LUTHER’S WORKS

Volume 60

 PREFACES

 II

Edited by
CHRISTOPHER BOYD BROWN

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE • SAINT LOUIS
CONTENTS

General Introduction ix
Abbreviations xi
Publisher’s Preface to Volume 60 xvii
Preface to Johann Brenz, Twenty-Two Sermons Delivered to the People during the Turkish Invasion of Germany (1532) 1
   Translated by Duane Ernest Peters. Edited by Gregory J. Miller.
Preface to Justus Menius, Commentary on the First Book of Samuel (1532) 7
   Translated and edited by Mickey L. Mattox.
Preface to Caspar Adler, Sermon on Almsgiving (1533) 11
   Translated by Jacob Corzine. Edited by Neil Leroux.
Preface to Account of the Faith, Worship, and Ceremonies of the Brethren in Bohemia and Moravia, Called by Some “Pikarts” or “Waldensians” (1533) 17
   Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by Phillip Haberkern.
Preface to Balthasar Raida, Response to Georg Witzel’s Slanderous and Mendacious Book (1533) 24
   Translated and edited by Robert Kolb.
Preface to Aegidius Faber, On the False Blood and Idol at the Cathedral in Schwerin (1533) 30
   Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by Gerhard Bode.
Preface to Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter [418] (1533?) 35
   Translated by Mark D. Nispel. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown.
Afterword to Letter of the Paris Theologians Censuring Cardinal Cajetan (1534) 45
   Translated and edited by Benjamin T. G. Mayes.
Preface to Antonius Corvinus, How Far Erasmus’ Recently Published Plan for “Mending the Peace of the Church” Should Be Followed While a Council Is Being Organized (1534) 57
   Translated by Robert Rosin. Edited by Robert Rosin and Margaret Arnold.
Preface to Caspar Huberinus, On the Wrath and Mercy of God (1 Samuel 2 [:6]) and How One Should Comfort and Speak to the Dying (1534)  
Translated by John R. Wilch. Edited by John A. Maxfield.

Preface to Lazarus Spengler, Confession (1535)  
Translated by William R. Russell. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown.

Preface to A True Account of What Took Place at Stassfurt on Christmas Eve, 1534 (1535)  
Translated by C. Matthew Phillips. Edited by Ronald K. Rittgers.

Preface to Urbanus Rhegius, Refutation of the Confession of the New Valentinians and Donatists at Münster, to the Christians at Osnabrück in Westphalia (1535)  
Translated by Christian C. Tiews. Edited by Robert Kolb.

Preface to New Report on the Anabaptists at Münster (1535)  
Translated and edited by Robert Kolb.

Preface to Complaint Concerning Good Faith, by a Pious and Spiritual Parson (as It Appears), from before Our Own Age, Recently Discovered [ca. 13th–15th century] (1535)  
Translated by Carl P. E. Springer. Edited by Franz Posset.

Prefaces for the Postils of Antonius Corvinus (1535, 1537)  
Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by Anna Marie Johnson.

Preface to Robert Barnes, Lives of the Roman Pontiffs (1536)  
Translated by Eric G. Phillips. Edited by Korey D. Maas.

Translated and edited by Kurt K. Hendel.

Preface and Afterword to John Hus, Three Letters Written to the Bohemians from Prison at Constance by the Most Holy Martyr [1415] (1536/1537)  
Translated by Mark D. Nispel. Edited by Phillip Haberkern.

Preface to Johann Kymaeus, An Ancient Christian Council, Held in Gangra in Paphlagonia [ca. 340], against the Sublime (So-Called) Sanctity of the Monks and Anabaptists (1537)  
Translated by John R. Wilch. Edited by Carl L. Beckwith.

Afterword to Johannes Annius, Disputation on the Papal Monarchy [1481] (1537)  
Translated by Mark D. Nispel. Edited by David M. Whitford.

Preface to Ambrosius Moibanus, The Glorious Commission of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior (Mark 16 [:15]) (1537)  
Translated and edited by Kurt K. Hendel.

Preface, Marginal Glosses, and Afterword to One of the High Articles of the Papist Faith, Called the Donation of Constantine [ca. 800], Translated by Dr. Martin Luther against the Postponed Council of Mantua (1537) Translated by O. Marc Tangner. Edited by David M. Whitford.

Preface, Marginal Glosses, and Afterword to Legation of Pope Adrian VI, Sent to the Diet of Nürnberg in 1522 (1538) Translated by James Langebartels. Edited by Timothy H. Maschke.


Preface to Justus Menius, How Every Christian Should Conduct Himself with Regard to All Doctrine, Good and Bad Alike, According to God's Commandment (1538) Translated and edited by Robert Kolb.

Preface to Confession of the Faith and Religion of the Barons and Nobles of the Kingdom of Bohemia (1538) Translated by Carl P. E. Springer. Edited by Phillip Haberkern.

Preface to Friedrich Myconius, How Ordinary Folk and Especially the Ill Should Be Instructed in Christianity (1539) Translated by Christopher Boyd Brown. Edited by William R. Russell.


Preface to Robert Barnes, Confession of Faith (1540) Translated by Mark E. DeGarmeaux. Edited by Korey D. Maas.

Preface and Afterword to Letter on the Wretched Condition of Curates or “Pastors” (1489) (1540) Translated by Richard J. Dinda. Edited by Franz Posset.

Preface to Urbanus Rhegius, Exposition of Psalm 52, against the Godless, Bloodthirsty Sauls and Doegs of These Last, Perilous Times (1541) Translated and edited by Robert Kolb.


Preface and Afterword to Brother Richard, O.P. [Riccoldo da Monte di Croce], Refutation of the Koran [ca. 1301] (1542) Translated and edited by Adam S. Francisco.
Preface to Urbanus Rhegius, *Prophecies of the Old Testament Concerning Christ* (1542) 267
Translated and edited by Mickey L. Mattox.

Preface to Erasmus Alber, *The “Eulenspiegel” and Koran of the Barefoot Monks* (1542) 274
Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by Timothy P. Dost.

Preface to Johann Spangenberg, *German Postil, from Advent to Easter, Arranged in Questions for Young Christians, Both Boys and Girls* (1543) 281
Translated and edited by Mickey L. Mattox.

Preface to Theodor Bibliander’s Edition of the Koran (1543) 286
Translated and edited by Adam S. Francisco.

Preface to Wenceslaus Linck, *Annotations to the Five Books of Moses* (1543) 295
Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by John A. Maxfield.

Preface to Philip Melanchthon, *Response to a Treatise by Certain Delegates of the Lower Clergy of Cologne* (1543) 303
Translated by Richard J. Dinda. Edited by Gábor Ittzés.

Preface to John Frederick II and John William of Saxony, *Declamations on the Office of a Good Prince, [etc.] . . . by the Illustrious Young Princes of Saxony* (1543) 311
Translated and edited by James M. Estes.

Translated by Carl P. E. Springer. Edited by Margaret Arnold.

Preface to Georg Spalatin, *Marvelously Comforting Examples and Sayings from the Lives and Sufferings of the Saints and Other Great Men* (1544) 324
Translated by Eric G. Phillips. Edited by Margaret Arnold.

Translated by Christian C. Tiews. Edited by Carol Geisler.

Preface to Johann Freder, *Dialogue in Honor of the Estate of Matrimony* (1545) 336
Translated by Jason D. Lane. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown.

Preface to Robert Barnes, *How Popes Adrian IV and Alexander III Showed Good Faith to Emperor Barbarossa* (1545) 347
Translated by John R. Wilch. Edited by Korey D. Maas.

Indexes 353
DURING Martin Luther’s lifetime, publishers knew that a preface written by Luther greatly increased the value of a book; title pages advertised his name and contribution. Luther’s activity as a writer of prefaces reveals him as a patron of the works of others and as a commentator on a wide range of subjects throughout his career. The prefaces are a rich source of Luther’s reflections on history—both the span of church history and the events of his own day—and on contemporary religious movements, including Islam.

The original 55 volumes of Luther’s Works: American Edition included only three prefaces in addition to the hymnal prefaces in LW 53. The two new volumes of prefaces, of which the second is published here, include almost all the rest. Each of Luther’s prefaces was written for a book or pamphlet that is, of necessity, lacking here. Moreover, each preface touches on myriad events and figures of sixteenth-century Europe. Therefore, the prefaces have not merely been translated here. Many of the world’s best Reformation scholars and historical theologians have provided thorough, informative introductions and footnotes to set Luther’s words in their context.

This wealth of material has necessitated splitting the prefaces, originally planned to appear in one volume, into two. The present volume sets forth Luther’s prefaces from the years 1532–45. The comprehensive introduction to the preface volumes will appear with the earlier prefaces in LW 59, to be published in 2012.

The publisher would like to thank the General Editor, Dr. Christopher Boyd Brown, who has raised the quality of these new volumes of Luther’s Works even above the legacy of the original 55 volumes and has in numerous places improved upon the scholarship presented in the definitive Weimar edition. In the two preface volumes, he has worked closely with the translators and assistant editors, guiding and bringing forth the best of what each contributor had to offer.

The publisher would also like to thank Dr. Brown and his whole team for their flexibility in managing such an extensive project. For this volume, Margaret Arnold contributed as editorial and research assistant. ChaoLuan
Kao assisted with library work. Dawn Weinstock served as copyeditor. Benjamin T. G. Mayes reviewed translations and coordinated the labors of the many contributors. Dr. Brown himself is responsible for the final state of the translations (except where the editor of the individual piece is also the translator). The individual editors are primarily responsible for the work they have undersigned.

The Publisher
Preface to Augustine,
On the Spirit and the Letter [418]

1533?  

Translated by Mark D. Nispel  
Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown  

Among all earlier Christian theologians since St. Paul, it was St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), the ancient church’s great defender and definer of the doctrine of grace, with whom Luther most closely identified his own theology. In a 1517 letter to Johann Lang (ca. 1488–1548), Luther declared: “Our theology and St. Augustine are progressing well, and with God’s help rule at our University.” In his autobiographical reflection in the 1545 Preface to the Latin Writings, Luther credited Augustine with confirming his new understanding of God’s righteousness as a gift, though with the qualification that “this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly.”

Luther’s theological identification with Augustine was not simply a result of the eminence of Augustine as an authority in medieval theology in general, nor more specifically a matter of Luther’s membership in the Order of Augustinian Hermits, where, despite the communal veneration of Augustine as a saint, the appropriation of his theology and writings was extremely varied. Rather, it arose out of Luther’s intensive reading, in the midst of his work as a lecturer, of particular books by Augustine.

