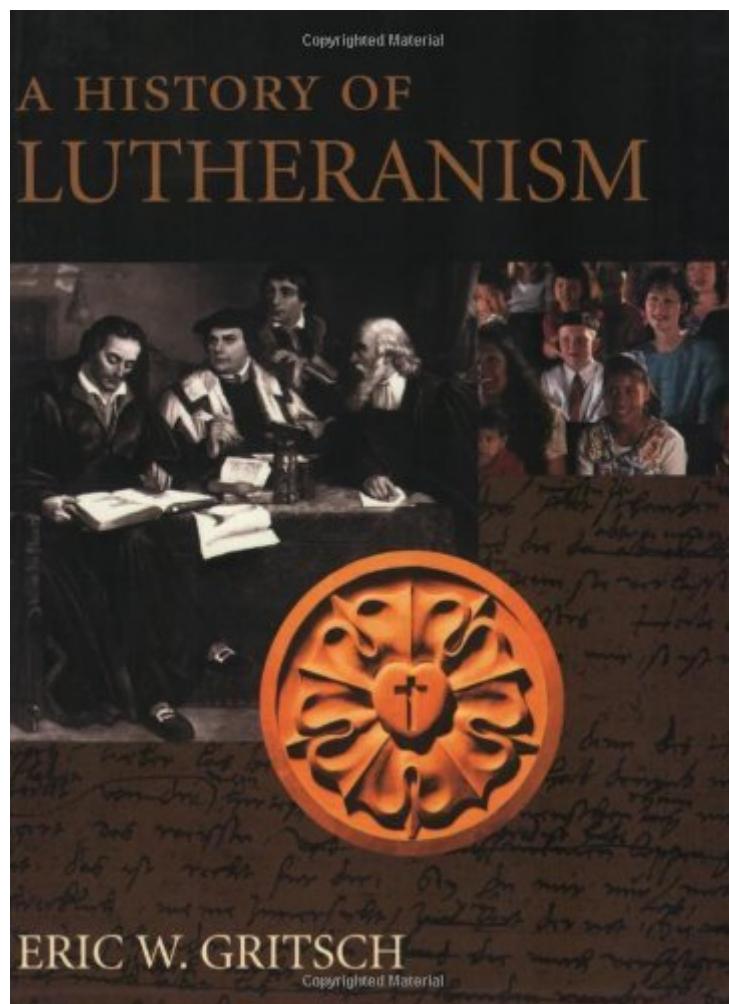


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A History Of Lutheranism



Synopsis

Conveys a clear notion of what's at issue in the controversies that mark Lutheran history. Includes illustrations, map, and chronology.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Eric W. Gritsch, A History of Lutheranism (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002) The first thing you need to do with this book is to take its title seriously. It is less a history of Lutherans than it is a history of Lutheran doctrines and confessions. It is not surprising that two-fifths of the book is dedicated to the first 60 years, between Luther's posting the 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517 to the publication of the Book of Concord in 1580. It does not even spend more than a few sentences on the political events in the conflict between Protestant and Catholic countries, the 30 Years War, in 1618--1648 and the Peace of Westphalia. But we may be surprised at the political facts which do come up. In America, it is virtually unthinkable to imagine our religion determined by our government, but that was what the idea of Christendom, the combination in a one body the functions of worship and governance. One of the motives which drove theological disputes

in central Europe was the right of the political ruler (King, Prince, Elector, Duke, Margrave, etc.) to determine their state religion, and enforce its observance by all residents of their state. One surprise is to read that Luther went to his grave hoping for a reunion of the German reformers and the Roman church. Echoes of this founding principle are subtle in modern Lutheranism, but they lived as active agenda item up to the Catholic Council of Trent (1545--1563), which launched the 'Counter-Reformation' and closed the door on resolution between Rome and the reformers. My primary interest in reading the book was to test my conjecture that compared to the Roman Catholics and the Calvinist influenced Reformed denominations, Lutheranism has a small theological footprint.

Unfortunately Eric W. Gritsch is a very one sided historian even when it comes to telling the history of the Lutheran Church in America. Given, all historians write with a bias but Gritsch's is not hard to find at all. From the preface, Gritsch claims "I have used the historical evidence and its scholarly interpretation." Yes, this may be true but Gritsch is more SELECTIVE in WHAT evidence and scholarly interpretation he uses then any other author writing on the history of the Lutheran Church. One of the most blatantly biased sections of this book is chapter 6 "Diversification" where he tells a one sided story of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as basically being a standoffish, exclusionary, radical, divisive church that has plagued the unity of Lutheranism in America ever since European immigrants came to this country. Obviously Gritsch does not use these words but if you really read the entire section you will understand why this is true in what I'm saying about him. For example, Gritsch takes time in this section to highlight a half true/half false point about slavery and the LCMS view on it, in which he tries to make it seem that the LCMS was in favor of Southern Slavery during the Civil War. Well, what he doesn't tell you is that the LCMS disapproved of the Southern Institution of Slavery because it was abusive and unjust. Gritsch only tells the reader that the LCMS believed it was sinful but nevertheless permitted it in order to bring together master and slave to Christ. This is just one example of the half truths that Gritsch tells about the LCMS in America. This book at times is like reading a political commentary which tries to tell the truth but only on issues relevant to the author's agenda.

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