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GUIDE TO MARTIN LUTHER'S
DE SERVO ARBITRIO (1525)

1. Sources and literature

The dispute between Erasmus and Luther is evident in their correspondence since 1516. Important letters are printed in German translation in *W²* (Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften, hg. v. Johann Georg Walch, vol. 18: Reformations-Schriften, 1888), and the editorial introductions to the editions trace the discussion. In 1524, Erasmus published his treatise *De libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio* (VD16 E 3147), to which Luther responded in 1525 with *De servo arbitrio* (VD16 L 6660). Erasmus' *Diatribē* has not yet been edited in the Amsterdam edition (Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi [ASD]), so that researchers have to use either the Leiden edition (Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera Omnia, vol. 9, 1706, 1215–1248 [LB]) or Johann von Walter's edition (Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio*, 1910), which also forms the basis of the Latin-German study edition in Erasmus' *Ausgewählte Schriften* (ed. Werner Welzig, vol. 4, 1969, 1–195 [AS]). Luther's book was edited in WA 18:551–787 by Albert Freitag, with a detailed introduction; both the edition and the introduction are still usable, and because WA 18 is often cited in the research literature, it is advisable to have this edition at hand. In twentieth-century Germany, many also used the edition in *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* published by Otto Clemen (vol. 3, 1929, 94–293 [CI]). As part of *Studienausgabe* of Luther's writings published in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Latin text was re-edited, with the introduction and commentary reflecting more recent research (vol. 3, 1983, 170–356 [LStA]). All three editions mentioned (WA 18 – CI 3 – LStA 3) can be used and cited for academic work. The authoritative English translation is that published by Philip S. Watson in *Luther's Works* (vol. 33, 1972 [LW]). Erasmus' and Luther's tracts are available in one volume in English translation: *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, translated and edited by E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, 1969. And there is a selection from Erasmus' three contributions to the controversy together with a selection from Luther's *De servo arbitrio* in English translation: *Erasmus and Luther. The Battle over Free Will*, ed. Clarence H. Miller, 2012.

Those seeking basic information about *De servo arbitrio* can consult not only the introductions to the editions and translations, but also the accounts of Luther's biography and theology, where the book and the controversy to which it belongs are discussed. In addition, there are numerous monographs and articles that either deal with *De servo arbitrio* or discuss the writing in other contexts. Many of these are studies of systematic theology, because Luther's controversy with Erasmus invites discussion of a number of fundamental questions: the relationship between divine governance (*praedestinatio*) and human freedom (*liberum arbitrium*), the nature and understanding of the Bible (*claritas scripturae*), the distinction between the hidden and revealed God (*deus absconditus/revelatus*), and the certainty of faith (*assertio*). The following selection is arranged by publication date and contains contributions that are oriented toward either church history or systematic theology:

- KARL ZICKENDRAHT, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit*, 1909
- FERDINAND KATTENBUSCH, *Deus absconditus bei Luther* (in: *Festgabe für D. Dr. Julius Kaftan zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, 1920, 170–214)
- ERDMANN SCHOTT, *Luthers Lehre vom servum arbitrium in ihrer theologischen Bedeutung* (*Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 7, 1930, 399–430)
- MARTIN DOERNE, *Gottes Ehre am gebundenen Willen. Evangelische Grundlagen und theologische Spitzensätze in De servo arbitrio* (*Lutherjahrbuch* 20, 1938, 45–92)

- JOHN DILLENBERGER, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus and its Significance for Religious Thought*, 1953
- HANS JOACHIM IWAND, *Die Freiheit des Christen und die Unfreiheit des Willens* [1957] (in: Id., *Um den rechten Glauben. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 1959, 247–268)
- HELLMUT BANDT, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott. Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie*, 1958
- RUDOLF HERMANN, *Von der Klarheit der Heiligen Schrift. Untersuchungen und Erörterungen über Luthers Lehre von der Schrift in "De servo arbitrio"* [1958] (in: Id., *Studien zur Theologie Luthers und des Luthertums*, 1981, 170–255)
- ALFRED ADAM, *Der Begriff "Deus absconditus" bei Luther nach Herkunft und Bedeutung* (*Lutherjahrbuch* 30, 1963, 97–106)
- HARRY J. MCSORLEY, *Luthers Lehre vom unfreien Willen nach seiner Hauptschrift De Servo Arbitrio im Licht der biblischen und kirchlichen Tradition*, 1967 (English translation: *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will*, 1969)
- KLAUS SCHWARZWÄLLER, *Sibboleth. Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio seit Theodosius Harnack. Ein systematisch-kritischer Überblick*, 1969
- KLAUS SCHWARZWÄLLER, *Theologia Crucis. Luthers Lehre von der Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio*, 1525, 1970
- HERMANN DÖRRIES, *Erasmus oder Luther. Eine kirchengeschichtliche Einführung* (in: *Kerygma und Melos, Festschrift Christhard Mahrenholz*, 1970, 533–570)
- GOTTFRIED KRODEL, *Erasmus-Luther: One Theology, One Method, Two Results* (*Concordia Theological Monthly* 41, 1970, 648–667)
- LINWOOD URBAN, *Was Luther a Thoroughgoing Determinist?* (*Journal of Theological Studies* 22, 1971, 113–139)
- OTTO KUSS, *Über die Klarheit der Schrift. Historische und hermeneutische Überlegungen zu der Kontroverse des Erasmus und des Luther über den freien oder versklavten Willen* (in: *Schriftauslegung. Beiträge zur Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments und im Neuen Testament*, ed. Josef Ernst, 1972, 89–149)
- EBERHARD JÜNGEL, *Quae supra nos nihil ad nos. Eine Kurzformel der Lehre vom verborgenem Gott, im Anschluß an Luther interpretiert* [1972] (in: Id., *Theologische Erörterungen*, vol. 2: *Entsprechungen: Gott – Wahrheit – Mensch*, 2002, 202–251)
- BRIAN A. GERRISH, "To the unknown God." *Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God* (*Journal of Religion* 53, 1973, 263–292)
- ROBERT D. SHOFNER, *Luther on the 'Bondage of the Will': An Analytical-Critical Essay* (*Scottish Journal of Theology* 26, 1973, 24–39)
- JOHN W. O'MALLEY, *Erasmus and Luther, Continuity and Discontinuity as Key to Their Conflict* (*Sixteenth Century Journal* 5/2, 1974, 57–65)
- BERNHARD LOHSE, *Marginalien zum Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther* [1975] (in: Id., *Evangelium in der Geschichte. Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, 1988, 118–137)
- DIETRICH KERLEN, *Assertio. Die Entwicklung von Luthers theologischem Anspruch und der Streit mit Erasmus von Rotterdam*, 1976

- HEINRICH BORNKAMM, Martin Luther in der Mitte seines Lebens. Das Jahrzehnt zwischen dem Wormser und dem Augsburger Reichstag, 1979, 368–405
- GEORGES CHANTRAINE, Erasme et Luther – libre e serf arbitre. Étude historique et théologique, 1981
- MARJORIE O’ROURKE BOYLE, Rhetoric and Reform: Erasmus’ Civil Dispute with Luther, 1983
- JÖRG BAUR, Zur Aktualität des neuen Ansatzes in Luthers Theologie [1983] (in: ID., Luther und seine klassischen Erben. Theologische Aufsätze und Forschungen, 1993, 29–45)
- Humanismus und Reformation – Martin Luther und Erasmus von Rotterdam in den Konflikten ihrer Zeit, ed. Otto Hermann Pesch, 1985 [essay collection]
- GÜNTER BADER, Assertio. Drei fortlaufende Lektüren zu Skepsis, Narrheit und Sünde bei Erasmus und Luther, 1985
- JAMES D. TRACY, Two Erasmuses, Two Luthers: Erasmus’ Strategy in Defense of De Libero Arbitrio (Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 78, 1987, 37–60)
- JOACHIM MEHLHAUSEN, Forma Christianismi. Die theologische Bewertung eines kleinen katechetischen Lehrstücks durch Luther und Erasmus von Rotterdam (Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 87, 1990, 437–455)
- REINHARD BRANDT, Die ermöglichte Freiheit. Sprachkritische Rekonstruktion der Lehre vom unfreien Willen, 1992
- Widerspruch. Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Erasmus von Rotterdam, ed. Kari Kopperi, 1997 [essay collection]
- ROBERT ROSIN, Reformers, the Preacher, and Skepticism. Luther, Brenz, Melanchthon, and Ecclesiastes, 1997, 79–150
- WERNER OTTO, Verborgene Gerechtigkeit. Luthers Gottesbegriff nach seiner Schrift De servo arbitrio als Antwort auf die Theodizeefrage, 1998
- HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, Die Rolle der Kirchenväter im Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther. Eine neue Besinnung (in: Die Patristik in der Bibelexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts, ed. David C. Steinmetz, 1999, 49–70)
- THOMAS REINHUBER, Kämpfender Glaube. Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von De servo arbitrio, 2000
- MELANIE BEINER, Intentionalität und Geschöpflichkeit. Die Bedeutung von Martin Luthers Schrift “Vom unfreien Willen” für die theologische Anthropologie, 2000
- ROBERT KOLB, Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method. From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord, 2005
- THOMAS KAUFMANN, Luther und Erasmus [2005] (in: Luther Handbuch, ed. Albrecht Beutel, ³ 2017, 173–183)
- GERHARD O. FORDE, The Captivation of the Will. Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage, 2005
- THEODOR MAHLMANN, Die Interpretation von Luthers De servo arbitrio bei orthodoxen lutherischen Theologen, vor allem bei Sebastian Schmidt (1617–1696) (in: Luthers Erben. Studien zur Rezeptionsgeschichte der reformatorischen Theologie Luthers, eds. Notger Slenczka and Walter Sparr, 2005, 73–136)
- GREGORY B. GRAYBILL, Evangelical Free Will. Philipp Melanchthon’s Doctrinal Journey on the Origins of Faith, 2010

