

Dear reader,

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion following peer review. The version of record [Schäufele, Wolf-Friedrich, Martin Luther's Occasional Writings: Table Talk, Letters, and Prefaces, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, März 2017] is available online at: <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-294>
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.294>

Original publication:

Schäufele, Wolf-Friedrich

Martin Luther's Occasional Writings: Table Talk, Letters, and Prefaces

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, März 2017

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.294>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published in accordance with the policy of Oxford University Press:

https://academic.oup.com/journals/pages/self_archiving_policy_f

Your IxTheo team

Luther's Occasional Writings: Table Talk, Letters, and Prefaces

Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele

Summary and Keywords

Besides the great treatises and the German Bible, there are a number of smaller texts by Martin Luther that can be characterized as occasional writings. They can be roughly divided into table talk, letters and prefaces. The larger part of these was not originally intended for publication. This is true especially of the so-called table talk. Since 1531 guests at Luther's table took down his remarks and collected them for their own purposes. Only in 1566 did Johann Aurifaber publish his famous edition of Luther's "*Table Talk*", which shaped the popular image of the reformer. Today we are well aware that the complicated history of the transmission of Luther's table talk makes it rather difficult to hear his authentic voice. Another important genre of Luther's occasional writings is his letters. Overall, about 2,600 letters from his hand in both Latin and German are extant. Although he rejected the publication of his private letters, the first collections appeared in print during his lifetime. Other letters had been published by Luther himself as open letters (*Sendbriefe*) for a wider public. Closely related to these are the prefaces and the dedicatory letters to individuals and groups Luther that added not only to his own books but also to those of other authors. Thus he could use his reputation in order to establish a large-scale publication campaign in favor of the Reformation.

Key Words: Correspondence, Epistles, Dedications, Letters, Prefaces, Table Talk

Table Talk

Origins and Transmission

Luther's so-called *Table Talk* causes a strange fascination. This collection of short anecdotes and quotes seemingly allows us, even more than Luther's sermons and letters, to encounter the reformer immediately and personally and to hear his own voice. It was the Luther of *Table Talk* who for centuries shaped the wider public's idea of the reformer.

The term "table talk" (*Tischreden*) goes back to the basic edition by Johann Aurifaber.¹ With this title Aurifaber alluded to the context in which a large part of the pieces had arisen – Luther's conversations with his guests during the meals in his house.

Even after his marriage Luther lived with his family in the Black Cloister, which had been given to him in 1524 by the Saxon elector. Besides his own family, several relatives and some servants there were always students living in the house as paying lodgers and also various guests from out of town. The domestic community had their meals together at ten o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the afternoon. For the second meal guests from the town often joined them, among them professors of the university, chiefly Luther's colleagues from the faculty of divinity Justus Jonas, Caspar Cruciger and Johannes Bugenhagen, as well as the professor of Hebrew Matthaeus Aurogallus, and sometimes also Luther's friend the painter Lucas Cranach the Elder with his wife and others. Apart from Luther's wife from time to time there were other women at the table. Originally the common meals were held in the former refectory of the cloister, and after the mid-1530s also in the recently refurbished "Luther hall" (Lutherstube).

Johann Mathesius who had been a student at Wittenberg in 1530-1532 and 1540-1542 and had recorded many pieces of table talk himself, gives a vivid description of the conversations at Luther's table:

"Although our doctor often took weighty and profound thoughts to table with him and sometimes maintained the silence of the monastery during the entire meal, so that not a word was spoken, yet at appropriate times he spoke in a very jovial way. We used to call his conversation the condiments of the meal because we preferred it to all spices and dainty food.

When he wished to get us to talk he would throw out a question, 'What's new?' (...) If the conversation was animated, it was nevertheless conducted with decent propriety and courtesy, and others would contribute their share until the doctor started to talk. Often good questions were put to him from the Bible, and he provided expert and concise answers. When at times somebody took exception to what had been said, the doctor was able to bear this patiently and refute him with a skilful answer. Reputable persons often came to the table from the university and from foreign places, and then very nice talks and stories were heard" (*LW 54: ix-x*).

The conversation at the table was held partly in German, partly in Latin as was customary among the scholars of that time. Sometimes a macaronic Latin-German style was used like that in some of Luther's letters.² When guests were present who did not understand Latin, it is likely that only German was spoken.

The transmission history of Luther's table talk is extremely complex and has not yet been explored in full detail. Overall, we know some twenty persons by name who recorded the conversations. The first one to take notes regularly was, according to his own assertion, Conrad Cordatus, the future superintendent of Stendal (*WA, TR 2: 310-311, no. 2068*). His first records date from autumn 1531. Luther, Cordatus reported, did not feel annoyed.³ Melanchthon, however, made Cordatus hand over his notes and wrote a Latin distich into his notebook that clearly expressed his disapproval.⁴ Encouraged by the example of Cordatus, other guests began to take notes, in particular Veit Dietrich, the future pastor of Saint Sebaldus Church at Nuremberg and Johann Schlaginhausen, the future superintendent of Köthen. Other important writers at Luther's table were Anton Lauterbach, the future superintendent of Pirna, the future Anhaltian chancellor Ludwig Rabe, Luther's private secretary Georg Rörer, Johann Mathesius, future pastor of Joachimsthal in Bohemia, and the future Nuremberg pastor Hieronymus Besold. Taking notes apparently became so common that Luther sometimes asked the writers explicitly to write down this or that of his remarks (*nos. 246, 463, 1525: WA, TR 1: 102, 202; 2: 123 = LW 54: 33, 77, 155*). Katharina Luther in 1540 even jokingly asked her husband to take money for his instruction from Lauterbach and the other writers (*no. 5187: WA, TR 4: 704 = LW 54: 396*).

