

Successes and Failures as an Agent of Change: Martin Luther as Theologian and as Reformer

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What initially comes to mind when we think upon Martin Luther? He was a champion of religious freedom; a defender of the rights of the individual conscience; an indefatigable idealist who was willing to risk his life, on numerous occasions, first to reform an institution he initially viewed as corrupt, and later, when he came to associate it fully with the Devil and Anti-Christ, to topple it. He was a brilliant scholar; a gifted translator; a champion of the vernacular; a thoughtful professor; an influential public intellectual; a prolific writer whose collected works comprise 120 volumes; a charismatic orator; and a courageous leader of a world-changing movement that was not only religious in nature but was also social, cultural, and political.¹ Despite the presence of some misogynistic comments in his writings, Luther may also be regarded as one of western culture's champions of women's rights, as his theological advocacy for and own embrace of clerical marriage and his denial of the spiritual necessity for clerical celibacy engendered a social revolution of macro-historical significance and began a continuing alteration and advancement in the way men perceive the female body and regard its linkage with sin. In two of his three great works of 1520, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther dispensed with the First (or Clerical) Estate all together and, in so doing, proposed a concept as political and socially revolutionary as any of the French Revolution. He was one of the few who perceived the possibilities that the technology of printing had to offer a writer and a reformer, a technology that had, for decades, been overlooked, under-appreciated, or unused due to financial constraints.² When I was in school, my teachers used to repeat the phrase, "without the printing press, no Reformation." But perhaps it is slightly more correct to say, "without Luther, no printing press."³ Along similar lines, Luther possessed the foresight to work toward the establishment of myriad institutional structures and pedagogic means (such as public elementary schools for boys and girls, catechisms, hymns, church ordinances) that he hoped would perpetuate his vision of reform after his own death. These are the immediate associations we have of Martin Luther.

I would like to delve a little deeper and pursue the theme of "Luther as an agent of change," first by examining Luther in his capacity as a theologian, on the one hand, and then as a parish reformer, on

the other. I will approach Luther as a theologian through an analysis of an important debate between him and the great Catholic humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, on the subject of predestination and the believer's ability or inability to perform any deed that might contribute to his or her salvation. I will then approach Luther as parish reformer by examining his role in the visitations to Orlamünde and Zahna in the 1520s, when he served as a member of a committee tasked with monitoring and enforcing the progress of the Reformation in those two congregations.

PART ONE: LUTHER AS THEOLOGIAN

As a theologian, Luther's tremendous and unexpected success stemmed, in large part, from certain aspects of his personality: his tendency towards cautious, gradual reflection before he reached a resolute conclusion; an incredibly analytical mind and an amazing command of scripture that he employed to expound his views; his perspicacity in recognizing crucial but highly subtle differences in belief and challenges to his positions; his complete disregard, when defending his understanding of doctrine, for what others thought of him or for the rules of academic etiquette; and his steadfast refusal to brook any compromise once he had made up his mind.

All of these aspects of Luther's success as an agent of theological change were on clear display in his very important and yet rather underappreciated debate with Erasmus over one's ability, or lack thereof, to affect, in any way, one's salvation—their debate over free will. This public dispute was initiated by Erasmus with the publication, in September 1524, of *A Dialectic or Sermon Concerning Free Will* and concluded with Luther's harsh and furious, yet theologically brilliant response, *The Bondage of the Will*, in December 1525.⁴ Though it was a formal, theological disputation, both works, given the celebrity of the authors, were immediately translated from their original Latin into vernacular editions.

This crucial debate has been relatively neglected in works about Luther, and I believe there are two reasons that explain why this has been so.⁵ The first concerns the date of Luther's reply: December 1525. The Peasants' War had already ended, his Reformation had been solidified, at least in Saxony, and Luther's key theological positions had long since been formulated. The second concerns the subject matter—Luther's extreme views on double-predestination tend to be overlooked today and were already being questioned and softened in the decades immediately following his death in 1546. (The debates over Luther's theological positions after his death were so contentious that they even played a role in the founding of a rival university to Wittenberg—the University of Jena—in 1558.)