- MARKUS MATTHIAS, Zur Auseinandersetzung um Martin Luthers “De servo arbitrio” im 16. Jahrhundert (Luther-Bulletin 19, 2010, 40–67)
- EILERT HERMS, Opus Dei gratiae: Cooperatio Dei et hominum. Luthers Darstellung seiner Rechtfertigungslehre in De servo arbitrio (Lutherjahrbuch 78, 2011, 61–135)
- ANDERS KRAL, Valla-Style Determinism and the Intellectual Background of Luther’s De servo arbitrio (Harvard Theological Review 108, 2015, 402–422)
- KLAUS W. MÜLLER, Zur “voluntas Dei abscondita” bei Martin Luther. Tradition und Innovation (Lutherjahrbuch 84, 2017, 118–169)
- WILLEM VAN VLASTUIN, Sola Scriptura: The Relevance of Luther’s Use of Sola Scriptura in De Servo Arbitrio (in: Sola Scriptura. Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture, Authority, and Hermeneutics, eds Hans Burger et al., 2018, 243–259)
- STEPHEN PAULSON, Luther’s Outlaw God, vol. 1–3, 2018–21
- PATRICK BAHL, “Solus spiritus”? Luthers Rede vom Heiligen Geist in “De servo arbitrio” zwischen Abgrenzungsargumentation und Unterscheidungslehre (Lutherjahrbuch 88, 2021, 69–112)
- Luther und Erasmus über Freiheit. Rezeption und Relevanz eines gelehrten Streits, eds Jörg Noller and Georg Sans, 2020 [essay collection]
- MIKKA RUOKANEN, Trinitarian grace in Martin Luther’s The Bondage of the Will, 2021
- MARKUS MATTHIAS, Der Briefwechsel zwischen Martin Luther und Erasmus von Rotterdam. Eine sprachlich-rhetorische Analyse (in: Briefkultur der Reformationszeit, ed. Johannes Schilling, 2023, 273–298)
- PATRICK BAHL, Bibelhermeneutik im Willensstreit. Auslegungsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des exegetischen Schlagabtausches über Ez 18 (Lutherjahrbuch 92, 2025, 137–161)
- OLLI-PEKKA VAINIO, Bound Choice (in: Id., Luther under Scrutiny. Knowledge, Will, and Metaphysics, 2025, 69–97)
- OLLI-PEKKA VAINIO, Metatheological Ramifications of the Debate between Erasmus and Luther. Reflections on Systematic-Theological Positions (Lutherjahrbuch 92, 2025, 294–306)
- ROBERT KOLB, Luther’s Legacy on Predestination in the Context of On Bound Choice (Lutheran Quarterly 40, 2026, 27–50)

2. A chronology of the debate between Luther and Erasmus

The following list contains only a few (mostly Latin) quotations. The correspondences of Erasmus (Allen = *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. Percy S. Allen), Luther (WA.Br = *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, section 4: Briefwechsel) and Melanchthon (MBW = *Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Heinz Scheible) contain many more passages referring to the debate between Luther and Erasmus.

Fourth and fifth centuries

Theologians in the Western Mediterranean, especially Augustine, establish voluntarism as a key theological concept.

High and Late Middle Ages

Scholastic theologians develop a doctrine of justification that preserves the sovereignty of divine grace while acknowledging the importance of human participation in the process of salvation. This doctrine assigns a role to free will (*liberum arbitrium*) in the process.

Fifteenth century

Renaissance humanism emerges, offering a view of humanity that blends elements of both optimism and pessimism about human nature. This perspective varies in its emphasis on human ability and acceptance of Christian doctrines regarding sin and grace.

Summer 1516

Luther studies Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* (VD16 B 4196) and uses it for his lecture on the Epistle to the Romans, without criticizing its content.

October 19, 1516: Luther to George Spalatin

“Quae me in Erasmo, homine eruditissimo, movent, haec sunt, [...] quod in apostolo interpretando iustitiam operum seu legis seu propriam (ita enim appellat apostolus [Rom. 10:3]) intelligit ceremoniales illas et figurales observantias, Deinde de peccato originali (quod utique admittit) non plane velit apostolum loqui cap. V ad Romanos. [...] Ego sane in hoc dissentire ab Erasmo non dubito, quod Augustino in scripturis interpretandis tantum posthabeo Hieronymum, quantum ipse Augustinum in omnibus Hieronymo posthabet. [...] Nequaquam igitur iustitia legis seu factorum tantum est in ceremoniis, sed rectius etiam in universi decalogi factis. [...] Officium itaque et amici et Christiani facias precor et Erasmus de iis certum face. Cuius auctoritatem sicut spero et cupio futuram celeberrimam, ita metuo, ne per eandem multi sibi accipiant patrocinium defendendae illius literalis, id est mortuae intelligentiae, qua plenus est Lyranus commentarius et ferme omnes post Augustinum” (WA.Br 1:70,4–37, no. 27). Spalatin forwards this criticism to Erasmus (Allen 2:417–49, no. 501), but does not receive a reply.

March 1, 1517, Luther to John Lang

“Erasmus nostrum lego, et indies decrescit mihi animus erga eum; placet quidem, quod tam religiosos quam sacerdotes non minus constanter quam erudite arguit et damnat in-

veteratae huius et veterosae incitiae; sed timeo, ne Christum et gratiam Dei non satis promoveat, in qua multo est quam Stapulensis ignorantior: humana praevalent in eo plus quam divina. Quanquam invitus eum iudico, facio tamen, ut te praemoneam, ne omnia legas, imo accipias sine iudicio. Tempora enim sunt periculosa hodie, et video, quod non ideo quispiam sit christianus vere sapiens, quia Graecus sit et Hebraeus, quando et Beatus Hieronymus quinque linguis monoglosson Augustinum non adaequarit, licet Erasmo aliter sit longe visum. Sed aliud est iudicium eius, qui arbitrio hominis nonnihil tribuit, aliud eius, qui praeter gratiam nihil novit' (WA.Br 1:90,15–26, no. 35).

January 18, 1518, Luther to Spalatin

“Ego denique apud eos, id est omnes, qui bonas literas vel oderunt studio vel nesciunt ignavia, Erasmus summis laudibus semper effero atque tueor quod possum, omni industria cavens, ne evomam ea, in quibus dissentio, ne mea quoque voce suam invidiam in illum confirmet. Quanquam sint quam multa in Erasmo, quae mihi ad cognitionem Christi longe aliena videantur. Si tamen ut theologus, non ut grammaticus loqui debeo, alioquin nihil eruditius, nihil ingeniosius viderit vel ipse Hieronymus, tanto praedicatus ab Erasmo praeconio. Atque hoc meum de Erasmo iudicium si alteri faeceris notum, tum scias amicitiae iura te violasse” (WA.Br 1:133,17–26, no. 57).

March 5, 1518

Erasmus sends Luther's theses on indulgences to Thomas More (Allen 3:239,37, no. 785).

Summer 1518

In the preface the new edition of the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus subtly approves of Luther's criticism of indulgences (Allen 3:366,185–367,212, no. 858)

September 4, 1518

Through Wolfgang Capito, Erasmus comes into contact with Luther. Erasmus approves of Luther's theses on indulgences: “quam videlicet honorifice, quam candide tuam veniarum istam disputationem miratur” (WA.Br 1:197,2–198,3, no. 91).