---

1 Luther’s preface was first published in 1556 in Johann Aurifaber’s (1519–75) edition of Luther’s correspondence: Epistololarum Reverendi Patris Domini D. Martini Lutheri, Tomus primus (Jena: Christian Rödinger, 1556) [VD16 L4649], pp. 154–55.
2 Luther to Lang, May 18, 1517, LW 48:42.
3 LW 34:337.
4 Luther to Spalatin, October 19, 1516, LW 48:24.
Of these, the most important was On the Spirit and the Letter, a work composed by Augustine in 418 to defend the claim that the human will was incapable of achieving righteousness without the gift of the Holy Spirit, received through faith, which was itself the gift of God. The book was addressed to the imperial commissioner Marcellinus (d. 413), a Christian layman, in the midst of Augustine’s controversy with the followers of the British monk Pelagius (ca. 354–ca. 418). Pelagius had come to Rome teaching a strict Christian morality as the condition of salvation, which was, however, achievable by every human being through the application of free will to the observance of God’s Law. The sin of Adam, according to Pelagius, influences others only to the extent they choose to imitate his bad example. Augustine’s battle against the theology of Pelagius and his followers—“the opponents of the grace of God”—dominated the last two decades of the saint’s life and works. On the Spirit and the Letter—a short book of thirty-six chapters—was among the most penetrating and focused of his anti-Pelagian works.

Beginning with Luther’s lectures on Romans (1515–16), On the Spirit and the Letter is a major presence, and Luther continued to appeal to the work in the disputations of the following years and periodically thereafter. Augustine served as witness that “free choice alone . . . avails for nothing but sin”, that St. Paul in contrasting the letter that kills and the Spirit that gives life (2 Cor. 3:6) was speaking


not about literal and allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but about the Law of God in contrast to grace⁹—and not merely about the ceremonial law but about the moral law of the Decalogue itself,¹⁰ that the Law could not produce righteousness apart from faith,¹¹ but only increased sinful desire, and had been given to provoke human beings to seek grace.¹² Above all, On the Spirit and the Letter served to confirm for Luther that—in contrast to the teaching of the nominalist theologians under whom he had studied at Erfurt—the righteousness of God was not God's righteousness applied against human beings as the standard of judgment, but the righteousness with which God clothed human beings when He justified them.¹³

These texts of Augustine had, of course, been available to the medieval theological tradition. But Luther’s reading of Augustine diverged from the majority of his predecessors in that Luther took Augustine’s polemical writings as the interpretive center of his works: especially against the Pelagians, but also in opposition to the Donatists, who made the Sacraments dependent on the moral integrity of their minister, and against the Manichaeans (the sect to which Augustine himself had belonged as a young adult), who denied the goodness of the material world and made of Christ an ethereal guide who shows the path of escape. In contrast, a broad medieval consensus held that Augustine in these works had articulated Christian theology in a distorted way, in an effort to counterbalance the heresy he was opposing.

---


This argument had first been advanced by Bonaventure (1221–74) in order to evade the literal force of Augustine's insistence, cited in Peter Lombard's (ca. 1095–1160) Sentences (in fact from a work by Fulgentius of Ruspe attributed to Augustine),\(^\text{14}\) that unbaptized infants suffer eternal hellfire: “He expresses this in a very rhetorical way [valde abundanter], saying more than he means to have understood.”\(^\text{15}\) Bonaventure's explanation was taken up by John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308) in his own commentary on the Sentences and recast into what became its axiomatic form: “Augustine speaks exaggeratedly [Augustinus excessive loquitur].”\(^\text{16}\) For Scotus, this was a general rule for interpreting Augustine and the church fathers: “Thus the saints often spoke exaggeratedly in the course of uprooting the heresies that had sprung up against them.” Beyond the confines of the original discussion, this principle became a means of reconciling Augustine's “exaggerated” teaching on grace, as expressed in polemic against the Pelagians, with scholastic doctrines of merit. The maxim was widely cited in Luther's own formative context: by Gabriel Biel (ca. 1410–95);\(^\text{17}\) by Luther's predecessors in the Augustinian order Johann von Paltz (ca. 1445–1511) and Johannes Dorsten (ca. 1435–81);\(^\text{18}\) by the Tübingen exegete Wendelin Steinbach (1454–1519);\(^\text{19}\) and

\(^{14}\) Fulgentius of Ruspe (468–533), De fide ad Petrum 27.70 (PL 40:774; CCSL 91A:753; FC 95:100).

\(^{15}\) Bonaventure, Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum 2 dist. 33 art. 3. q. 1 ad 1 & 2, in Opera Omnia (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902), 2:794.


\(^{17}\) Biel, Collectorium 2 Dist. 33 q. un. art. 3 dub. 2 (ed. Hanns Rückert et al. [Tübingen: Mohr, 1973–92], 2:593–94). Biel cites the maxim in a composite form derived from both Bonaventura and Scotus.


by Luther’s future opponent Johann Eck (1486–1543) in his 1514 Chrysopassus Praedestinationis. Erasmus, too, in his own phrasing, affirmed the received medieval wisdom.

It was against that “common knowledge” shared by predecessors and contemporaries that Luther composed the first thesis of his Disputation against Scholastic Theology: “To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere.”

The most prominent medieval opponent of this consensus was the Ockhamist general of the Augustinian Hermits, Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300–1358), who had lectured at the University of Paris from 1340–44. Although scholars debate how early Luther was acquainted with Gregory as an exception to the medieval relativization of Augustine—it may, ironically, have been Eck who first pointed Luther to Gregory—in this preface Luther hails Gregory as the sole faithful exponent of Augustine among the scholastics.

Luther’s defense of Augustine resonated among the Wittenberg theologians. The former Thomist and dean of the theological faculty Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541), initially hostile

22 Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517), LW 31:9. See also Luther to Hieronymus Dungersheim, June 1520, WA Br 2:125, no. 301; Vorlesung über den 1. Johannesbrief (1527/1708), WA 20:753; Draft on the Power to Impose Laws in the Church (1530), WA 30/2:668 (LW 72); Table Talk no. 2544a (1532), WA TR 2:515; no. 5439a (1542), WA TR 5:153–54.
to Luther, was provoked by Luther to careful reading of Augustine and became a convinced adherent of both men, publishing his own commentary on On the Spirit and the Letter in 1518, though his understanding of each theologian was somewhat idiosyncratic. Although Augustine was from the beginning the nominal patron of the Wittenberg theological faculty, Luther’s “new” Augustine now began to influence the school’s curriculum. Already in 1518, Luther identified On the Spirit and the Letter as part of his Wittenberg “course of study,” reflecting Karlstadt’s extraordinary lectures (that is, ones outside the fixed curriculum) on the book. By 1533, the statutes of the Wittenberg theological faculty, drafted by Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), stipulated regular public lectures on Augustine’s book, “so that the students may see that the doctrine of our churches has the witness of the more learned fathers” and, as the elector’s confirmation in 1536 put it, “in order to maintain the correct understanding of grace in Paul.”

The place of Luther’s preface for On the Spirit and the Letter within the history of the Wittenberg use of Augustine is not immediately clear. It was never published during Luther’s lifetime, though Luther’s autograph manuscript survived to be included in Johann Aurifaber’s edition of Luther’s correspondence in 1556. Aurifaber there dated the preface to 1518, presuming that it had been prepared for Karlstadt’s commentary. But Luther’s reference to Augustine’s modern opponents as the “Papists” would be anachronistic in that year, since the term first appears in Luther’s writings no earlier than 1520. Instead, the preface more likely belongs to the mid-1530s, at the time of the revision of the university statutes. In that context, the Wittenberg reformers seem to have envisioned their own selected edition of Augustine for


26 Luther to Spalatin, January 18, 1518, LW 48:54.


28 See Luther’s preface, notes, and afterword to Prierias, Response (1520), WA 6:348 (LW 71); sermon on Matt. 6:24 (1520?), WA 4:706–15.
the use of their students. The complete works of Augustine had been published at Basel by Johannes Amerbach (ca. 1440–1513) in eleven volumes in 1505–6 and, as edited by Erasmus, in 1528–29 in ten volumes. These impressive and important resources were far too expensive for most readers, and so it was expedient to supply cheap editions of a few Augustinian works—as Luther puts it below, “one or two books of St. Augustine’s”—and a surviving Wittenberg copy of Erasmus’ Augustine edition seems to have been marked up for this purpose, though none was in fact produced from the Wittenberg presses at the time, and so Luther’s preface was set aside.

When a new Wittenberg edition of On the Spirit and the Letter did appear in 1545, it was accompanied not with Luther’s preface from a decade earlier but with one by Melanchthon. Melanchthon, too, praised Augustine as an interpreter of Paul on Law, Gospel, sin, grace, faith, letter and Spirit—indeed, as the progenitor of the Wittenberg theology. But Melanchthon, reading the church fathers within the context of a sophisticated scriptural hermeneutic, was also frankly critical of Augustine’s limitations when judged by the doctrine of the Scriptures themselves. He chiefly had in mind Augustine’s frequent description of justification in terms not simply of faith but of the love enkindled in the heart by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, as well as his continued use of such established theological terminology as “merit.” Thus Melanchthon argued that though in substance Augustine ultimately agreed with the Wittenberg

29 Prima [–Undecima] pars librorum divi Aurelii Augustini (Basel: J. Amerbach & J. Froben, 1505–6) [VD16 A4147].


31 The copy of Erasmus’ Opera Omnia Augustini described by Peter Way, “A ‘Lutheran’ Copy of Erasmus’ Edition of St. Augustine,” LQ 14, no. 4 (2000): 373–408, which seems to be associated with the study of Augustine in Wittenberg, is especially heavily annotated in vol. 9, containing De doctrina Christiana as well as De spiritu et littera.

32 Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi liber de spiritu et littera (Wittenberg: Joseph Klug, 1545) [VD16 A4242]. For Melanchthon’s preface, see CR 5:803–10.


theology, his language was sometimes misleading. As Melanchthon had put it: “In the midst of such strenuous disputes, he sometimes expresses himself improperly or awkwardly.” Although the content of Melanchthon’s reservations was quite different, the form of his criticism here was uncomfortably similar to the scholastic critique of Augustine as one who had “spoken exaggeratedly” in arguing against the heretics. It was likely this potential confusion with the scholastic maxim categorically rejected by Luther in his unpublished preface that led Melanchthon to supply his own substitute.

In Luther’s praise of Augustine, he was loath to concede that Augustine might have misspoken in the midst of dispute. Instead, Luther commended Augustine’s polemical works in particular, contrasting these later works with Augustine’s earlier, more philosophical writings, which he placed at a lower level. When challenged elsewhere on the details of Augustine’s agreement with his own understanding of St. Paul, Luther insisted that, when pressed, the African saint had expressed his confidence not in the transformation wrought within him by the Holy Spirit, but in God’s sheer mercy in Christ—an argument then adopted by Melanchthon as well for his preface.

Luther, in the preface to his German works, described the true theologian as one who had been shaped not only by prayer and meditation but also by the experience of temptation. Luther regarded Augustine as one who, in the midst of such conflict, had been “awakened” from theological torpor to become “a strong and faithful defender of grace.” It was this Augustine, hard-pressed by heretics, the theologian and believer

---

35 Melanchthon, *Declamatio de vita Augustini* (1539), CR 11:454; see also *De Ecclesiae auctoritate et de veterum scriptis* (1539), CR 23:625; *Disputation of Melanchthon with Luther on Justification* (1536/1552), WA Br 12:191 (LW 72).


