

## BRIEF NOTES

### TWO NOTES CONCERNING PAMPHLET LITERATURE OF THE REFORMATION ERA

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In the immediately preceding issue of *AUSS*, we were pleased to publish a catalog of forty-seven Reformation-era *Flugschriften* ("tracts" or "pamphlets") in the "Heritage Room" of the James White Library at Andrews University. We indicated in our "Introductory Note to Volume 24" (on p. 3) that from time to time we would endeavor to provide further information on at least a few of the more intriguing (and/or less well-known) of these pamphlets. In harmony with this purpose, we present here a brief note concerning the first pamphlet in the catalog—a short piece set forth as a communication from the "hellish Prince Lucifer" to Martin Luther. Also, immediately following this note we include a second one, relating more broadly to the type of literature that is classified as "Reformation-era *Flugschriften*."

#### 1. A MESSAGE FROM "HELLISH PRINCE LUCIFER" TO MARTIN LUTHER

So-called "letters from heaven" and "letters from hell" provided one of the familiar forms into which Reformation-era *Flugschriften* or "pamphlets" were cast. "Heavenly letters" had for centuries provided a fairly common literary device for promoting religious ideas and ideals. At precisely what time their negative counterpart, the "letters from hell," came into being is not easy to determine; but such literature is known to have existed in late-medieval times. For instance, during the era of the Avignonese Papacy (the so-called "Babylonian captivity of the church," A.D. 1309-77), a "Devil's Letter" appeared in the year 1351.<sup>1</sup> This Avignonese-Papacy period

<sup>1</sup>See Otto Clemen, "Einleitung" to his edition of the "Absag oder Fehdschrift Lucifers an Luther (1524)," in Clemen, *Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation*, 3 (1909): 356.



and that of the "Great Papal Schism" which immediately followed (with two rival popes from A.D. 1378 to 1409 and then three popes until 1417) were particularly conducive to the rise of criticism of the church. Such criticism came not merely from persons or groups denominated as "schismatics" and "heretics," but from prominent churchmen and other loyal Catholics. (The "Devil's Letter" of 1351 has been attributed variously to Bishop Nicolaus Oresimus of Lisieux, Pierre d'Ailly, and Heinrich von Langenstein.<sup>2</sup>)

Writers in the Lutheran-Reformation movement of the early sixteenth century quite naturally adopted the "letter-from-hell" type of presentation as one of their literary vehicles for disseminating their polemic, and it is to this literary type that a short, intriguing piece in the Andrews University collection of Reformation *Flugschriften* belongs (entered as No. 1 in the "Catalog of Reformation Pamphlets" which appeared in the immediately preceding issue of *AUSS*). In the original, it carries the following title:

"Absag/ oder vhed schrift/ || Des Hellischen Für|| stē Lucifers/ Doc|| tor  
Martin Lu|| ther yetzt zu ge|| sandt.:"

This *Absag* ("Renunciation") or *Fehdschrift* (a sort of declaration of "Feud [or Warfare]") on the part of the "hellish prince Lucifer" against Martin Luther is anonymous, but it appears to be one of a sequence of writings that were penned during the years 1523 and 1524, probably by Erasmus Alber while he was a schoolteacher in Oberursel, near Speyer.<sup>3</sup> The particular edition of this *Absag* that is in the Andrews University collection is apparently the second among at least five early editions.<sup>4</sup> It should probably be dated to 1524, just as in the case of the first edition, which presumably was printed in Speyer by Jakob Faber, and in its concluding statement is dated "the last day of September" of that year. Our copy, which has been tentatively identified as printed in Zwickau by Jörg Gastel,<sup>5</sup> carries the same "endnote," but this appears to be simply a "carry-over" statement from the first edition. In any event, it is likely that

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>For discussion and bibliographical listing, see *ibid.*, pp. 360-362.

<sup>4</sup>See Alfred Götze, "Erasmus Albers Anfänge," *ARG* 5 (1908): 66-67. (For a brief biographical sketch, see, e.g., Theodor F. H. Kolde's article on Alber in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1: 103.)

<sup>5</sup>*AUSS* 24 (1986): 87, entry 1; and cf. Clemen, p. 361, paragraph 2.

this Zwickau edition came from the press prior to the publication in December, 1524, of the "Indulgence Bulls" by Pope Clement VII, and to which reference seems to be made in the mention of an "Ablaßbrief" of that Pope in two of the further editions of the *Absag*.<sup>6</sup>

In order for us to have a setting for this "Lucifer message" of 1524, reference should briefly be made to a publication of the previous year (and also attributed to Alber)—the "Precious *Dialogus* of Martin Luther and the Message Sent from Hell."<sup>7</sup> In this rather lengthy document, we find a messenger from hell in monk's garb coming to Luther and dialoging with the Reformer at the time the latter was translating the OT into German. A long series of Luther's offenses against the traditional religion is covered, and finally the devilish emissary offers the Reformer great reward: If Luther would but renounce his present stance and desist from preaching against the spiritual order, indulgences, monastic life, etc., the Reformer would become "a great lord, granted a cardinal's hat and have his own courtesans and servants." Luther, of course, immediately rejected the proposal, and the devil left.

The *Absag* appears to have this *Dialogus* of 1523 as its immediate background. The format now is not that of a dialogue, however, but is instead a "written communication" from Lucifer, delivered to the Reformer. Also, there is no longer an effort to reason with and to appeal to Luther, but rather a pronouncement of condemnation and of declaration of war against him. If the earlier publication intended to set forth "hell's" purpose as being to appeal to Luther and even to attempt to cajole him into compliance, the later document sets forth Lucifer as endeavoring to intimidate and frighten the Reformer. Here, too, of course, the devilish intent is foiled; and both documents present well their polemic in favor of Luther and his adherents.

The contents of the *Absag* may be briefly summarized as follows: In his letter to Luther, Lucifer introduces himself as "a lord and

<sup>6</sup>See the note to line 9 in the text given by Clemen, p. 367. This note provides the supplementary material in the editions which Clemen considers as nos. 4 and 5 and which bear a slight variation in title: *Absag brieff des Fürsten dyser / welt etc. wider Marti= / num Lutter* (title as given in no. 4).

<sup>7</sup>The text of this has been given by Ludwig Enders in *Neudrucke deutscher Litteraturwerke des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*, no. 62 (1886), pp. 1-29.

inhabitant of eternal darkness, powerful ruler and master of the entire world and also possessor of all of the treasures and riches that are in it, etc." Luther is then greeted with Lucifer's anger and displeasure, and the devil makes mention of his own "beloved" and "faithful" Romish legates and other officials gathered at Regensburg (in June-July of 1524). Then, after reference to Luther's "evil petulance" and "obstinate mind," the devil attacks the Reformer for such activities as propagating the Bible and evangelical books, encouraging monks and nuns to leave the cloisters and marry, etc. Because the Reformer in his "bullheadedness"<sup>8</sup> would not be persuaded by "friendly and earnest admonition," Lucifer is now moving against him and his adherents with threat of burning at the stake, decapitation, and other penalties. Lucifer has given "earnest" or "strict" order and "full power" to his servants who are "now assembled in Regensburg" to attack Luther and the latter's followers and supporters. The document concludes with the intriguing "publication datum" that it was printed and disseminated "in our city of eternal damnation on the last day of September" in 1524.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Literally, "your hard head" ("deinen harten kopff").

<sup>9</sup>See the text in the entry in *AUSS* 24 (1986): 87. The 4th ed. carries the further notation, "Getruckt zů Saltzburg, durch den geweichten Krumbschnabel by der Roßschwemb"; see Clemen, p. 367, note to lines 12-13.