rome. At 153 pages there is only so much that can be covered and only so much context as well through sometimes the visual aspect of the graphic novel does come in handy. While the short length of the book obviously foreshadowed only the barest minimum that could be covered on his life, yet the graphic novel aspect seemed to offer a way to enhance the chronicling of Luther's life.

Unfortunately the artwork looks like screen caps of a video game with so-so graphics with only a few great pages of art, usually at the beginning of each chapter.

The overall quality of the biographical and artwork content of *Renegade* is a mixed bag of a passable chronicle on Luther's life and so-so artwork. While some younger readers than myself might find it a very good read and hopefully make them want to know more about Martin Luther and the Reformation, I found it a tad underwhelming.

I received this book through LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program.

Trevor Durham says

Honestly, it kind of makes me sad to dislike an original work this much... But it seemed as though every aspect was a heinous offense. Small things as grammar grew in scope as the type-face and font didn't even fill dialogue bubbles, the dialogue and script felt clunky compared to Luther's works included, and the writer removed the most fascinating events behind lackluster transitions, taking the best parts away from readers. The art felt like a Gary's Mod event gone wrong, with faces awkward and static, making the entire work seem a cheap claymation graduate film. There wasn't any enjoyment to be had in this work about an enjoyable figure in history, and all I learned from this work was to not give it to anybody else.

Rama says

The Heretic: Martin Luther

This year is the 500 anniversary of the reformation that began when Martin Luther, a stubborn monk and a leader of protestant movement, published his 95 theses or complaints against Catholic Church. This marks the beginning of a revolution in the annals of Christianity. But the interesting thing about this book is that there are about 11 other books published in 2017. In addition, this biography is a graphical illustration and not a textual record. It is certainly creative, but the pictorial arts are unappealing. The graphics is poorly portrayed; much of life-like illustrations are dark or dark brown. In many instances the background is too dark to really appreciate the vibrancy of historical facts. The author fail to hold the reader's interest. Comparing this book to textual biographies already published, this work comes short. Another con is that the pages of the book have a very unpleasant odor, and the smell simply does not go away.

While being born in poverty, plague, and superstitions, Martin Luther joins a monastery after graduating from the university. He becomes disillusioned with the practices of Catholic Church and seeks for redemption. Luther begins to revolt against Rome's teachings. He spends his time incognito at Wartburg Castle, translates Bible into German, and finally his morally offensive marriage to former nun Katharina von Bora reflects negatively in the eyes of Catholic Church. In his later years, his tirades against peasants and Jews tarnishes his character. Despite that, one of the bright aspect of this book is the final chapter, "The Epilogue." This is perhaps the best work of the creators wherein the a private conversation between Luther's

companion Philip Melanchthon and Luther's crypt, and the a royal decree read by the Ferdinand I of Holy Roman Empire officially recognizing the protestant faith is creatively presented. Accordingly, each German prince is free to choose between the Catholic and Protestant faiths. And the prince's religion becomes the exclusive faith of his kingdom.

Jason Brown (Toastx2) says

Renegade- Martin Luther, The Graphic Biography: Not about the awesome Styx or JayZ songs

October 31st, 1517: Young monk, Martin Luther nails documents to the front door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. On the pages were printed 95 theses defining man's relationship with God and religion. These were tumultuous times and blasphemy is a dangerous game for renegades and suicidal fools anxious to receive the lash.

2017 marks the five hundredth anniversary of this event. Martin Luther rallied against the Pope and started a revolution in thought that shook the cornerstones of known Christianity. The writing and distribution of Luther's 95 theses, caused ripples in our social structures still in evidence.

Slated for release on 10/08/2017

Preorders available

Renegade: Martin Luther, The Graphic Biography (Dacia Palmerino, Andrea Ciponte)

160 pages

Plough Publishing House

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I have bastardized a bit of this, but bear with me as I am far from being a religious historian. I will leave the hard core cross comparison to those with stronger background experience.