37 Cf. *Table Talk* no. 4777, WA TR 4:490.

38 *Table Talk* no. 3984 (1538), WA TR 4:55–56: “Augustine writes nothing sharp-edged [acriter; cf. Augustine, *Retractions* 2.37 (PL 32:646; FC 60:140)] about faith unless he is fighting against the Pelagians. They woke him up and made him into a man.”

39 *Table Talk* no. 51(1531), LW 54:8.
formed by temptation, that Luther commended without reservation to his students.

The translation is made from Luther’s Latin as edited in WA Br 12:387–88.41

C. B. B.

[Preface of the Reverend Father Dr. Martin Luther for Augustine’s On the Spirit and the Letter]42

It is not without good reason that it has been appointed in this school that public lectures be held on this book of St. Augustine’s, On the Spirit and the Letter43—especially in our present age, in which the Papists, even more rabidly than Pelagians, are inveighing against the grace of God by which we are freely justified in Christ, for the purpose of defending and shoring up their satisfactions, Masses, and merits. Therefore, students of theology should become familiar with this book so that they may be able to stand firm and to refute those rabid voices of the Papists, who shout that we are bringing a new kind of doctrine into the church. For this book of St. Augustine is not new; rather, it demonstrates conclusively that it is the Papists who are the inventors of new dogmas, the ones who have introduced their wicked and sacrilegious opinions, over this ancient doctrine handed down by the apostles, and thereby scourged, crucified, and buried it.

There is a saying among them—quite satanic, but one which they regard as a theological rule—namely, that Augustine “spoke exaggeratedly” in these matters.44 For thus they have evaded the force of the doctrine and work of the holy man, lest they be defeated by the authority of St. Augustine and forced to abandon their abominable fabrications. Thus at the same time they witness against themselves that it is not in ignorance that they have taught and defended their monstrosities, since they knew and read perfectly well that Augustine is in utter disagreement with them. One of them, Gregory of Rimini, dared to put forward Augustine in Paris and to oppose the sophists in this matter.45 But he did not prevail over the theologians of the Sorbonne. They overcame him, and in accordance with their pharisaical arrogance they decided that Augustine had spoken exaggeratedly. Since therefore not

41 Aland 53a.
42 The title is given in Aurifaber’s 1556 edition.
43 See the introduction above, p. 40.
44 See the introduction above, pp. 37–39.
45 See the introduction above, p. 39.
everyone is able to obtain all the works of Augustine for himself, it seemed necessary to publish one or two books of St. Augustine for the sake of those of slighter means, so that everyone may see that we are neither the first nor the only ones who have dared attack the wicked theology of the sophists and that not we, but rather they, have been the authors of novelties in the church of God. They, having abandoned the boundaries established by the fathers [cf. Prov. 22:28], have cast the hearts of the simple headlong into their tortuous and “devious paths” (as Scripture says [Judg. 5:6 Vg]). As a result, according to the word of the prophet, Christ’s people have forgotten Him days without number and were forced to play the whore with infinite lovers or foreign gods, who did not give them rest either day or night [Jer. 2:32; 3:1; 16:13 Vg].

But so far as the praises of Augustine are concerned, I will say nothing here except for this one thing, which I am able to affirm safely, having been taught by experience: Next to the Holy Scriptures there is no doctor in the church who is to be compared with him in Christian knowledge. I concede to others their praises, whether they be speakers like Chrysostom, or versed in secular literature like Jerome. Yet in all of them put together you will not find half as much as you will in Augustine alone. Therefore, if you are able and have time, after Holy Scripture choose as your teacher this St. Augustine, especially where he argues against the Pelagians, the Donatists, and the Manichaeans. For here is a man of solid learning in Christ. To be sure, he also wrote certain [other] books at the beginning of his career, but I am of the opinion that you should read those when you have extra leisure time. Not a few such hours I once wasted in Jerome, Chrysostom, and similar authors. If you do not believe me, who have learned by experience, you can put it to the test yourself for my sake and afterward repent along with me. May our Lord direct and preserve us by His Holy Spirit, for His glory and our salvation. Amen.

46 John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), bishop of Constantinople, received the epithet “golden-mouthed” for his oratorical skill as a preacher.

47 Jerome (ca. 345–420) was the greatest philologist among the church fathers. In a famous dream, he reported being chastised by Christ for being a “Ciceronian, not a Christian” (Letter 22.30 [PL 22:416–17; NPNF 2 6:35–36]).

48 See the introduction above, pp. 36–37.

49 Augustine’s earliest works were of a predominantly philosophical character. See LCC 6.

50 Cf. Table Talk no. 252 (1532), LW 54:33–34.

Preface to
Antonius Corvinus,
How Far Erasmus’ Recently Published Plan for “Mending the Peace of the Church” Should Be Followed While a Council Is Being Organized

1534¹

Translated by Robert Rosin
Edited by Robert Rosin and Margaret Arnold

Antonius Corvinus [Rabe] was born at Warburg, near Kassel, on February 27, 1501.² Corvinus, the illegitimate son of a petty noble, entered a Cistercian monastery at the age of eighteen and was educated there and at the University of Leipzig, where he became a devoted student of humanist learning, an adherent of the larger movement for church renewal inspired by the “prince of the humanists,” Erasmus. In 1523, however, Corvinus was expelled from Riddagshausen cloister in Braunschweig for alleged Lutheran sympathies—perhaps in an attempt to get rid of someone with inconvenient Erasmian tendencies. When he was called to Goslar as a pastor in 1528, he still seems to have seen himself primarily as a humanist, working on behalf of reform. But in 1529, after visiting Wittenberg and encountering Luther and Melanchthon, Corvinus not only left the Erasmian camp but publicly rejected Erasmus’ conciliatory attitude toward Rome along with the

¹ Antonius Corvinus, Quatenus Expediat Aeditam Recens Erasmi de Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia Rationem sequi, tantisper dum adparatur Synodus, Juditium (Wittenberg: Nickel Schirlenz, 1534) [VD16 C5429]. 28 leaves in octavo.

soft hand wielded by Pope Paul III (r. 1534–59), whose mild reforms yielded rather limited results.\(^3\)

Despite his education under the Cistercians and at Leipzig, Corvinus was largely self-taught when it came to Lutheran Evangelical theology. He nonetheless became a faithful promoter and spent the larger part of his professional years introducing and implementing the new Evangelical ideas with a clear eye toward proclaiming the Gospel Luther had rediscovered. Corvinus engaged in various theological debates and disputes,\(^4\) but his particular focus was on homiletics: he composed postils for preachers on the Gospel and Epistle lessons (for which Luther also provided prefaces),\(^5\) as well as model sermons on the Epistle readings, Psalms, and Genesis.

While Johann Bugenhagen is the best known among Lutheran church organizers and administrators,\(^6\) Corvinus also was active in northern Germany. He composed church orders\(^7\) and worked with Bugenhagen on the reform of Hildesheim in 1544. Although such organization was usually done in service to various princes, Corvinus supported ideas that made the church more autonomous, for example, carrying out church discipline independent of the institutions of the state. Indeed, in the last years of Corvinus’ life, he was imprisoned by Duke Erich II of Braunschweig-Lüneberg (r. 1545–84) for opposing the duke’s interference in church matters. After nearly three years in

---

\(^3\) On Pope Paul’s brief reforming career, see below, p. 123 n. 8.

\(^4\) At the behest of Landgrave Philip of Hesse (r. 1509–67), Corvinus engaged with Anabaptists imprisoned after the 1534–35 Münster episode (see below, preface to Rhegius, *Refutation* (1535), pp. 82–90; *New Report on the Anabaptists at Münster* (1535), pp. 91–98; see also below, p. 61 n. 22). He subscribed to the *Smalcald Articles* in 1537, and he traveled to Regensburg in 1541 as a delegate to the Lutheran-Roman colloquy.


\(^7\) For the city of Northeim (1539) (Sehling 6/2:922–39) and for the territories of Calenberg (1542) (Sehling 6/2:708–843) and (with Bugenhagen) of Wolfenbüttel (1543) (Sehling 6/1:22–81).
prison (November 1549 to October 1552), Corvinus was released but died a few months later on April 5, 1553.

Corvinus’ ability and commitment likely prompted Luther to write a preface for more than one of his works, including the pages here aimed at Erasmus and his middling attitude, as expressed most recently in the aging humanist’s treatise On Mending the Peace of the Church (1533), a commentary on Psalm 83 intended as a final attempt to mend the rift between supporters of Rome and the Evangelical reformers. Erasmus’ plea for toleration and unity was dedicated to Julius Pflug (1499–1564), the jurist and fellow humanist who had solicited the treatise. Corvinus’ response takes the form of a dialogue between himself and “Julian,” who presents the Erasmian position. Corvinus maintains that abuses in matters of faith must not be tolerated, though Christians ought to continue to offer one another personal forbearance, distinguishing between public and private persons. He identifies medieval monasticism and practices such as the veneration of the saints and private Masses as false and satanic corruptions of the true Church, and avers that real authority resides only in the Word. He takes up the defense of several central themes of Luther’s controversy with Erasmus, including the bondage of the will, faith and works, and justification.

Luther’s own final rejection of Erasmus, expressed in a letter to Nicolaus von Amsdorf (1483–1565) that had appeared in print in

---

8 Erasmus, De Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia [On mending the peace of the church], CWE 65:125–216. Although the treatise failed as an immediate solution to the problem, some irenic theologians continued to use the work in the decades that followed in advocating a doctrine of “double justification,” intended to acknowledge the imputation of saving righteousness to the sinner while insisting that the Spirit-driven righteousness of the Christian life also had to be cultivated and seen. See Heribert Smolinsky and Peter Walter, eds., Katholische Theologen der Reformationszeit (Münster: Aschendorf, 2004).


11 Corvinus, Quatenus, fol. B2r.

12 Corvinus, Quatenus, fol. B4r.

13 Corvinus, Quatenus, fol. C2r.
the spring of 1534,\textsuperscript{14} and Erasmus’ response, published in May as A
Justification against the Intemperate Letter of Luther, immediately
preceded Corvinus’ treatise.\textsuperscript{15} Luther was pleased that Corvinus was
giving a straightforward reply to Erasmus’ proposal, with a moderation
of style that Luther could admire in others (with qualified warning)
even if it was not his own native mode.\textsuperscript{16} He agrees, however, with
Corvinus’ central argument: though Evangelicals practice charity in
personal relations with their opponents, concessions must not be made
in matters of faith; Luther cites Eph. 6:12 on the difference between
love’s gentle treatment of flesh and blood, and faith’s unequivocal
correction of the soul. Lastly, he seeks to unmask Erasmus’ moderation
as contemptible skepticism that would abandon believers to a parlous
uncertainty. Certainty can be derived only from the Scriptures, which
have been neglected by the medieval church in favor of false, human
traditions. Luther concludes by attempting to show a pacific, “quiet
spirit” to his opponents while insisting as steadfastly as ever on the
impossibility of remaining silent about the Gospel.\textsuperscript{17}

The translation here is made from the Latin text of the 1534
Wittenberg edition as edited in WA 38:276–79.\textsuperscript{18}

R. R. \& M. A.

TO THE GODLY READER, GREETINGS IN CHRIST
FROM DR. MARTIN LUTHER

THE printer has pried from me this preface that is supposed to be published
under my name, so that this little book, marketable enough by itself,
might be regarded with all the more favor on account of my endorsement.
In fact, the book has pleased me greatly both because of its substance and
elegant style and also because of its modesty, and without a doubt it will also
please pious and learned people all the more even without my endorsement.
And I frankly admit that it is not my own style and custom to deal with this

\textsuperscript{14} Luther to Amsdorf, March 11, 1534, WA Br 7:27–40, no. 2093.

