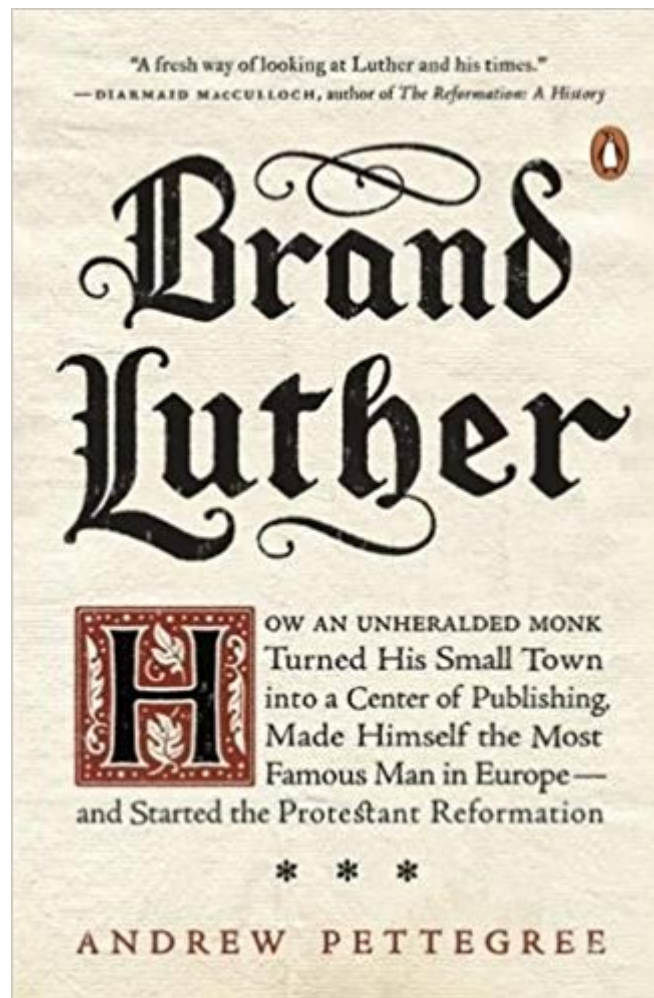


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# Brand Luther: How An Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town Into A Center Of Publishing, Made Himself The Most Famous Man In Europe--and Started The Protestant Reformation





## Synopsis

A revolutionary look at Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the birth of publishing, on the eve of the Reformation's 500th anniversary

When Martin Luther posted his "theses" on the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517, protesting corrupt practices, he was virtually unknown. Within months, his ideas spread across Germany, then all of Europe; within years, their author was not just famous, but infamous, responsible for catalyzing the violent wave of religious reform that would come to be known as the Protestant Reformation and engulfing Europe in decades of bloody war.

Luther came of age with the printing press, and the path to glory of neither one was obvious to the casual observer of the time. Printing was, and is, a risky business—the questions were how to know how much to print and how to get there before the competition. Pettegree illustrates Luther's great gifts not simply as a theologian, but as a communicator, indeed, as the world's first mass-media figure, its first brand. He recognized in printing the power of pamphlets, written in the colloquial German of everyday people, to win the battle of ideas. But that wasn't enough—not just words, but the medium itself was the message. Fatefully, Luther had a partner in the form of artist and businessman Lucas Cranach, who together with Wittenberg's printers created the distinctive look of Luther's pamphlets. Together, Luther and Cranach created a product that spread like wildfire—it was both incredibly successful and widely imitated. Soon Germany was overwhelmed by a blizzard of pamphlets, with Wittenberg at its heart; the Reformation itself would blaze on for more than a hundred years.

Publishing in advance of the Reformation's 500th anniversary, Brand Luther fuses the history of religion, of printing, and of capitalism—the literal marketplace of ideas—into one enthralling story, revolutionizing our understanding of one of the pivotal figures and eras in human history.