Luther's history is incredibly fascinating. After a classic schooling, Martin Luther was left with more questions than answers. He found himself in dismay, attempting to reconcile his religious beliefs with the world around him. He frustratingly finds that they fail to be cohesive. During a walk in the countryside (I cannot tell if this is legend or fact) a brewing storm sent a bolt of lightning into a nearby tree. Luther took this as divine instruction, changed directions in his life and entered the monastic life.

Martin was in a conundrum, spending multiple sessions every day in confession. He felt that no matter how devout he was, the Church advised that he was a sinner in peril and would never be allowed into Heaven without being even more penitent. His concern for the state of his immortal soul weighed on him and his conflicted feelings increased. How could his soul be always at risk while the Catholic church allowed people to buy forgiveness of sins? If you dropped money into coffers, buying penance for yourself or loved ones seemed very wrong.

Luther invests a great deal of time in solitary study and comes to terms with a belief that is contrary to the teachings of the Church. His belief is that (as the Bible states) his Faith alone is needed to save him from damnation. The Church, the Pope, and all other earthly institutions are nothing more than tools being used as diversions between mankind and God.

Luther spends time translating the Bible from Latin to German and distributing it to the masses. This allows the Everyman to have a direct relationship with the words and instructions of the Christian God. The direct relationship removes the need to join the cattle call for multiple daily Mass, which served value only as lip service in his eyes. Mass then becomes worship for those who attend.

Palmerino's writing in this Graphic Novel was wonderful. I was concerned at first that this was going to be a chore to read, with the initial pages being presented a bit dry, feeling like the reader is preparing to be lectured on theology. After a short introduction, however, Renegade moves to Luther's ingress to school and branches the story. It immediately picks up in an easy to read manner. Reading this is less like Sunday school and more like a well crafted Hollywood Biopic.

The story itself is paired nicely with some absolutely stunning artwork by Ciponte. The framing of the story with the imagery really brings Luther to life again rather than simply being viewed as a Reformist whose bones are long since turned to dust. Watching the facial expressions change panel by panel as he makes deep personal realizations causes the pages glow with a Human element that must have taken a great deal of passion and forethought.

The artistic design also wavered between styles. In many areas, it was a purposeful rough and divisive; in others, it was almost stream of consciousness, with pages and phrases from the Bible floating around Luther's personal universe.

The words and art have a gentle interaction, taking difficult religious topics and complex political situations and placing them in a highly consumable presentation. A fine example of this is a full page spread showing Martin after he identifies that monastic vows are not permanent life long vows. In this page spread, Luther is getting married, the panels pan outward showing his happy marriage day. As each panel gets further from him and his bride, the final panel shows dark silhouettes of dead hanging from nooses, with the chapel in their background. The imagery and metaphor are haunting.

I would consider this graphic novel suitable for any age group 8 and above and highly recommend it for any history buff, religiously minded or not. As a primer to the topic, this media may have a huge benefit and I would be interested in seeing the Plough publishing house put out more work in this style, even potentially for other religions.

Bonus thought- Did Piers Anthony base his Devil Character in the series 'The Incarnations of Immortality' on Martin Luther? There is a segment of this Graphic Novel where Luther is in disguise and hiding from the authorities. He goes a bit crazy being secreted away and unable to be himself. He feels himself falling apart and in the Graphic Novel, it presents him as being visited by a hallucinatory succubus. The hyper religious 'good man' who is tainted by a succubus is how Anthony's character evolves 'For Love of Evil', being that the best person to keep the goodness in line is someone who loves God enough to be able to set his love aside and play the game fairly. I performed a bit of side research and it looks like this is documented in Martin's writings, so I find the correlation to another series I love to be an unexpected joy.