\textsuperscript{15} Erasmus, \textit{Purgatio adversus epistolam non sobriam Lutheri}, ASD 9/1:427–83. See Brecht

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Luther’s acknowledgment of Melanchthon’s draft of the Augsburg Confession for its

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Corvinus, \textit{Quatenus}, fol. C7r.

\textsuperscript{18} Aland 145. A section of the preface (WA 38:276–78) was translated in John Scott, \textit{The
History of the Church of Christ: Particularly in Its Lutheran Branch, from the Diet of Augsburg
A.D. 1530 to the Death of Luther A.D. 1546} (London: L. B. Seeley \& Son, 1826), pp. 166f.
sort of matter so softly and mildly as our Corvinus does here, especially
now that such a tumult has arisen between the Erasmian theologians and
myself. But for the sake of this little book, I shall master myself as much as
I am able and, setting aside my vehemence, I shall say that, in my view, the
method of teaching that “Julian”19 here defends on Erasmus’ behalf cannot
be approved. For myself, I can easily believe that Erasmus and his followers,
with good intention, want to deal with such affairs—or, rather, tumults—by
means of such moderation and mutual concession on both sides, fearing lest
everything come undone, as it is said.20 But conscience and the truth itself
cannot tolerate this plan for peace. For the unity of faith is one thing, and
love is another. So far as love is concerned, nothing has ever been omitted
on our part or failed to be offered with the greatest goodwill in order either
to maintain peace and harmony or to mend them. We always have been
fully ready to do, to suffer, and to retain everything the opponents might
command, enjoin, and inflict upon us, provided that there was no injury to
the faith.21 And this we have ceaselessly demonstrated both in our action and
in its fruits. For we have never thirsted after their blood, much less spilled
it, [and] we have never done them any injury or taken anything from them.
Rather, we have stood firm, acted, and labored against the rebellious and
fanatical spirits22 on their behalf, and (as pious and godly people, and even
many among them, confess)23 we have done more than they themselves have
to preserve their position, and for that we have received even greater and

19 Corvinus’ interlocutor in the dialogue format of his treatise; see the introduction above,
p. 59.

20 Ne res in nervum eat. See Erasmus, Adages 2.5.85, 2.6.36 (CWE 33:278, 309), based on
Terence, Phormio 325 (Loeb 23 [2001], pp. 46–49).

21 The most prominent example of such willingness on the part of the Lutherans was
the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (and its Apology), which declared the willingness of the
Lutherans to retain much of the structure and ceremony of medieval church life, if the preach-
ing of the Gospel were allowed. See, e.g., AC XXIV 1; Ap XIV 1–2 [VII 24–25] (Kolb-Wengert,
pp. 68–69, 222–23; Concordia, pp. 47, 187).

22 Although Luther counted as “fanatics” all those who, whatever their other differences
or agreements, discounted the spiritual power of the external Word and the Sacraments, here
he probably has in mind especially such groups as the rebellious peasant followers of Thomas
Münzer (ca. 1489–1525) (see Luther’s preface and afterword to Terrifying Story of Thomas
Münzer [1525], WA 18:362–74 [LW 59]) and the Anabaptists who, at the time of this 1534
preface, had taken control of the city of Münster: see below, Luther’s prefaces to Rhegius,
Refutation (1535), pp. 82–90; and New Report on the Anabaptists at Münster (1535), pp. 91–98.
See also Sigrun Haude, In the Shadow of “Savage Wolves”: Anabaptist Münster and the German
Reformation during the 1530s, Studies in Central European Histories (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

23 Although Roman Catholic writers consistently blamed Luther and his teaching for pro-
voking the Peasants’ War, they did sometimes grudgingly acknowledge Lutheran opposition
to the Anabaptists and other sectarians: see Confutation of the Augsburg Confession 9, in Kolb
and Nestingen, Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord, p. 112.
more bitter hatred. For the rebellious and raging spirits are far more mild in their hatred of the Papists than of the Lutherans, though in the meantime the Papists do not cease spilling and shedding our blood, pursuing us with sword, fire, water, and every kind of madness, for no other reason than that we cannot, against our conscience, make their man-made traditions equal with God and His Word, or, rather, set them above God and His worship. Therefore, God will judge here whether the fault for not preserving peace lies on their side or on ours. For our boast is the most joyous testimony, that of an untroubled conscience [cf. 2 Cor. 1:12]: that with utmost diligence, so far as love is concerned, we have sought out, asked for, and insisted upon peace. And this even after so much of our people’s blood has been shed, and after having to endure the limitless cruelty and hatred of our adversaries.

Yet it is in vain that Erasmus seeks after peace in faith or doctrine through the counsel that we should yield and make concessions to each other. This is not simply because the adversaries do not yield anything at all—nor are they willing to yield, but rather defend everything even more rigidly and more obstinately than ever before, so that they have even dared to defend the sort of things that prior to Luther they themselves condemned and disapproved. But it is also because we ourselves are unable to approve things that manifestly conflict with the divine Scriptures and which, as it is said, “allow no middle ground.” For the doctrine of faith “does not contend with flesh and blood” [Eph. 6:12], as does love, which deals with people and their vices by tolerating them, correcting them, and improving what can be changed, and it has the hope, which endures until death, of converting sinners. Rather, [faith] “contends with the spirits” of wickedness and with desperate men whose malice is forever resolute, and there is no hope of converting them or of changing their mind. Thus between faith (or the doctrine of Christ) and the desires of demons no peace, no harmony, no friendship should be attempted. “[The devil] is a murderer and the father of lies” [John 8:44], and it is just as impossible for him not to hate the doctrine of the faith as to change his lying and pernicious will. “For what accord has Christ with

24 On Anabaptist criticism of Lutherans, see below, preface to New Report on the Anabaptists at Müünster (1535), pp. 93–98.
25 Peace negotiations between the Smalcaldic League of Protestant princes and the Holy Roman emperor had been conducted throughout the early 1530s. On Luther’s hopes for a peaceful political settlement, see Luther’s letter to Elector John, about February 12, 1532, LW 50:45; Brecht 2:423–26.
26 For such shifts among reform-minded Catholic theologians after 1517 on questions such as justification, see Stephen D. Bowd, Reform before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 8–17, 229.
Belial? What fellowship is there between light and darkness?” [cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–15].

“But,” you will say, “the Papists likewise boast of the doctrine of Christ, and they do not want to seem to be teaching the errors of demons.” They may well boast, but “the tree is known by its fruits” [cf. Matt. 7:16]. And, not to argue the point at too much length, it is well recognized that they care nothing about teaching anything with firm assurance to strengthen consciences. Their only cry is “Church, Church, Church!” And they give the name “Church” to men, even godless ones, who are able to think and decree things above and contrary to the Scriptures, and to do this by divine authority. This manner of speaking of theirs is confirmed by Erasmus, too, who promises everywhere that he is following the Church, and in the meantime he teaches that everything is doubtful and uncertain. But if we are to call “Church” this thing that they cry out is the Church, and then are to believe whatever that church of theirs says and does, what need is there for divine Scripture? Why are vices reproved? Why do we stand in peril for the confession of the truth? For we might be saved with the briefest summary, even while sleeping lazily away, merely by saying, “I believe that the Papists are the Church and I believe that whatever the Papists decree is the truth, even if they make their decrees without, above, and contrary to the Scriptures.”

But what will you do with pious and good souls who, captive to the authority of Scripture as the Word of divine truth, cannot believe what is taught in manifest contradiction to the Scriptures? Shall we tell them one must listen to the pope so that peace and harmony are maintained? Or should these be left in uncertainty, suspending their judgment in the meantime until the pope along with his followers decrees something else? But let others be as secure and as negligent of their salvation as they will; certainly a mind that reveres God and earnestly fears eternal death and desires eternal life cannot be set at rest by uncertain and dubious teachings.

Thus also in my Bondage of the Will I rebuked that opinion of the Skeptics in Erasmus’ theology. For in the Church one must have sure

---

28 Cf. below, preface to Rhegius, Refutation (1535), p. 88.
29 See especially Erasmus, Freedom of the Will, LCC 17:37.
30 The generic assent to whatever the church taught (considered to be the form of faith necessary for all Christians) was called by the scholastic theologians fides implicita: see, e.g., Aquinas, ST 2–2 q. 2 aa. 5–6 (Blackfriars 31:78–86); John Brevicoxa (d. 1423), Treatise on Faith, the Church, the Roman Pontiff, and the General Council, in Heiko A. Oberman, Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 69; Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983), pp. 82–83. For Luther’s fuller criticism of the idea, see Letter to the Christians in Frankfurt am Main (1532), WA 30/3:562–63.
31 See Bondage of the Will (1525), LW 33:19–24.
dogma and the sure Word of God, in which we may trust with certainty and assurance, and in this certainty of faith both live and die. Because Erasmus cares little about this certainty and because the Papists do not teach it—nor can they, since they do not understand anything about it, but instead they hate it and persecute it—no harmony can be achieved in faith and doctrine. For the Church cannot do without this sure anchor of faith, and no faith can continue to exist beyond or above the Word of God. Thus whatever the Papists or Erasmus teach or advise in this matter is futile and useless. Such human counsel and remedies cannot and will not help consciences. Instead, consciences desire to hear the voice of their own Bridegroom [John 3:29], the voice of their Shepherd [John 10:2–3] and only Teacher [Matt. 23:8]. To the voice of strangers they say [cf. John 10:5], “Because this does not have authority from the Scriptures, it is despised as easily as it is proved.” I am not talking about controversies carried out on the basis of the Scriptures, but rather about those that the adversaries defend outside of and apart from the Scriptures, and enforce by violence and every kind of fury. Such things are not heretical (for heresies are concocted by ungodly spirits out of the Scriptures), but instead are utterly profane and most certainly diabolical. Because of this, Erasmus would have been safer if he had stayed away from theology and practiced his eloquence in other matters for which he has the talent. Theology requires a mind that seeks the Word of God and loves it with seriousness and simplicity, as we read: “And seek Him in simplicity of heart, for He is found by those who do not tempt Him” [Wisdom 1:1–2]. And in Romans 12 [:7] Paul commands that the teaching of Christians should “be analogous to the faith.” And 1 Peter 4 [:11]: “If anyone speaks, [let him speak] as the words of God.” And 2 Peter 1 [:20–21]: “The prophecy of Scripture does not come by someone’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man.” And we have had more than enough misery under the papacy; we were blown about by all sorts of winds of doctrine [cf. Eph. 4:14] while we concocted our own articles [of faith] by human will outside of the Scriptures, until we even worshiped the monks’ cowls. By this idolatry we clearly surpassed all the monstrosities of the pagans. For those who cry that the church believes many articles [of faith] that are not contained in the Scriptures are driven by their own lunacy,
concocting for themselves a different church—namely, the synagogue of Satan [Rev. 2:9; 3:9]—and in the name of the holy Church, the virgin and Bride of Christ, they adorn and advertise the devil’s whore and madam with the most impudent lies.