From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

"A perceptive study of Luther's ideas and the rise of a new print culture in Europe. Some regard [Luther] as the man who opened the floodgates of modernity, as a very modern man. Mr. Pettegree does not attempt an explicit comparison, but the name that comes to mind is Steve Jobs, a person who transformed an industry and created his own brand in doing so. The Wall Street Journal "Insightful and fresh. An important story told with careful scholarship and elegant writing. National Catholic Reporter "There is very little serious academic work that explicitly explores the role of printing in the rise of Protestantism. Brand Luther fills that gap. It is an insightful and highly scholarly book but it's very readable at the same time. It is a well-researched book that provides deep analysis of the rise of Protestantism. It should be on university curriculums for history. It is a must-read for everyone interested in the history of Europe and religion. Pettegree's scholarship is unmatched in its insight, scholarly value, and authority. The Washington Book Review "A remarkable story, thoroughly researched and clearly told, and one sure to change the way we think about the early Reformation. Washington Post "Pettegree expertly guides us through Luther's years and achievements. Most of all, though, Pettegree deserves credit for his fresh slant on the Reformation and his dynamic storytelling. And as this absorbing and illuminating book capably shows, after Luther, print and public communication and indeed, religion would never be the same again. Weekly Standard "Pettegree shines light on an overlooked talent of [the Reformation's] main progenitor. Brand Luther shows how Wittenberg's most famous son took keen interest not only in the content of his books, but also in how they were manufactured, designed, and marketed. Christianity Today "Pettegree admirably presents Luther, warts and all. But in the final analysis, he asks whether printing created Luther and the Protestant Reformation or Luther created mass media through his shrewd manipulation and adaptation of the printing industry to his specific needs. This book argues both it's hard to separate one from the other since the rising success of printing as well as Protestantism seemed to go hand in hand. Well researched and well written, this essential book is for anyone remotely interested in Luther or early modern technology."

Library Journal "Well researched and well written, this essential book is for anyone remotely interested in Luther or early modern technology." —Sandra Collins, Byzantine Catholic Seminary Lib., Pittsburgh

"A cogent and authoritative overview of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and of the burgeoning printing industry that disseminated his ideas. An informative history of a man of Æadamantine strengths and Ævery human weaknesses Æ who incited a theological revolution."

Kirkus "Authoritative and beautifully written, Pettegree's book provides a radical take on a revolutionary figure." —Bruce Gordon, Yale Divinity School, author of Calvin

"Andrew Pettegree draws on a lifetime's scholarly engagement with the history of the book to offer us a fresh way of looking at Luther and his times. Of all the many new books which will commemorate the momentous events of 1517, this will be one of the most original: not just a biography of Martin Luther, but a study which uses the printing industry as a lens through which to view his extraordinary achievement as writer and inspiration of the movement which reshaped European religion."

Diarmaid MacCulloch, author of The Reformation: A History and Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years

"This perceptive and engaging analysis of the German Reformation highlights the fruitful interweaving of Martin Luther's skills as a preacher, writer, and publicist and the burgeoning printing industry. Pettegree's lucid and persuasive account offers unparalleled insight into this outstanding early modern example of effective use of communication techniques that allowed Luther's message to take hold."

Karin Maag, Professor of History and Director, H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin College and English editor and translator of The Reformation and the Book

"Andrew Pettegree brings his expert knowledge of the sixteenth-century book business to bear on the old crux of Æprinting and the Reformation. Æ Many images of Luther will appear in the next few years, and this one is particularly intriguing. Pettegree's Luther understood the importance of the new medium and the new format in which his message was expressed. He was not an artless voice declaiming against the whirlwind, as he sometimes portrayed himself. Rather he was an astute publicist for a message that he firmly believed was much greater than himself."

Euan Cameron, Union Theological Seminary; author of The European Reformation

"Brand Luther is an important recasting of the history of Martin Luther and the rise of the German Reformation. Without reducing the role of religious ideas or the power of personal faith, Andrew Pettegree demonstrates how Luther was able to harness and exploit the emerging power of print in order to broadcast his message of religious reform and ultimately bring about a transformation of European Christianity. Pettegree tells both

sides of the story with equal vigour and understanding, moving between Luther the reformer, the relentless weaver of words, and the emerging forms of early modern media. The result is a book that does not just commemorate the Reformation but helps us to view its history in a completely different way.

—C. Scott Dixon, author of *Protestants: A History from Wittenberg to Pennsylvania*

“Brand Luther tells two tales. The first is an engaging biography of the German reformer Martin Luther. The second is a stimulating account of the first time the printing press helped shape a mass movement. Andrew Pettegree deftly combines these two stories to show how an abstract academic dispute grew into the Reformation that divided western Christendom. This is history-writing at its best!”