Disclosure: This Graphic Novel was provided for review purposes by the Publisher. Even a free cupcake is still a cupcake. If it were a disgusting cupcake, I would not eat it and instead, choose to throw it into a trash receptacle. Sometimes, the free cupcake has beautiful pillows of cream cheese frosting piled on top and a moist delicious carrot cake interior. You do not question it, you just dive into the blissful cakey goodness and enjoy the cupcake. Carrot cake is the best. I will fight you at the flagpole after school if you disagree.

Bob says

Summary: A richly illustrated graphic biography of the life of Martin Luther, covering the major events of his life from boyhood to death, and the setting in which that life took place.

I'm not a graphic novel person. I've only reviewed one graphic novel on this blog and I was ambivalent about it. So I had my doubts when this new "graphic biography" of Martin Luther arrived for review. Add to that the spate of books on Luther on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and you had the recipe for skepticism. Instead, I have to admit that my encounter with this work was powerful, leaving me thinking about Luther's life in a fresh way.

The artist's palette is dominated by reds, earth tones, dark blues, grays, and black. Somehow, this worked in capturing the setting of Luther's life—urban streets filled with rats, plague, poverty, and violent justice; castles and churches for isolated study and refuge, public disputation and conflict; sumptuously clothed churchmen and demonic figures; night-time journeys of lightning filled terror, kidnapping, scenes of slaughter from the Peasants War, and a final journey to death. This preview serves as a good sample of the graphic character and quality of the work.

The artwork and selection of episodes from Luther's life brought a familiar story from church history to fresh life. We glimpse Luther's strict upbringing amid the horrors of plagues and burnings at the stake, a severity of discipline and the justice of God. We trace the turmoil of a young man struggling under a sense of his own inadequacy before a righteous God, vowing to become a monk to the disappointment of his father, finding no relief in confessions, penances, journeys to Rome or counsel with Father Staupitz. We accompany him in his study of Romans at Wittenberg, until his stunning realization that the righteous lives by faith, that by faith we are made righteous.

We trace the beginnings of the Reformation to the posting of the 95 Theses in response to Father Johann Tetzel's marketing of indulgences to build St. Peter's Basilica. We glimpse the power of the newly invented printing press in circulating his ideas, and fomenting discontent, which must be quashed by Rome. We see the dawning realization of this monk that he is not defending Rome from excesses and errors but facing Rome's power to excommunicate and condemn him, and his courageous statement before the Diet of Worms:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or clear reason, I am bound by the biblical texts I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Therefore I cannot and I will not recant anything. I cannot act contrary to my conscience. So help me God! Amen."

The artist imaginatively captures Elector Frederick's daring ploy to secret Luther away to Wartburg Castle, the temptations he faces as he hides out in idleness, and the determination to translate the scriptures into the vernacular. Subsequently he goes free, returns to Wittenberg, and provides shelter for nuns who, influenced by Luther's ideas, have left the convent. He marries one of these, Katharina von Bora, who basically tells him she should marry her!

What we encounter less in the histories of Luther are the Peasant's War touched off in part by his ideas, particularly as they are extended by the radical theologian, Thomas Muntzer. Muntzer's rallying cry, "Omnia sunt communia" ("all things in common") fuels a violent peasant revolt leading to seizure of property, the

execution of a count, and a bloody forceful suppression of the rebellion ending in the execution of Muntzer, supported by Luther who writes against their rebellion and disobedience, even while realizing how his own ideas have fueled their acts.

We also see, in the final narrative of his life, and his fatal trip to Eisleben and Mansfeld in February 1546, his increasing hostility toward the Jews, against whom he speaks in his last sermon in the town of his birth, the conclusion of negotiations with Count Albrecht to protect his family's mining interests, and his deathbed affirmation of faith, with his final written words, "We are all beggars, that is true."

There are gaps, to be sure, particularly between 1530 and 1546 which are the period of consolidating this new movement of Reformation churches. It would have been delightful to have a chapter on "table talk" and Luther's domestic life. But what this biography helpfully does is help us understand the arc of Luther's life and the backdrop of disparities of wealth and poverty that made his ideas so volatile, beyond even his ability to control them. It highlights Luther's breakthrough insight on justification by faith, and his climactic encounter at Worms.