But I will handle this subject more thoroughly when I write about the Church, if the Lord gives the time and strength. 36 For as long as the devil's kingdom lasts, there is no reason for us to hope for peace and harmony in doctrine. There is only one way: patience in the love of Christ, that we let them rage, and we bear their hate and rancor with a quiet spirit. For we must truly be Christophers 37 and members of the Order of the Holy Cross. 38 Christ will convert His elect and will finally deliver us all. His is the victory, the power, and the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen.


36 Although no such treatise came close on the heels of Luther’s preface for Corvinus, several well-known titles would appear a few years later. In 1539 came On the Councils and the Church, LW 41:3–178, and in 1541 Luther published Against Hanswurst, LW 41:179–256.

37 i.e., “bearers of Christ.” St. Christopher (d. ca. 251) was among the most popular saints in late medieval devotion and art, remembered as a giant who persevered in carrying the astonishing weight of the Christ Child on his shoulders across a river: see LA 2:10–14, no. 100. For the application to all Christians, cf. Luther’s sermon of July 25, 1529, WA 29:498–505 (LW 56).

38 The Kreutzorden was a military crusading order; here Luther applies the epithet to all Christians who bear the divinely imposed cross of opposition to the Gospel.
Preface to
Urbanus Rhegius,
Prophecies of the Old Testament
Concerning Christ

1542

Translated and edited by Mickey L. Mattox

In this preface, Luther praises the life and work of his recently deceased fellow reformer Urbanus Rhegius. Rhegius had led the Reformation in Augsburg in the 1520s and later, at the invitation of Duke Ernst, did the same in Braunschweig-Lüneburg. In 1537, Rhegius had published a German book based on the Emmaus road discourse of Luke 24:13–35. Cast in the form of a dialogue with his wife, Anna, the work sought to fill in the risen Jesus’ exposition of “the things in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27) with a topical catalog and exposition of Old Testament passages prophesying of Christ. Anna’s patient and thoughtful questions modeled an Evangelical faith seeking understanding, while Rhegius’ insightful answers provided a textbook example of the learned pastor at work in the parish. In this way, the two of them offered a wide-ranging Evangelical

---

1 Prophetiae Veteris Testamenti de Christo, Collectae et Explicatae per D. Urbanum Rhegium, cum Praefatione D. Martini Lutheri (Frankfurt: P. Brubach, 1542) [VD16 R1777]. 166 leaves in folio.

2 On Rhegius, see above, the introductions to Luther’s prefaces to Rhegius, Refutation (1535), pp. 82–86; Exposition of Psalm 52 (1541), pp. 239–42.

3 Dialogus von der schönen predigt die Christus Luc. 24. von Jerusalem bis gen Emaus den zweien jüngern am Ostertag aus Mose vnd allen Propheten gethan hat Durch D. Urbanum Rhegium (Wittenberg: Josef Klug, 1537) [VD16 R1766]. 271 leaves in quarto.


interpretation of the Old Testament, including mainly the testimonies of the patriarchs, the Psalms, and the prophets. Against opponents who might criticize him for carrying on a dialogue with a woman, Rhegius appeals to Christ’s many dialogues with women, as well as to the examples of church fathers such as Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, all of whom wrote in response to questions from women. This work was subsequently translated into Latin by Rhegius’ friend and collaborator, Johann Freder [Ireneaus] (1510–62), and Luther’s preface first appears with this Latin translation, published in 1542. An English translation was published in 1578, and German editions continued to appear until late in the seventeenth century.

Luther’s remarks reflect not only his sadness at Rhegius’ death but also profound concern for the well-being of the church and Christian society. The threat of “the Turk” overshadows Luther’s thoughts about the loss of his pious friend. He worries that such men are too few and complains frankly about the moral and spiritual failings of his dear German people, from the youth and the commoners to the princes. The loss of virtuous men such as Rhegius, he fears, portends nothing less than divine judgment and calamity for the future.

When Luther turns to consider Rhegius’ treatise itself, however, his apocalyptic brooding is muted by his admiration for this shining example of conjugal society. Marriage is the “seedbed of the Church,” he avers, and he presents the partnership of Urbanus and Anna as a paradigmatic example of the Christian home, one marked by devotion to the Word, the good of offspring (they had eleven children), mutual prayer, and spiritual admonition. As they go about the honorable work of procreation and the education of their children, Luther assures the reader, husband and wife will see many examples of God’s blessings. In short, Luther portrays marriage as an authentic spiritual estate, and he excoriates his “Papist” opponents who, he says, fail to see the glory of this conjugal dialogue and society.

---

6 See above, p. 267 n. 1.
7 See Rhegius’ letter to Luther, April 18, 1537, requesting a preface, WA Br 8:72–73, no. 3149.
8 The Sermon which Christ made on the way to Emaus to those two sorrowfull disciples, set downe in a dialogue by D. Urbane Rhegius, trans. William Hilton (London: John Day, 1578).
9 See above, p. 223 n. 3.
10 See below, p. 272.
Luther’s vivid description here of the departed Urbanus’ present, heavenly life with Christ and the saints must be set alongside his descriptions elsewhere of the death of the saints as a “sleep” awaiting the resurrection.\textsuperscript{11} The elder Luther’s endorsement of this work should also be seen in the context of one of his central theological concerns, namely, the Christological and trinitarian exegesis of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{12} To that extent, Rhegius’ Prophecies should be set alongside such works of Luther’s as The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith (1538) and On the Last Words of David (1543)\textsuperscript{13} as a witness to the early Lutheran approach to interpreting Scripture.

The translation is made from the Latin of the 1542 Frankfurt edition as edited in WA 53:399–401,\textsuperscript{14} though the Latin may be Freder’s translation from a (no longer extant) German original by Luther.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{M. L. M.}

\textbf{Dr. Martin Luther’s Preface}

\textbf{F}or many reasons I feel profound sorrow whenever I now hear about the deaths of the pious, especially of those of notable virtue in ruling over the state or the home. In the first place, I mourn the losses to the church, the state, or the households that have been deprived of such faithful caretakers. Speaking now about the churches, what great injury have the churches of Saxony suffered at the loss of Urbanus Rhegius! He was truly the bishop of our neighboring lands, where he spread abroad the Gospel of Christ in its purity, corrected the worship and morals of the people, suppressed

\textsuperscript{11} See Lohse, \textit{Martin Luther’s Theology}, p. 327; cf. below, introduction to the preface to Melanchthon, \textit{Response to the Clergy of Cologne} (1543), p. 305.


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{LW} 34:197–229; \textit{LW} 15:265–352.

\textsuperscript{14} Aland 642.

\textsuperscript{15} The opinion of Otto Clemen, WA 53:398.
the madness of the fanatics,\textsuperscript{16} and guided many pious ministers and other rulers with his teaching, advice, and authority. A great many of these now acknowledge that they are wandering like a flock without a shepherd [cf. Matt. 9:36].

To one who reflects on the sudden loss of such men, however, there is added another sorrow much greater and more bitter. When in my mind I look about at the churches of all the lands, which I include in my prayers, it is not without great sorrow that I consider how few capable ministers there now are, and how even among those who are considered the best how great is their weakness and, in some, even their error. Next, I lament also the contempt for the Gospel among the people, who have no concern for religion, no zeal to uphold the ministry, who do not fear the dreadful wrath of God and do not change their ways. When I then consider the schools, in which our “seedlings” ought to be cultivated for ruling over the church and the state for the coming generations, and when I see the insolence, ignorance, and arrogance of the youth who will follow after us, how I am grieved! Finally, when I cast my eyes upon the princes and their courts, then truly I am set afire with indignation mixed with sorrow. For those especially of that highest rank should show favor to the churches, uphold discipline, and stir up zeal for learning and virtue. They should adorn the Gospel by their own good example and manifest the fear of God in their domestic life, diligence in their judgment, zeal in the severity of their punishments, fortitude and good faith in their defense of our citizens and our allies. But which of these things do they do? If the princes were carrying out their office diligently, they would, in turn, be adorned by God with great glory. As it is written: “The ones who glorify Me I will glorify” [1 Sam. 2:30]. How splendid it would be if God would stir them up to defend their native lands against the furies of the Turk and would “teach their hands for war,” as the psalmist says [Ps. 18:34].\textsuperscript{17} But, to return to my purpose, I am moved by great sorrow as I consider the vices of each order [of society].\textsuperscript{18} So when notable members of Christ are called out of this life, I am stirred also by what that signifies. For when the punishment of a people is imminent, God first takes away the elect from the rest of the multitude. As Isaiah [57:1–2] says, “The righteous are taken away, lest they see evil; they enjoy peace and rest in their beds.” For

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] I.e., those who, like the Anabaptists and Zwinglians, minimized the role of the external Word and Sacraments in favor of the direct working of the Spirit. See below, p. 332 n. 11 and p. 334 nn. 18 and 20.
\item[17] Cf. \textit{Appeal for Prayer against the Turks} (1541), LW 43:213–41.
\item[18] “Order” here refers to one of the three “estates” of which Luther has spoken above, i.e., the church, the home, and the state. Cf. Luther’s preface to Breismann, \textit{Response to Schatzgeyer} (1523), WA 11:290 (LW 59); Klingebeil, \textit{On Clerical Marriage} (1528), WA 26:530–31 (LW 59); Menius, \textit{Oeconomia Christiana} (1529), WA 30/2:62–63 (LW 59).
\end{footnotes}
example, before the flood, which destroyed the whole human race except for the family of Noah [Genesis 6–8], the pious fathers and those who listened to them died in peace so they might not see such great wrath of God. Likewise, before the destruction of Jerusalem, the saints were first driven out [cf. Luke 21:21].

God, as John says, is accustomed first to gather up the wheat into His granary, but afterward to throw the chaff into the eternal fire [cf. Matt. 3:12]. At the present time, the deaths of the pious are a frequent thing, and those who remain are an inferior crowd: despisers of God, presumptuous; contending in ambition and greed; given over to extravagance; capricious, cunning, schooled in new and unheard of deceits; lying and treacherous. By this sign I am most powerfully convinced that great disasters and revolutions in human affairs are imminent, such as will punish human audacity and will put the bridle back on a rampant world.