—Dr. Amy Nelson Burnett, Paula and D.B. Varner Professor of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

“Andrew Pettegree’s *Brand Luther* brings new excitement and insight to the persistent question of why Martin Luther calls for reform revolutionized western Christianity when earlier critiques had not. Drawing on his deep knowledge of the Protestant Reformation and the early modern printing industry, Pettegree has crafted a compelling narrative that conveys the excitement, chaos, and uncertainty of the first decades of the Protestant Reformation. In Pettegree’s incisive telling, the Reformation is just as crucially a “commercial revolution” as a theological one. He presents Luther as an innovative, forward-thinking mover of the print industry whose mastery of the new medium of print transformed both Christianity and the business of printing. Pettegree places the interactions among Luther, the emerging print industry, and the economic development of the city of Wittenberg at the center of the Reformation drama, returning a sense of suspense to a well-known story and emphasizing the fact that Luther’s success and long-lasting influence was never a foregone conclusion.”

—Karen E. Spierling, editor, *Calvin and the Book: The Evolution of the Printed Word in Reformed Protestantism*

From the Hardcover edition.

Andrew Pettegree is Professor of Modern History at the University of St Andrews, where he was the founding director of the St. Andrews Reformation Studies Institute. He is the author of a number of books on the Reformation and the history of communication, including *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, *The Book in the Renaissance*, which was a New York Times Notable Book of 2010, and *The Invention of News*. In 2015 *The Invention of News* won the Goldsmith Prize of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He lives in Fife, Scotland.

From the Hardcover edition.

By Shane Kastler  
In Andrew Pettegrew's book: "Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe--and Started the Protestant Reformation" Pettegrew gives a very serviceable overview of Luther's life leading up to the 1517 Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther was a confrontational man. He was also a true, Biblical theologian in a time when theological deceit ruled the day. He sought both to please the Pope; but insisted on speaking against the Pope's errors. While he respected the church, he also saw, very clearly, that the church was corrupt. He was aware that they were selling indulgences for a way to earn time out of purgatory/ (Hell) and Luther was disgusted by the practice. He insisted on speaking out against it. His 95 Theses posted to the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517 sparked the Protestant Reformation. God used Luther in numerous ways. But God used others as well; both people and systems. Good old fashioned "capitalism" was used by God as much as anything to elevate Luther's message and destroy his Catholic detractors. Let me explain. In his book, Pettegrew lays out the events in systematic fashion to prove the point that it wasn't only Luther's superior theological knowledge. It was also the fact the the common man, who was also a consumer, chose to buy Luther's works over and against his Catholic antagonists by a ration of almost 10 to 1. The old fashioned economic axiom of "supply and demand" played a major role in determining the outcome of the Reformation. And the facts were simple yet profound. The people wanted to buy and read Luther. And they did not have a desire to read his Catholic detractors at anywhere near the same clip. Luther won on ideas. But he also won in terms of popularity and economics. He was in demand, so the printers of the day printed his works. The Catholics were not in demand and so their books went unsold and in many cases, un-printed. Luther lit the torch of the Reformation when on Oct. 31, 1517 he nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle door. Luther did not expect much of a response. A few weeks earlier he had posted a "Theses" bemoaning scholasticism in Germany and this provocation went largely unheeded. That is to say, no one really cared about Luther's view on the matter. But in God's provenience, the theses against indulgences turned out to be a much different matter. Luther shook the world when he spoke out against the Catholic practice of raising funds by selling indulgences that would knock years off of purgatory. Even before Luther, there was a bit of a backlash against Rome. Some Germans felt like they were being exploited; and Luther's words gave voice to this unrepresented mass. Luther became an immediate hero in Germany and the Catholic church fell further and further into the abyss of unpopularity. John Tetzel was no doubt the indulgence salesman that Luther went after most vociferously. And Tetzel, who was a scholar in his

