LUTHER FOR EVANGELICALS, by
Paul R. Hinlicky. Grand Rapids:
(paper).

Paul R. Hinlicky has set out to rein-
troduce Martin Luther and his theol-
ogy to evangelical Christians in the
twenty-first century. Consequently,
Luther for Evangelicals is not an act of
Luther-interpretation per se. Rather, it
is a self-conscious exercise in theologi-
cal hermeneutics with the specific goal
of tendering an account of Luther’s the-
ology that is relevant and accessible to
Anglophone evangelicals. Moreover, the
book is designed to push readers into a
sustained and firsthand interaction with
Luther’s writings themselves. Structur-
ally, the book is divided into two parts,
the first of which—“Luther in Evangeli-
cal Perspective”—introduces Luther’s
theology from the vantage of four major
preoccupations in contemporary evan-
gelicalism: the new birth, the Bible,
evangelization, and the atonement.
These four Hinlicky takes from the Brit-
ish scholar David Bebbington. Part 2
treats “Luther’s Evangelical Theology”
and consists primarily of an interpreta-
tion of Luther’s approach to teaching the
Christian faith found in the catechisms.

Luther for Evangelicals begins with
prefatory remarks, a short introduc-
tion, and a brief “Overture” before com-
mencing the body of its argument with

a chapter on “The New Birth.” Here,
Hinlicky enlists Luther’s perspective on
the matter of being “born again” (see
John 3:7)—an important preoccupa-
tion in the evangelical tradition. For
Hinlicky, this occasions an introduc-
tion to Luther’s understanding of the
document of justification by faith alone
without works. The description set forth
discloses a particular sympathy for the
new Finnish school of Luther studies
and its endeavor to read Luther’s doc-
trine of justification in terms of deifica-
tion or theosis. Hinlicky suggests that
later Lutheranism, especially with the
Formula of Concord, subverted Luther’s
document of justification as both imputation
and regeneration together. What Hin-
licky fails to adequately highlight is how
Luther’s performative account of the
external word as promise (promissio)—
not a version of theosis—foregrounds
Luther’s rich and vital description of
God’s justification of the godless with
his word and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 treats the Bible. For Hin-
licky, Luther’s way of approaching
Scripture provides a helpful alternative
to the fundamentalist legacy of modern
evangelicalism, which has engaged in
numerous interminable debates about
the authority and inerrancy of the
Bible. The challenge of higher critical
scholarship renders the fundamental-
ist approach to the Scriptures distinctly
unviable, according to Hinlicky. Yet
Luther’s christological configuration of the doctrine of Scripture dismantles the rather unhelpful binary opposition of fundamentalist and liberal approaches to Scripture and its inspiration. Luther helpfully refocuses the matter of scriptural authority from a fixation on the manner of verbal inspiration to the purpose of the text itself to promote and inculcate Jesus Christ (*was Christum treibt*).

Hinlicky enlists the topic of evangelization in chapter 3 to develop some rather interesting observations on theological anthropology, the problem of secularization in the aftermath of the Reformation, and Luther’s view of Christian civic vocation in public life. For Hinlicky, Luther’s view of the two kingdoms and the two kinds of righteousness neither evacuates God’s presence from the world nor blunts the apocalyptic edge of God’s interruptive self-donation in Jesus Christ. Luther’s vision is one of “holy secularity” in which Christians both serve within the public space but also bear witness to the gospel of God’s coming in Jesus. On the matter of atonement (chapter 4), Hinlicky helpfully retrieves Luther’s view of Christ as both sin-bearer and victor over death. He also locates some observations about Luther’s relationship with Judaism in this chapter.

Part 2 shifts to a description of Luther’s theology from the vantage point of the catechisms. Hinlicky takes Luther’s view of catechesis (Christian instruction) as a helpful supplement to evangelicalism in the wake of revivalism.
To unpack Luther’s own catechetical theology, Hinlicky treats the parts of the catechism in order: the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, baptism, confession, and the Eucharist. With each of these topics as an organizational scaffolding, Hinlicky deploys part 2 both as an introduction to the Christian life according to Luther and also as a primer on the basic content of the Christian faith as Luther understands it. A concluding “Postlude” nicely brings the book to a close. An appendix including the lyrics to each Luther hymn Hinlicky references is contained here. The back matter also consists of endnotes and a helpful index of subjects and names.

