

Book Review:

CARUANA Salvino,

“Jien s’hawn nista’,” Martinu Luteru:

*Riforma jew riforma?*

(Malta: Provincġa Agostinjana Maltija, 2018), viii + 474pp.

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The eirenic commemoration of the fifth centenary of the Reformation, last year, continues to have positive echoes, not only on an ecumenical dimension. All over the academic world, many learned works have been published these last few years on Martin Luther and the Reformation. The recent volume “*Jien s’hawn nista’*,” *Martinu Luteru: Riforma jew riforma?* by Rev. Prof. Salvino Caruana O.S.A. is one of them.

Fr. Caruana, Emeritus Professor of Patristics at the Faculty of Theology of the has gifted Maltese readers with a masterpiece wherein he presents Luther within the socio-political and religious context in which he lived and later, gave birth to a movement which spread like wildfire in many parts of Europe. As the author acknowledges in the Introduction, he commits himself to depicting the reformer in an objective manner, namely a perspective which puts events and their implications within a much wider and truer picture. He refrains from following the former black-and-white schemes of “us” and “them”, preceding the era of authentic ecumenical dialogue and relations.

Fr. Caruana endeavours to illustrate 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and what was taking place in Germany, which was then a myriad array of autonomous principalities, dukedoms and bishoprics. The Renaissance was at its height, as was the Age of Discovery. Calls for a true reform of the Church had long been uttered in previous centuries by preachers and leaders of contrasting hues: from

Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) to St Francis of Assisi, John Wycliffe in Britain, Jan Hus in Bohemia, and so forth.

The invention of printing by Gutenberg in Germany was instrumental in the rapid spread of Luther's thought. Moreover, Luther's ideas found fertile ground for various reasons, in particular the innate opposition in Germany to Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the reluctance to finance the building of the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The whole issue of the sale of indulgences was the straw that broke the camel's back. Luther's publication of the 95 theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517, signalled the formal genesis of the Protestant Reform, although the cauldron had long been simmering.

The volume gifts its readers with a detailed account of Martin Luther's family and social background, his personality, early studies, his joining the Augustinian Order (following a vow he made when he was nearly struck by lightning during a terrible storm), and his brilliant academic career. The various vicissitudes experienced by the Augustinian Order in Germany in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century are also described.

The volume takes its name from the words attributed to Luther. After he was excommunicated, Luther sought to defend himself at the Diet of Worms (1521). As he concluded his defence, he affirmed: "I stand convicted [convinced] by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. *I can do no other.* God help me."

Caruana's text is lavishly enriched by about 700 footnotes. These notes supply the reader with valuable biographical information on the persons mentioned, as well as references to the many sources used. Caruana also provides us with excellent information on the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which sought to control the flood waters caused by the Reform, thus leading to a much-needed Catholic Restoration in doctrine and the spiritual life with great personalities and founders, the likes of St Ignatius of Loyola, St Teresa of Avila, St Philip Neri and St Cajetan. The book also offers the precious evaluations made on the Reform by a number of thinkers and historians. This is paramount in order to reach a balanced judgement on Luther and the Reform movement.

The volume by Rev. Prof. Salvino Caruana is the first of its kind in the Maltese language. Though laden with copious information, the author successfully keeps the readers riveted to its pages. The text flows magnificently as the style is

beautiful, the details colourful and the data arousing. I heartily recommend the book. It is indeed a rare and precious gem.

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