October 17, 1518

Erasmus expresses his sympathy for Luther's criticism of indulgences to John Lang: “Eleutherium audio probari ab optimis quibusque; sed aiunt illum in suis scriptis sui dissimilem esse. Puto illae conclusiones placuerunt omnibus, exceptis paucis des purgatorio; quod isti nolunt sibi eripi” (Allen 3:409,12–15). He criticizes Prierias' “insulsissimam responsionem” (409,16). At the same time, however, he cautions against approaching the necessary renewal of the Papal Church too openly: “haud scio an expediat hoc vlcus aperte tangere” (410,19–20).

March 28, 1519

Luther praises Erasmus and wants to establish friendly relations with him (WA.Br 1:361–363, no. 163).

April 14, 1519

Erasmus expresses both sympathy and distance toward Luther in his letter to Frederick the Wise: “Lutherus mihi tam ignotus est quam cui ignotissimus, vt suspectus esse non queam, quasi faueam amico. Huius lucubrationes nec tueri meum est nec improbare, vt quas hactenus non legerim nisi carptim. Certe vitam hominis nemo qui nouit non probat; quae cum longissime absit ab omni suspicione auariciae atque ambitionis, et morum innocentia vel apud ethnicos fauorem inuenit. Quam non congruit mansuetudini theologicae, protinus ac ne perlecto quidem libro tam immaniter debacchari in nomen ac famam probi viri; idque apud imperitam plebeculam, quae prorsus caret iudicio! praesertim cum ille disputanda proposuerit, cum omnium iudicio sese submiserit, quorum oportuit et quorum non oportuit. Nemo monuit, nemo docuit, nemo reuicit. Tantum vociferantur haeticum, seditiosis clamoribus ad lapides prouocant. Dicas eos sitire sanguinem humanum, non salutem animarum. Quo inuisius est hereseos nomen auribus Christianis, hoc minus committendum est vt temere in quenquam impingatur. Non statim quiuis error haeresis est, neque protinus hereticum est quicquid huic aut illi displicet. Neque semper fidei negocium agunt qui praetexunt huiusmodi splendorum titulos. Imo plerique suum agunt negocium, vel questui suo consulentes vel tyrannidi. Quin praecipiti ledendi studio sepe criminantur in alio quod ipsi domi probant” (Allen 3:530,66–87, no. 939).

April 22, 1519

Erasmus speaks favorably of Luther to Melanchthon: “Martini Lutheri vitam apud nos nemo non probat, de doctrina variant sententiae. Ipse libros illius nondum legi. Quaedam admonuit recte, sed vtinam tam feliciter quam libere!” (Allen 3:540,33–35, no. 947).

May 30, 1519

Erasmus responds kindly to Luther’s letter of March 1519 (Allen 3:605–607, No. 980). Erasmus finds himself suspected of being a sympathizer of Luther. However, it seems he views Luther critically.

October 19, 1519

After being accused of sympathizing with Luther during his time in Leuven, Erasmus explains his relationship with Luther in a letter to Cardinal Albrecht of Mainz. The letter is intended for wider distribution and can therefore be considered a public statement: “Lutherus mihi tam ignotus est quam qui ignotissimus; cuius libros nondum vacauit legere, nisi quod carptim degustauit quaedam. Si bene scripsit, nihil mihi debetur laudis; sin secus, nihil est quod mihi imputetur. Illud video, vt quisque vir est optimus, ita illius scriptis minime offendi: non quod probent omnia, opinor, sed quod hoc animo illum legant quo nos legimus Cyprianum ac Hieronymum, imo etiam Petrum Lombardum, nimirum ad multa conuenientes. Libros Lutheri editos dolebam; et cum cepissent primum ostendi libelli nescio qui, pro viribus obstabam ne ederentur, praecipue ob hoc, quod vererem ne quid tumultus ex his oriretur. Scripserat ad me Lutherus epistolam bene Christianam, mea quidem sententia, et respondi, obiter admonens hominem ne quid seditiose, ne quid in Romanum Pontificem, ne quid arrogantius aut iracundius scriberet, sed doctrinam Euangelicam animo sincero cum omni mansuetudine praedicaret. Id feci ciuilitate, quo magis proficerem. Ad-

didi hie esse qui illi fauerent, quo magis ad horum iudicium sese accommodaret. Haec quidam stultissimi sic interpretati sunt quasi Luthero fauerem: cum istorum nemo hominem adhuc monuerit, ipse solus admonui. Ego Lutheri nec accusator sum nec patronus nec reus. De spiritu hominis non ausim iudicare; est enim difficillimum, praesertim in partem peiorem. Et tamen si illi fauerem vt viro bono, quod fatentur et hostes; si vt reo, quod iuratis etiam iudicibus permittunt leges; si vt oppresso, quod dictat humanitas – si vt oppresso ab his qui simulato praetextu deuotis animis tendunt aduersus bonas literas, quae tandem esset inuidia, modo ne causae me admiscerem? Postremo Christianum est, opinor, sic fauere Luthero vt, si innocens est, nolim eum improborum factionibus opprimi; sin errat, velim sanari, non perdi: hoc enim magis congruit cum exemplo Christi, qui iuxta Prophetiae testimonium linum fumigans non extinxit, neque baculum confractum comminuit” (Allen 4:100,38–101,68, no. 1033).

November 1519

In his letter accompanying a new edition of his *Colloquia*, Erasmus defends his correspondence with Luther, which became public knowledge through the publication of his letter from May 1519 (→ Allen 3, no. 980): “Non me pudet respondisse Lutherio; qui prouocatus responderem et Turcae. Bonis illius faueo, non malis; imo Christo faueo, non illi. Et sic respondeo vt illum de multis admoneam. Admonui ciuilitate, quod ita plus profici sciam. Sic, opinor, illi fauent permulti, quemadmodum Cyprianus fauit Tertulliano, multi Lactantio, plures Origeni. Quod tamen citra fraudem Lutherii dictum velim. Ego illius nec accusator sum nec patronus nec iudex. Viderint ii quibus hanc prouintiam nominatim delegauit Rhomanus Pontifex. Quanquam quae tandem inuidia sit extra causam fauere primum viro bono (quod fatentur et hostes), deinde pectori quod, etiamsi iustis de causis exasperatum plus iusto incanduit, tamen alio vocatum possit esse egregium organum Christi, qui non extinxit linum fumigans, sed excitauit; longe dissimilis istis qui perdere malunt quam mederi, opprimere quam docere. Permittit legum seueritas etiam iuratis iudicibus vt faueant reo. Dictat humanitas vt faueatur oppresso. Haec loquor et a causa Lutherii alienissimus, et ab omni genere dissidii, vt si quis alius, auersus, Porro epistolam, quae parum bene intellecta et peius interpretata dedit occasionem huic suspicioni, et ipse Lutherius aeditam dolet; id quod proximis suis literis liquido testatur” (Allen 4:121,27–122,47, no. 1041).

1520

In numerous letters and conversations, Erasmus advocates that Luther’s case be heard before an arbitration tribunal and that a settlement be reached (Allen no. 1156, et al.). He considers it possible “rem sic esse componendam, ut et Pontifex auferret laudem clementiae et Lutherus obedientiae” (Allen 4:482,32–33, no. 1199). On November 5, 1520, Erasmus speaks with Elector Frederick the Wise in Cologne. He agreed in part with Luther: “cum esset interrogatus Coloniae a duci Fridrico cur damnaretur Lutherus quid peccasset respondit: Multum peccavit, qui tetigit ventres monachorum et coronam papae” (WA.TR 1:55,33–35, no. 131). However, he also criticizes Luther’s “immodica maledicentia et arrogantiae species” to the Elector (*Spongia aduersus aspergines Hutteni*: ASD 9/1:182,420–28). During this period, Erasmus is warned by the imperial advisor bishop Aloisius Marlianus, “ne me admiscerem Lutheri negoti” (Allen 4:459,10–11, no. 1195). Rather than the growing

criticism of his hesitancy to take sides against Luther, it is Erasmus' reading of *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae* that makes him increasingly critical of Luther (ASD 9/1:182,424; Allen 4:444,7, no. 1186; 494,25, no. 1203; 537,38, no. 1217). However, he does not yet actively participate in the campaign against Luther and his followers.

August 1, 1520

In his response to a letter from Luther that has since been lost, Erasmus once again addresses the disputes surrounding Luther and the accusation that Erasmus sympathized with him (WA.Br 2:155–59, no. 321). The distance Erasmus puts between himself and Luther in this letter is clearer than in his letter from May 1519. Erasmus advises Luther not to fuel the conflict and to keep Erasmus' name out of it.