Luther's opponent in this debate, Erasmus of Rotterdam, has, according to historiographical convention, been regarded as he “who laid the egg that Luther hatched.” By 1524-25, the time of his debate with Luther, Erasmus was Europe's most celebrated and successful humanist, and his scalding and very witty criticisms of the customs of the late medieval church—pilgrimages, indulgences, fasts, the

veneration of relics—and of its personnel, most especially greedy and ignorant monks but even the pope, suggested to most contemporaries that he and Luther were fast allies in the reform of religion. Erasmus's anonymously published but nonetheless immediately attributed work *Julius Excluded* depicts, for example, St. Peter barring the recently deceased Pope Julius II at the gates of heaven for his many sins. But for all of his criticisms of the Catholic Church and its personnel, Erasmus never abandoned the cornerstones of its theology, namely, the understanding that performing good works and practicing ethical behavior would likely earn a believer salvation, that mankind absolutely possessed the free will needed to make these ethical decisions, and that people's own choices, and not an arbitrary God, determined their eternal reward. Like many contemporary critics of Luther, Erasmus worried that Luther's predestinarian theology would incite common people to engage in unethical behavior and plunge society into moral turmoil, a fear seemingly validated by the onset of the Peasants' War in 1524.⁶

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Luther immediately perceived that the cornerstone of his own theology, the absolute reliance upon predestination as the only means of gaining an unmerited salvation, was completely incompatible with Erasmus's theological position and focus of reform and that, in the realm of theology, they were not, nor ever could be, allies. At the end of his published reply to Erasmus, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther even thanked Erasmus for also grasping the crucial theological difference between them: "I give you hearty praise: alone, in contrast to all others, you have discussed the real thing . . . the essential point. You have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such trifles."⁷

Luther gradually came to believe that man's essence was one of total depravity. Left on one's own, none could earn or deserve salvation. Luther arrived at this insight after years of study and reflection and through a life-altering reading of St. Augustine's views on predestination—a reading significantly informed by his atypical but fortuitous immersion in medieval German mysticism.⁸ Formulating a position on justification and salvation derived from his close study of the works of three authors: the late-medieval German mystic Johannes Tauler, the church father St. Augustine, and the apostle Paul, Luther ultimately came to embrace the idea that man possessed absolutely no free will regarding his salvation. An important corollary to this idea was Luther's conviction that, while all people are inherently wicked and wholly undeserving of salvation, God, out of pure love, chooses to save some of them for reasons no human could ever hope to fathom. Luther took great efforts to acquit God against any charge that He is iniquitous, cruel, or arbitrary when judging an individual. Rather than being offended by a reality in which man lacked any agency for his own salvation or being frightened by it, Luther came to trust in God's mercy, to welcome, as signs of God's saving grace, the feelings of existential despair [Anfechtungen] from which he suffered, and to rejoice in the awareness that he was no longer responsible for his own salvation. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther summed up the ideas that had taken years to

germinate: “[D]oes it not evidently follow that when God is not present to work in us, everything we do is evil, and that we of necessity act in a way not availing unto our salvation? . . . And this willingness and desire of doing evil [man] cannot, by his own strength, eliminate, restrain, or change. He goes on still desiring and craving to do evil.”⁹

This theological position absolutely separated him from Erasmus. As early as March 1517, at precisely the time he was, via a close reading of Augustine, formulating his ideas on *sola gratia* [salvation through God’s grace alone], Luther had already discerned the widening and irreconcilable gap between himself and Erasmus. In a letter to his friend and ally in reform, Johann Lang, who at that time served as the prior of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt (where Luther had earlier been a monk), Luther wrote, “I am reading our Erasmus, but daily I dislike him more and more . . . I am afraid . . . that he does not advance the cause of Christ and the grace of God sufficiently.”¹⁰ Likewise, in a letter to Georg Spalatin just under a year later, Luther claims:

I am very careful not to air my disagreements with [Erasmus] lest by chance I too would confirm [his enemies] in their hatred of him. Yet, if I have to speak as a theologian rather than as a philologist, there are many things in Erasmus that seem to me to be completely incongruous with a knowledge of Christ.¹¹