own right, responded to Luther in print. But when Luther offered a counter-rebuttal to Tetzel he did something unorthodox and indeed, controversial. Rather than writing in Latin, the common language of academic debate, Luther decided to write in German so the common people could take part and share their opinion in the debate. Biographer Pettegrew records: “If this was to be a public scandal, Luther would address the public. But by doing so, taking the debate out of the academic theater and the formal process of the dissertation, he also abandoned the protection of his status as a professor. From this point on Luther would be a marked man.” (kindle location, 1328.) By God’s providence, Tetzel had not much longer to live. And Luther claimed to have written words of encouragement to him on his deathbed; though this cannot be proven. At any rate, the Reformation had begun and Luther was its primary human agent. Luther continued to crank out works against Catholicism from his Wittenberg post; though these went largely ignored and unheeded by a Catholic hierarchy who saw Luther as nothing more than a “fly in the ointment.” In reality, Luther was gaining in popularity and would take Germany and even to a wider extent, Europe by storm. Luther, in his own right, had become a continental celebrity. His unrestrained railings against Catholicism had both chagrined Rome and empowered the commoners. Luther was their champion, even though he eschewed some of the excesses of the populace. When the “Peasants War” broke out in the 1520s; Luther ungaurded his restraint and even wrote against the rebellious excesses of the commoners. Though he was beloved for standing up to Rome, he was also a beacon of peace unto those who would use his teaching to spark a governmental rebellion. But Luther wanted no part of this. Initially he desired to reform within the Catholic church. When that became impossible, he sought a peaceful church within what was becoming known as “Lutheranism” or “evangelicalism.” The plain and simple fact was, at the height of the reformation, Luther was more popular and a “better sale” than his catholic counterparts. Pettegrew records: “In the years between 1521 and 1525, when the pamphlet war was at its height, Luther and his supporters out-published their opponents by a margin of nine to one.” (Brand Luther, by Pettegrew, kindle location 3219) A few months later in the Reformation, Pettegrew records: “Luther’s works outstrip those of any other author by a factor of ten; he out-published the most successful of his Catholic opponents by a factor of thirty. Even this bald statistic understates the dominant role of Wittenberg in the printed works of the Reformation. After Luther, three of the next four most published authors were Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, and Justus Jonas; the only author to break into this Wittenberg cartel was Urbanus Rhegius of Augsburg.” The demand for Luther



was much, much greater than the demand for his Catholic detractors; and this as much as anything else, signaled the direction that the Reformation would take. The “supply and demand” of Luther’s popularity coupled with Catholicism’s unpopularity made Luther a hero and the Pope a goat. Even when the Catholic church sought to force their publications on others, it backfired on them. The common man simply refused to purchase the Catholic rebuttals of Luther. And, more often than not, the Catholic church was too “high-brow” to answer Luther in the vulgar vernacular of German anyway. They wished to stay academic and dialog in Latin; but Luther took the debate to the people; and in so doing gained a following far beyond anything the staid Catholics were willing to gain. When it was all “said and done” Luther won the day. Evangelical reforms took hold in Germany and the church educated the children according to gospel standards, at Luther’s demand. Catholicism waned in Germany, as well as other parts of Europe. Luther, for all of his faults, had won. Europe, indeed the entire world, would never be the same. Luther would live out his days trying to give structure to the theological movement he produced. He pressed for better Christian education and he set up a structure for the new “Lutheran” church in Germany. People would no longer seek to buy their way to salvation through the purchase of indulgences. They would be taught to look to and trust in Christ alone for salvation. Apart from him we have nothing. But with him we have everything. This, as much as anything, was the message of Luther. He proclaimed a very “Christ-o-centric” gospel and as such he left the chicanery of indulgence selling behind. He upset the sensibilities of the Catholics of his day. But he rested in the preaching of the true gospel. Luther was far from perfect, but he believed in a sovereign God who saved sinner’s in accordance with His perfect will and plan. Through Luther, God restored the gospel. We no longer need be enslaved to worldly salesman who see Godliness as a means of financial gain. To the contrary, we can trust in Christ and Him alone. As Luther taught. We trust in Christ and not man; but we rejoice in the men God has used to preserve his gospel. God used Luther. Let us rejoice. Pettegrew’s book focuses specifically on how the printing industry brought about the Reformation. And in many ways he is right. From the day of Guttenberg’s press, until the time of Luther; the publishers made much money by printing indulgence certificates for the Catholic church. But Luther’s arrival on the scene changed all of that. Now that he was in demand at a ratio of 10 to 1 over his Catholic counterparts, meant that the publishers were eager to print his works; if not for theological reasons, then for economic ones. Luther not only turned the theological world on its head, but he also turned the printing industry; and by extension the economy itself in upheaval.