September 9, 1520

In a letter to Gerhard Geldenhauer, Erasmus criticizes the excommunication bull and the campaign against Luther: “Male metuo misero Luthero: sic vndique feruet coniuratio, sic vndique irritantur in illum principes, ac praecipue Leo Pontifex. Vtinam Lutherus meum sequutus consilium ab odiosis illis ac seditiosis abstinisset! Plus erat fructus ac minus invidiae. Parum esset vnum hominem perire: si res haec illis succedet, nemo feret illorum insolentiam. Non conquiescant donec linguas ac bonas literas omnes subuerterint. Iam Capnionem rursus aggrediuntur, tantum odio Lutheri: qui me dissuadente nomen illius suo negocio admiscens, et illum degrauavit invidia, et sibi nihil omnino profuit. Disputauit Ecius; Hoochstratus promiserat nescio quos syllogismos, quibus omnes cedere cogentur. Disputabant atque etiam scribebant Louanienses. Expectabatur iudicium Academiae Parisiensis, et ecce res de repente in Bullam et in fumum exitura videtur. Excusa est Bulla formidabilis, sed quam Pontifex vetuit publicari. Vereor ne res in grauem tumultum exeat. Qui haec suadent Pontifici, dant illi mea sententia consilium, non dico quam pium, sed certe periculosum. Res e pessimis fontibus primum orta est, deinde pessimis rationibus hucusque prouecta. Ex odio bonarum literarum et stoliditate monachorum primum orta est haec tragoedia. Deinde magnis conuiciis, maliciosis conspirationibus huc vesaniae res progressa est. Quo tendant nulli dubium est, nimirum vt oppressis his literis quas illi nesciunt, impune regnent cum sua barbarie. Ego me huic tragoediae non misceo. Alioqui paratus est vel episcopatus, si velim in Lutherum scribere. Mihi dolet sic obrui doctrinam Euangelicam, nosque cogi tantum, non doceri; et doceri ea a quibus abhorrent et sacrae literae et sensus communis” (Allen 4:339,7–340,34, no. 1141).

September 13, 1520

In a letter to Pope Leo X, Erasmus evaluates Luther in a benevolent yet distant way: “Lutherum non noui, nec libros illius vnquam legi, nisi forte decem aut duodecim pagellas, easque carptim. Ex his quae tum degustavi, visus est mihi probe compositus ad mysticas literas veterum more explanandas, quando nostra haec aetas immodice indulgebat argutis magis quam necessariis quaestionibus. Bonis igitur illius faui, non malis, imo gloriae Christi in illo faui. Ferme primus omnium odoratus sum periculum esse ne res exiret in tumultum; a quo sic abhorruui semper vt nemo magis. Proinde minis etiam egi cum Ioanne Frobenio typographo, ne quid operum illius exeuderet. Scripsi tum crebro tum diligenter

amicis, admonerent hominem vt in scriptis meminisset Christianae mansuetudinis, seruiretque semper Ecclesiae tranquillitati” (Allen 4:345,13–24, no. 1143).

“Luthero ne tum quidem patrocinar cum vtcunque liberum esset fauere. Tantum impetendi modum improbabam, non Luthero consulens sed auctoritati theologorum. Videbam rem ex odio linguarum ac bonarum, vt vocant, literarum natam. Videbam acerbis odiis et seditiosis apud populum clamoribus rem geri, quibus nihil aliud efficiebant quam vt nobilitarent opera Lutheri, et vulgus hominum ad auiditatem legendi prouocarent. Si prius refellissent Lutherum et animis hominum exemissent, deinde libros exussissent, totum Lutherum citra tumultum orbis abolere poterant, siquidem id merebatur quod isti praedicant. Libera ac generosa ingenia doceri gaudent, cogi nolunt. Hoc consilium pro theologis aduersus Lutherum faciebat, nisi quidam perperam interpretarentur” (346,67–78).

November 17, 1520: Luther to Lazarus Spengler

“Erasmus und ich, will’s Gott, wollen wohl eins bleiben. Das ist wohl wahr, daß ich mit Philippo insgeheim zuweilen disputiere, wie nah oder weit Erasmus von dem Weg sei; das hat er auch und jedermann von mir zu tun ungefährlich und freundlichen Gewalt. Ich will niemand am ersten angreifen; mir ist genug, mich, so ich angegriffen werde, beschützen” (WA.Br 2:217,18–23, no. 353).

January 1521

In his *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum* Luther claims that the question of free will is of primary importance. In defense of his article 36 (i.e., “Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit, quod in se est, peccat mortaliter”, see WA 7:142–49) he states that this article is “omnium optimus et rerum nostrarum summa” (148,16). After having interpreted several Biblical statements on the question of free will, he concludes: “Male enim dixi, quod liberum arbitrium ante gratiam sit res de solo titulo, sed simpliciter debui dicere, ‘liberum arbitrium est figmentum in rebus seu titulus sine re’. Quia nulli est in manu sua quippiam cogitare mali aut boni, sed omnia (ut Viglephi articulus Constantiae damnatus recte docet) de necessitate absoluta eveniunt” (146,4–8).

May 8/26, 1521

The Edict of Worms accuses Luther of wrong teaching regarding liberum arbitrium: “Er bestetigt auch aus der heidnischen poeten gedicht, das kain freier will sei, der mainung, das alle ding in einer gewissen satzung steen” (DRTA.JR 2,647,1–3 [no. 93]).

May 10, 1521

In a lengthy letter, Erasmus attempts to convince Justus Jonas to distance himself from Luther and openly criticizes Luther (Allen 4:486–493, no. 1202).

May 24, 1521

Erasmus complains to William Warham about the imminent danger posed by Luther: “Ingentes turbas excitauit Lutherus; nec video finem, nisi Christus nostram temeritatem ita vertat, quemadmodum noctua solet Atheniensium stulta consilia bene fortunare. Vellem

Lutherus aut tacuisset quaedam aut aliter scripsisset. Nunc vereor ne sic vitemus hanc Scyllam vt incidamus in Charybdim multo perniciosiorem. Si istis qui ventris ae tyrannidis suae causa nihil non audent, res succedit, nihil superest nisi vt scribam epitaphium Christo nunquam reuicturo” (Allen 4:497,22–29, no. 1205).

May 27, 1521

In the dedication preface addressed to Beatus Rhenanus in the *Epistolae ad diversos*, Erasmus prepares his public change of position toward Luther: “At rursus horum temporum ratio fecit vt me eius consilii poeniteret. Iampridem magnis odiis flagrabant studia tuentium linguas ac bonas literas, et istorum qui sibi stultissime persuadent decedere suis commodis quicquid accrescit prouentui melioris literaturae. Mox Lutherana tragoedia in tantam exarsit contentionem, vt nec loqui tutum sit nec tacere. Rapiuntur in diuersum omnia, etiam quae optimo animo scribuntur: ne tempus quidem perpenditur quo scripsit aliquis, sed quod suo tempore recte scribebatur, transferunt in tempus incommodissimum” (Allen 4,499,42–50, no. 1206).

June 1521

In a letter to the theologians of Leuven, Erasmus distances himself from Luther and hints at the possibility of making a public statement: “Hactenus in illum non scripsi. Verum est. [...] Et tamen pro mea virili non deero, neque tranquillitati Ecclesiae Catholicae, neque veritati Euangelicae, neque dignitati Romani Pontificis, cum licebit. Et fortassis plus adferam momenti quam ii qui putant his tumultibus rem posse confici. Illud nobis videndum, ne sic oderimus Lutherum vt illius odio perdamus et ea quae sunt optima; et ita seruiamus dignitati nostrae vt non laedamus autoritatem Euangelicae veritatis, et ita faueamus hominum gloriae ne quid officiamus gloriae Christi” (Allen 4:539,138 and 539,146–540,153, no. 1217).

September 9, 1521, Luther to Spalatin

“Neque Capitonis neque Erasmi iudicium me tantillum mouet. Nihil alienum opinione sui apud me faciunt. Quin et hoc veritus sum, ne quando mihi cum alterutro negocium fieret, quando Erasmum a cognitione gratiae longinquum esse viderem, qui non ad crucem, sed ad pacem spectet in omnibus scriptis. Hinc omnia putat ciuili et beneuolentia quadam humanitatis tractanda gerendaque. Sed hanc non curat Behemoth neque hinc quicquam sese emendat” (WA.Br 2,387,2–7, no. 429).

October 1521

Erasmus leaves the Netherlands and moves to Basel.

April 1522

Erasmus mentions his plan to write against Luther and the accusations of Pelagianism against himself to Johannes Glapion, the emperor’s confessor: “Iam aggressus eram nonnihil libelli De finiendo negocio Lutherano; sed valetudo interrupit omnia studia. Interim oratione literisque permultos temperaui, mire Luthero addictos. Epistolis etiam aeditis declarau mihi nihil vnquam foederis fuisse cum vllo Lutherano, sed seditiosum negocium

mihi semper displicuisse. Iam hoc toti Germaniae sic notum est, vt nullus impendio Lutheranus mihi bene velit, quidam minitentur dentatos libellos, alii lacerent conuiciis, Pelagianum appellantes et palponem, non Euangelicae doctrinae praeconem. Me certe neque vita neque mors distrahat ab obedientia Ecclesiae et a synceritate fidei Christianae” (Allen 5:48,20–29, no. 1275).