Apparently Luther's guests did not write on separate sheets, but in thin notebooks or on folded layers of paper. They made no full minutes but rather wrote down only what seemed important to every one of them, and they did so in varying degrees of detail, depending on their individual writing speed and interest. Rörer, for example, who had developed an own Latin shorthand, was the fastest writer and recorded more details than others, but did not strive for a literal rendering. Dietrich on the other hand was particularly concerned with the exact wording. Presumably some of Luther's German remarks were recorded in Latin, partly due to academic practice and partly because there was only a Latin stenography. In addition to Luther's statements during the meals the writers also recorded remarks the reformer had made on other occasions. These, too, are included in the literary genre "table talk".

Unfortunately, all original records are lost. A second stage of tradition can be discerned, however, in the form of clean copies made by the writers from their notes using supplementary material from their memory, adding information on the context of the discussions and writing the individual pieces in chronological order into books or on layers of paper to have them bound later on. Several clean copies of this kind are extant, even though for the most part only in later transcripts. We do have, however, autographs from the hands of Dietrich and Rörer.

In the third stage larger collections of table talk were composed. We know that the first writers communicated their records with each other early on. Some of them, especially Cordatus and Mathesius, but also others that had never sat at Luther's table, afterward systematically compiled all available traditions, also adding other sayings of Luther as well as opinions, letters, and other texts. Since the end of the 1540s some of these compilations were rearranged by subject headings. Thus they became reference books in which one could look up easily Luther's opinions on all kinds of issues. After Luther's death and the Schmalkaldic War there was obviously a need to verify the genuine ideas of the reformer.

The writers at Luther's table had made their records only for private purposes and had not thought of having them printed. With the compilation of thematically arranged collections, however, and the formation of a Lutheran memorial culture the idea of a printed edition of Luther's *Table Talk* could seem desirable, especially among the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans. The first printed edition was published by Johann Aurifaber, Luther's last private secretary, who had also been his companion on his last journey to Eisleben. From 1561 to 1566 Aurifaber worked full-time on the publication of writings, letters, and sermons of Luther on behalf of the counts of Mansfeld. His edition of Luther's *Table Talk* was printed for the first time in 1566. Like the manuscript compilations by Dietrich and Lauterbach, it was a thematically arranged reference-book. Aurifaber arranged texts concerning theological questions, church issues and worship, Christian life and particular classes of people in eighty-two sections. Aurifaber gathered his texts from half a dozen different sources and significantly revised them. For the sake of the thematic arrangement he divided some conversations. He consistently expanded his templates, and he translated all Latin passages into German. Aurifaber particularly emphasized edifying and didactic features. Wherever he found Luther's locution too harsh he tended to tone it down. A telling example of Aurifaber's practice can be found in table talk no. 122. According to Veit Dietrich Luther recommended this remedy against temptations: "You should eat, drink, and talk with others. If you can find help for yourself by thinking of a girl, do so" (WA, TR 1: 49-50 = LW 54: 18). In contrast Aurifaber first inserted an admonition to take comfort from the Scriptures and deleted the commendation of amorous fantasies (WA, TR 1: 52 = LW 54: xviii).

Before long, Aurifaber's edition of *Table Talk* became a popular classic that was frequently reprinted. Nearly all later German editions were based on Aurifaber's. A revision of his compilation made by Andreas Stangewald at Frankfurt in 1571 was similarly popular until the 18th century. Stangewald reduced the number of the sections to forty-three and moved all pieces that were not table talk into an annex. In 1577 Nicolaus Selnecker once again revised Stangewald's edition. Unlike the German editions of Aurifaber and Stangewald, the Latin *Table Talk* edition by Heinrich Peter Rebenstock from 1571 was not successful.

It was not until the rediscovery of the older manuscript compilations of Lauterbach and Cordatus as well as other writers later on, that it became possible to compare Aurifaber's edition with his sources and to realize the inadequacy of his working method. The authoritative modern edition of Luther's *Table Talk* was arranged by Ernst Kroker for the *Weimar Ausgabe* in the years 1912 to 1921. Kroker criticized Aurifaber and included his texts only in small print for comparison. He himself consequently

went back to the manuscripts. Kroker tried to reconstruct the complex transmission history and printed for each piece the version that to his mind seemed most original. Divergent readings of other versions he marked in footnotes, and only in the case of major differences did he give the entire passage. His arrangement of the texts was neither thematic as with Aurifaber nor consistently chronological. Instead each of the twenty sections represented a particular manuscript.

Altogether Kroker's edition comprises 7,075 numbered pieces (due to a numbering error there are in effect only 6,075 pieces). As a matter of fact, many pieces are transmitted in multiple versions, so that the total might amount to little more than three thousand talks. Further pieces that were discovered only after the completion of the *Table Talk* section have been edited by Johannes Haußleiter in volumes 48 and 59 of the *Weimarer Ausgabe*.

Although Kroker's edition is undoubtedly meritorious a revised version seems desirable. Not only has the number of known manuscripts increased (from fifty-five in Kroker's time to at least 110 nowadays).⁵ Above all Kroker neither covered all various readings nor is it possible to discern the original contexts of transmission or the editorial processes from his edition.

Contents and Topics

Luther's *Table Talk* is not a defined literary work with a given text and fixed shape. It is not possible, therefore, to reconstruct something like an original text for every single piece. Also a reliable dating and an assessment of the historical context are for the most part impossible. Thus a reliable interpretation requires much prudence.

Most pieces of *Table Talk* still display the original conversation character. The majority of them are rather short and anecdotal. Often they center on a particular statement by Luther and thus have an aphoristic quality. In some cases, however, longer conversations are reproduced. The subjects are highly varied. There is information, for instance, on Luther's biography, his academic and personal conditions, his religious experience, discussions of theological questions and current ecclesiastical issues, comments on the political situation and teachings about Christian life and the probation of faith in different situations or professions. *Table Talk* offers details of Luther's life and thought that cannot be found elsewhere. It should be noted, though, that all these records only date from the last decade and a half of Luther's life (1531-1546). What we learn about earlier conditions or opinions of the reformer, is stated in the retrospect and frequently stylized.