*Luther for Evangelicals* competently executes its rather modest aim of providing an entrée to the theology and perspective of Martin Luther. Hinlicky is an ingenious reader of Luther’s writings and skillfully develops a number of proposals that he has elucidated more fully in his other works. While Hinlicky’s perspective on Luther will prove interesting to many, this has at least two drawbacks. A first is that, while readers familiar with Hinlicky’s previous work will notice how the gestures he makes fit within the broader context of his scholarly project, readers new to Hinlicky might find some of the proposals in *Luther for Evangelicals* to be idiosyncratic—if not discreet from the task of supplying a basic reintroduction to Luther. Another problem is the matter of audience. While the book’s prefatory remarks disclose an experience at a Billy Graham crusade, as well as a brief personal interest in the charismatic movement, it is more difficult to discern to whom, specifically, Hinlicky hopes to address this retrieval of Luther. Reference is made throughout to a number of scholars of evangelicalism, such as Molly Worthen. But it is less clear which contemporary exponents of evangelical theology Hinlicky hopes to reach, since reference to such figures is more sparse. With these issues in mind, *Luther for Evangelicals* could very possibly serve as a fine entry point to Luther’s theology for students, pastors, and interested lay people.

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After its initial, attention-grabbing subtitle, Jesus Vs. Caesar: For People Tired of Serving the Wrong God by Joerg Rieger proves to be an insightful read. By juxtaposing the dynamics of early Christians against the Roman Empire, Rieger provides modern readers a lens by which tensions between a servant Jesus and a domineering world can be viewed. Jesus serves as the image of inequality and the constant pressure against imperialism both in the ancient and modern worlds. Caesar, to contrast, is the embodiment of systems and policies that exist solely to center power in the few to the detriment of the many.

In five chapters, Rieger breaks down how the mission, theology, and image of Christ were initially set against the repression of the Roman Empire and its sycophants. With clear description and detail, Rieger explains how Jesus’s movement is from the bottom up, in distinct contrast to Caesar and the empire’s top-down control. Further, Rieger describes the monumental coup of the empire in adopting and adapting Jesus into its own Caesar-like image, thereby transforming, for centuries, Jesus into a tool of oppression, leaving a true understanding of Jesus to the minority.

Not only are the themes and dissonances of the ancient world explored, so too are the issues of the modern world. In every chapter Rieger describes a tension or actions in the ancient world and compares them, quite clearly, with the modern world. Many readers may be surprised by how similar the disparities of these two worlds are.

In chapter 1, Rieger introduces early Christians as atheists in the eyes of the Roman Empire, a minority group that rejected the deified Caesar in favor of a deity completely different and in opposition to Caesar. He then discusses how the empire successfully adopted Jesus and transformed him into a more Caesar-like deity more palatable to those in power and the systems that keep them in power. Rieger then suggests that the modern movement away from the church and toward atheism is not, in fact, a movement away from God; rather it is a movement away from the imperialized Jesus.

Rieger then moves the conversation toward religion and politics in chapter 2. He reminds readers that separation of church and state is a modern creation and did not exist in the ancient world. When Jesus criticized Caesar, Herod, or the religious authorities, he was criticizing both the religion and the politics of the day. Bringing in the discussion of the imperial Jesus from the preceding chapter, Rieger shows how much of the modern political system is guided by the imperialized Jesus. Historical examples and modern trends help to solidify Rieger’s arguments.

One of the more interesting points Rieger makes is fleshed out in the third chapter, which takes a sincere look at the spiritual versus the material. Rieger discusses again how Jesus’s ministry was just as much, if not more, about the material world as the spiritual, and that the coup in imperializing Jesus took away much of the weight of Jesus’s mission on the material. Rieger gives many examples (as he does in the other
chapters) of biblical passages that have been distorted from a material to a spiritual perspective. Both in ancient times and modern times, Rieger argues that a focus on the spiritual is beneficial to the people in power and the systems that sustain inequality, which is detrimental to the poor.

The title of chapter four, “God vs. Mammon,” may return the reader to high-school literature and specifically Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. This is the chapter about economics, both ancient and modern. Rieger delves into Jesus’s mission and how it was influenced by the economic inequality of the ancient world. Patronage ruled the ancient world and, though not as obvious as back then, continues to greatly influence the modern world economy. Inequality is central to this chapter, and the imperial Jesus versus the true Jesus plays a pivotal role in modern economic structures. A warning, however, if you enter this chapter believing in trickle-down economics, prepare to have that belief challenged.

Rieger does not leave the best for last in the final chapter, though it is certainly still engaging. Chapter 5 is all about dialogue, interreligious and otherwise. One of the most important insights Rieger has, and one that should not come as a shock to readers, is that interreligious dialogue may be more important between Christians and Christians than Christians and non-Christians. Differences, to Rieger, are essential to a healthy dialogue and a healthy society. Creating schisms and accentuating differences as “us versus them” plays into Caesar rather than Jesus.