May 28, 1522: Luther to an unknown recipient

“De praedestinatione sentire Mosellanum cum Erasmo antea novi; totus enim Erasmius est. Ego contra sentio Erasmus minus de praedestinatione scire vel scire sese ostentare, quam hactenus Sophistarum scholae sciverunt. Neque est, ut timeam, casurum me, nisi mutem sententiam. Non est Erasmus in hac re formidabilis, sicut neque in summa ferme tota rerum Christianarum. Potentior est veritas quam eloquentia, potior spiritum quam ingenium, maior fides quam eruditio. [...] Non provocabo Erasmus, sed neque provocatus semel atque iterum mox referiam. Tamen non videtur mihi consultum, ut vires eloquentiae suae in me instituat. Metuo enim non inveniet in Luthero Fabrum Stapulensem, neque possit gloriari, sicut de illo gloriatur: ‘Omnes gratulantur mihi, victum esse Gallum.’ Quod si se commiserit huius aleae, videbit Christum nec portas inferi nec potestates aeris formidantem. Et occurram balbutientissimus eloquentissimo Erasmo cum fiducia, nihili etiam habitae eius auctoritate, nomine et favore. Ego novi, quod sit in hoc homine, quandoquidem et Sataanae cogitationes noverimus, quamquam expecto, ut in dies magis revelet id, quod in me alit” (WA.Br 2:544,7–545,29, no. 499).

1522/23

In an exchange of letters with Pope Adrian VI, Erasmus discusses possible courses of action against Luther and the Protestant movement (Allen, nos. 1324, 1329, 1338, 1352). The Pope demands that Erasmus openly oppose Luther and come to Rome. Erasmus, on the other hand, proposes a combination of church reforms and efforts to reach an understanding.

February 1, 1523

In a letter to Marcus Laurinus, Erasmus discusses the question of free will in more detail, distancing himself from Luther. This passage reveals that Erasmus had previously shown little interest in the subject and could not fathom why it was so important to Luther. “Superest adhuc vnum crimen omnium maximum. In Paraphrasi, qua explico nonum caput Apostoli Pauli ad Romanos, tribuo minimum quiddam libero arbitrio, videlicet sequutus Originem et Hieronymum. Principio quum paraphrasis sit commentarii genus, quum profitear me in plerisque sequi probatos ac priscos interpretes, quid admissum est piaculi, si sequor alicubi Originem et Hieronymum, autores, vt arbitror, in sacris literis non aspernandos? Atque id factum est ante quam Lutherus prodidisset dogma suum, siue Vuicleuticum, Quicquid facimus siue boni siue mali, esse necessitatis absolutae. Nam mea Paraphrasis excusa est Louanii, anno millesimo quingentesimo decimoseptimo; et aliquot mensibus erat Antuerpiae scripta prius quam excuderetur. Atque interim quidam appellatur totus Erasmius, quod de libero arbitrio mecum sentiat et a Luthero dissentiat: sed tamen huic datur venia, quod iuuenis bonae spei breui sit aliter sensurus.

Hic rursus appello meum aequum iudicem, quum hoc scripserim ante proditum Lutheri dogma, quum idem sentiant omnes theologi tum veteres tum recentes, Origines, Hieronymus, Chrysostomus, Hilarius, Arnobius, Scotus, Thomas, cur ego, velut autor huius sententiae, vocor in ius? et quur qui dissentit a Luthero vocatur Erasmianus potius quam Hilarianus aut Hieronymianus? praesertim quum eam quaestionem non susceperim pertractandam in Paraphrasi, sed obiter transilierim, quemadmodum fecit ipse Paulus, qui non dignatur illic respondere percontatori improbo? Et tamen vide, lector, quanto minus illic tribuam libero arbitrio quam tribuant vel veteres vel recentiorum scholae. Suspisor enim haec esse verba quibus offenduntur ex capite nono. Quum enim proposuissem improbam quaestionem obiectam Deo, quae conatur illi impingere iniusticiam, 'Imo,' inquam, 'nonnihil est in voluntato conatuque [nostro] situm: licet hoc ita sit exiguum vt ad Dei gratuitam beneficentiam nihil esse videatur. Nemo damnatur nisi sua culpa: nemo seruatur nisi Dei beneficio. Eo dignatur quos vult, sed ita vt sit de quo gratias agas, non sit quod queraris'. Haec in Paraphrasi.

Videbam hinc Scyllae periculum illiciens ad fiduciam operum, quam ego pestem religionis maximam esse fateor. Illinc videbam Charybdim, malum etiam formidabilius, quo nunc non pauci tenentur, dicentes, 'Obsequemur animo nostro; siue torquemus nosipsos, siue indulgemus animo, tamen eueniet quod semel statuit Deus'. Itaque sermonem meum moderatus sum, vt minimum quiddam tribuerem libero arbitrio, ne fenestram aperirem tam capitali socordiae, vt abiecto omni conatu vitae melioris, quod suo animo collubitum fuerit quisque faceret. Et tamen haec scribebam, ignarus fuisse quenquam qui funditus tolleret omnem liberi arbitrii vim; quod dogma, etiamsi mihi constaret esse verum, nolim tamen nudis verbis in vulgus serere. Nunc quis nescit de fato disputatum inter philosophos ante Christum natum? et hinc ad nos venerunt quaestiones inexplicabiles, de praescientia, de praedestinatione Dei, de libero hominis arbitrio, de futuris contingentibus: in quibus arbitrator optimum esse non admodum anxie versari, quando abyssus est imperuestigabilis. Malim ea inculcare quae nos hortantur ad modis omnibus conandum optima: nihil tamen interim nobis arrogantes, etiamsi quid esse nostrum possit, sed totum iudicium deferentes Christo, cum bona fiducia de illius benignitate potissimum concepta." (Allen 5:225,926–226,979, no. 1342)

March 11, 1523

Through Spalatin, Erasmus writes to Frederick the Wise. The letter is preserved in Spalatin's translation. Erasmus expressed his concern that the church's violent actions against Luther were endangering the renewal of Christianity. He writes: "Ich forcht des Luthers nicht, sondern zwey ding bewegen mich. Wenn der Luther solt zu poden geen, so wurd wider keyn Gott noch keyn mensch mit den munchen kunnen auszkummenn. Folgend, so kan der Luther nicht vmbkummenn on das es vergee dann mit im ein grosser teyl der Evangelischenn lautterckeit" (Allen 5:251,30–34, no. 1348).

June 20, 1523, Luther to John Oecolampad

"Quid Erasmus in rerum spiritualium iudicio sentiat aut simulet, testantur erius libelli abunde tam primi quam novissimi. Ego etsi aculeos eius alicubi sentio, tamen, quia simulat, se non esse hostem palam, simulo et ego, me non intelligere suas astutias, quamquam

penitius intelligam, quam ipse credat. Ipse fecit, ad quod ordinatus fuit: linguas introduxit et a sacrilegis studiis avocavit. Forte et ipse cum Mose in campestribus Moab morietur, nam ad meliora studia (quod ad pietatem pertinet) non provehit. Vellemque mirum in modum abstinere ipsum a tractandis scripturis sanctis et paraphrasibus suis, quod non sit par istis officiis et lectores frustra occupat et moratur in scripturis discendis. Satis fecit, quod malum ostendit; bonum ostendere (ut video) et in terram promissionis ducere non potest” (WA.Br 3:96,14–25, no. 626). Erasmus soon knows about the content of Luther’s letter (Allen 5:329,52–58, no. 1384).

August 31, 1523

In a letter to Zwingli, Erasmus criticizes Luther’s doctrine of justification: “Lutherus proponit quaedam enigmata in spetiem absurda: ‘omnia opera sanctorum esse peccata, que indigent ignoscente Dei misericordia’; ‘liberum arbitrium esse nomen inane’; ‘sola fide iustificari hominem, opera nihil ad rem facere’. De his contedere, quomodo velit intelligi Lutherus, non video quem fructum adferat. Deinde video in plerisque illi addictis miram peruicaciam. Et in Lutheri scriptis quantum maledicentiae, sepe preter rem” (Allen 5:327,9–16, no. 1384).

September 1523

In his *Spongia*, Erasmus rejects Ulrich von Hutten’s *Expostulatio* and explains his position on Luther. Erasmus initially sympathized with Luther but has now turned against him. Erasmus confirms, “neutri factioni velle inuolui” (ASD 9/1:162, 953).