Therefore, though we must grieve that the Church is stripped of its bulwarks through the death of the learned and the pious, nevertheless we should rejoice with them for their departure, as it were, from this world. “Blessed are the dead,” the Scripture says, “who die in the Lord” [Rev. 14:13]. Therefore, we may also be confident that our Urbanus, who lived constantly in the true worship of God and faith in Christ, who faithfully served the Church and adorned the Gospel with chaste and pious morals, is blessed and possesses life and eternal joy in fellowship with Christ and the heavenly Church, in which he now learns, sees, and hears face-to-face all those things that he here in the church set forth according to the Word of God. Just as he with his wife and children—and, indeed, with all his readers—used to discuss the sayings of the fathers and prophets, which he lists so piously, learnedly, and aptly in this dialogue, even so he now listens to those same first teachers and Christ Himself interpreting those texts. He rejoices that his faith agrees with the voice of Christ and the fathers. He gives thanks to God for the light given him before he departed from here, by which the sin in him was driven out and eternal life begun. I think that it was not by mere chance that shortly before his death he very frequently read this dialogue concerning the resurrection, as if in his mind he had already a premonition of his departure. Here, contemplating the glorious resurrection of Christ, he knew that death itself had been destroyed, and he impressed upon himself the words of Christ where He says, “I will be your death, O death, and your sting, O hell” [Hosea 13:14].

Since there was in Urbanus an extraordinary piety toward his wife and children, and his wife excelled in all the virtues of a pious matron and his family was honorably educated, it is probable that it was not without sadness

---

19 On the departure of Christians from Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70, see Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5.3 (PG 20:221–224; NPNF² 1:138).
that he took leave from his family, who relied on his services. Nevertheless, he knew that “God is the Father of orphans and the defender of widows” [Ps. 68:5]. He now commends his family to God, who has surely thus far protected and will also henceforth protect the families of pious priests and support them even despite the hostility of the world, as it is written: “I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging for bread” [Ps. 37:25]. I hope also that it will come to pass that by the military service—that is, the devotion and prayers—of these pious women, daughters, and sons our churches and states will be protected against the savagery of the Turk.

[We have written] this much about Urbanus, whose memory we should hold fast, so that his writings may be the more eagerly read, for they contain pious and salutary doctrine. But when we think about his death, let us rejoice with him for his surpassingly sweet companionship with Christ, but let us be stirred up by the orphaned state\(^\text{20}\) of the churches and let us ask God to draw forth similar ministers into the harvest of the Gospel [cf. Matt. 9:38]. Let us also pray that He will mitigate the disasters impending on the world, and let us change our ways.

I commend this dialogue especially to the students, for it contains the most useful consolation for the pious, because he has drawn together many testimonies into a single bundle and explains them with great learning. Even against its will, the world must acknowledge that for many centuries this doctrine of the promises of the Gospel, which was handed down in the sayings of the fathers, had not so much light as, by God’s blessing, it now enjoys. Therefore these writings must be preserved. But so great is the presumptuousness of men, in the midst of even the most serious vices, that it is to be feared that once again the deepest darkness and its punishments will follow, with all sorts of disasters, revolutions, and devastations.

How [Urbanus] converses with his godly wife about the sayings of the fathers and the prophets also provides an honorable and praiseworthy example, for this conjugal society is the beginning and seedbed of the Church. This is why there is nothing more fitting for spouses to discuss than God and His benefits and His wondrous works. Pious spouses see examples of these each day in the procreation and upbringing of their offspring. And then there is nothing sweeter than a married husband and wife who share the same faith, which calls upon God with one voice. Each one is a mighty bulwark for the other when the faith of one is concerned for the other and labors on the other’s behalf in the presence of God. Finally, marriage is the sort of society of which Christ says, “Wherever two are gathered in My

\(^{20}\) Reading *orbitate* with EA Var 7:561 and the 1542 printing, consulted in the exemplar of the Kessler Reformation Collection of Pitts Theology Library at Emory University, for WA *novitate*. 
name, I am in the midst of them” [Matt. 18:20]. In true faith spouses should call upon God together, talk with each other about the Gospel, and teach the Gospel to their children. In the common life and perils of such spouses, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is no doubt present and destroys the works of the devil, who, even as he strives to destroy the whole Church, directs his fiercest attacks against pious spouses and pious households. Amid all these dangers, however, the faith of the saints shines forth and Christ triumphs. The Papists, those foul and polluted defenders of celibacy, deride conversations like these between pious spouses. But there is no doubt that the Papists will suffer the penalties for their obscenity, by which they defile the whole natural order and commit a horrible offense against God. Oh, the hard and unyielding minds of men! The sins of the papacy are manifest: idolatry and the most disgusting lusts; and the penalty, namely, the fury of the Turk, is in plain view. Still they continue to praise and to defend such abominable wickedness. Let us therefore pray to God that as soon as possible that most joyous day of the Church may begin to dawn, when Christ will reveal Himself openly to this world and, when the dead have been raised, will cast the devil and the ungodly into eternal punishment and glorify that assembly which through many hardships in this life has been obedient to the Gospel.
As work on the final revision of Luther’s own Church Postil was being completed by Caspar Cruciger Sr., Luther continued to support the independent parallel efforts of others, as he had with Antonius Corvinus’ 1535 postils. In 1543, Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550) was the Evangelical pastor and preacher at St. Blasius Church in Nordhausen, where he served from 1524–46, and was well-known to both Luther and Melanchthon. Cyriakus Spangenberg (1528–1604), Johann’s better-known son, followed in his father’s footsteps as a pastor and a theologian and became an important participant in the theological debates among Lutherans after Luther’s death. Originally trained as a schoolteacher, Johann Spangenberg was, as a pastor, deeply concerned with the reform of education. As part of his work in Nordhausen, he reestablished the city’s public school, an activity that underscores the dynamic relationship between religious reform and the renewal of education along humanist lines in the early Reformation, and he cooperated with Luther to produce a comprehensive repertory
of liturgical music in Latin and German for the use of Lutheran churches and schools. In 1546 he would accept a call to serve as superintendent over the Evangelical churches in Mansfeld.

The sermons for which Luther penned this preface stem from Spangenberg’s Nordhausen years. Intended for young people, they followed the question-and-answer format favored by teachers. Relying on theology and exegesis he had learned from Luther and other leading reformers, Spangenberg continued to expand the collection Luther introduces here, promoting the Evangelical faith in sermons on the Sunday Gospels from Advent to Easter, followed by further volumes for the summer months, for the festivals of the church year, and on the Epistles for the year.

Luther’s preface offers a somewhat backhanded commendation. In fact, he says little about the sermons themselves and instead exhorts the preachers and pastors who may make use of such works, whatever they may be, to remember that their first duty is to Holy Scripture, and that their vocation requires constant reading and meditation on Scripture itself. Although in his 1535 preface to Corvinus’ postil Luther had approved the possibility of simply reading the printed sermons from the pulpit, here he warns pastors and preachers not to lean too heavily on such aids, but instead to attend personally to the biblical text. Luther also appeals to his own experience as an example that demonstrates how the experienced reader comes ever more to appreciate the wonder of Christ. Noting Paul’s use of the term “mystery” (Greek μυστήριον; Latin sacramentum), Luther draws the reader’s attention to the enduring mystery of God made flesh and crucified. The seasoned preacher ever remains, as Luther elsewhere puts it, a venerable beginner, one who returns each day anew to the deep mystery revealed in the Gospel: God for us in Jesus Christ.

The growing shadow of Luther’s own mortality also shows through in this text. He is anything but morose, however, as he considers the nearness of his own death. Now the old warhorse of the Evangelical

---


6 On Spangenberg’s postil, see Frymire, Primacy of the Postils, pp. 90–92. Spangenberg’s summer postil is VD16 S7892, the festival postil is S7901, and the Epistle postil is S7902.


8 Cf. Luther, Large Catechism (1529) pref. 2 (Kolb-Wengert, p. 379; Concordia, p. 351).
movement, he notes with understandable pride that for the moment he stands at the head of the battle, but warns that the next generation will soon have to take his place. The battle against the devil, the world, and the flesh demands that all who would lead should keep their noses, and their hearts, in Holy Scripture and in just that way fulfill their duty to impart to others the gift of the mystery of Christ. Perhaps Spangenberg had this exhortation in mind when he accepted the call to leadership for the church in Mansfeld.

Readers clearly found Spangenberg’s sermons remarkably useful. After Luther’s own Postils, they were the most popular such books of the early modern era.\(^9\) They remained in print into the eighteenth century and were translated into both Latin and Low German.

The translation of Luther’s preface here is made from the 1543 German text as edited in WA 53:216–18.\(^{10}\)

---

**Dr. Martin Luther’s Preface**

St. Paul writes now and again that Christ our Lord is a “mystery,” *mysterium*, and indeed the holy Church, too, with Christ, her Bridegroom, can be called a “mystery” [Col. 1:26–27; 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 5:32]. In times past—when I had to permit myself to be called a doctor of Holy Scripture—I considered this a straightforward expression that I understood very well. But now that I, praise God, have again become a poor student of Holy Scripture and understand less and less as time goes on, I am beginning to look on these words with wonder, and experience, I find, supplies this gloss: that it must be a mystery indeed. For no matter how brightly and clearly as the apostles preached about it—even with miracles—nevertheless it still remains hidden and secret to the very greatest and most clever people on earth, just as He says in Matthew, chapter 11 [:25]: “You have hidden these things from the wise and clever, but have revealed them to the children,” etc.

Is this not a sufficient wonder? Is that not enough of a secret? It is preached so manifestly, and it shines more brightly than the sun, and is also confirmed with so many great miraculous signs (which no man can deny that God must be doing). And nevertheless, here the very greatest and most clever, the holiest and best people remain blind, deaf, and senseless, so that

---

\(^9\) According to Frymire, *Primacy of the Postil*, p. 91 n. 50, Spangenberg’s *Postil* appeared in some forty-two sixteenth-century editions, and forty-seven by 1620 (Frymire, *Primacy of the Postil*, p. 508).

\(^{10}\) Aland 691.
they cannot see it, hear it, or feel it. 1Answer me that riddle! How is that? There is nothing more manifest, and yet nothing more secret; nothing is more comprehensible than Christ in the manger and on the cross; nothing is more incomprehensible than Christ at the right hand of God and Lord over all. So it is also with the Word that preaches about Him.

Our own experience must also testify to that. In what richness, brightness, and clarity do we now possess that salutary Word about Christ? But to whom is this manifest, bright, clear light known and welcome? Is it not a great secret and mystery, not only to the Papists but also to our people, who boast of being very evangelical? They simply think that when they have read or heard it once, they are so abundantly supplied that they could even instruct all the apostles, not to mention their poor pastors and preachers. Such folk think that this is no mystery or profound insight, but only a spoonful of wisdom they can down in a single gulp.

