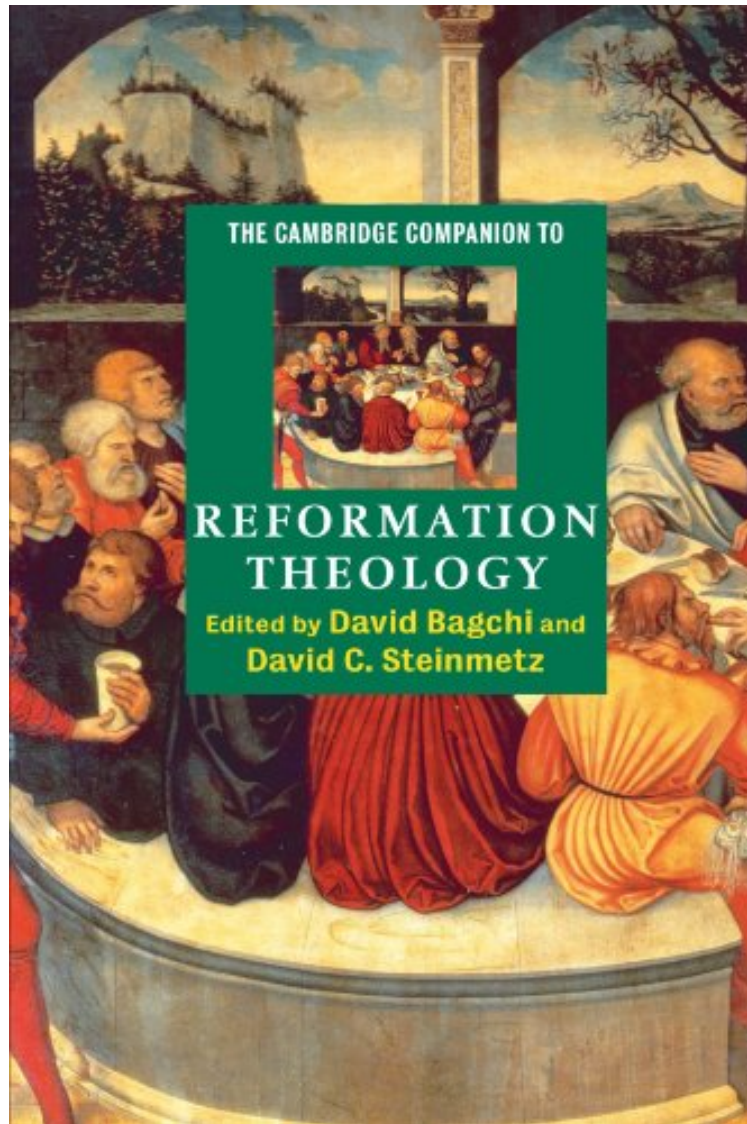


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The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology (Cambridge Companions to Religion)

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From Brand: Cambridge University Press : The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology (Cambridge Companions to Religion) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology (Cambridge Companions to Religion):

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Good but flawedBy L. WolfThis book is hard to review. It contains much that is good, but it also contains much that is bad. First, the good. The book has eighteen chapters, and