In other words, Luther had recognized, six or seven years prior to his debate with Erasmus, the fundamental differences between them and had realized that their respective understandings of what constituted genuine reform were completely dissimilar. At the time he wrote these letters, Luther was still a relatively unknown professor at a fairly insignificant university, and yet he showed no indication, to say the least, that he was at all intimidated by the great Erasmus or willing to doubt his own beliefs in the face of Erasmus’s alternative conception. Indeed, a few years before their debate, Luther, in another letter to Spalatin, predicted his eventual conflict with Erasmus, criticized Erasmus’s desire for compromise, and argued that civility in matters of reform helps only Satan:

I have been afraid that someday I should have some trouble with [Erasmus]. For I saw that Erasmus was far from the knowledge of grace since in all his writings he is not concerned for the cross but for peace. He thinks that everything should be discussed and handled in a civil manner and with a certain benevolent kindness. But Behemoth [Satan] pays no attention, and nothing improves by this.¹²

Other reasons for Luther’s success as a theologian are evident in *The Bondage of the Will*. An important biographer of Luther’s reminds us of the fact that Luther himself regarded *The Bondage of the Will* (along with his catechisms) as his most enduring theological work.¹³ In myriad sections of this short book, one sees Luther’s extreme confidence, powerful command of scripture, refusal to compromise on matters of doctrine, and unfortunate proclivity to express all of these qualities by mocking his opponent. All of these aspects contributed to his victory over Erasmus in this debate, or, at least, to Erasmus’s

failure to prove him wrong, and they demonstrate the reasons Luther, as a theologian, was such an effective agent of change.

In the essay's introduction, Luther justifies his yearlong delay in replying to Erasmus's criticisms in a statement that highlights his confidence in both himself and his beliefs, as well as the derision he felt towards those of Erasmus:

I have been so long in answering your Diatribe . . . because . . . it seemed quite superfluous to answer your invalid arguments. I have already refuted them myself . . . your book is, in my opinion, so contemptible and worthless that I feel great pity for you for having defiled your beautiful and skilled manner of speaking with such vile dirt . . . Hence, you see, I lost all desire to answer you, not because I was busy, or because it would have been a difficult task, nor on account of your great eloquence, nor for fear of you but simply because of disgust, indignation and contempt, which . . . expresses my judgment of your Diatribe.¹⁴

Seeking compromise and accord, Erasmus had, in *A Diatribe or Sermon Concerning Free Will* in a chapter based upon sections in the New Testament that seem to confirm the notion of free will, tactfully suggested that differences of opinion between Luther and the church had been caused by the ambiguity and obscurity of certain key passages of scripture.¹⁵ Rather than humiliate Luther or arrogantly condemn his ideas, Erasmus tried to smooth over their differences. Throughout his reply, Luther refused the offers Erasmus had made to compromise in order to maintain Christian fellowship, and, far from accepting compromise, Luther explicitly castigated Erasmus for valuing unity of belief and avoidance of conflict over what he regarded as objective scriptural truth:

In short, your words amount to this, that it matters little to you what anyone believes anywhere, as long as the peace of the world is undisturbed . . . You seem to look upon the Christian doctrines as nothing better than the opinions of philosophers and men.¹⁶

In the essay's conclusion, Luther reiterates his disdain for compromise: "I will not accept or tolerate that moderate middle way which Erasmus would, with good intention, I think, recommend to me."¹⁷ Luther, confident and unwilling to compromise in the slightest, rejected all of Erasmus's overtures. While agreeing with Erasmus that certain scriptural passages were abstruse or obscure, Luther made the larger point that, while particulars might remain unknown, the gist of the message was completely comprehensible and "set in the clearest light."¹⁸ Relying upon his profound knowledge of scripture, Luther, in his essay, demonstrated how themes rendered unclear in some passages were, in fact, clarified in others. Luther went out of his way to disparage both his opponent and the principle of compromise:

I am concerned with a serious, vital, and eternal verity, yes such a fundamental one, that it ought to be maintained and defended at the cost of life itself, and even though the whole world should not only be thrown into turmoil and fighting, but shattered in chaos and reduced to nothing. If you don't grasp this, or if you are not moved by this, then mind your own business . . . Christ openly declares: "I come not to send peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34) . . . I see indeed, my dear Erasmus, that you deplore the loss of peace and concord.¹⁹