As Christians, we merely see this as God's providence in getting the truth of the gospel proclaimed during very theologically dark days. God used Luther in amazing ways. God's truth shined forth in the midst of overwhelming darkness. Any Christian should be excited to read of this universe-altering events. I recommend all Luther students, and even casual students of Christian history to read this work. It will not only help you understand the 16th century better; but it will help you understand how the economic aspect of "supply and demand" played a role in God using the print industry in the Reformation to elevate Luther and the true gospel over the fairy tales then expressed by Roman Catholicism. Pettegrew does a good job of placing Luther's wider life within the context of the Reformation and of the print industry in general. The main focus of Pettegrew's work was how Luther effected the print industry; and in this regard Pettegrew did not disappoint. But throughout the book he gives a good synopsis of Luther's overall life and in so doing he gives good context for what Luther did and why he wrote what he wrote. Pettegrew is to be commended to making this mercurial, historical figure more understandable for 21st century ears. In conclusion, I would highly recommend the reading of this book. Not only for those who would like to know how the print industry can have a massive effect on the world at large. But also for those who admire Luther for his courage and want to know why they should admire him for things beyond this. He was willing to die for his belief in the true gospel. Oh, that God would give us more like Luther. He was a rare jewel for the church. May God be pleased to give us more with his combination of zeal, knowledge, and fearlessness.

This book offers a look into an aspect of the Reformation that is not very well known: the impact Luther had on the printing and book publishing business. While there are occasional errors in historical details, the book is well written, lively, fascinating and well worth the time to learn more about Luther, not only a Reformer of the Church, but a revolutionary in the realm of publishing. Highly recommended.

Nearly all books on the life of Martin Luther or the Protestant Reformation tend to focus on the theological implications of the revolution, and rightfully so. *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* sent quantum shockwaves through Europe in the 1500s that left the landscape changed forever. Few historians and biographers, however, take a detailed look at how the reformation actually happened. In *Brand Luther* Andrew Pettegree looks to answer this as he uncovers the nuts and bolts of the reformation. How did a small Podunk town with relatively no

printing industry become the central hub for printing in the world, crippling the Roman church in the process? How did a conflicted monk who had never published anything before the age of thirty spark and fan the flames of the reformation with his writings? Why did a pious catholic and collector of relics go to such great lengths to protect a defamed heretic? Of these questions and much more Pettegree answers in this book. And what is uncovered is fascinating. Luther is depicted less as a transcendent church father, and more as a shrewd and innovative entrepreneur. A man who not only revolutionized Roman theology, but revolutionized how theology was written (writing concise and in the common tongue) with unparalleled success.

“Luther’s works outstrip those of any other author by a factor of ten; he outpublished the most successful of his catholic opponents by a factor of thirty. He invented a new style, a unique brand which changed history in the process. Furthermore, his eye for good printing, artistic wood cuts, and different font types show a creative Luther who tenderly cared for his movement every step of the way. Printing alone could not carry the weight of the Reformation however. Pioneer church leaders and local figures throughout Europe bought into the movement at great risk to themselves. Printers continued to print Luther’s writings because it was the only thing that sold! As communities began to digest the fire hose of publications coming out of Wittenberg, it was often the laity that stood unified over and against the established church authorities. Though confident and bold, Luther understood his personal shortcomings and recognized the value of friendships where both parties could mutually benefit. This is Luther the businessman. His relationships with the artist Cranach and theologian Philip Melanchthon are both examples of this and both relationships substantially contributed to Luther’s cause. As I read this book, I realized more and more that the stars really did align for the reformation to occur. It was the perfect storm, and without the printing press, without vernacular writings, without friends in high places, without buy in from commoners none of it would have happened. “Brand Luther” is a scholarly book and though it gets dry at parts, it is an incredible perspective that is rarely if ever discussed.

Provides the historical backdrop to the Reformation and Luther’s use and development of the printing industry. Clever Luther used the German vernacular instead of the academic Latin. His opposition was at a disadvantage. A confluence was the wealth drain to Rome through papal indulgences that provided Luther the support of German princes and electors. Good read that will introduce the reader to Luther’s contemporaries.

Excellent book with a slightly different out look of just how this man, Martin Luther, affected the entire world going forward. The aspect of this book is to look specifically at the printing world. But as the interest in Luther's translation of the Bible and elucidation of The Word grew popular with the common man, people learned to read, created schools. Printing spread his works through out the world. It's amazing to read the progress and how this one man made a difference in the world.

This study of Luther's Reformation and the rise of the printing industry provided a fresh perspective on a splendid subject. The 500th anniversary of the 95 Theses of Luther is a wonderful time to take up this well written, thoroughly engaging volume.

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