sixteen of these are dedicated to particular theologians or theological movements. Three of these chapters discuss Catholic theology - there is a chapter on late medieval Catholic theology, a chapter on pre-Tridentine Catholic theology in the period after Luther, and a chapter on the Council of Trent. There are chapters on Lollardy, Hussitism, and Erasmus. And, of course, there are many chapters on theologians and theological movements of the Protestant Reformation. The majority of these chapters focus on the Lutheran and Reformed traditions - there are individual chapters on Luther, Melancthon, Confessional Lutheranism, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, the Scottish Reformation, and Protestant Orthodoxy. There is one chapter on the Anabaptist movement. And, though there are chapters on Cranmer and the English Reformers, any reader who hopes to learn about Anglicanism will be disappointed. More on that later. The book is rounded out by an introductory chapter on the Reformation and a concluding chapter that discusses the future of scholarship on Reformation theology. For the most part, these chapters are packed with useful information about Reformation theology, and some of them are exceptional. The chapters on Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Protestant Orthodoxy, and the Scottish Reformation are perhaps the best, and I would strongly recommend them to others. In particular, the chapters on Calvin and Protestant Orthodoxy correct many common misunderstandings of the Reformed tradition, and they also provide some great insights into the nature of that tradition. They should be read by all Christians who are interested in Calvin and the so-called "Calvinist" movement. Actually, there is a lot of good information in most of the chapters, and unless you are a specialist you will surely learn a great deal. I certainly learned a tremendous amount from reading this book. I knew very little about Zwingli or Bucer before reading the chapters on those thinkers, and I am now very curious to learn more about them. Zwingli in particular raised my curiosity. I also knew very little about Lollardy and Hussitism, and I found the chapters on these subjects very engaging. Many of the chapters are well written and lively. All of the chapters were written by competent scholars, and many of these authors are leaders in their respective fields. So, what's wrong with the book besides a lack of solid information on Anglicanism? This brings me to the bad. The chapters in this book concentrate almost entirely on Reformation theology, with almost no attention given to the historical or socio-political dimensions of the Protestant Reformation. For example, nothing is said about the political structure of the Holy Roman Empire or Gutenberg's new printing press, which were both important to Luther's success. Those who are familiar with the basic history of the Protestant Reformation will already know these details, but those who are new to it may well wonder how Luther managed to avoid execution, especially considering that Hus and other "proto-Reformers" had been put to death by the Catholic Church. Perhaps the contributors to this volume could be forgiven for omitting historical conditions even as important as these. However, the authors often refer to historical events that are unknown to most non-specialists without explaining their nature or significance. For instance, the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 is mentioned in several chapters, but the nature of the revolt is never explained. Similarly, the Marburg Colloquy is referenced by several authors, but none of these authors provides any real information about it. There is a little information on the Augsburg Interim and the Leipzig Interim, but neither of them is explained clearly even though they are each mentioned several times. Other events that are mentioned with little or no explanation include the Munster Rebellion, the formation of the Schmalkaldic League, the "Castilian" incident in Scotland, and Tyndale's translating of the Bible into English. Amazingly, the chapter on Cranmer doesn't explain how the English Church split from the Roman Catholic Church, but rather presupposes that the reader already knows this story. To make matters worse, the index is incomplete. To give just one example, the Marburg Colloquy is listed only once in the index, on page 90, but it is also discussed on pages 108 and 253. Thus, one may not get much help from cross-referencing. Personal details are often omitted - one never learns how Luther and Melancthon met, and the relationship between Wishart and Knox is barely sketched. In the introductory chapter, the editors of the volume state that the focus of the book is Reformation theology, and not Reformation history. That is fine. But it would have been helpful to devote at least one or two paragraphs to the political situation in Germany etc. And, it is inexcusable for an author to reference a largely unknown historical event without bothering to explain it in any detail, as happens often in the book. It isn't simply that many of the contributors neglect to explain historical events that they mention - they also fail to explain many theological ideas that they discuss. For example, the following theological terms and expressions are used without any explanation whatsoever: "classical atonement theories" (54); "antinomianism" (59); "Aristotelian habitus" (73); "double divine will" (105); "the exclusivist revelation theology of `Jerusalem'" (105); "federal theology" (141); and, "ex opera operato" and "ex opera operantis" (244). In some cases, the lack of explanation is almost comical. For instance, in his chapter on Cranmer, Peter Newman Brooks says that the *via media* is regarded by many as "the abiding theological characteristic of English reformation" (158), but he never provides a clear explanation of what the term "*via media*" means. Again, readers who have already studied the English Reformation will understand what Brooks is saying, but any reader who hopes to learn about the fundamentals of the English Reformation from this chapter will be completely lost, and likely extremely frustrated as well. Such a reader may profit from Brooks' chapter if she is willing to consult other resources while studying Brooks, but I think that she would be better off ignoring Brooks' chapter altogether. Some theological terms, like "erastian" and "adiaphora", are used often throughout the early chapters of the book with no explanation before finally receiving some comment in later chapters. Another such term is "Nicodemism", which seems to me to be ambiguous and to be used by different authors in different ways, often without explanation. Finally, many people