Seeking another path by which to reach concord with Luther, Erasmus had suggested that the very subject under debate might itself be an impious or unresolvable pursuit. Luther responded to this suggestion by attacking Erasmus's priorities: "It is not irreligious, curious or superfluous, but extremely wholesome and necessary for a Christian to know whether or not his will has anything to do in matters pertaining to salvation. . . . If we know nothing of these things we shall know nothing whatsoever of Christianity, and shall be worse off than the heathens."²⁰ This quote validates what a noted biographer of Luther once wrote: "If one differed from Luther on scripture, one was simply ignorant or malicious, and not a member of the true community of Christ."²¹

The unbiased reader of both works in this debate will concede that Luther's intransigence and refusal to compromise strengthens both his presentation and the force of his conviction; in comparison, Erasmus's ultimate desire for Christian unity and his consequent willingness to seek compromise with Luther weakened his arguments. Erasmus's choice of title was deliberate—*diatribe* is of Greek origin and meant, at the time, a non-judgmental comparison—and indicated his conciliatory approach.²² Even Luther's closest partner and ally, Philip Melanchthon, read Erasmus's essay "with interest and sympathy."²³ Not so Luther. In matters of theology, Luther never compromised. Barely concealing his contempt for Erasmus, Luther concluded his short book by advising him, in a patronizing way, to withdraw from theology all together:

I pray you, remain content with your own gift and study, adorn and promote literature and the languages, as hitherto you have done to great advantage and with much credit . . . God has not willed yet, nor granted, you to be equal [to the subject matter of this debate].²⁴

Even years later, during the 1530s, Luther's companions, on numerous occasions, witnessed his lingering rage against Erasmus and his defense of free will. At one dinner, Luther declared, "I vehemently and from the very heart hate Erasmus."²⁵ At another he said, "Erasmus is an eel. . . . He is a double-dealing fellow . . . he corrupted the youth with the wicked opinions he expressed."²⁶ On a third occasion, Luther exclaimed, "Erasmus sticks to . . . heathen business. He doesn't care about ours, that is, theological affairs."²⁷ Finally, "[Erasmus] mocks both God and religion. . . . See how he blabbers. . . . He never has anything to say about the article of justification."²⁸

PART TWO: LUTHER AS REFORMER²⁹

In 1521, while in exile at the Wartburg following his refusal to recant at the Diet of Worms, an act of defiance that produced a life-threatening edict against him, Luther wrote a letter to Melanchthon, who was attempting—and not all together successfully—to oversee the progress of the Reformation in Wittenberg during Luther's absence. Luther reproached himself for not sufficiently helping his neighbors.³⁰ Luther tasked Melanchthon and his other colleagues with doing whatever they could for the

people of Wittenberg.³¹ Luther increasingly worried over the radical and socially de-stabilizing direction the Reformation was taking during his exile. He finally determined, at risk of his own life, to return to Wittenberg. He wrote to Frederick the Wise, notifying his prince of his impending homecoming by arguing that, in his absence, “Satan has intruded into (his) fold at Wittenberg.”³² Yet some twenty-three years later, and about six months before his death, Luther, once more out of town, wrote to his wife and informed her that he had no desire to return to Wittenberg, as he had become so disheartened by its residents’ un-Christian lifestyles. Comparing Wittenberg to Sodom, he told her to sell some property and liquidate some assets. He coldly predicted that the people of Wittenberg would turn on her after his death, would refuse to tolerate her presence, and would expel her from the city. In that same letter, Luther also wished a horrible disease (St. Vitus’ Dance) on those in the city whose dancing followed a new style, one that he evidently viewed as risqué.³³ From his time in the Wartburg (1522) to the time shortly before his death (1546), Luther’s views of his fellow parishioners certainly changed considerably! So, what happened? I believe that the very attributes that were so advantageous for Luther as an agent of change in the realm of theological disputation—confidence, stubbornness, refusal to compromise, a preference for incivility over diplomacy—were unacceptable qualities in his role as an agent of change in the realm of constructing evangelical parishes in Saxony.