As the book trailer for this work emphasizes, this is no "door stop" biography. But it could serve well as a means to educate a new generation on the anniversary of the Reformation about this pivotal figure and his times.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher via LibraryThing. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

Jim Gallen says

Renegade comes in a format that is unfamiliar to me, a graphic biography. When I entered the contest in which I won it, I was not sure what I was getting in to. It is not the gore I was worried about but a biography told in cartoons.

I knew a little about Martin Luther, that he nailed his 95 theses to the church door and started the process that became the Protestant Reformation, or Revolt, depending on your perspective. In high school, Augustinian Academy, I learned that he had been an Augustinian monk but that is about as far as I got before opening Renegade.

What I found is an entertaining, easy to read introduction to the high points of its subject's life. The pictures are colorful and easy to understand. The text captures the story line in the accompanying caption balloons. The stage is set in the dark times of the Black Death, the controversy over the purported sale of indulgences and power struggles between Church and crowns. Luther's tale is told as beginning with a strict disciplinarian mother, a soul searching for God's will, the lightning bolt that misses him and it continues into the discovery of new understandings of faith. The recognition of his status as a sinner dependent totally on the mercy of God for his salvation is shown as leading to many of his later tenets, such as the translation of the Bible into German, sola scriptura, his challenge to papal authority, and that priests and nuns should marry. His dismay at the politicization of his movement and his antisemitism are included in the saga. One thing I really like about this work is that I do not see it as advancing a particular agenda. From my Catholic (partly formed by Augustinians) viewpoint, I see an unfortunate soul driven by turbulent times into grave

error with tragic consequences. I can see how a follower of Luther's theology would see an enlightened scholar who arrives at truths that had eluded so many others.

I recommend this as a first introduction to Martin Luther. After reading this you will have a general understanding of his life. If you choose to read on you can do so with a framework in which to organize the contents of more detailed biographies.

Nancy says

Martin Luther: Renegade, The Graphic Biography is one of dozens of books that have come out on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant revolution, which began when Luther dared to stand up to church corruption. Although I was tempted to read several of these new books, I could not fit them into my tight reading schedule.

I read Martin Bainton's biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*, several times, albeit in the 1970s. At Temple University I had a course on the Reformation. Our professor called Luther a cultural icon, a game changer, who freed the common people's minds with a Bible they could read. The result was a peasant uprising against all in power. In a seminary course on The Book of Romans we learned about its influence on Luther. Most recently I reviewed *Brand Luther* by Andrew Pettigrew. I have at least a foundation of understanding.

The oversize book of 154 pages is illustrated by Andrea Grosso Ciponte. The art is beautiful, often with striking light and dark contrasts. Some pictures appear painted over photographs. The story by Dacia Palmerino tells Luther's faith journey. Life was brutal in Luther's time, with disease, poverty, and the abuse of power by governmental and church authorities. People turned to faith and the hope of escaping eternal damnation through works-- acts of piety, including church donations called indulgences.

Luther struggles over justification in God's eyes and with the easy buy out offered by indulgences. Reading the Bible he becomes his own theologian and realizes that we are justified in God's eyes by faith, and faith alone, and that works without faith is meaningless.

Luther is excommunicated and goes into hiding for a while, protected by the local prince. He uses the newfangled printing press to great advantage. The peasants rise up and are mowed down by the army. Luther frees the priesthood from celibacy and consents to marry.

I would not suggest this graphic biography for younger readers. It is very dark, even if it did skip Luther's self-flagellation, and the theology and historical milieu would be confusing.

I am concerned about the portrayal of Luther's later years and emphasis on his talk about the Jews needing to come into the fold now he has reformed the church to a purer state. I worry it would spur a justification of Anti-Semitism.