Now what will we preachers do, who are supposed to govern churches in the midst of such archangels and super-archangels? Here is what we will do: We will allow them to know everything better, even a hundred times better, than we do, and among them Christ shall be no mysterium or mystery but merely an empty nutshell, since long ago, before they were born, they emptied out the nut and threw away the shell. We, however, will suckle at this mystery like a baby at his mother’s breast until we finally get something out of it, and will not let ourselves be weaned from it so quickly and prematurely, the way these lofty people wean themselves from it and are ashamed to suck at their mother’s breasts. For these are people able to run by themselves before their legs and feet are full-grown.

In sum, we have to let the world and the devil run their race, while we keep right on preaching, chastising, and admonishing for the sake of those who will recognize such a mystery. As for the rest, to them it is preached like rain falling into water or, as our Lord put it [Matt. 13:19], like “seed sown along the path.” The mystery [of the Word] will bring forth fruit from only a quarter of the field. Therefore, I would very much like to see this and other similar books go out among the people, not only to reveal this mystery but also to displace other, false books. For those who write today are not all pure [cf. John 13:10], and everyone wants to offer himself for sale in the shops, not because he wants to reveal Christ or His mystery, but rather he does not want his own mysteries and lovely ideas, which he esteem more than the mystery of Christ, 1to be acquired for nothing. With them he hopes to convert even the devils, yet he has never converted nor can ever accomplish the conversion of even so much as a gnat—as if perversion were not the far worse consequence of his efforts.
On the other hand, there are likewise some lazy pastors and preachers, who are no good themselves, those who count on getting their sermons from these and other good books. They do not pray, do not study, do not read, do not meditate on anything in Scripture, just as if on account of [these books] one did not have to read the Bible. They avail themselves of books such as the Formulary and the Calendar\(^{11}\) to earn their annual keep. And they are nothing but parrots or jackdaws that learn to repeat without understanding. But our intention and that of such theologians\(^{12}\) is to use these [books] to lead people into Scripture and to admonish them that they should consider how they themselves will defend our Christian faith against the devil, the world, and the flesh once we are dead. For we will not always stand here in the front line of battle as we do now.

Just as our forefathers have handed this mystery down to us, though it was abominably despised by the pope, so we now also hand it down to those [who read our books]. If they do not have as much to do to purge away such abominations as we had, they will still get just as much to do, if not more, in standing and fighting against the devil so that he does not again inflict such abominations upon the Church. This is the advice: Keep watch! Study! *Attende lectioni!* [“Attend to reading!” 1 Tim. 4:13]. Truly, you cannot read in Scripture too much, and what you do read you cannot read too well, and what you read well you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well. *Experto crede Ruperto* [“Take it from Rupert, who knows from experience”].\(^{13}\) It is the devil, the world, and the flesh that are ranting and raging against us. Therefore, beloved lords and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, and keep busy. Truly, at this evil, shameful time, it is no time for loafing, snoring, or sleeping. Use your gift, which has been entrusted to you [cf. 1 Tim. 4:14], and reveal the mystery of Christ [cf. Col. 1:26]. As St. Paul says, “If anyone refuses to know it, let him be unknowing” [1 Cor. 14:38]. Since Baptism and the Sacrament are present, we must not keep silent about the Word of the mystery. It will certainly catch up with them if we have but done our part. Amen.

---

\(^{11}\) Luther refers here to the broad variety of sermon helps that had long been available for preachers. See Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 91.

\(^{12}\) I.e., the writers of good books such as Spangenberg’s postil.

\(^{13}\) A Latin rhyming proverb (the name “Rupert” seems to be significant only for its rhyme with *experto*); cf. Wander 1:838, “Erfahrene” no. 1.
Preface to Theodor Bibliander’s Edition of the Koran

1543

Translated and edited by Adam S. Francisco

Luther had long desired to read a copy of the Koran in translation, but had been obliged to content himself with fragmentary excerpts, having failed to obtain a complete manuscript of the Muslim holy book to read or to publish for the instruction and warning of Christian audiences. On February 21, 1542, however—Shrove Tuesday of that year—Luther received a Latin manuscript translation of the Koran, which he eagerly perused. To his surprise he found that, in his judgment, the text of the Koran itself vindicated Christian polemics against it that he had formerly discounted as scurrilous slander. With the complete text in hand at last, he began a renewed campaign to fortify Christian believers against the temptations of a militarily resurgent Islam that was advancing into Europe with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

Outside of Wittenberg, Latin manuscripts of the Koran had been in fairly wide circulation, particularly in the twelfth-century

---

1 Machumetis Saracenorum Principis, Eiusque Successorum Vitae, Ac Doctrina, Ipseque Alcoran (Basel: Nikolaus Brylinger für Johann Oporinus) [VD16 K2584]. 134 leaves in folio.

2 See, e.g., On War Against the Turk (1529), LW 46:176.

3 See above, preface and afterword to Brother Richard, Refutation of the Koran (1542), p. 254.

4 See above, preface and afterword to Brother Richard, Refutation of the Koran (1542), pp. 251–66. The Ottoman Turks had consolidated their control over Hungary with the capture of Buda and Pest in 1541; the counterattack the following year, under the command of Joachim II of Brandenburg, had utterly failed. In Saxony, calls for prayer and repentance in the face of the Turkish threat were increasingly frequent: Appeal for Prayer against the Turks (1541), LW 43:219–41; Admonition to Pastors (1543), WA 53:558–60 (LW 61). See Brecht 3:352–57; Fischer-Galati, Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism, pp. 76–96.
translation made by Robert of Ketton (ca. 1110–ca. 1160). So when the Swiss scholar and publisher Johannes Oporinus (1507–68) of Basel set out to offer the first printed edition of the Latin Koran during the early 1540s, he probably did not expect to encounter any resistance. He was sorely mistaken. After news of what he was up to spread, Oporinus was placed under arrest while the city council determined whether it would be safe for Christians to read such a text, requesting advice on the case from Protestant scholars across northern Europe.

The humanists were the first to support Oporinus and his pending publication, but it was a letter sent by Luther that seems to have persuaded the council to release Oporinus so that he might finish the task. Luther was so eager to see the Koran in print that he sent the following preface to accompany its publication. Early in 1543, Oporinus received the complete manuscript from its editor and annotator—as well as the principal instigator of the project—the famed Hebrew and Arabic scholar Theodor Bibliander (1506–64), and began to run the first of several editions.

In Bibliander’s edition, the Koran was printed and collated with a variety of other related works, amounting together to an “encyclopedia of Islam.” The first section contained prefaces by Luther, Melanchthon, Bibliander, and Peter the Venerable (1094–1156); the Koran itself; Bibliander’s annotations; two recorded dialogues of Mohammed (i.e.,

---

5 See Burman, Reading the Qur’ān in Latin Christendom, pp. 1, 88.

6 The Koran had been printed in Arabic for the first time in 1537–38 by the Italian publishers Paganino and Allesandro Paganini. See Hartmut Bobzin and August den Hollander, eds., Early Printed Korans: The Dissemination of the Koran in the West (Leiden: IDC, 2004).


11 See Kritzeck, Peter the Venerable and Islam.
hadith); and an account of the origins of Islam.\(^{12}\) The second section contained a variety of polemical and apologetic works written in response to Islam. The final section contained histories of the Ottoman Turks and accounts of life under their rule.

Whether Luther knew his preface would be included in such an ambitious project is not clear. Certainly, however, Luther’s purpose in advocating the publication of the Koran was allied with that of the other Christian authors whose polemical works were incorporated in Bibliander’s edition. Luther regarded Islam as a deception—albeit not uniquely so, but of a piece with the devil’s deceit among the Jews and Papists, and indeed not so dangerous as the teachings of the papacy.\(^ {13}\) Nevertheless, as his preface demonstrates, he thought it was essential for Christians to become thoroughly acquainted with the teachings of the Koran (from their source) and with the history and theology of Islam, enabling them to counter Islamic claims faithfully and, just as important, reasonably. Above all, Luther wanted Christians to understand for themselves the sharp contradictions between Christian and Islamic positions: on the Scriptures (as Mohammed’s production of a new book claiming to superannuate the writings of the prophets and apostles makes clear) but also on the sacrifice of Christ and original sin. Although Luther did not fulfill the proposal implied here of writing a further book specifically about Islam, he (together with Melanchthon) did continue the engagement with Muslim theological claims in both formal and informal academic disputations over the following years, offering critiques of Islamic theology in contrast with Christianity that echoed the arguments outlined in the preface.\(^ {14}\)

Luther’s preface is translated here from the Latin of the 1543 edition as edited in WA 53:569–72.\(^ {15}\)

A. S. F.

---

\(^{12}\) Luther’s preface is found in only one of the six different printings of Bibliander’s Koran in 1543 (VD16 K2583–2585, ZV1036, ZV16001, ZV18456). See Bobzin, Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation, pp. 209–15.

\(^{13}\) See above, preface and afterword to Brother Richard, Refutation of the Koran (1542), pp. 251–66; cf. the juxtaposition of these forms of polemic in Edwards, Luther’s Last Battles.

\(^{14}\) See the May 23, 1544, doctoral disputation of Theodor Fabricius (1501–70) and Stanislaus Rapagelanus (d. 1545), with theses by Melanchthon, held under Luther’s presidency, WA 39/2:260–62, 267–83 (LW 73), and the informal colloquy of August 6, 1545, held in Merseburg, Table Talk no. 7203, WA 48:712.

\(^{15}\) Aland 84.
Preface to the Koran
by Martin Luther, Doctor of Theology
and Preacher of the Church at Wittenberg

Many people have published books of moderate size containing the rites, beliefs, and way of life of the present-day Jews for the very purpose that their lies and their errors and madness, once they have been made known and revealed, might the more easily be refuted. There is no doubt that when godly minds compare the testimony of the prophets to the delirium and blasphemies of the Jews, they are greatly strengthened in faith and in love for the truth of the Gospel and are provoked to a righteous hatred of Jewish perversity. What person of good sense or moderation would think that there was so much utterly ridiculous slander, so much insanity and wickedness in Jewish beliefs and rites as there is in fact revealed to be when their Eleusinian mysteries are set forth by learned and good men, such as Lyra, Burgensis, and Margaritha?2

Just as it was the devil who at first in Paradise bewitched poor Eve with his lies and tore her away from God, so it is equally certain that ever since then the fury of all nations against the true doctrine of God has originated from the devil. All of these things: that all nations have offered human sacrifices, examples of which are on record not only among the ancient

---

16 mediocria volumina


18 Luther compares the "secret" practices of the Jews with the ancient Greek mystery cult at Eleusis. Cf. Erasmus, Adages 2.5.66 (CWE 33:207).

