

Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts that Continue to Shape our World by Brad S. Gregory
Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

The main contentions of *Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts that Continue to Shape our World* by Brad S. Gregory is to define for the reader the political, cultural and intellectual factors that influenced Martin Luther and the manifestation of the Protestant Reformation. Gregory contends that the Reformation led to differing understandings of the Bible, the creation of rival churches, political struggles, and social disorders across Europe. Luther and others wanted reform the Roman Catholic Church, however the consequence of the Reformation was far more than Luther and the other reformers envisioned.

Gregory discusses the creation of so many opposing versions of Protestantism. For Luther, his foundation was *sola Scriptura* or Scripture alone. Luther went on to criticize anything in Church teaching and practice that contradicted God's words. Debate with Roman Catholic theologians raised the question of what authority was the final authority in matters of Scripture. Gregory recognizes that the acknowledging of Scripture's final authority was a problem. Protestants disagreed with other Protestants, while Lutherans argued with Zwinglian and with Anabaptist and Reformed followers. While today there is essentially one Roman Catholic Church, there is no one Protestant Church. Protestant Church often disagree to the point of not talking with each other. "The Reformation is a paradox: a religious revolution that led to the secularization of society," claims Gregory. This statement alone does not answer the underlying differences and *Rebel in the Ranks* does not adequately address the reasons for the differences.

Gregory also argues, "Just as the reformers never intended to pave the way for any and all interpretations of God's Word, so they never intended to facilitate endless doctrinal controversy or recurrent violence, let alone to divide Christendom itself." While the reformers may not have intended the results of the Reformation, Christianity changed forever. Gregory makes a valid point when he states that religion was always more-than-religion. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries religion was interwoven in the fabric of everyday life. Gregory offers an explanation by contrasting religion today to the early sixteenth century, "Religion today is a distinct area of life - separate from your career, professional relationships, recreational activities, consumer behavior, and so on. None of this was true in the early sixteenth century: religion was neither a matter of choice nor separate from the rest of life." Due in large part to this relationship, religious disagreements also became disagreements in other aspects of society. Many of these disagreements resulted in what were extremely violent.

Gregory spends a considerable of the book discussing secularization as the answer to dealing with the problems of achieving peace when people could not even agree on the Bible interpretations. Gregory argues that a secular society is one in which religion would be a matter of individual preference. The increase of personal freedom and the decrease of the scope of religion occurred over time since the Medieval period. People are free to define morality for themselves and live their lives as they see fit. According to Gregory, the benefits of secularization are the freedom to practice whatever religion a person is inclined to practice. Secularization, did not, however, reconcile the differences between Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church or even between the various Protestants churches. He calls secular societies hyperpluralism declaring that reason alone has not led people, any more than Scripture alone, to agree about morality or meaning.

Personally, I hadn't thought much about the social, political and economic effects of the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps it is because the Reformation has typically been presented in the religious context. While what Luther and the other reformers started changed Christianity, they would not have considered the ramifications their actions had in all the other areas of society. In *Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts that Continue to Shape our World*, Gregory shows a notable grasp of theology and the roots of Luther's problems with the Catholic Church. Christianity's past has been filled with violence and it is easy to lose sight of the extremes as we judge the extremes of Islam today. *Rebel in the Ranks* is clearly organized and can provide a valuable resource for students of the Reformation or for someone looking for some more details about the modern effects of the Reformation.

Gregory's books leads us on a journey from societies in Europe where the Roman Catholic religious view was the part of the everyday life of society to modern Western society and the separation of religion from everyday life. For many people, religion is not part of their life. and in many cases is not part of people's lives at all. *Rebel in the Ranks* makes it clear that religion is no longer the principal factor that holds society together.