

*QUO PROPRIOR LUTHERO,
EO MELIOR THEOLOGUS*
(“The Closer to Luther,
the Better the Theologian”)

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In what did Luther’s greatness consist? . . . Luther’s greatness lies in the greatness of his childlike faith. . . . Luther believed, believed, believed. That is the secret of his strength and his greatness. . . . All things are possible for him who believes. That has proven true in him. Luther believed the Lord like Abraham. That is his most striking characteristic. How simply, like a child, how hopefully and firmly, how confidently and unshakably the man believed! We simply recall the burning of the papal bull, Worms, the stay at the Wartburg, his letter to the elector while leaving the Wartburg, in which he wrote to him, “I come in the protection of one much higher than electors; indeed I maintain, I will protect your Electoral Grace more, than you protect me; whoever believes the most will here protect the most.”² His letters testify to this childlike and yet heroic faith, right from the first, dangerous time. But even every writing, every work of Luther, all his great blows against Rome, against Münzer and the peasants, against the sacramental enthusiasts, his monumental writings on the Lord’s Supper and the proper interpretation of Scripture, his commentary on Galatians, his book on the captive will, his arrangement of the German worship service, his catechisms, his fight at Marburg, his stay at the Coburg, his attitude toward the Smalcald League, his Bible translation, his position on the council which was finally announced, his Smalcald Articles, his firmness against Bucer, his final renunciation of

¹WLQ 14:73,74,76,77. Translated by Andrew Hussman; edited and excerpted by James L. Langbartels. Full text available at: <http://www.studiumexcitare.com/content/128>.

²From Luther’s March 5, 1522 letter to Elector Frederick: “I have written this so Your Electoral Grace might know that I am going to Wittenberg under a far higher protection than the Elector’s. I have no intention of asking Your Electoral Grace for protection. Indeed I think I shall protect Your Electoral Grace more than you are able to protect me. And if I thought that Your Electoral Grace could and would protect me, I should not go. The sword ought not and cannot help a matter of this kind. God alone must do it—and without the solicitude and co-operation of men. Consequently he who believes the most can protect the most. And since I have the impression that Your Electoral Grace is still quite weak in faith, I can by no means regard Your Electoral Grace as the man to protect and save me.” LW 48:391.

the Swiss, his confession about the Lord's Supper, his last powerful writing against the Papacy, his hymns and prayers, in short, every writing and every deed of Luther up until his childlike, joyful death is a testament to his simple, joyful, often burdened, but firm, unshakable, heroic faith in Christ and his grace, in God and his promises, and in the written word.

Whoever up till now is not yet at home with Luther should in this Luther-year begin with the serious study of Luther and look at Luther's faith with his own eyes. . . One may study with great precision those writings of Luther to which the pending questions of the time point. But in addition to that one may read continually Luther's main works in chronological order, and do not pass over the letters to his friends, for in these Luther often reveals himself according to his most intimate sides and inner heart. In this anniversary year [1917] everything which Luther has written should interest us. But there is by all means too much, and some, especially from his first period, is unimportant and unripe. We would advise beginning with the significant writings of the year 1520, that is: *To the Christian Nobility* [LW 44:115-217], *On the Babylonian Captivity* [LW 36:3-126], *On the Freedom of a Christian Man* [LW 31:327-377], *Against the Bull of the Antichrist* [LW 70/71], also the sermon on good works [LW 44:15-114]. From the next years the *Warning against the Rebellion* [LW 45:51-74], *Warning against the Contempt of the Word*, the writings *on the Mass and its Misuse* [LW 36:127-230], on the *Spiritual and Monastic Vows* [LW 44:243-400], *That a Christian Congregation has Right and Power*, etc. [LW 39:301-314], then *To the Councilors* [LW 45:339-378], *Sermon on the Chief Points of a Christian Life* (both from 1524), *Against the Heavenly Prophets* [LW 40:73-223], *Against the Robbing. . . Peasants* [LW 46:45-55], *German Mass*, etc. [LW 53:51-90]; from the next years the truly powerful controversial writings on the Lord's Supper against the Zwinglians [LW 36:329-361; 37:3-372], from the year 1530 the sermon that *One Should Bring Children to School* [LW 46:207-258] (it should be published today as a pamphlet and distributed among our people, as well as *To the Councilors*), *Letter on Translating* [LW 35:175-202], all writing on the *Keys* [LW 40:321-377]; from the year 1532 the writing *On Those who Creep In and Those who Preach on the Street Corners* [LW 40:379-394] (which would produce with one blow clarity over the doctrine of the ministry), then *On the Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* [LW 38:139-214]. From the year 1535 above all the Detailed Explanation of the *Letter to the Galatians* [LW 26-27]; from the years 1537-1540 the writings *Against the Antinomians* [LW 47:99-119] and *On Councils and Churches* [LW 41:3-178]. And his valuable *Interpretation of the Psalms* no one may leave unread [LW 10-14,64,65]. Finally, Luther's *Confessions on the Lord's*

Supper [LW 38:279-319] and *Against the Papacy at Rome Established by the Devil* [LW 41:257-376]. Luther's "best" book, *That the Free Will is Nothing* [LW 33:3-295], from the year 1525, remains, like the strongest food, best for last. It can cause the beginner great troubles.

Of all the editions of Luther the St. Louis is the most suitable for the needs of the spiritual teacher and the people in every connection. Whoever cannot purchase it, buy from our publishing house the Buchwald of ten octavo volumes for \$12.00. It contains just the main writings.³ But we should make use of this Luther-year in order to move the congregations to purchase a St. Louis edition for the sacristy. The Weimar (Kaiser) edition is of no use for the typical pastor.

³Georg Buchwald, ed. *Luthers Werke für das christliche Haus* (Braunschweig: C. S. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1889-1892).