Nevertheless, *Table Talk* is a valuable source for Luther's biography in particular. The talks in which Luther speaks of his family and childhood have become famous. The poverty of his parents (no. 2888a) was, according to recent research, at most an interlude. The strict upbringing and physical punishment Luther remembers (nos. 1559, 3566A) were not extraordinary. Luther also commented on several other stages in his life, such as the thunderstorm at Stotternheim when he promised to join a monastery (no. 4707), his journey to Rome (nos. 3478, 3479a, 3582A, 3700), his time in the convent (nos. 121, 495, 4442) and his temptations there (no. 518) and the panic he felt during his first Mass (nos. 1558, 3556A, 4574). The idea of Luther's discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith as a sudden inspiration in the tower (or possibly even in the lavatory) of the Black Cloister also stems from *Table Talk* (nos. 1681, 3232b, 3232c, 4007, 5518). Of course, *Table Talk* is an important source for Luther's relationship to his wife Katharina as well. In no. 49 there is his famous declaration of love: „I wouldn't give up my Katy for France or for Venice" (*WA, TR 1: 17 = LW 54: 7-8*). *Table Talk* also provides, however, evidence of the teasing tone of the couple (e.g., no. 1461).

In addition to Luther's printed works *Table Talk* expresses pointed opinions on theological issues. Luther comments on the right way of practicing theology (nos. 153, 352), on the recognizability of God (no. 257) and again and again on the distinction between law and gospel (nos. 590, 1234, 5518). He deals with the understanding of the Bible (no. 81) and its translation (nos. 312, 5002, 5324, 5533). He gives his opinions on the Church Fathers (no. 51, 252), medieval authorities like Thomas Aquinas (no. 280), and contemporaries like Erasmus of Rotterdam (nos. 131, 466, 484, 1319, 4028). Issues of Christian life, too, were discussed over and over again at Luther's table, especially coping with temptations and melancholy (nos. 19, 122, 461, 491, 522, 3798-3799.) but also the nature and practice of marriage (nos. 185, 1659, 2867b, 3528). Among contemporary events the Turkish threat figures prominently (nos. 206, 289, 332, 1405, 1420, 5398). Even the so-called last note of Luther with the famous final clause "We are beggars. That is true" was transmitted among *Table Talk* (no. 5677: *WA, TR 5: 317-318 = LW 54: 476*).

Letters

General Observations

Luther was a prolific letter writer. Already in 1516, when he was a district vicar of his order, he complained about spending nearly the whole with answering letters, for which he could have employed two secretaries (*WA, B 1: 72, no. 28 = LW 48: 27, no. 10*), and in 1545 he even longed for the Last Day to come so that he might be delivered from the burden of letter writing (*WA, B 11: 20, No. 4069*). Probably throughout his life Luther devoted several hours every day to correspondence. Overall, there are some 2,600 letters extant from his pen, plus 166 he drew up together with others. Numerous letters got lost. Luther did not retain copies of the letters he had written nor did he keep all those he received.⁶ The complete edition of Luther's letters in the *Weimar Ausgabe* comprises in total some 3,700 letters by and to Luther (the official numbering of the edition erroneously counts 700 more). This is much less than the extant correspondence of Melancthon (c. 9,700 letters) or of Heinrich Bullinger (c. 12,000 letters), but nevertheless a respectable amount.

The oldest letter certainly written by Luther dates from April 22, 1507, and is an invitation to Luther's first Mass addressed to the vicar of Eisenach Johannes Braun (*WA, B 1: 10-13, no. 3 = LW 48: 3-4., no. 1*). The oldest known autographic letter from Luther's hand was written on August 5, 1514, and is addressed to Georg Spalatin, secretary to the elector of Saxony (*WA, B 1: 27-29, no. 9 = LW 48: 8-11, no. 3*). His last two letters Luther wrote on February 14, 1546, four days before his death, to his wife and to Melancthon (*WA, B 11: 299-300, no. 4207 = LW 50: 310-13, no. 324; WA, B 11: 300-01, no. 4208 = LW 50: 313-16, no. 325*). An extraordinary number of letters emerged during Luther's forced absences from Wittenberg. At Wartburg Castle (May 1521 to March 1522) he wrote forty-four letters, at the Veste Coburg citadel (April to October 1530) 117.

Luther wrote nearly all his letters with his own hand. Only in exceptional cases did he dictate them to a secretary, such as when he was sick or when he wrote conjointly with his Wittenberg colleagues. In one case Johannes Bugenhagen served as a secretary (letter to Spalatin from May 20, 1532, *WA, B 6: 311-12, no. 1934*). Luther wrote his letters on single sheets which were subsequently folded, addressed on the outside and sealed. Delivery was provided by couriers so that transportation could take from a few days to several weeks.

Luther wrote letters in both Latin and German, depending on the addressee. The major part of his correspondence (c. 60 percent) is in Latin and addressed to savants and educated clergymen. For

letters to secular princes, urban councils and ordinary citizens he chose the German language. Luther's first known letter in German is to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony dated from November 1517 (*WA, B 1*: 119-120, no. 51 = *LW 48*: 49-52, no. 17). In German letters to educated addressees Luther could also include Latin expressions or, as in his table talk, make use of a mixed Latin-German style.⁷ On the other hand Luther also included German expressions in Latin letters, mostly to express emotions.