September 4, 1523

Erasmus promises King Henry VIII of England that he will publicly turn against Luther (Allen 5:330,11–12, no. 1385).

October 1, 1523

Luther writes to Konrad Pellikan, that Erasmus has launched literary attacks on Luther and his supporters, but Luther does not wish to respond with an open counterattack. The letter reveals Luther’s critical attitude toward Erasmus. He refers to Erasmus’ criticism of his high regard for assertions and uses this criticism against him: “Ego habeo, qui causam defendat, etiamsi totus mundus in me solum insaniat, id quod Erasmus in me vocat pervicaciam asserendi” (WA.Br 3:160,23–24, no. 661).

fall 1523

In his hymn *Now Rejoice, Dear Christians*, Luther uses formulations in his description of the sinner’s situation that also play a role in *De Servo Arbitrio*, such as “dem teuffel ich gefangen lag” (WA 35:423,6), “Es war kein gutts am leben meyn, / Die sund hat mich be-sessen” (423,11–12), and “Der frey will hasset Gotts gericht, / Er war zum gutt erstorben” (423,15–16).

November 21, 1523

Erasmus informs John Augustanus Faber that his planned treatise against Luther will address the question of free will (Allen 5:350,14–15, no. 1397).

February 13, 1524

Erasmus informs Pope Clement VII that he is working on his treatise with the title “De libero arbitrio adversus Lutherum” (Allen 5:399,53–55, no. 1418).

March 1524

In a new edition of his *Colloquia*, Erasmus adds a dialogue between a representative of the papal church and a Luther sympathizer. This dialogue shows that Luther’s followers affirm the church’s creed and that there is no fundamental disagreement between the papal church and Luther (ASD 1/3:361–374).

April 15, 1524, Luther to Erasmus

Luther praises Erasmus’ philological achievements but also criticizes his reluctance toward the Papal Church and rejection of the Reformation. He would like to avoid an open confrontation: “Hactenus stilum cohibui, utpene pungeres me, cohibebitur etiam, scripsi in literis ad amicos, quae tibi quoque lectae sunt, donec palam prodires” (WA.Br 3:270,38–40, no. 729). He wishes: “Satis morsum est, nunc providendum est, ne consumamur ab invicem” (271,65).

May 8, 1524, Erasmus to Luther

In his reply to Luther’s April 1524 letter, Erasmus openly criticizes Luther: “Tua quaedam legens valde pertimesco, ne qua arte deludat Satanas animum tuum” (WA.Br 3:285,5–6, no. 740), but he has not yet openly opposed him (“Nihil adhuc in te scripserim, facturus id magno principum applausu, nisi vidissem hoc absque iactura evangelii non futurum”, 285,14–16), because such criticism could benefit the Gospel (“Fortasse Erasmus scribens in te magis profuerit evangelio”, 285,24).

September 1524

Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio* is simultaneously published in Basel and Antwerp. On September 6, Erasmus informs the English king of this: “exiit in lucem libellus De libero arbitrio” (Allen 5:541,4, no. 1493). The same day he also informs Melanchthon about the publication (MBW.T 2:167–176, no. 341).

September 1524

In his preface to Ecclesiastes in the partial edition of the Wittenberg Old Testament translation, Luther uses the book as evidence against free will: “Nu dis buch solt billich den titel haben, das es widder den freyen willen geschrieben were, Denn es alles dahyn zeucht, das aller menschen, rad, anschlege, vnd furnemen vmb sonst vnd vergeblich sind, vnd ymer anders hynaus gehet, denn wyr wöllen vnd dencken, auff das er vns lerne gelassen stehen, vnd Gott lassen alleyne alle ding, vber, widder, vnd on vnsern wissen vnd rad thun” (WA.DB 10/2:104,24–106,2). This may be a response to Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio*.

September 30, 1524

Melanchthon informs Erasmus of his assessment of *De libero arbitrio* and Luther's expected reaction: this moderate work will receive an equally moderate response from Luther (Allen 5:555,42–61, no. 1500).

December 1525

Luther's *De servo arbitrio* is published in Wittenberg and reprinted several times in 1525 and 1526 in other places. In 1526 Justus Jonas publishes his German translation. The Latin text is reprinted in the Luther editions of the sixteenth century and both the Latin and the German text are reprinted in several single editions (1591: VD16 L 6672; 1602: VD17 15:727 288H; 1664: VD17 12:116 961K; 1707: VD18 14 080 206).

early 1526

Erasmus receives Luther's *De servo arbitrio* and responds with outrage in his letters to Luther's criticism (Allen 6:269,24–34, no. 1670; 364,8–9, no. 1723).

February 1526

The first part of Erasmus' *Hyperaspistes* is published.

April 11, 1526, Erasmus to Luther

In response to a lost letter from Luther defending *De servo arbitrio*, Erasmus regrets that Luther has discredited himself as a person and theologian with his book, which has confused the public debate (WA.Br 4:46–48, no. 992).

July to November, 1526

Luther lectures on Ecclesiastes (Qohelet). His lecture is printed in 1532 based on transcripts under the title *Annotationes in Ecclesiasten* (WA 20:1–203). For Luther, the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes demonstrates that the world and human life are completely controlled by God. However, with reference to his doctrine of the three estates and vocation he also asserts that human beings are responsible for acting in the roles God has assigned to them.

March 30, 1527

Erasmus informs Thomas More that he is not currently working on another response to Luther and that Luther's position can be reduced to two points: namely, that the law serves only to reveal sin, and that human beings are entirely governed by sin. Erasmus also summarizes his view regarding liberum arbitrium: He takes a critical stance toward Scholasticism, Paul, and Augustine, and would prefer his connection between divine grace and human freedom to be understood in such a way that greater weight is given to human freedom.

“Sed amor in me tuus non fert quorundam insolentiam, gestientium quasi non habeam quod Lutero respondeam. Aliis grauioribus molestiis sum excercitatus vt ista leuicula facile contemnam. Si refert respondisse, iam in Diatriba et Hyperaspiste dissolutum est quicquid ab illo potest adduci. Tantum habet duas arces, per legem nihil effici nisi cognitionem vel

agnitionem potius peccati, et per Adae peccatum sic esse vitiatam humani generis massam vt nec Spiritus Sanctus in ea quicquam operetur nisi malum. Ab his deiectus concidet” (Allen 7:7,47–54, no. 1804).

“Iam mihi finge nec ocium deesse nec vires. Si tractauero materiam ex animo monachorum ac theologorum, qui nimium tribuunt hominum meritis ob quaestum hinc redeuntem, profecto loquar aduersus conscientiam meam, et sciens obscurabo gloriam Christi. Sin temperauero stilum vt aliquid tribuam libero arbitrio, gratiae plurimum, offendam vtranque partem: quod mihi venit vsu in Diatriba. Quod si sequar Paulum et Augustinum, perpusillum est quod relinquitur libero arbitrio. Hic enim duobus libris quos scripsit ad Valentinum iam senex, asseuerat quidem liberum arbitrium. Sed gratiam sic probat vt ego non perspiciam quid reliquum faciat libero arbitrio. Fatetur opera ante gratiam facta esse mortua, tribuit gratiae quod respiscimus, quod volumus benefacere, quod bene facimus, quod perseueramus. Fatetur hec omnia gratiam in nobis operari. Vbi igitur meri[ta ?] Hic constrictus Augustinus huc confugit, vt dicat Deum sua bona opera nobis imputare pro meritis et sua dona coronare in nobis. Nonne belle defensum est liberum arbitrium? Mihi non displiceret opinio que putat nos ex meris nature viribus absque peculiari [gra]tia posse de congruo, vt illi loquuntur, gratiam instituere, nisi refrageretur Paulus; quanquam ne scholastici quidem hanc recipiunt sententiam” (ibid. 8:75–95).

September 1527

The second part of Erasmus’ *Hyperaspistes* is published.

October, 1527

The publication of the second part of Erasmus’ polemical reply is reflected in some passages of the correspondence of Luther and Melanchthon. Here are two quotes that show how Erasmus was seen. On October 2 Melanchthon writes to Luther: “Legi bonam partem Erasmici voluminis recens editi de libero arbitrio. Longa et confusa disputatio est, quam non multi de vulgo intelligent, vt video. In eo vno est, vt sententias a te citatas callide interpretetur, ne dissentire credantur a iudicio rationis humanae. Ego, etiamsi velis respondere, nollem tamen te properare. Velim autem te, si quando videretur, non confutationem huius operis (nam istos ἀντιπάλους λόγους non facile intelligunt, nisi exercitatissimi in hoc ipso genere), sed tuae sententiam simplicem enarrationem instituere. Id non esset tibi difficile factu, et extra pugnam minus esset habitura acerbitatis oratio” (WA.Br 4,256,2–10, no. 1152).