The first visitation in Electoral Saxony occurred in 1526 and resulted from Luther’s crucial disputes with Andreas Bodenstein (a.k.a. Karlstadt) and Thomas Müntzer over the direction the Reformation should take and after Luther realized the many problems that could emerge when congregations selected their own, often unqualified, ministers—an exercise in local autonomy that occurred frequently during the Peasants’ War of 1524-25. After these watershed events, Luther no longer believed that Saxon parishes should be allowed to choose their pastor, method of service, and prayers as he once enthusiastically had. After 1525, he recommended the direct intervention of secular authorities for the regulation of parishes, including appointing church personnel, settling parish finances, overseeing education, and imposing and safeguarding doctrine. Luther’s new position facilitated the process of state-building, and so, in 1526, Elector John “the Constant,” the brother and successor of Frederick the Wise, approved the use of frequent visitations to Saxon and Thuringian parishes as a means for monitoring and enforcing a Reformation “from above.” The visitation committees charged with monitoring the Reformation’s process and enforcing its progress consisted of trustworthy and leading theologians, but they also included state administrators, lawyers, and even military personnel, as the committees focused on issues not always theological.

Luther and Melanchthon served (separately) as members on several of these initial visitation committees, and, although the more tactful and diplomatic Melanchthon authored the official guide for all these committees—*Instructions for the Visitors* (1528)—Luther composed its preface, edited it, and

rewrote key sections of it. John the Constant went as far as waiting for Luther's final approval before allowing the work to be published. Even when his numerous duties prevented him from participating fully in the first major visitations through Saxony, held in 1528 and 1533 respectively, Luther was heavily involved in them and often resolved matters that the on-site visitors had deferred for his consideration.

However, the interaction between Luther and rural parishioners in Saxony regarding the establishment of "Lutheran" communities in the late 1520s was often not a pleasant one. While Luther and his associates regarded the religious, educational, and socio-economic reforms they sought to introduce via church visitations as beneficial—removing unqualified clerics, establishing systems of relief for the poor, creating public schools, formulating convenient schedules for services, eliminating excessive clerical privileges—the villagers whom they encountered more often than not resisted these initiatives. Luther's key theological doctrines were reinterpreted (innocently or deliberately) by the peasants to legitimate their own socio-economic and cultural demands: "Christian freedom" permitted the drinking of beer during services; "the invisible church" justified absenteeism from services; and "the priesthood of all believers" enabled peasants to withhold payments from their pastors, compel them to perform additional field-work, and to select their own pastors. These visitations offered villagers a chance to exact concessions, and they transformed what Luther had envisioned as a benign procedure into a combative series of unanticipated negotiations. The process of constructing new religious communities provided opportunities for parishioners to realize long-desired demands apart from religious considerations and offered possibilities for villagers to refashion social relations within their community.

Luther's convictions and personality made him a poor choice for what turned out to be highly contested interactions. As a visitor monitoring Thuringian parishes during the summer of 1523, a few years before the visitations were institutionalized, Luther had an (in)famous experience in Orlamünde.³⁴ His former colleague and current nemesis Karlstadt had illegally assumed the pastorate of this village with the support of its parishioners, arguing that they alone had the right to appoint their pastor. Once there, he discontinued infant baptism and the Lord's Supper, gave up wearing vestments, removed all images, and publicly questioned Luther's doctrines. Immediately prior to his arrival in Orlamünde, Luther visited the village of Kahla. Having already rejected Luther's teachings on the permissibility of images, the parishioners in Kahla, inspired by their pastor, who was a follower of Karlstadt, deliberately left pieces of a smashed crucifix in Luther's way as he tried to ascend the church's pulpit. As a result of this experience as well as from the contents of a harsh letter sent to him in anticipation of his visit by the congregation in Orlamünde, Luther arrived in that village in a foul mood. The letter addressed him disrespectfully—as "brother," implying equality, and not as "doctor" or "professor"—and explicitly rejected his position on images, his biblical interpretations, and his negative judgment of them and of Karlstadt and then went so far as to question Luther's own status as a Christian! Upon meeting the