The end of the biography highlights how Luther ended the power of the Catholic Church over government, for each Prince was free to choose his faith.

I won *Renegade* from Plough Publishing House through a Publishers Weekly giveaway.

Jay says

An interesting take on the life of Martin Luther. The illustrations are mostly similar to what you see on the cover – slightly blurred details, some parts almost photo-realistic, some parts quite vague and washed out. There are a variety of images, including many that set a dark scene that includes rats, disembodied heads with large hooks going through them, and mass hangings. This isn't a kids book. The conversation is mostly contemporary, although there are some Latin phrases here and there relating to books and edicts from the Pope. This is written in a contemporary way, which somewhat detracts from the message while also allowing a new audience to understand Luther's story. The story focused on a few key periods in Luther's life, and I was left wondering how he went from the renegade emboldening peasants with a German translation of the New Testament to siding with the Princes against the peasants later. This may have been the focus of another period of his life not covered here. There are decades skipped before the last scenes as Luther dies. And he's changed immensely by then, also without understanding. I missed those key changes in his personality. The book also had a strange way early on with chronology, going back and forth. Sometimes a chapter is described to its end, then illustrated in more detail, repeating events. It was very strange, and detracted from understanding. Overall, I found this an interesting book, and I'm glad I read it. I would read more by the same author and illustrator.

I won a copy of this book from Goodreads "First Reads" giveaway program.

Rianna (RiannaBlok) says

55/45 books read in 2017

Provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

2 stars for the art + 4 for the storytelling = 3 stars.

Be aware that the depiction of violence can be quite graphic, so be mindful when handing it to children.

"500 years ago a brash young monk single-handedly confronted the most powerful institutions of his day. His bold stand sparked the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of history..." (back cover of the graphic novel)

This is a graphic novel biography about Martin Luther, the man who reformed the Christian church by translating the Bible into German and preaching against the money obsessed and fear preaching of the Catholic Church of his days.

Although the artwork of this novel was not something I particularly enjoyed, I did enjoy the rest. This is not a glorification of Martin Luther. It portrays his good work in fighting the corruption of the Catholic Church and bringing the Bible to the people (giving them the opportunity to assess it themselves), but it also shows his disdain for the common folk and his antisemitism (which btw were both normal for people grown up in his social circles). This graphic novel really does portray a real person, I appreciate that.

This book portrays an interesting part of European history and I would recommend it for that quality.

Forrest Schultz says

500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 95 THESES CELEBRATED:

GRAPHIC NOVEL DEPICTS THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERHERO MARTIN LUTHER

Andrea Grosso Ciponte & Dacia Palmerino Renegade -- Martin Luther: The Graphic Biography (Plough Publishing, 2017)

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Translator: Michael G. Parker

Reviewer: Forrest W. Schultz

When I was a boy Superman was my favorite comic book super-hero. Since then the greatness of Superman has been recognized in Superman: The Movie starring Christopher Reeve and in today's "graphic novels" of Superman. Martin Luther has long been regarded as one of the greatest of history's "movers and shakers" (as we used to say back in the 1980s) and now, with the publication of the book under review he is rightly regarded as one of its super-heroes. Now, if super-heroes are appropriate as characters in graphic novels, and if Luther is a super-hero, then it logically follows that it is permissible and reasonable to tell us his biography by means of the graphic novel format. Q.E.D. Having said that, it must be admitted that it certainly seems very far-out to use the graphic novel for talking about Luther, but that very seeming strangeness is what makes this book so interesting and attractive AND lots of fun to read and look at!! It is its very unexpectedness that makes it so funny and yet also a striking way of communicating what Luther and his time was like. AND, because October 31, 2017 is the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the famous (or is it infamous?) 95 Theses, this year there are (and will be) lots of books about Luther, the book under review here has a great advantage because, unlike the others, this one presents such a strange and interesting format!! If you are tired of reading same-old-same-old theology and history books about Luther, I recommend reading Renegade !! The book's very format is a renegade type!