On October 19 Luther writes to Justus Jonas (please note that Luther’s wife did understand Latin): “Gratulor tibi, optime Iona, de tua palinodia, qua nunc tandem Erasmum illum tuum suis pingis coloribus, viperam illam letalibus aculeis refertam recte cognoscis, quem ante multis nominibus praedicabas. Gaudeo te ex unius Hyperaspistae lectione tantum profecisse et tuum de illo mutasse iudicium. Cumque ego hanc epistolae tuae partem legere uxori, continuo illa inquit: Ist nicht der teur Manne [sc. Erasmus] zur Kröten worden? Sihe da! Gaudet et ipsa idem te nunc mecum sentire de Erasmo. Intelligis, mi Iona, recte quidem sensisse, qui praeceperunt neminem ante supremum diem laudandum” (WA.Br 4:268,1–269,9, no. 1160).

Fall 1527

Melanchthon's commentary on Colossians, published with Luther's approval, proposes a compromise solution to the question of free will, emphasizing *servum arbitrium* with regard to salvation, while granting *liberum arbitrium* with regard to responsibility in this world (Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, vol. 4, ²1980, 221–225).

July 24, 1529: Melanchthon to Joachim Camerarius

“Περὶ Ἐράσμου quod mones [...], ne quid ad illum amplius scribam, geram tibi morem. Et scis me antea non magnopere ambivisse eius amiciciam. Vide, quantum iudicii sit nostris inimicis: Illum amant qui multorum perniciosissimorum dogmatum semina in suis libris sparsit, quae quidem longe graviores tumultus aliquando excitatura erant, nisi Lutherus exortus esset ac studia hominum alio traxisset. Tota illa tragoedia περὶ δείπνου κυριακοῦ ab ipso orta est. Quam aequus ubique est Ario et illius factioni, quam nos hic constantissime improbavimus. Quae litera in illius libris est digna viro christiano de iustificatione, de iure magistratum? Horum locorum perfectam tractationem a magnis viris requiro. Sed tollant eum qui non norunt” (MBW.T 3:550,28–551,39, no. 807).

1533 (?)

In a 1527 print of Erasmus' New Testament, Luther adds marginal notes primarily commenting on the annotations. Several of these notes criticize Erasmus' theology and character, for example: “Ego non sum Candidus Lector, Nec tu candidus scriptor” (WA 60:204,28).

March 1534

In 1534, a correspondence between Amsdorf and Luther regarding Erasmus is published (WA.Br 7, no. 2093). Luther's letter (translation: LuthQ 37, 2023, 313–34), which is more than ten pages long, is a critical assessment of Erasmus as a person and a theologian. Erasmus answer Luther's criticism with his *Purgatio aduersus epistolam non sobriam Martini Lutheri* (VD16 E 3481).

May 12, 1536

Melanchthon acknowledges Erasmus' influence on his *Loci theologici*, but remains cautious (Allen 11:322–324, no. 3120; MBW.T 7:114–116, no. 1735). Melanchthon emphasizes his interest in preserving church doctrine and distancing himself from doctrinal disputes. However, between the lines, it becomes clear that Melanchthon does not agree with Erasmus on theological matters.

June 22, 1537

Melanchthon emphasizes to Veit Dietrich that he and Luther agree on predestination but approach it differently in their language. He adds that uneducated people overemphasize Luther's pointed statements: “Alioquin enim magnopere optarim eos articulos, de quibus quaedam videtur esse dissimilitudo, diserte et utiliter explicari. Scis me quaedam minus horride dicere, de praedestinatione, de assensu voluntatis, de necessitate obedientiae nostrae, de peccato mortali. De his omnibus scio re ipsa Lutherum sentire eadem, sed ineruditi quae eius φορτικώτερα dicta, cum non videant quo pertineant, nimium amant. Nec ego

cum illis pugnandum mihi esse duco. Fruantur suo iudicio. Mihi tamen concedant homini peripatetico et amanti mediocritatem minus stoice alicubi loqui” (MBW.T 7:464,10–18, no. 1914).

July 9, 1537, Luther to Capito

“De tomis meorum librorum disponendis ego frigidior sum et segnior, eo quod Saturnina fame percitus [driven by Saturnian hunger, Saturnus = Kronos] magis cuperem eos omnes devoratos. Nullum enim agnosco meum iustum librum, nisi forte de Servo arbitrio et Catechismum” (WA.Br 8:99,5–8, no. 3162).

1540/41

In his Genesis lecture on Gen. 26:9 (WA 43:457,32–463,17), Luther includes a pastoral digression on predestination and prescience, which emphasizes “non esse inquirendum de praedestinatione Dei absconditi”, but rather “ea acquiescendum esse, quae revelatur per vocationem per ministerium verbi” (463:11–13). Luther refers to his *De servo arbitrio* (458:35–36: “Sic igitur in libello de servo arbitrio et alibi docui”) for the distinction between Deus absconditus and revelatus, and he quotes “Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos” (458:40).

1546

De servo arbitrio is printed in vol. 2 of the Wittenberg edition of Luther’s Latin writings, reprinted in 1551 and 1562.

1557

De servo arbitrio is printed in vol. 3 of the Jena edition of Luther’s Latin writings, which is reprinted in 1567, 1582, and 1603.

1559

In the final version of his *Loci communes* Melanchthon presents his mature doctrine of free will, stating “Nec miscenda est disputatio de determinatione divina quaestioni de libero arbitrio” (Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, vol. 2/1, ² 1978, 263:25–26).

1577

The Formula of Concord substantiates Luther’s assertion of servum arbitrium with regard to “cooperatio voluntatis nostrae in hominis conversione” with a quotation from Luther’s *On the Supper of Christ* and notes: “Hoc negotium D. Lutherus in libro suo De servo arbitrio contra Erasmus egregie et solide explicuit, atque hanc sententiam piam et invictam esse demonstravit” (FC SD II:44; BSLK 889,26–30).

3. Erasmus of Rotterdam
De libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio
1524

Introduction (LB 9:1215^A–1221^A; AS 4:2–37)

1. Praefatio (LB 9:1215^A–1218^C; AS 4:2–21)

the Diatribe was prompted by various statements made by the Wittenberg Reformers, particularly Luther's *Assertio omnium articulorum* of 1521 (AS 4:2–7)

Erasmus criticizes dogmatic assertions in general and, more specifically, those concerning the question of liberum arbitrium (AS 4:6–11)

the Bible is not always clear, even if the essentials, namely ethics, are undisputed (AS 4:10–13)

certain religious topics should not be discussed in public (AS 4:12–21)

2. Prooemium (LB 9:1218^C–1221^A; AS 4:20–37)

in addition to the Bible, church tradition is also important for discussing this question (AS 4:20–27)

the Bible requires spiritual interpretation (AS 4:26–35)

preview of the following discussion and preliminary definition of liberum arbitrium (AS 4:34–37) → “*liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem aut ab iisdem avertere*” (36)

First main section: Bible passages that prove liberum arbitrium (LB 9:1221^A–1230^A; AS 4:36–91)

1. Old Testament (LB 9:1221^A–1227^A; AS 4:36–73)

Sirach 15:14–18 shows that human beings were created with free will (AS 4:36–41)

the weakening of free will through the fall and God's support through the law (AS 4:40–49) → second provisional definition of liberum arbitrium: “*voluntas, qua eligimus aut refugimus, hactenus depravata fuit, ut suis naturalibus praesidiis non posset sese revocare ad meliorem frugem, sed amissa libertate cogebatur servire peccato, cui se volens semel addixerat*” (40)

theological interpretations of the relationship between liberum arbitrium and grace throughout church history (AS 4:48–59) → third provisional definition of liberum arbitrium: Erasmus considers the opinion of those to be more probable who “*longissime fugiunt a Pelagio, plurimum tribuunt gratiae, libero arbitrio pene nihil nec tamen in totum tollunt: negant hominem posse velle bonum sine gratia peculiari, negant posse incipere, negant posse progredi, negant posse perficere sine principali perpetuoque gratiae divinae praesidio,*” because this view “*relinquat homini studium et conatum et tamen non relinquit, quod suis ascribat viribus*” (56)

more Old Testament texts that teach free will (AS 4:58–67)

the biblical imperatives and the biblical accounts of the wrathful God showing mercy imply free will (AS 4:66–73)

2. New Testament (LB 9:1227^A–1230^A; AS 4:72–91)

Jesus' admonitions imply free will (AS 4:72–79)

Paul's exhortations imply free will (AS 4:80–89)
there are many more biblical passages that contradict Luther's denial of free will
(AS 4:88–91)

