Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments by Samuel Torvend

Samuel Torvend's original and important reconstruction of the emergence of Luther's and the early Reformation church's response to the poor gathers fragments from across Luther's early writings. He uncovers a striking counter-image to the usual portrait of a quietist orientation that left the world to deal with its own problems. Instead, he finds that Luther's concern emerged early in his career, centered around hunger and the hungry poor, and was deeply rooted in his encounter with the Bible and with the sacramental character of the local church.

My Personal Review:
Hungry Poor turned a sociological category into a verb! This small, important book took me through the tiny keyhole allowed for religion today (individual salvation, private and personal, with a few very radioactive topics and little real impact) into two big rooms. First, I felt part of the world in which Luther was commenting not on in-house church controversies but on the way his culture saw money, status, and religion, and ignored poverty, hunger and despair. Second, I found myself in an expansive adjoining room, the world of Jesus and the first century writers of the New Testament. In both arenas, the lines between religion and social justice were erased, and the focus was on the total welfare of those forgotten people who did not benefit from any of the systems, temporal or eternal. Luther was pulling away the blindfold that hides both his times and ours from the unintended consequences of ignoring larger social issues. Three dozen 16th C illustrations inserted at exactly the right spot in the text invited me to put my own face in the shot--and see where I am blinded. This book will appeal to thoughtful readers who are either socially or spiritually concerned, as well as those ready to meet Martin Luther with new eyes.

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