But what about historical accuracy?? Aha! Glad you asked. Listen, this innovative graphic novel format is very appropriate because Luther himself was very innovative in HIS time in using the then newly invented printing press to publicize his teachings. And some of his writings included what we now call cartoons!

AND, Luther not only was up to date but he also was a pace-SETTER in that his excellent German translation of the Bible greatly influenced the very future of the German language just as a century later the excellence of the King James translation of the Bible greatly influenced the future of the English language. Luther was not only "with it", he also established what later became regarded as "with it"!! As a famous verse in the Bible puts it, he was "the head" not "the tail" -- an innovator not a copycat.

Back in the 60s there was a lot of discussion about "medium" and "message" due to the provocative ideas of a man named Marshall McLuhan. My conclusion on that matter is that the medium influences or becomes part of the message. As I hope I have established above, the graphic novel medium is appropriately used in communicating the message we need to know about Luther.

I wish to thank Maureen Swinger from Plough Publishing for sending me a copy of this very interesting book. It will be published next week.

October 3, 2017

Ben says

I mean... I didn't hate it.

It definitely had that edge of "I-was-clearly-meant-to-be-educational-and-so-I'm-not-as-polished" feel that you get with edutainment. The art had an odd CG, uncanny valley feel to it, and the scenes often lacked dynamic feeling... which is a problem when you're portraying literal riots.

The pacing did seem really good; I don't know that it particularly felt that it dragged in any way. It covered his life accurately. Though, ironically, I don't think it actually bothered to list out his 95 Theses, which probably should have at least been an appendix.

I did learn quite a bit; I hadn't known about the German Peasant War; I didn't know about the start of Protestantism past Luther, and I didn't realize that Luther was so antisemitic. I appreciate that Palmerino didn't shy away from the more uncomfortable aspects of Luther's life and personality.

I don't know why you'd read this, unless you were interested in the history or particularly fond of Luther. Again though, it's not bad... just decidedly mediocre.

Louise says

I was curious when I saw this book in our public library. How would this genre tell the Martin Luther story? The short answer: In this book, the way has not been found.

The art work is disturbing. The images are dark throughout, starting with the poverty and superstition Luther saw in his youth and several pages (many frames) of Luther as he ages and dies. In between images of violence dominate: shadows of hanging bodies, a head on a chopping block, a head on a cleaver hanging from a church bell, people with torches and spears, etc. The graphics have an eerie look. Are they photos that have been painted over?

A few images of note: Pages 66-67 injects a twist of modernism and levity which contrasts with the overall medieval and depressed feeling of the other pages. Page 97 heralds a major contribution of Luther: the German translation of the Bible. It has three of the book's brightest and most upbeat images. I presume the text that surrounds Luther has symbolism. Page 127 has a bizarre rendering of a captured Count's children tied in ropes. The children look like something out of a Disney movie, lined up to be rescued by a magical bird.

The content selected from Luther's eventful life includes: his grim childhood; his father's disappointment in his joining the clergy; his dedication as a student who is chosen for a mission for which he walks to Rome; emphasis (from among his theses) on the challenge to indulgences the importance of having the Bible accessible to the general public; the challenge to clerical celibacy; the circumstances of his marriage (minimized as is his wife); how his teachings lead the peasants to revolt, which he disavows. The end has Luther bemoaning the devil who appears as a "Jew, Muslim, Papist, Antibaptist".. There is the hint of negotiations until Charles V recognizes the Protestant faith within the Holy Roman Empire.

Both the content and the graphics make you wonder who the book is designed for. The material will be known to most people who will pick the book up out of curiosity (like me). Some will be put off by the graphics. Teens may be an audience, but the story will not grab them.

It may be that a graphic bio of Luther is not possible... The authors are right in that he lived in very grim times.