Luther's virtuosity in writing letters has often been praised, and justly so. But one must be aware that he was thoroughly trained in the rhetorical art of epistolography. In many letters he made use of the medieval five-part letter scheme consisting of *salutatio* (greeting), *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (narration), *petitio* (request) and *conclusio* (conclusion). Also important is the model of the Pauline Epistles Luther adopted for himself after 1515. But what justifies his rank as a master letter writer is his ease in subordinating form and convention to content. Distancing himself from humanistic epistolography, Luther placed the message above stylistic elegance (*WA, TR 4*: 595, no. 4967). Luther displayed this same freedom in his handling of formal salutations. He responded personally and empathically to the addressees and preferred a plain, unadorned style close to oral speech. This gives his letters a unique liveliness and immediacy.

Unlike humanistic letter writers who chiefly communicated with their learned peers and wealthy patrons, Luther exchanged letters with a highly diverse group of correspondents.⁸ There are letters to close family members such as his father (period of preserved correspondence: 1521-1530) and mother (1531), his wife Katharina (1529-1546) and his son Hans (1530-1543), as well as ones to collaborators and companions such as Georg Spalatin (1512-1544), Johann Lang (1516-1545), Philipp Melanchthon (1518-1546), Wenzeslaus Linck (1518-1545), Justus Jonas (1520-1545), Nicolaus Hausmann (1521-1538) and Jacob Propst (1527-1546). In total the letters to relatives and friends make up about 40 percent.

Another important group of correspondents amounting to c. 30 percent are secular authorities, princes, and magistrates. Among them of special importance are the Saxon electors and dukes Frederick the Wise (1518-1525), John the Steadfast (1520-1532), and John Frederick the Magnanimous (1520-1546), Princes George (1533-1546), Joachim (1532-1542), John (1532-1544) and Wolfgang (1528-1541) of Anhalt, and Landgrave Philip of Hesse (1526-1545). But Luther also wrote to Emperor Charles V (1520-1521), King Henry VIII of England (1525), and Kings Christian II (1532) and Christian III (1528-1546) of Denmark.

The remaining c. 30 percent of Luther's correspondence was with correspondents from almost all classes of society, from Pope Leo X (1518-1520) and Cardinals Thomas Cajetan (1518) and Albert of Mainz (1517-1536) to simple citizens and craftsmen. Until 1525 Luther also frequently wrote letters to oppressed Protestant congregations, such as those at Worms, Miltenberg, Halle and Zwickau. Besides the correspondence with his wife Luther wrote more than forty additional letters to women.

Luther's correspondence covers a wide variety of topics. It portrays the whole reality of life at that time. Luther answers questions, provides information about persons or legal issues, gives his view on current theological or political problems, and offers advice to secular authorities and church officials. His main areas of focus are issues of pastoral and spiritual care. But Luther's own life and personal circumstances are also frequently touched upon. This makes Luther's correspondence an important primary source for his biography.

Some Outstanding Examples

One of Luther's most important letters is the Latin letter to Cardinal Albert of Mainz from October 31, 1517, in which he enclosed his Ninety-Five Theses (WA, B 1: 108-113, no. 48 = LW 48: 42-49, no. 16). Luther signed with the only recently adopted form of his name "Martinus Luther" (instead of "Luder"). Undaunted, he blames the cardinal for abuses with regard to indulgences and asks him to withdraw his instruction for the pardoners. The letter Luther wrote to his sovereign Frederick the Wise on March 3, 1522 (WA, B 2: 453-457, no. 455 = LW 48: 388-393, no. 117) was, as Luther himself admitted, unusually bold too. Against the will of the elector whose weak faith he bewailed, Luther returned from the Wartburg to Wittenberg sharply renouncing any protection by Frederick. Instead, he promised to protect the elector himself by the force of his very faith.

The letters Luther wrote to his wife Katharina occupy a special position. Twenty-one of them are extant, eleven as autographs. They offer unique insight into the great mutual appreciation of the spouses but also into the teasing tone with which they addressed each other. Unfortunately, all the letters of Katharina to her husband are lost. Obviously the reformer, unlike his wife, did not keep even these special letters.

Particularly moving are the letters of consolation Luther wrote to his sick parents in 1530 and 1531 (WA, B 5, 238-241, no. 1529 = LW 49, 267-272, no. 203; WA, B 6: 103-106, no. 1820 = LW 50: 17-22, no. 241). The letter from Coburg to his four-year-old son Johannes (Hans) (WA, B 5: 377-78, no. 1595) is considered the earliest letter in German language of a father to his small child.⁹ With its depiction of heavenly pleasures in children's terms, it is a touching document of fatherly love. Examples of Luther's pastoral skill can be found in his letters to the depressed and suicidal Jonas von Stockhausen and his wife (WA, B 6: 386-389, nos. 1974-75).

A potentially promising correspondence between Luther and Calvin did not come about. The Geneva reformer had written a letter to Luther on January 1, 1545 (WA, B 11: 26-29, no. 4072) but had entrusted it to Melanchthon who decided not to hand it over.

Luther's Letters in Print

Some of Luther's letters were intended to be printed from the outset. In so-called open letters (*Sendbriefe*) he gave his opinion on current topics, expressed exhortations and warnings, consoled persecuted congregations or justified his own behaviour. A prominent example is the *Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit* from 1524, wherein he warned Elector Frederick the Wise and his brother Duke John against Thomas Müntzer (WA 15: 210-221 = LW 40: 47-59.) The *Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants* from 1525 (WA 18: 384-401 = LW 46: 63-85) was addressed to the Mansfeld chancellor Caspar Müller. Luther's treatise *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* from 1524 (WA 15: 27-53 = LW 45: 341-78) was another open letter, as was the famous *Open Letter on Translating* from 1530, probably originally addressed to Wenzeslaus Linck (WA 30/2: 632-646 = LW 35: 187-189).