and movements such as the Waldensians, Foxe, and Servetus are mentioned without explanation. Many readers will not know the denotation of the term "radical". My biggest complaint is about the term "nominalism". I am a graduate student in philosophy, and I specialize in metaphysics; but, I have also done a fair amount of reading in ancient and medieval philosophy. In my reading of medieval philosophy, I have encountered the term "nominalism" many times, where it often denotes the view that there are no true universals in nature. (The term often has this sense in contemporary metaphysics too.) It seems to me that this is how many contributors to the book use the term, but it is hard to be sure in some cases. At any rate, the term "nominalism" is used throughout the book, but it is never clearly explained (though an attempt is made on page 11). Furthermore, it is sometimes used in ways which seem contradictory. For example, on page 11, Denis Janz says that many scholars of medieval theology once believed that nominalism inevitably led to heresy, though he doesn't explain the alleged connection between nominalism and heresy. On page 69, Robert Kolb associates nominalism, at least in part, with the view that "God's Word [is] the instrument through which he accomplishes his will." Surely there is nothing heretical in the idea that God accomplishes His will through His Word? After all, as Kolb points out, Luther embraced this idea. Where then is the threat of heresy? And how might this idea be related to the denial of true universals in nature? It is also worth mentioning that Scott Hendrix describes Luther as holding a "two kingdoms" doctrine, while Robert Kolb criticizes what is "often falsely called [Luther's] doctrine of the two kingdoms" (76). What gives? Is the term "two kingdoms" right or wrong? Since I'm not a specialist in Lutheran studies, I have no idea. This all leads to what is perhaps the greatest problem with the book - its intended readership. I doubt whether this book would be of much use to specialists, though I may be wrong about that. At any rate, I am certain that it would be hard going for readers who have had no prior introduction to Reformation theology. Nonetheless, I think that the book would be very beneficial to readers who have had some previous exposure to Reformation theology but are still beginning their study of the subject. These readers may find it helpful to brush up on the major figures of the Reformation before delving in. I think that David Calhoun's lectures on the Reformation, which are available free online through iTunes, would complement the book well. There are other problems with the book. Reformation thinkers are often quoted at length without citation. More seriously, the book fails to provide clear explanations of both pre-Reformation Catholic methods of biblical interpretation, including the allegorical method, and the loci method employed by Melancthon and others. Don't get me wrong - these subjects are discussed by a number of contributors. But they are never clearly explained, and this is problematic. It is very hard to understand what was distinctive about Reformation theology without a good grasp of the difference between pre-Reformation Catholic and Reformation Protestant approaches to biblical interpretation. I think that the editors should have provided a few good examples of each in the introduction. Interested readers may want to consult John Rogerson's chapter on the history of biblical interpretation in *The History of Christian Theology: Vol.2: The Study and Use of the Bible*. Moreover, while the three chapters on Catholic theology touch on the subject of Catholic soteriology, I don't feel that the book provides a clear explanation of this subject either. Steinmetz's treatment of Catholic soteriology in the chapter on Trent is probably the clearest, but many questions remain. For example, it isn't clear to me from Steinmetz's chapter how Trent understood the role of the human will in salvation. Steinmetz says that Trent "aimed for a broad consensus and declined to define theological positions too closely" (241), but I am certain that Trent had more to say on the question than he reports. I also found some of David Bagchi's discussion of pre-Tridentine Catholic soteriology unclear. On a more historical note, if Augustinian views on soteriology were as widespread in the pre-Reformation Catholic Church as Janz suggests, then why did Luther struggle for so long in reading Romans before making his "breakthrough"? It is disappointing that a book on Reformation theology would fail to provide clear, detailed explanation of Catholic thinking on soteriology. The Reformed tradition is explained fairly well in the book, and the chapter on Anabaptism is quite good. However, as I noted above, the chapter on Cranmer provides little information on Anglicanism that will be useful to non-specialists. (Carl Trueman's chapter on the English Reformers corrects some of the deficiencies of Brooks' chapter on Cranmer, but one never gets a real introduction to Anglicanism from either author.) Also, the chapters on Melancthon and Confessional Lutheranism are confusing and incomplete in many places (see, e.g., the discussion of Melancthon's synergism in Kusukawa's chapter). I doubt that many non-specialists will benefit much from these chapters. This was a great disappointment to me; I had really hoped to learn more about the Lutheran tradition. Lastly, the book says very little about the Reformed catechisms and confessions. That too was disappointing to me. Despite these criticisms, I want to emphasize that the book contains good discussions of a number of subjects. These include the following: the common difficulties in studying Lollardy, Erasmus, Zwingli, and Bucer; the relationship of Hussitism to the Protestant Reformation; the Scots Confession; the Regulative Principle; the nature of Protestant Orthodoxy; the Council of Trent's views on the authority of Scripture and tradition; and, the complexity of late medieval and early modern Catholic theology. The introductory and concluding chapters are quite useful. The book also contains an extensive bibliography.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great Book
By Ben J. Welch III
Currently using it to teach early Christian theology at my church. This book helps to educate parishoners who are ignorant about their Christian history.
24 of 29 people found the following review helpful. A Good Overall Overview of the Reformation
By Jan Peczkis
Although the Reformation is often thought of in terms of Luther and Calvin, it was much broader than that. There were many reformers in many European lands at the time, and this book