Throughout *Jesus vs. Caesar* many of the deeply held beliefs of modern Christians are deconstructed, and we are given a glimpse of what Jesus could have been without imperial distortion. Anyone who, as the subtitle of the book says, is tired of serving the wrong god would benefit from reading this book. Especially at a time when inequality is growing, and differences are becoming barriers to communication, this book can open our eyes to how things could, and perhaps should, be. Rieger provides us with the information we need to see through the imperial Jesus while leaving it up to us to find out how we can follow Jesus instead of Caesar.

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Approximately fifty million people globally have some form of dementia. Researchers expect that number to nearly triple by 2050. The prevalence of dementia means that nearly every congregation holds persons living with Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or some other form of dementia, which means those congregations also hold caregivers. Janet Ramsey’s book, part of the Living with Hope series from Fortress Press, offers compassionate, care-filled insights, observations, and suggestions for persons living with dementia, their caregiver(s), and the congregations that hold them.

This is a storybook. Ramsey tells her own stories of caregiving, and she shares poignant stories that come from those who generously shared their experiences with her. People aren’t painted in unrealistic ways; they report their crankiness, their exhaustion, and their frustrations along with their kindness, their patience, and their love. The interviews Ramsey conducted before writing the book anchor her recommendations in the messy reality that is inherent in living with dementia.

In addition, Ramsey’s experience as a gerontologist and a practical theologian provides deep theological and theoretical grounding. Her book is conceptually rich yet not dense. Ramsey uses examples to explicate nearly every concept, creating the feel of a warm, encouraging conversation with the author. One can almost hear her saying, “Does that make sense?”

Dignity and Grace is written in two parts. The first part tends to the deep need for dignity that persons with dementia and their caregivers have: the need to be
seen, heard, cared for promptly, spoken to kindly. The three chapters in this part deal with dignity and life with dementia, dignity as accompaniment, and dignity and congregations. An emphasis on mutual hospitality (for example, offering to pray for those with dementia and asking them to pray for us) offers a particular insight into what Ramsey means by “dignity.” The commitment to offer respect and dignity comes from our awareness of our common humanity and a deep belief that full personhood does not depend on full cognitive capacity.

The second part engages grace, with chapters on love, forgiveness, and creativity. Stories in this part of the book hold powerful examples of the complexity of relational dynamics that must be considered as people make caregiving decisions. Pastors and congregational members must understand that dementia doesn’t arrive in an ahistorical context. Prescriptive ideas about who should offer care and how can be hurtful to those who are already navigating complicated relational realities. Ramsey’s inclusion of stories that represent those painful situations is both gift (to those in the middle of troubled relationships) and caution (to those observing from the outside).

Creativity might seem like a surprising element of life with dementia. Ramsey’s inclusion of it reminds us of the multidimensional nature of a whole life. Experiences of beauty through art, music, worship, and imaginative activity do not depend on full cognitive capacity. Researchers tell us that music sometimes finds its mysterious way through the confusion of dementia, connecting people to experiences of joy and memory. Some museums offer specialized tours for persons with memory loss and their families and caregivers that invite storytelling coming out of engagement with pieces of art in their collections (for example, “Discover Your Story” tours at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). Ramsey’s inclusion of creativity as an element of grace is a wonderful, if unexpected, aspect of the book.

The structure of Dignity and Grace adds to its usefulness. Each chapter ends with Ramsey’s lovely, insightful meditations on a psalm or portion of a psalm. These “grace notes” to each chapter provide opportunities for theological and emotional reflection and are grounded in Ramsey’s theological and theoretical understandings in ways that educate, remind, and sometimes gently challenge. Pull quotes and sidebars highlight particularly powerful points and recommendations. A summary of helpful online and print resources, a brief glossary, and thorough endnotes that invite further exploration all add to the value of this book for pastors, congregations, support communities, and, of course, persons living with dementia and their caregivers.

One concept that would complement Ramsey’s book and might amplify a congregation’s understanding of how to support caregivers in particular is that of ambiguous loss. Ramsey includes in the resource section a book written by Pauline Boss, who has developed the concept of ambiguous loss over the past four decades. Initially identified in families with members in the military who were missing in action and thus physically absent but psychologically present, Boss expanded it to include families who had members who were physically present but psychologically absent, such as family members with dementia. The ambiguity of the situation creates tremendous stress for the family as they deal with questions of how to reconfigure family roles and make decisions. The nature of ambiguous loss suggests that
the most helpful goal for caregivers and those who support them is developing greater resilience in the face of the paradoxical reality that the loved one with dementia is both here and not here. This is not a criticism of Ramsey’s work (no book can contain everything) but may be a helpful place for further exploration for those deeply involved with caregivers and others whose loved ones are living with dementia.