Greeks and Romans but also more recent ones, such as Emperor Severus; that the Egyptians have worshiped cats; the Arab peoples, dogs; the Lampsacensians, Priapus; and other people, other monstrous things; that acts of unchastity became like sacred rites in Cyprus, Egyptian Thebes, and elsewhere—it is certain that all of these things have occurred at the devil’s impulse upon the blind minds of men, first, so that he might make it clear that he is an enemy of God and, then, so that he might in his pride mock the feebleness of human nature. So likewise the fury of the Jews originated from the devil: when they incited seditions after Christ’s resurrection; when they made war a second time, led by Bar Kokhba, after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem; and when they began to build the temple again at the time of Julian. It is no less a madness that, though they are incapable of taking up arms, they sit in their dens and curse the Son of God and concoct foolish and venomous corruptions of the prophetic testimonies. They make up cruel rites. They lacerate their own bodies and those of their infants. They dream of their hopes of ruling over the world contrary to the manifest testimony of the prophets.

---

20 Luther’s source may have been Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* 30.3.12 (Loeb 418 [1963], pp. 284–87), which mentions the formal prohibition of the practice of human sacrifice around AD 97. Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 9 (PL 1:314A–327A; ANF 3:24–26).

21 Perhaps a reference to the sacrifice of boys for the sake of augury by the imperial claimant Didius Julianus (r. 193) at the time of Septimius Severus (r. 193–211): see Cassius Dio (ca. 150–235), *Roman History* 74.16.5 (Loeb 177 [2001], pp. 156–57).

22 See Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 5.27.78 (Loeb 141 [1945], pp. 506–7); *De natura deorum* 1.29.82 (Loeb 268 [1979], pp. 78–79).

23 Cf. 2 Kings 17:31, where the name of the Avvite god Nibhaz can be construed to mean “barker” in Hebrew.

24 Lampasacus was an ancient Greek settlement on the Hellespont; Priapus was an ithyphallic fertility god of ancient Greece. See Ovid, *Fasti* 6.345 (Loeb 253 [1989], pp. 344–45); cf. Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), *Etymologiae* 8.25 (PL 82:317; Stephen A. Barney et al., trans., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], p. 185).

25 On Cyprus, where Venus is supposed to have introduced prostitution, see Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.17 (ANF 7:29–30). On sacred prostitution in Thebes, see Strabo (ca. 64 BC–AD ca. 25), *Geography* 17.46 (Loeb 267 [1959], pp. 120–25).

26 The first Jewish–Roman War (AD 66–73), see Josephus, *Jewish War* (Loeb 203, 487, 210 [1927–28]).


28 On the aborted attempt to rebuild the Jewish temple (361–63) under Emperor Julian the Apostate, see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History* 23.1 (Loeb 315 [1937], pp. 310–11).

29 Luther probably has in mind here not only circumcision but also other religious rituals he has heard of, such as piercing children. See *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), LW 47:217.
Certainly the devil would not have wanted his deceptions to be revealed nor to be brought to light nor to be reproached. But just as the apostles condemned the errors of the Gentiles, so now the Church of God ought to refute the errors of all enemies of the Gospel so that the glory of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, may be celebrated against the devil and his instruments. When the Son of God was hanging on the cross, everything in nature bore witness, with new and terrifying signs, that this death was a matter in which God was concerned, threatening not only the Jews but also the entire world of all times for holding the Son of God in contempt. Although few were moved, God still wanted there to be a witness. Likewise, even if the last age of this world is overwhelmed by an enormous multitude of idols—those of the Jews, of Mohammed, and of the Papists—still let us sound forth the voice of the Gospel and bear witness that the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, whom the apostles show us, truly is the Son of God and the Savior, and let us curse all their errors that conflict with the Gospel.

Therefore, for my part, just as I have written and shall write against the idols of the Jews and Papists in proportion to the gift given to me, so also I have begun to refute the pernicious opinions of Mohammed and will in the future refute them at greater length. But for anyone preparing to undertake such a task, it would be useful to examine directly what Mohammed wrote. That is why I have desired to see a complete copy of the Koran. I have no doubt that when other godly and learned people read it, they will curse both the errors and the name of Mohammed all the more. For just as the foolishness—or, rather, the insanity—of the Jews is the more readily grasped once their secrets have been exposed, so also when Mohammed's book has been brought forward and all its parts thoroughly examined, all godly persons will more easily discern the madness and venom of the devil, and will be able to refute it more easily. This is the reason that has moved me to wish that this book be made available.

However, because some are afraid that by reading this weak minds will be harmed, as if by an infection, and torn away from Christ, to them I make this response. May there be no one in the Church of God so weak as not to have this maxim firmly fixed in his mind—as certainly as he is certain that he is alive while his senses and bodily movements are still active, as he is certain that it is day when he sees the sun passing over the earth in the midst of the heaven—so that he considers it impossible for any religion or doctrine

---

30 See, e.g., above, Luther's preface and afterword to Brother Richard, Refutation of the Koran (1542), pp. 253–66.

31 Apart from a few explorations in subsequent disputations (see the introduction above, p. 288), Luther did not fulfill this intention for a fuller refutation of Islam.

32 See the introduction above, p. 286.
concerning the worship and invocation of God to be true if it utterly rejects
the prophetic and apostolic writings. There is one Church, existing per-
petually ever since the time of Adam, to which God has disclosed Himself
with sure and marvelous testimonies in the very Word that He gave to the
prophets and apostles.33 Again and again He commands that He should be
known in this doctrine and that all other beliefs concerning Him should
be rejected. He binds us to this one doctrine, just as is clearly said in Isaiah
59 [:21]: “This is My covenant, says the Lord: My Spirit is in you, and let not
My words that I have put in your mouth depart from your mouth or out of
the mouth of your seed forever.” And Christ says: “If you abide in Me and
My words abide in you, whatever you ask shall be done for you” [John 15:7].
And Paul says that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and
prophets [Eph. 2:20]. Therefore, all the beliefs of all the Gentiles concern-
ing God, as they either ignore or reject the prophets and apostles, should be
most firmly condemned.

Mohammed admits that he has invented a new belief that differs from
the prophets and apostles.34 So just as you firmly repudiate the beliefs of the
Egyptians, who worshiped cats, and of the Arabs, who worshiped dogs, so
you should abhor the invention of Mohammed, because he himself plainly
admits that he does not embrace the doctrine of the prophets and apos-
tles. If there are any so ignorant that they do not have this maxim fixed in
their minds—that the only true religion is the oldest one handed down by
God with sure testimonies through the prophets and apostles35—then even
if they do not read Mohammed’s writing but only hear or see the Turks,
how will they fortify themselves against their beliefs? Indeed, it is shameful
and impious laziness if they do not remind themselves every day in prayer
about this maxim and separate themselves from the Jews, the Turks, and the
heathen in calling upon [God], and if they do not reflect that this one alone
is truly the eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, who hears us
and will give us eternal life—the one who revealed Himself in the prophetic
and apostolic writings, who has sent His Son and willed that He should be
a sacrifice for us.36 Those who do not reflect on this in calling upon [God]

33 See Melanchthon’s theses of February 16, 1543, for the disputation of Johann Marbach
(1521–81), under Luther’s presidency, thesis 1, WA 39/2:206 (LW 73).

34 The Koran claims, on the contrary, that Islam is not a new religion but the religion of the
patriarchs, prophets, and even Jesus (see, e.g., Koran 3:84). But Luther probably has in mind
Muslim criticism of the Scriptures used by Christians (and Jews) as corrupted and falsified in
comparison with the Koran (see Koran 2:75), as well as the manifest contradictions he sees
between the Koran and the teachings of the Christian Bible.

35 Cf. Luther’s sermon of January 31, 1546, LW 58:422.

36 Cf. Melanchthon’s theses for the May 23, 1544, doctoral disputation of Fabricius, held
under Luther’s presidency, especially nos. 7 and 9, WA 39/2:260–61 (LW 73).
should recognize that this stupidity is no trivial sin. Because few rightly call upon God, the Church is suffering the punishment for her ignorance and neglect. But since the punishment is now in sight, it should admonish us to separate ourselves (as I have said) from the Turks, Jews, and heathen, and to invoke the true, eternal God, Creator of all things, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us and rose again. I will, however, speak more fully about this at another time. 37 Daniel and other captives brought the king of Babylon and a multitude of others to the true knowledge of God [Dan. 2:47; 3:28–29]. The victorious Goths, Vandals, and Franks were converted to God by their captives. 38 So perhaps God will also now call some from among the Turks out of that darkness by means of learned captives; or at least He wants the oppressed, uneducated Christians in Illyria, Greece, and Asia [Minor] to be strengthened by those who, having read this book, will be able to fight for the Gospel all the more steadfastly. The following antitheses contain a powerful assurance of these things:

As the Church of God is perpetual, so also the doctrine of the Church must be perpetual;39 whereas this book makes it clear that this invention of Mohammed is something new:

The Church of God of necessity embraces the prophets and apostles; whereas Mohammed rejects their doctrine.40

Ever since the beginning, this voice of the Gospel—that the eternal Father wanted the Son of God to be made a sacrifice for sins—has always been handed down in the Church of God; whereas Mohammed ridicules this sacrifice and propitiation.41

The doctrine concerning the causes of human weakness, failure, and death—namely, the sin passed down after the fall of our first parents—has always been maintained in the Church; Mohammed, as if he were an Epicurean, regards these things as empty fables.42

37 See the theses for Fabricius and Luther's comments on the disputation, WA 39/2:260–62, 267–83 passim (LW 73).

38 That is, the Arian Goths and Vandals and the pagan Franks eventually embraced the Catholic Christianity of their subjects in what had been the Roman West. On the complications of this story of conversion to Christianity, see Richard Fletcher, The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

39 Cf. Melanchthon, 1543 theses for Marbach, no. 18, WA 39/2:207 (LW 73).

40 See above, p. 292 n. 34.

41 The Koran, in fact, rejects that Jesus was ever crucified or even that He died. See Koran 4:157–58.

42 The Koran does not speak of original sin. The consensus of Muslim theologists is that, while individuals commit sins, it is the result solely of falling to temptation and not of a sinful nature or disposition, since all human beings are born in a state of righteousness.
And this book itself will provide many other antitheses, and setting them alongside each other would be most instructive for the pious.

There can be no thought of leisure, especially for those of us who teach in the church. We must fight everywhere against the armies of the devil. How many different enemies have we seen in our own time?—the defenders of the pope’s idols, the Jews, a multitude of Anabaptist monstrosities,\(^\text{43}\) the party of Servetus,\(^\text{44}\) and others. Let us prepare ourselves against Mohammed as well. But what will we be able to say concerning things of which we are ignorant? That is why it is beneficial for learned people to read the writings of their enemies—so that they may more accurately refute, strike, and overturn those writings, so that they may be able to correct some of them, or at least to fortify our own people with stronger arguments.

\(^{43}\) On the Anabaptists, see above, introductions to the prefaces to Rhegius, *Refutation* (1535), pp. 82–86; *New Report on the Anabaptists at Münster* (1535), pp. 91–93; and below, introduction to the preface to Menius, *On the Spirit of the Anabaptists* (1544), pp. 330–32.

\(^{44}\) Michael Servetus (1511–53) wrote several works challenging the doctrine of the Trinity (and other classical Christian doctrines), most notably the *Christianismi Restitutio* (1553). He was eventually burned at the stake in Geneva for heresy.