The first printed compilation of Luther's letters made in 1525 by Vinzenz Obsopoeus, included only such open letters.¹⁰ A publication of his private correspondence was rejected by the reformer. In a table talk from the summer 1540 he harshly dismissed such a suggestion.¹¹ Nevertheless, his letters were collected early on.¹² In 1545 Luther's colleague Caspar Cruciger had a collection of consolatory letters printed which included the letters to his parents. In the same year Georg Rörer published a similar collection. The two compilations edited by Johann Aurifaber in 1547 and 1550 exclusively contained letters of consolation too. In contrast, the edition of Luther's letters from Coburg produced by Matthias Flacius Illyricus in 1549 presented the reformer as an upright and unbending champion of orthodoxy in contrast to the weak and compliant Melanchthon.

The letters printed in the older editions of Luther's Works were taken from the compilations of Röer and Aurifaber. In the 18th century more letters became known. A first critical edition was produced by Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette in the years 1825-1828, and another, for the first time also including letters from others to Luther, was produced by Ernst Ludwig Enders and Gustav Kawerau from 1884 to 1932. A more recent authoritative edition is the correspondence (*Briefwechsel*) section of the *Weimarer Ausgabe* that since 1930 was prepared by Otto Clemen and completed by Hans Volz and Eike Wolgast until 1985. Limited resources did not allow for thorough textual criticism. Nevertheless, its completeness and extensive comments make this edition a well-established tool for research. Additional letters discovered after the completion of the *Weimarer Ausgabe* have been published in the *Lutherjahrbuch*.

Prefaces

Most of the prefaces Luther added to his own books or to books of other authors are technically letters. Like the open letters discussed above, they were meant for a wider audience and were intended to be printed from the outset.

With regard to the prefaces, a distinction can be made between general prefaces and dedicatory prefaces (or dedications).¹³ General prefaces can already be found in classical antiquity. These were introductions written by the author of the book himself for the sake of readers in order to set forth his intention, to describe the genesis of the book, or to explain particular circumstances. In other cases it is not the author himself but a different person – the editor, the printer, or a well-known figure – who draws up the preface, which then can also be called a “foreword”. This kind of preface occurs chiefly after the invention of printing. Often, but not always, prefaces are molded on letters to the readers of the book.

Dedicatory prefaces developed out of the general prefaces during the Renaissance era. Generally they took the form of letters addressed to some particular individual or to a group of individuals. Dedications, too, can be written either by the author of the book himself or by another person. They can serve various purposes. A dedication can be an expression of respect or gratitude or of the desire for protection. In addition, it can give the author a share in the reputation of the dedicatee. In humanist literature dedications were often aimed at establishing and displaying connections to learned figures or at gaining rewards from patrons.

Luther's Prefaces for His Own Writings

Luther wrote both general and dedicatory prefaces, for his own books as well as for those of others. To his first self-authored publication, the exegesis of the seven penitential psalms from 1517, Luther added a preface in which he provided information about the Latin text and asked for tolerance toward his novel interpretation (*WA* 1: 158). The epistolary features are easily perceivable in this preface: it is addressed “to all members of Christ”, starts with a salutation reminiscent of the Pauline Epistles and ends with the name of the author. Luther added such prefaces to numerous later writings as well. Whereas in the early years they were usually directed “to the Christian reader” or “readers” (or to the “dear Christians”, “all believers”, and so on) after the mid-1520s there is an increasing number of prefaces without any form of address.

Luther's first dedicatory preface for a work of his own dates from the year 1518. It is the dedication of his *Explanations to the Ninety-Five Theses* to his religious superior and confessor Johann von Staupitz (WA 1: 525-527 = LW 48: 64-69). Here in his protest against the sale of indulgences Luther appealed to the new understanding of penance Staupitz had taught him. Again the epistolary features (address, salutation, date) were clearly present. Therefore, in the *Weimar Ausgabe* Luther's dedicatory prefaces are numbered together with his letters (WA, B). The most famous dedicatory preface for a book of Luther's is without doubt that of his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* to Pope Leo X (WA 7: 3-11, 42-49 = LW 31: 334-336). Here Luther assured the pope that it was not his intention to attack his person. Although Luther had written this dedication not before the beginning of November 1520, he backdated it to September 6, right before the public proclamation of the bull "Exsurge Domine".

Unlike in later centuries, with a few exceptions Luther included either a general or a dedicatory preface, but not both. In rare cases he wrote an afterword instead of or in addition to a preface.¹⁴ The language (German or Latin) of the preface is always the same as that of the book. As a result, even the 1521 dedication of Luther's treatise *On Monastic Vows (De votis monasticis)* to his father was in Latin (WA 8: 573-76 = LW 48: 329-336), even though Hans Luther did not understand this language.

A special case consists of prefaces by Luther for books he himself had authored or instigated but that were edited by other persons. In these Luther's prefaces served as an authorization of the printing. Examples of this are the prefaces to the Summer Postil from 1526 and the Winter Postil from 1528, both edited by Stephan Roth; the revision of the Summer Postil by Caspar Cruciger from 1544; and the House Postil edited by Veit Dietrich in 1544 (WA 10/1,2: 211; 21: 3; 21: 200-203; 52: 10). Likewise Luther authorized the first volume of his *Lectures on Genesis* edited by Dietrich in the same year (WA 42: 1-2 = LW 2: 235).

Of particular interest are the prefaces Luther wrote for the first volumes of the Wittenberg editions of his German and Latin writings. In his preface to the German writings from 1539 (WA 50: 657-661 = LW 34: 283-288) Luther affirmed his desire that instead of his books the Scriptures should be studied, and for the study of theology he recommended a three-stage-method of prayer (*oratio*), contemplation (*meditatio*) and temptation (*tentatio*). In the preface to the Latin writings from 1545 (WA 54: 179-187 = LW 34: 327-338) he looked back to the beginnings of the Reformation and recounted his discovery of the righteousness of God from Romans 1:16-17.