villagers, Luther chose to reject protocol and refused to doff his hat; he also turned down an offer to preach. Attacking them for having appointed Karlstadt, he also refused Karlstadt's offer once Karlstadt joined the meeting, already in progress, to discuss the matter one-on-one with him. Luther threatened to leave the village if Karlstadt remained in his presence. He spent the day haranguing the parishioners, trying to get them to accept his teaching on images, and criticizing their letter. With nothing resolved, Luther departed, as parishioners threw stones at him and told him to "go to the devil."³⁵ As an important biographer of Luther's has written: "The prospects of an agreement with the congregation had probably been minimal from the very beginning. . . . Luther's mind . . . [was] fixed . . . totally on confrontation. He did not believe the polite welcome. . . . Here there was no trace of his great ability as a serious and winsome counselor; he gave vent to his temper . . . because he saw no other way."³⁶

Due to experiences like this one, Luther's patience with the peasants waned by the early 1530s. In a letter from 1532, one written to advise regents and councilors from the territory Brandenburg-Ansbach and the city of Nuremberg on a proposed church ordinance, Luther unleashed bitter sarcasm engendered by his frustration over the lack of moral and spiritual improvement in Saxony. Going so far as to advocate the denial of the sacrament in certain cases, Luther stated, "We are content to withhold the sacrament from those who live and remain in public sins, even though the world is now so crude and beastly as to be in no hurry at all for the sacrament and church so that this exclusion from the Lord's Supper might not be regarded as a punishment."³⁷ That same year, Luther criticized the peasants who resided outside of Wittenberg for their embargo of the city when Wittenberg was stricken with plague in 1527 and had all but exhausted its food supply. Luther noted that when plague ravaged those same peasants shortly thereafter, they selfishly entered a then-healthy Wittenberg to buy and sell, and infected many of the city's residents as a result.³⁸ I find it significant that Luther did not criticize these peasants at the time (1527) but only did so five years after the fact, suggesting his frustration with the peasants had, by 1532, begun to color his memories and reflections.³⁹ The very next year (1533), Luther again attacked the peasants as selfish and ungrateful and cited their lack of appreciation as a way to highlight God's love and generosity, in that God bestowed "good wine, grain, eggs, chickens . . . on the wicked and those who blaspheme him."⁴⁰ In a final example, in 1538 Luther told some students of his experience in Zahna ten years earlier: When Luther and his fellow visitors had asked the peasants why they willingly paid the shepherds but withheld money from their pastor, they had responded, "Because we can't get along without a herder"; Luther then concluded this conversation with his students with the lament, "For shame, that it has come to this in my lifetime!"⁴¹ Later that same year (1538), Luther told a different audience that the permanent hatred between pastors and parishioners was "not without reason because untamed people don't want to be corrected," arguing that parishioners sought revenge against those pastors who

tried to improve them. He predicted that “[if] the princes didn’t have power over them, the people would pursue them with the same hatred [they feel towards the pastors].”⁴²

When the inherent tensions between the demands of the villagers and the expectations of the reformers were exposed and played out, Luther felt betrayed and unappreciated, just as he had with the rebellious peasants in 1524-25 and as he would with the Jews in the mid-1540s, just prior to his death. In all three cases—the Peasants’ War, the visitations, and the failure of the Jews to convert—a pessimistic Luther responded with vindictive and horrific publications and with callous statements. The strengths he had brought to bear as an agent of change in the realm of theology were not so well suited to the realm of exploited and over-burdened peasants and maltreated religious minorities.

NOTES

1. On Luther’s legacy, see Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), pp. 308-338.
2. The most thorough treatment in English of printing and of the print industry is now Pettegree, *Brand Luther*.
3. This is one of the many insights of Johannes Burkhardt, *Das Reformationsjahrhundert: Deutsche Geschichte zwischen Medienrevolution und Institutionenbildung 1517-1617* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Druckerei, 2002), p. 26.
4. I have used Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, trans. and ed. Ernst F. Winter (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981).
5. A recently published, excellent biography of Luther, by one of the world’s greatest scholars of Luther and the Reformation, consists of nearly 300 pages of text but devotes less than two full pages to this debate. Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
6. Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 450.
7. Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, p. 137.
8. Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther: Vom Mönch zum Feind des Papstes* (Darmstadt: Lambert Schneider: 2013), pp. 31-35. Leppin’s book explicitly situates Luther’s intellectual development and ultimate theological positions within the systems of thought of Paul, Augustine, and Tauler. Leppin stresses the fact that Tauler was read and discussed to a greater extent in Erfurt and Wittenberg (*i.e.*, the cities at whose universities Luther received his degrees and lectured) than anywhere else in the German-speaking world (p. 33).
9. Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, p. 111.

10. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 48, *Letters I*, trans. and ed. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), No. 13, pp. 39-40.
11. Spalatin was the tutor of Frederick the Wise's nephew John Frederick, who would himself be Elector of Saxony (reigned 1532-47). Spalatin also functioned as Elector Frederick the Wise's court chaplain, advisor, and secretary. According to Gottfried Krodel (see Note 10), Spalatin's responsibility in developing the library at the University of Wittenberg facilitated his role as liaison between members of the faculty, such as Luther, and the Elector. For Spalatin's biography, see Luther, *Letters I*, p. 8. For the letter, Luther, *Letters I*, No. 18, p. 53.
12. Luther, *Letters I*, No. 96, p. 306.
13. Marius, *Martin Luther*, p. 456.
14. Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, pp. 97-98.
15. Ibid., pp. 37-45.
16. Ibid., p. 102.
17. Ibid., p. 132.
18. Ibid., p. 104.
19. Ibid., pp. 107-108.
20. Ibid., p. 106.
21. Marius, *Martin Luther*, p. 448.
22. Introduction to Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), trans. Philip S. Watson in collaboration with Benjamin Drewery, pp. 8-9. Printed in Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 33, *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 3-295.
23. Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 33, p. 10.
24. Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, p. 137.
25. “*Ego vehementer et ex corde odi Erasmum.*” The quote is printed in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe), *Tischreden I*, No. 818, p. 397. I use the English translation of Richard Marius, *Martin Luther*, p. 442.
26. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 54, *Table Talk*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), No. 131, p. 19.
27. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 466, pp. 77-78; the quote is on p. 77.
28. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 1319, p. 136.
29. A few passages in the following section of this essay—certain direct quotes of Luther and my interpretations of them—have appeared before, in my essay “Luther and the Common Man—the

Common Man and Luther” in Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt, eds. *Luther zwischen den Kulturen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 66-88.

30. Luther, *Letters I*, No. 77, pp. 215-217; the quote is on p. 215.
31. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 5.
32. Luther, *Letters I*, No. 118, pp. 393-399; the quote is on p. 395.
33. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 50, *Letters III*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), No. 313, pp. 273-281. “St. Vitus’ Dance,” known today as Sydenham’s chorea, is caused by a streptococcal infection. Its symptoms include frequent shaking of the hands and feet and lurching of the head. For a fascinating cultural analysis of St. Vitus’ Dance in Reformation-era Germany and its linkage to notions of sin, see H. C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 32-49.
34. The incidents in Orlamünde and in Kahla that I summarize here are taken directly from Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining*, where they are described and analyzed, pp. 157-162.
35. Ibid., p. 161.
36. Ibid.
37. Luther, *Letters III*, No. 251, pp. 61-67; the quote is on p. 64.
38. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 1455, p. 152.
39. An important and interesting theme running throughout Leppin’s recent biography of Luther (see note 8, above) is the difficulty the historian faces, when reading Luther’s *Table Talk*, in trying to determine whether what Luther recalled was accurate or not. Informed by Leppin’s arguments, I am of the opinion that Luther never deliberately lied, but, as an old and physically ailing man, he sometimes seems to have misremembered events from his past and to have allowed his memories to be informed by the politics of the day.
40. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 443, pp. 71-72, here on p. 72.
41. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 4002, p. 308. The account of the visitation is located in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden, 10598, Bl. 275-285. A printed summary of the archival material is in Karl Pallas, (ed.), *Die Registraturen der Kirchenvisitation im ehemals sächsischen Kurkreise*. (Halle: O. Hendel, 1906-1918), vol. 6, pp. 365-372.
42. Luther, *Table Talk*, No. 4143, p. 323.