Perhaps Ramsey’s greatest contribution to her audience is urging us toward “tough hope” (152): “In the face of great suffering, we need tough hope.” In the afterword, she encourages persons with dementia, their caregivers, and the communities that surround all of them to maintain hope (beyond mere optimism), both now and for the future. She ends with a hope-based addition to Rom 8:37–39: “‘For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor dementia . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ . . . Not only do we have dignity and grace, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (157, emphasis added).

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Among historians, there is an often-held disdain for recent history. A frequently heard adage is that any work of history that treats subjects less than one hundred years old is journalism, not history (usually spoken with a sneer on the word journalism). There are some reasons for this. The writing of recent history is fraught with peril, as it does take some time before the historical “dust” settles on events, and their lasting implications can be fully traced. At times, works of recent history have been later proven to be wrong, sometimes spectacularly so. And then there is the messy inconvenience of having some of these human subjects still living and able, perhaps, to refute what was said of them and their times. Messy, indeed.

Yet there is a desperate need for recent histories, which accounts for the reason that so many of them are written (and sold). Readers want to make some sense of the world around them, especially the history that is still in living memory, even though it recedes from view every successive generation. The history of our time is important in that an author can take a larger view of events that we ourselves have known or heard of and put these events in some perspective. This is especially true of the history of the twentieth century, the sources for which are so voluminous that the details threaten to overwhelm us.

The twentieth century is one of Christianity’s most momentous centuries, equal perhaps to the fourth and sixteenth centuries. The transformations of Christianity during the twentieth century have been astounding, and historians are just beginning to take them all in. Think of the Christian world in 1900. In that year, half of all the world’s Christians lived in Europe; two-thirds of them lived on one side or the other of the North Atlantic. Think of what was still to come after that year: world wars, communism and fascism, the growth of secularism and technology, and huge social shifts. Within Christianity, think of the rise of Pentecostalism and fundamentalism, the rise of liberal Christianities, the ecumenical movement, Vatican II, and so many other things. Above all, consider the dramatic shift of Christianity to the Global South, which would see by century’s end two-thirds of all Christians living in South America, Africa, and Asia.

Fortunately, there are historians willing to brave the task of writing histories of Christianity in this turbulent and transformative century. Brian Scott, professor of world Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, and Scott Sunquist, dean and professor of world Christianity at Fuller Seminary, have each attempted a single volume to capture the essence of Christianity in the twentieth century (curious how the missiologists are leading the way on this one). Their task is enormous: trying to encapsulate the events and movements of a sprawling, contentious century in the life of Christianity into a single
volume. Their strategies differ markedly, but by different means, they each produce a volume that is both readable and thought-provoking.

The volume by Brian Stanley clocks in at a substantial weight, close to five hundred pages, and leans more toward a comprehensive volume, although a complete history of this subject would easily run multiple volumes. Stanley’s organization is actually very intriguing; ordered roughly chronologically, his volume nevertheless is organized thematically. Stanley picks representative themes in the history of twentieth-century Christianity and then explores each theme by examining it in paired examples. Thus, for example, he examines the role of nationalism in modern Christianity by looking at a pair of case studies, in this case, Poland and South Korea. Or, in another chapter, Christianity and genocide in Nazi Germany and Rwanda. Not all of his chapters are paired in this way, but most are, and these pairings (often not immediately apparent) are an intriguing way of examining both the themes and the areas themselves. A couple of these paired chapters are not quite as successful, such as the one on liberation movements in Latin America and among the Palestinians, but in general, they provide a thought-provoking entry into this history.

The book by Sunquist is less hefty, at a little over two hundred pages, but in its own way manages to give a satisfactory introduction to the history of twentieth-century Christianity, with a focus on the reversals and transformations outlined above. This is a work of only six chapters, and like Stanley’s volume, is roughly chronological by thematic chapters. The first chapter deals with the Christian situation at the beginning of the twentieth century and is followed by subsequent chapters on the how Christians lived their faith lives, then politics and persecution, the confessional families of Christianity and their development, Christianity and migration, and finally Christianity and other religions. Sometimes the chapters, by necessity, seem a bit too thin, but the narrative never seems to drag, and even experienced readers can find here new information and ideas.

It would be difficult to suggest which of the two books to read, assuming that a reader would have to choose between the two. Both are engaging books, and both are thoughtful enough to engage the reader. It is perhaps an evasion to say that you should read them both, but you should read them both, especially to gain the sweep and intensity of Christianity in this transformation century.

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