The most important and effective among Luther's prefaces are certainly those he added to the individual books of the Bible as well as to the Old and New Testament as a whole. With these he furnished his readers with a genuinely Protestant outlook on the Holy Scriptures and guided them to an independent reading of the Bible.

Luther's Prefaces for Writings of Other Authors

Especially interesting are the prefaces (forewords) and dedications Luther contributed to the writings of other authors. Luther supplemented his very first publication, the 1516 edition of a fragment of an anonymous mystical treatise from the Middle Ages, which he would later on call *A German Theology*, with a foreword (WA 1, 153). His first dedication for a book by another author he wrote in 1518 for the *Apologetic Response* of the Zwickau pastor Johannes Silvius Egranus (WA 1: 316). Overall, Luther wrote some ninety forewords and dedications of this kind.

Authors and more often printers frequently asked Luther for such prefaces. At least since 1520 he was the best-selling author in Germany and a preface from his pen was a valuable recommendation and endorsement and would be announced right on the front page. Furthermore Luther himself employed his popularity and the reputation of his prefaces to have books by other authors printed. Thus he could make propaganda for the Protestant cause even beyond his own writings.

The major part of these prefaces Luther wrote for pamphlets by other reformers. Among them his university colleagues from Wittenberg and former students figured prominently. Most prefaces (in total seven) Luther wrote for books of the Thuringian reformer Justus Menius, followed by the Swabian reformer Johannes Brenz, Philipp Melanchthon and Urbanus Rhegius at Augsburg and Celle.

Their books were partly presentations and explanations of the evangelical doctrines. Christopher Boyd Brown has drawn up a useful thematic classification.¹⁵ According to this classification, a first class includes commentaries on biblical Books by Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Brenz and others. To the second class belong sermons, postils and instructions for catechesis and pastoral care. Other writings were devoted to the practical implementation and formation of the Reformation, such as Melanchthon's *Instruction for the Visitors* of 1528 (Luther's preface: WA 26: 195-201 = LW 40: 69-73) and treatises on municipal relief for the poor and on educational reform. In a class of its own there are writings on celibacy (among them several apologies of married clergymen or religious persons) and on the Protestant conception of marriage.

The remaining part of the books Luther furnished with prefaces were polemics against adversaries. Luther thus could support his allies and engage in various disputes to which he had not been able to contribute own books. The main focus was, of course, polemic against the Church of Rome. Usually the books were not sophisticated theological treatises but pamphlets related to local debates in single cities. But Luther also wrote prefaces for books against the humanistic theologian Georg Witzel who had re-converted to Catholicism as well as against Erasmus of Rotterdam (WA 38: 84-85; 38: 276-79 = LW 60: 24-29; 57-65). A radical attack on the papacy in historical perspective were the *Lives of the Roman Pontiffs* by the English reformer Robert Barnes (WA 50: 3-5 = LW 60: 11-16). Luther and his allies eagerly made use of historical or contemporary official documents of the Roman Church, supplemented with critical prefaces and remarks, that could demonstrate its wickedness. Among these were the critical commentaries of Franz Lambert on the Rule of the Friars Minor and of Erasmus Alber on the Franciscan *Liber Conformitatum* (WA 11: 461; 53: 409-411 = LW 59: 48-52; 60: 274-280). Luther himself in 1537 edited a German translation of the notorious forged *Donation of Constantine* on which the Roman pontiffs had tried to base their worldly power (WA 50: 69-89 = LW 60: 158-184). In 1538 he edited two documents in which a committee of seven cardinals and Pope Adrian VI had freely admitted the need for a reform of the Roman Church (WA 50: 288-291; 355-360 = LW 34: 231-267; 60: 185-201).

Other polemical writings were directed against Protestant adversaries, Zwinglians as well as radicals on the "left wing of the Reformation", hence against all those Luther used to call "Schwärmer" (enthusiasts). Luther's prefaces to the German translations of the *Swabian Syngamma* of 1525, a joint reply of southern German theologians to the eucharistic doctrine of Johannes Oekolampad, were his first public statements in the dispute about the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper (WA 19: 457-461; 529-530 = LW 59: 150-162). After the death of Thomas Müntzer in 1525 Luther published an annotated compilation of his writings (WA 18: 362-374 = LW 59: 120-126). Moreover he wrote prefaces to the polemics of Justus Menius and Urbanus Rhegius against the Anabaptists (WA 30/2: 211-214; 38: 338-340 = LW 59: 263-271; 60: 82-90).

Finally, Luther contributed prefaces to books on Islam and on the military threat from the Turks, which he considered to be a sign of the last days. The most substantial publication of this kind was

the first printed edition of a Latin translation of the Qur'an produced by Theodor Bibliander in 1543 (WA 53: 569-572 = LW 60: 286-294), which owed its public acceptance to an opinion Luther had given to the Council of Basel. Additionally, Luther himself edited two pertinent pamphlets from the late Middle Ages and added his own prefaces (WA 30/2: 205-208; 53: 271-396 = LW 59: 255-262; 60: 251-266).

Luther's Prefaces for His Editions of Ancient and Medieval Witnesses of the Truth

A particularly important category of publications Luther supplied with prefaces were books by authors from Christian antiquity or the Middle Ages that could serve as witnesses for the legitimacy of Protestant positions. In them Luther found evidence that there had always been upright Christians who had upheld and confessed the pure evangelical doctrine and had protested against the abuses of the Roman Church. The very idea Luther's disciple Matthias Flacius Illyricus would elaborate historiographically in his *Catalogue of the Witnesses of Truth* in 1556 inspired Luther and his collaborators to a program of editing historical books.