Second main section: Bible passages that appear to contradict liberum arbitrium (LB 9:1230^A–1241^D; AS 4:90–156)

1. Passages from the Old and New Testaments (LB 9:1230^A–1235^C; AS 4:90–121)
 - introduction (AS 4:90–93)
 - the account of Pharaoh's hardening (Ex. 9) and its inclusion in Romans 9 appear to contradict the doctrine of free will, but must be understood in light of the relationship between necessity and foreknowledge that makes human freedom possible (AS 4:92–107)
 - Genesis 25:23 – Jacob and Esau (AS 4:106–109)
 - Isaiah 45:9 – potter and clay (AS 4:108–115)
 - Isaiah 10:15 – craftsman and axe (AS 4:114–115)
 - there are many more texts in the Bible that show that divine omnipotence and human freedom are compatible (AS 4:114–121)
2. On the Bible passages in Luther's *Assertio omnium articulorum* of 1521 (LB 9:1235^C–1237^F; AS 4:120–137)
 - Genesis 6:3 (AS 4:120–123)
 - Genesis 8:21 (AS 4:122–125)
 - Isaiah 40:2 (AS 4:124–125)
 - Isaiah 40:6–8 (AS 4:124–129)
 - Jeremiah 10:23 (AS 4:128–131)
 - Proverbs 16:1 (AS 4:130–133)
 - Proverbs 21:1 (AS 4:132–135)
 - John 15:5 (AS 4:134–137)
3. Further passages from the Old and New Testaments (LB 9:1237^F–1241^D; AS 4:136–157)
 - John 3:27 (AS 4:136–139)
 - Matthew 10:20 (AS 4:138–141)
 - John 6:44 and John 14:6 (AS 4:140–141)
 - 2Corinthians 3:5 (AS 4:140–145)
 - Philippians 2:13 and similar passages (AS 4:144–149)
 - Jesus' parables (AS 4:148–155)
 - conclusion (AS 4:154–157) → “Homo nihil non potest auxiliante dei gratia”

Conclusion (LB 9:1241^D–1248^D; AS 4:156–195)

to counter the overemphasis on both divine grace and free will, a middle path must be taken that unites grace and freedom and does not place God in the wrong (AS 4:156–177)
→ Erasmus advocates a “temperatura” (a balancing mixture of causes) in the bringing about of salvation: “*simul concurrant duae causae, gratia dei et hominis voluntas, sic tamen, ut gratia sit causa principalis, voluntas secundaria, quae sine principali nihil possit, cum principalis sibi sufficiat*” (172) → regarding liberum arbitrium, the following applies: “*homo to-*

tam salutem suam divinae gratiae ferre debeat acceptam, cum perpusillum sit, quod hic agit liberum arbitrium, et hoc ipsum, quod agere potest, sit divinae gratiae, qui primum condidit liberum arbitrium, deinde liberavit etiam ac sanavit” (172)

Luther and Karlstadt have pointed out the misunderstanding regarding liberum arbitrium, but they exaggerate in the opposite direction and are thus partly to blame for the escalation (AS 4:176–19)

concluding remark on Erasmus’ approach and claim (AS 4:190–195) → “CONTULI, penes alios esto iudicium”

4. Martin Luther
De servo arbitrio
1525

Preface (LStA 3:177,1–180,15; WA 18:600,1–602,37; LW 33:15–19)

First main section: Response to Erasmus' introduction (LStA 3:180,16–234,39; WA 18:603,1–666,13; LW 33:19–110)

The right and necessity of assertio (LStA 3:180,17–183,22)

The clarity of Scripture – first discussion (LStA 3:183,23–186,23)

The essence of Christianity (forma Christianismi) (LStA 3:186,24–194,28)

The necessity of public debate about the essence of Christianity (LStA 3:194,29–196,17)

Erasmus' advocacy of compulsory confession to secure peace in the world is incompatible with Christian freedom (LStA 3:196,18–203,17)

The Reformation's teachings on justification and election and the paradox of mere necessity (LStA 3:203,18–210,11)

Concluding remarks on the first part of Erasmus' introduction (LStA 3:210,11–211,5)

The ecclesiastical tradition and liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:211,6–221,12)

The clarity of Scripture – second discussion (LStA 3:221,13–230,3)

Rejection of Erasmus' definition of liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:230,4–234,39)

Second main section: Refutation of Erasmus' scriptural evidence for liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:235,1–301,27; WA 18:666,13–733,21; LW 33:110–212)

1. Old Testament texts that appear to speak in favor of liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:235,1–256,39)

Sir. 15:14–18 (235,1–244,10)

Gen. 4:7 (244,11–33)

Deut. 30:15+19 (244,34–246,7)

Deut. 3:30 (246,8–247,2)

Hermeneutics of Imperatives (247,3–250,28)

Ezek. 18:23 and Ezek. 33:11 (250,29–254,30)

Deut. 30:11–14 (254,31–256,23)

Review of Erasmus' treatment of the Old Testament passages (LStA 3:256,24–39)

2. New Testament texts that appear to speak in favor of liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:256,40–267,18)

General characterization of Erasmus' treatment of the New Testament (256,40–257,3)

Matth. 23:37 (257,3–258,30)

Matth. 19:17 and comparable statements (258,31–260,5)

praecepta and meritum (260,6–264,30)

Luke 23:23 (264,31–265,18)

John 1:12 (265,19–266,21)

Rom. 2:4 (266,22–267,4)

Further passages from Paul (267,5–11)

Luther agrees with Wyclif's 'omnia necessitate fieri' (267,11–18)

3. Biblical evidence for servum arbitrium, reinterpreted by Erasmus (LStA 3:267,18–301,27)
against tropological mitigations (267,21–270,30)
Ex. 4:21 – “Ego indurabo cor Pharaonis” (270,30–283,8)
Rom. 9:16 – Paul on the induratio Pharaonis (283,9–291,6)
concluding remarks on induratio Pharaonis (291,7–8)
Gen. 25:23 – Jacob and Esau (291,8–295,20)
Isa. 45:9 – Potter and clay (295,21–301,27)

Third main section: Erasmus' arguments against Luther's remarks on Art. 36 in his 'Assertio omnium articulorum' of 1521 (LStA 3:301,28–326,2; WA 18:733,22–756,23; LW 33:212–246)

- Gen. 6:3 – Spirit/flesh (LStA 3:301,29–303,37)
- Gen. 8:21 – malum cordis (LStA 3:303,38–304,26)
- Isa. 40:2 – Grace or reckoning? (LStA 3:304,27–307,18)
- Isa. 40:6 – Flesh/Spirit – totus homo (LStA 3:307,18–313,10)
- Jer. 10:23 (LStA 3:313,11–314,21)
- Prov. 16:1+4, Prov. 21:1 (LStA 3:314,22–316,13)
- John 15:5 (LStA 3:316,14–322,10)
- Further examples provided by Erasmus (LStA 3:322,11–324,21)
- Conclusion (LStA 3:324,22–326,2)

Fourth main section: Luther's attack on liberum arbitrium (LStA 3:326,3–351,13; WA 18:756,24–783,17; LW 33:246–288)

Luther's approach (LStA 3:326,3–13)

1. Paul (LStA 3:326,13–343,41)

Rom. 1:18 (326,13–329,6)

Rom. 3:9 (329,7–28)

Rom. 3:10–12 (329,29–331,22)

Rom. 3:19 (331,23–332,7)

Rom. 3:20a (332,8–334,16)

Rom. 3,20b (334,17–335,21)

Rom. 3:21–25 (335,22–28)

Rom. 3:21a (335,28–336,14)

Rom. 3:22 (336,15–29)

Rom. 3:23a (336,30–38)

Rom. 3:23b (336,8–337,24)

Rom. 3:24 (337,25–339,32)

Rom. 4:3 (339,33–341,2)

Rom. 5:12 (341,2–13)

Review of the passages from Paul discussed so far (341,14–342,6)

Rom. 8:3–9 (342,7–343,16)

Rom. 10:20 (343,17–41)

2. John (LStA 3:343,42–351,13)

Introduction: John as the 'liberi arbitrij uastator' (343,42–344,2)

John 1:5–16 (344,2–346,10)

John 3:1–7 (346,11–31)

John 14:6 (346,31–347,43)

John 3:18 (348,1–20)

John 3:36 (348,20–33)

John 3:27+31, John 8:23 (348,34–349,19)

John 6:44 (349,20–350,6)

John 16:8–9 (350,7–15)

Summary remarks (350,15–351,13)

Luther's concluding remarks (LStA 3:351,13–354,31; WA 18:783,17–786,20; LW 33:288–293)

Admonition to Erasmus (LStA 3:354,32–356,9; WA 18:786,21–787,14; LW 33:294–295)