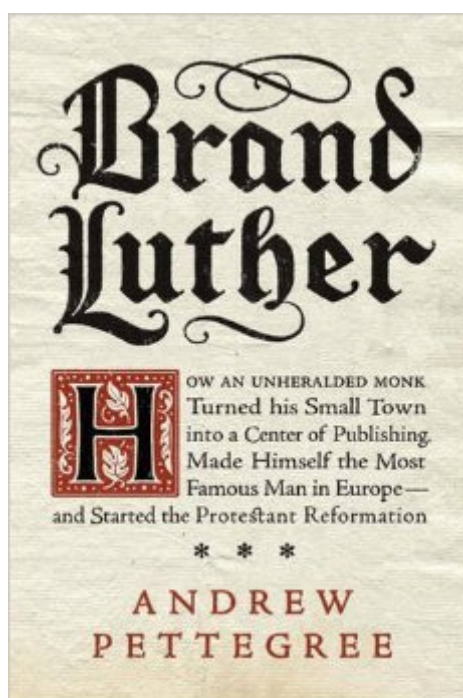


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Brand Luther: How An Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town Into A Center Of Publishing, Made Himself The Most Famous Man In Europe--and Started The Protestant Reformation



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 95 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.

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Customer Reviews

Many have written about the spiritual aspects of Martin Luther's rise. Much more have debated his 95 theses against the indulgences and its staggering influence on modern world. Some of these perspectives often make simplistic assertions about the Reformation. Most of the time, they portray it like an overnight, not-a-lot-of-work-involved, Holy Spirit-inspired phenomenon. Brand Luther, however, takes a different view of the happenings surrounding the Reformation of 1517. This book looks at the Reformation mostly through mundane eyes. It looks through capitalist and economic lenses to decode the hidden fires that kindled the Reformation to an unstoppable inferno that spread throughout the world. It examines the effect of Gutenberg's creation (the printing press) on the propagation of Luther's beliefs. Also, it reveals how Luther's unremarkable background contributed to the rise of his ideas. First of the ironies surrounding of Luther's rise is that he lived in Wittenberg, a town with no significant allure to draw large commerce or fame to it. Wittenberg, is said to be a "a poor, unattractive town, with old, small, ugly wooden houses, more like a village than a town." Even the age of printing almost passed Wittenberg by. Though the printing press had been in existence since the 1440s, the first printing press in Wittenberg was not established until 1502. Yet "within the next fifty years Wittenberg would defy all the rules of the new printing economics and become a center of the book world. This was almost entirely due to Martin Luther: his notoriety, his passionate following, and his uncommon talent as a writer." Secondly, Martin Luther understood the power of uniqueness. The he branded his books was different from other books.

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)â”with unparalleled success. âœLutherâ”™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.â” 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.

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