From early Christianity Athanasius of Alexandria, some of whose writings Johannes Bugenhagen edited in 1532, could be mobilized against contemporary deniers of the doctrine of the trinity (WA 30/3: 528-532 = LW 59: 342-347).¹⁶ Shortly thereafter there was a plan in Wittenberg to publish Augustine's treatise *The spirit and the Letter*, one of the key documents of his theology of grace. The plan was not realized, but Luther's preface has been preserved (WA, B 12: 386-388, no. 4306 = LW 60: 35-44).

As witnesses of the evangelical truth from the Middle Ages Luther edited as early as 1516/1518 the mystical treatise he called *A German Theology* (1516: WA 1: 153. – 1518: WA 1: 378-379 = LW 31: 75-76) as well as, in 1522/1523, writings of the Dutch reform theologians Wessel Gansfort and Johannes von Goch (WA 10/2: 316-317; 329-330 = LW 59: 6-17) and of the Florentine Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (WA 12: 248 = LW 59: 77-81). A commentary on the Book of Revelation Luther edited in 1528 came from a Lollard and Hussite background (WA 26: 123-124 = LW 59: 203-207). After contributing a dedication to the second volume of the edition of the writings of Jan Hus by Otto Brunfels in 1524 (WA, B 3: 359, no. 783 = LW 59: 97-101), he himself in 1536/1537 published two collections of Hus's letters (WA 50: 23-29, 676-688 = LW 60: 122-133, 152-157). In 1544 he also wrote prefaces for two compilations of hagiography purified from superstitious elements by Georg Major and Georg Spalatin (WA 54: 109-111, 113-115 = LW 60: 315-323, 324-329).

In contrast, the edition of Aesop's Fables Luther published with his preface (WA 50, 452-460) in 1537 was meant not for theological but for didactic purposes.

Review of the Literature and Agendas for Future Research

Modern research on *Table Talk* began in the second half of the 19th century with the discovery and edition of the manuscripts of Lauterbach and Cordatus. Kroker's edition in the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (1912-1921) was the result of considerable research as well. Shortly before Preserved Smith published the only comprehensive study in English.¹⁷ Birgit Stolt analyzed *Table Talk* from a philological point of view.¹⁸ Her hypothesis that the macaronic style went to Luther himself has widely been accepted. Several more recent contributions are dedicated to the treatment of particular topics, for instance the book of Nicole de Laharpe on national stereotypes.¹⁹ A new initiative towards intensified

research on *Table Talk* has been launched by a conference at Jena in 2010.²⁰ Under the auspices of cultural history, future research will have to focus not so much on the reconstruction of the original wording of certain sayings as on uncovering the mechanisms of transmission and adaptation and thereby of the memorialization and canonization of Luther's personality. For this purpose, a complete new digital edition of all extant manuscripts is necessary, which would make it possible to examine the individual pieces of tradition in their varying contexts.

Earlier research on Luther's letters was primarily interested in his correspondence with princes and secular authorities. Toward this end it focused partly philological aspects,²¹ partly political and historical ones²². At the end of the 20th century the interest shifted to Luther's letters of consolation and his pastoral correspondence.²³ The most comprehensive overview was produced by Matthieu Arnold in 1996.²⁴ Since then Arnold has published several papers on particular aspects. Individual letters of Luther have been discussed in numerous papers by various authors. A great variety of topics concerning Luther's biography, his relationships to people and places, his theology, and contemporary conditions and developments can be studied on the basis of his letters. Still widely unexplored is the history of the tradition of his letters and letter collections. In the medium term a new critical edition is required, as the texts printed in the *Weimarer Ausgabe* do not meet all standards of modern philology.

Concerning the prefaces, in 1984 Helmar Junghans published the first paper on Luther's dedicatory prefaces²⁵ and in 1988 held a seminar about the interpretation of Luther's prefaces at the International Congress for Luther Research at Oslo.²⁶ A thorough survey of Luther's prefaces for books by other people was published by Philippe Büttgen in 1998.²⁷ More research is urgently needed. A comprehensive critical edition of all of Luther's prefaces would be desirable.

Primary Sources

The authoritative edition of Luther's *Table Talk* was made by Ernst Kroker for the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (*WA, TR*: 6 volumes, 1912-1921). A complete English edition is lacking. The older editions by Henry Bell (1652) and William Hazlitt (1848) are based on Aurifaber. The edition in *LW* 54 prepared by Theodore G. Tappert follows the *Weimarer Ausgabe* and adopts also its numbering though including only a tenth of the material.

The authoritative critical edition of Luther's own letters as well as the letters of others addressed to him is to be found in the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (*WA, B*: 18 volumes, 1930-1985). The American edition of Luther's works presents a selection of 325 letters only from Luther's hand in three volumes edited by Gottfried G. Krodel (*LW* 48-50). Due to the large number of additional documents the older two-volume edition by Preserved Smith is still useful.²⁸

In the older editions of Luther's works the prefaces were usually printed together in a separate section. The *Weimarer Ausgabe* departed from this custom and arranged them chronologically among the other writings. In vols. 59 and 60 of the American edition the majority of Luther's prefaces are presented together in English translation (except those prefaces that were assigned to other volumes of *LW* for thematic reasons).

Further Reading

Table Talk

Bärenfänger, Katharina, Volker Leppin, and Stefan Michel, ed. *Martin Luthers Tischreden: Neuansätze der Forschung*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

Bartmuß, Alexander. „Tischreden.“ In *Das Luther-Lexikon*. Edited by Volker Leppin and Gury Schneider-Ludorff, 686-696. Regensburg, Germany: Bückle & Böhm, 2014.

Beyer, Michael, „Tischreden“. In *Luther Handbuch*. Edited by Albrecht Beutel, 347-353. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

Junghans, Helmar. „Die Tischreden Martin Luthers“. In *Spätmittelalter, Luthers Reformation, Kirche in Sachsen: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*. By Helmar Junghans. Edited by Michael Beyer and Günther Wartenberg, 154-176. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001.