discusses quite a few of them. However, a major shortcoming of this book is its failure to do more than briefly mention Jan Laski, a Polish Reformer. Although this book focuses on the Reformation, it also discusses the Roman Catholic response to the Reformation, and not only in terms of the Council of Trent. Even though Luther's initial conflict with the Catholic Church is often framed in terms of the manner of salvation of a Christian, this book argues that the actual conflict was primarily in terms of church authority. Otherwise, the Catholic-Protestant conflict is often seen in terms of the former promoting the authority of Tradition, and the latter promoting the authority of Scripture. But it was not as simple as that. There were some Catholic counter-reformers who sought to refute Protestant claims solely from Scripture. Conversely, some Protestant polemicists argued that the teachings of the post-apostolic Christian church (e. g., the Church fathers) actually reinforced and supported Protestant theological views. Soon, Protestants and Catholics each claimed to own the teachings of the primitive Christian church, and to accuse its opponents of heretical innovation. Each sided often misrepresented the others' teachings. For example, Luther's teaching of "faith alone" for salvation was misrepresented as teaching that a Christian can live any way he wants. In actuality, Luther stressed good works, but as an outcome, not condition, for salvation. Conversely, the Catholic Mass was misrepresented as re-crucifying Christ every time it was offered. In fact, it did and does no such thing.

Each chapter in this Companion includes an up-to-date account and analysis of the thought associated with a major Reformation theology figure or movement. The book also focuses on lesser reformers such as Martin Bucer, and on the Catholic and Radical Reformations, as well as the major Protestant reformers.

"Like other books in the "Cambridge Companion" series, this is a compendium of brief essays; written by noted scholars of Reformation theology, they examine the thought of major figures and movements...a superb resource for college classes on the Reformation." CHOICE "This is an excellent volume and commendable for several reasons. First, the contributors are of the highest quality. Secondly, the choice of topics of intelligent.... A further commendatory attribute is the fine introductory and concluding remarks which precede and follow these contributions.... All in all ... this volume is a treasure, and very much worth commending to any wishing to find a well-written, intelligent, and informative overview of Reformation theology." Sixteenth Century Journal "Bagchi explores three phases of activity--polemical, political, and propagandistic--and then provides a discussion of nine important topics that is unique in English and, as such, an invaluable resource." - John M. Frymire, University of Missouri "...Overall, it is an accomplishment in intellectual history. Not only will the reader acquire a great store of information, s/he will likely be stimulated to pursue additional reading on the thought of the reformation. The editors encourage that pursuit in their concluding section, where they sketch out new sources for and fresh inquiries about Reformation thought....It is easy to be enthusiastic about this book. It is informative, contemporary, accessible to the ordinary reader, and about the ideal length. It concludes while the reader is still interested in the topic and anxious for pointers toward other sources in the field. It demonstrates that specialists can communicate with common readers and instill in them the passion of the scholars' pursuit of knowledge that matters. And all this comes at a price an ordinary person can afford!" --Luke L. Keefer, Jr., Ashland Theological Journal

About the Author David Bagchi is Lecturer in the History of Christian Thought, Department of Theology, University of Hull. He is the author of *Luther's Earliest Opponents* (1991). David C. Steinmetz is the Amos Ragan Kearns Professor of the History of Christianity, Divinity School, Duke University. His major publications include *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in its Late Medieval Setting* (1968); *Reformers in the Wings* (1981); *Staupitz and Luther* (1980); *Luther in Context* (1986); *Memory and Mission* (1988); and *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (1990).