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Martin Luther

Lyndal Roper



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When Martin Luther nailed a sheet of paper to the church door of a small university town on 31 October 1517, he set off a process that changed the Western world for ever.

Luther's ideas spread like wildfire. His attack on the Church soon convulsed Germany, divided Europe and polarised people's beliefs. They triggered decades of religious persecution, social unrest and war. And in the long run, his ideas paradoxically helped break the grip of religion in every sphere of life.

But the man who started the Reformation was deeply flawed. He was a religious fundamentalist, a Jew-hater and a political reactionary. He was a fervent believer who was tormented by doubt, a brilliant writer who shaped the German language and a vicious and foul-mouthed polemicist. He was a married ex-monk who liberated human sexuality from the stigma of sin, but also a man who insisted that women should know their place. For him the Devil was not just a figure of speech but a very real and physical presence.

In this first historical biography for many decades, distinguished historian Lyndal Roper gives us a fleshand-blood figure, warts and all. She reveals the often contradictory psychological forces that drove Luther forward – insecurity and self-righteousness, anger and humility – and the dynamics they unleashed which turned a small act of protest into a battle against the power of the Church.

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