Stolt, Birgit. *Die Sprachmischung in Luthers Tischreden: Studien zum Problem der Zweisprachigkeit*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964.

Tappert, Theodore G. „Introduction“. In *LW 54*: ix-xxvi.

Letters

Arnold, Matthieu. *La Correspondance de Luther: Étude historique, littéraire et théologique*. Mainz, Germany: Zabern, 1996.

Ebeling, Gerhard. *Luthers Seelsorge: Theologie in der Vielfalt der Lebenssituationen an seinen Briefen dargestellt*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1997 .

Mennecke, Ute. „Briefe Luthers“. In *Das Luther-Lexikon*. Edited by Volker Leppin and Gury Schneider-Ludorff, 120-124. Regensburg, Germany: Bückle & Böhm, 2014.

Mennecke-Haustein, Ute. *Luthers Trostbriefe*. Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1989.

Schilling, Johannes. „Briefe“. In: *Luther Handbuch*. Edited by Albrecht Beutel, 340-346. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

Prefaces

Brown, Christopher Boyd. „Introduction to Volumes 59 and 60“. In *Luther's Works*, vol. 59. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown, xvii-xl. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011.

Büttgen, Philippe. „Luther et les livres des autres: Fonction du paratexte et statut du livre dans la Pensée du Réformateur“. In *Le pouvoir des livres à la Renaissance*. Edited by Dominique de Courcelles, 115-142. Paris: École des Chartes, 1998.

Junghans, Helmar. „Die Widmungsvorrede bei Martin Luther“. In: *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers*. Edited by Gerhard Hammer, 39-65. Cologne: Böhlau, 1985.

¹ *Tischreden oder Colloquia doct. Mart. Luthers ...*, ed. Johann Aurifaber (Eisleben, Germany: Gaubisch, 1566).

-
- ² Birgit Stolt, *Die Sprachmischung in Luthers Tischreden: Studien zum Problem der Zweisprachigkeit* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964). Cf. the critical assessment by Tappert in *LW* 54: xix-xxi.
- ³ Luther “never indicated by as much as a word that what [Cordatus] did displeased him” (*LW* 54: x).
- ⁴ “Omnia non prodest, Cordate, inscribere chartis, / Sed quaedam factum dissimulare decet” (*WA, TR* 2:310, no. 2068) = “Everything don’t try to tell / Silence would at times be well” (*LW* 54: xi).
- ⁵ Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele, “Beständeübersicht zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung der Tischreden Martin Luthers,” in *Martin Luthers Tischreden*, ed. Katharina Bärenfänger, Volker Leppin, and Stefan Michel (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 127-80.
- ⁶ Cf. *LW* 54: 206: “If I had kept only the letters that have been sent to me I could have filled a large building” (= *WA, TR* 3: 341, no. 3472).
- ⁷ Cf. the letter to Johann Rühl from June 29, 1534 (*WA, B* 7: 81-83, no. 2125).
- ⁸ Cf. the directory of his correspondents in *WA, B* 16: 115-149.
- ⁹ Johannes Schilling, “Briefe,” in *Luther Handbuch*, ed. Albrecht Beutel (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 340.
- ¹⁰ Vinzenz Obsopoeus, ed., *Martini Lutheri Epistolarum Farrago* (Hagenau: Johann Setzer, 1525).
- ¹¹ *WA, TR* 4: 691-92, no. 5170: “When someone said: Doctor, your letters should be published, he answered: Indeed not! No one should do that. Although no thing causes me more labor and concern” (translated by WFS).
- ¹² For a detailed history and bibliography of the editions of Luther’s letters see *WA, B* 14:353-632.
- ¹³ Cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117-136, 161-294.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Philippe Büttgen, “Luther et les livres des autres: Fonction du paratexte et statut du livre dans la Pensée du Réformateur,” in *Le pouvoir des livres à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: École des Chartes, 1998) 115-42, 124.
- ¹⁵ See *LW* 59: xxiii-xxvi.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Carolyn Schneider, “Luther’s preface to Bugenhagen’s edition of Athanasius,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003): 226-30.
- ¹⁷ Preserved Smith, *Luther’s Table Talk: A critical study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1907).
- ¹⁸ Stolt, *Sprachmischung*.
- ¹⁹ Nicole de Laharpe, *Image de l’autre et image de soi. Les stéréotypes nationaux dans les “Tischreden” de Luther* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).
- ²⁰ Katharina Bärenfänger, Volker Leppin, and Stefan Michel, eds., *Martin Luthers Tischreden: Neuansätze der Forschung* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).
- ²¹ Theodor Lockemann, *Technische Studien zur Luthers Briefen an Friedrich den Weisen* (Leipzig: Voigtländer, 1913).
- ²² Karl Trüdinger, *Luthers Briefe und Gutachten an weltliche Obrigkeiten zur Durchführung der Reformation* (Münster, Germany: Aschendorff, 1975).
- ²³ Ute Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe* (Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1989); Gerhard Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge. Theologie in der Vielfalt der Lebenssituationen an seinen Briefen dargestellt* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).
- ²⁴ Matthieu Arnold, *La Correspondance de Luther: Étude historique, littéraire et théologique* (Mainz, Germany: Zabern, 1996).
- ²⁵ Helmar Junghans, “Die Widmungsvorrede bei Martin Luther,” in *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers*, ed. Gerhard Hammer (Cologne: Böhlau, 1985), 39-65.
- ²⁶ See the report of Theodor Dieter, “Die Interpretation von Vorreden Luthers,” *Lutherjahrbuch* 57 (1990): 271-274.
- ²⁷ Büttgen, “Luther et les livres des autres”.
- ²⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Correspondence*, 2 vols., ed. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913-1918).