

# To Philip Melanchthon

## Wartburg, August 1, 1521

*Commenting on Karlstadt's theses of June 21 and July 19, Luther develops his ideas on clerical and monastic celibacy, on communion "in both kinds," on the private mass, and on the dynamics of faith.*

*Text in Latin: WA, Br 2, 370–372.*

...

In addition to this Paul speaks very openly concerning the priests. He says demons have forbidden them to marry. Since the voice of Paul is the voice of the Divine Majesty, I do not doubt that it must be trusted in this matter. Therefore even if they have consented to the devil's prohibition at the time of their initiation, then now, knowing the true state of the case and with whom they made their pact, the contract should be boldly broken.

...

Moreover, celibacy is merely a human institution. Man, who has instituted it, can also abolish it; therefore any Christian can abolish it. I would say this even if it had been instituted by a good man instead of by demons.

...

I am greatly pleased, of course, that you are restoring Christ's institution. I had especially intended to work for this, had I returned to you; for now we recognize this tyranny and can resist it, and are no longer forced to receive only "one kind."<sup>24</sup> But I also will never say another private mass<sup>26</sup> in all eternity. Let us pray to the Lord, I beseech you, that he hasten to give us a larger portion of his Spirit, for I suspect that the Lord will soon visit Germany, as its unbelief, impiety, and hatred of the gospel deserve. But of course this plague will then be charged to us on the grounds that we heretics have provoked God, and we will be scorned by men and despised by the people.<sup>28</sup> [The papists], however, will find excuses for their sins, and will justify themselves; [God will thus prove] that the wicked cannot be made good, either by kindness or by wrath, and that many will be tempted to do evil. The Lord's will be done.<sup>30</sup> Amen.

If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin<sup>32</sup> boldly, but believe and<sup>34</sup> rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here [in this world] we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says,<sup>37</sup> we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by<sup>39</sup> the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a

day. Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins<sup>41</sup> by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner. *August 1, 1521*<sup>1</sup>

*(The above paragraph we will talk about – very controversial and misunderstood but it has a wonderful truth to it – PB)*

## To Nicholas Gerbel Wartburg, November 1, 1521

*This is a long overdue letter in which Luther expresses his appreciation not only for Gerbel's friendship but also for his interest in Luther's work. Replying to Gerbel's inquiry about his literary work, Luther gives a detailed report on his writings.*

*Nicholas Gerbel of Pforzheim (1485?–1560) studied theology at the University of Cologne and at the Dominican college of the University of Tübingen. In October, 1514, he was graduated by the University of Bologna as a Doctor of Canon Law. Although he was drenched in traditional Scholasticism, he became an admirer of Reuchlin (whom he supported against the University of Cologne; see p. 10, n. 11) and of Erasmus (whom he visited in Basel in the fall of 1516 for the purpose of assisting in correcting the proofs of the Greek text of the New Testament; see p. 23). In 1515 Gerbel came to Strassburg and worked as critic, corrector, and editor for the Schürer publishing house. He also practiced law and was a legal consultant to the bishop, the cathedral chapter, and the city council. It is not clear when his friendship with Luther began, but as early as May, 1521, he had already sent several letters to Luther. For a while Gerbel acted as a liaison man between Luther and the clergy and the city council of Strassburg, although he stayed mainly in the background. In the eucharistic controversy between Luther and Zwingli, Gerbel openly supported Luther; this was exceptional if one realizes that Strassburg was almost completely under Zwingli's influence, at least at the beginning of the controversy. He spent his later years studying history and geography.*

*Text in Latin: WA, Br 2, 396–398.*

To Nicholas Gerbel, distinguished by education and Christian piety, a lawyer, and my  
most faithful friend in Christ  
Jesus

Greetings in Christ. Your letter, my kindest Gerbel, which you wrote to me on the vigil of Pentecost, reached me finally on St. Michael's Day, and I write this letter to you today, on All Saints' Day. For goodness' sake, when will it reach you? Maybe at another Pentecost, or maybe not at all! Thus you see the reason for my silence; it is evident that you may ascribe my silence to fate, that is, to the hidden will of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [Luther's works, vol. 48: Letters I](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 48, pp. 276–282). Fortress Press.

Yet I believe that in the meantime you found out from other people about the state of my affairs, which you ask about with such great anxiety and friendship. I have withdrawn from the public and thus obeyed the advice of friends. I have done this against my will, and I am uncertain whether with this action I have done something which is pleasing to God. I certainly thought I should expose my neck to the public fury; but [my friends] were of another opinion. Upon their suggestion, armed horsemen captured me along the way in a fake attack, and placed me in a safe spot where I am now treated in the kindest way.

But you may believe me, in this leisurely solitude I am exposed to a thousand devils. It is so much easier to fight the devil incarnate—that is, people—than the spirits of iniquity in heavenly places. Often I fall, but the right hand of the Most High raises me again. Therefore I yearn again and again for companionship. But I do not want to go back unless the Lord has called me back.

It is not safe for me to send my little books to you, but I have written on this matter to Spalatin, asking him to take care of it.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime a little book on the Antichrist, *Against Catharinus*, has come off the press, one *Against Latomus* at Louvain, one in German *On Confession*, also the 67th Psalm explained in German,<sup>19</sup> the [*Magnificat*] of Mary explained in German, and the 36th Psalm explained as comfort for the congregation in Wittenberg.<sup>21</sup> Philip has published a *Defense* in my behalf against the Parisians, to which I have added a German preface. It is already out; [and that takes care of that]. He also has the theological *Loci*<sup>24</sup> in the press, a book worthy of Philip. My German exposition of the Epistles and the Gospels for each Sunday of the church year is being printed. I have also completed a public rebuke of the Cardinal of Mainz, because he has again erected the idol of indulgences, [and this time] at Halle. The explanation of the Gospel concerning the ten lepers is also ready.<sup>27</sup> All this is in German. I am born for my Germans, whom I want to serve. I am eager to launch a public attack against the universities, but I have not yet made definite plans.<sup>29</sup> I have made up my mind not to write a commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew. In Wittenberg, however, I had begun to preach to the people from the pulpit on both Testaments, starting at the beginning of each; in Genesis I had progressed to chapter 32, in the Gospels to the voice of John the Baptist. There my voice was silenced.<sup>32</sup> Now you know everything about which you asked. ....

Please greet your wife; may she love you and in turn be loved by you. You lucky man, that you have by an honorable marriage conquered that unclean celibacy which is reprehensible because it causes either a constant burning or unclean pollutions. Suffer whatever this way of life brings, since it is instituted by God, and be grateful to him. That most miserable celibacy of young men and women daily presents such great horrors to me that even now nothing sounds worse to my ears than the words “nun,” “monk,” and “priest.” I consider marriage to be a paradise, even if it has to endure greatest poverty.

Greet also the others whom you have mentioned to me, Otto Brunfels, Caspar Uringer,<sup>43</sup> Luke Bathod, and all who agree with you in the gospel and condemn the “worship of the angels,” as the Apostle [Paul] says.<sup>45</sup> Farewell, stay very happy, and pray for me.

*From my wilderness, 1521* MARTIN LUTHER<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [Luther's works, vol. 48: Letters I](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 48, pp. 317–322). Fortress Press.

## To Elector Frederick Wittenberg, March 7 or 8, 1522

*Luther returned from the Wartburg excommunicated by the church and under the ban of the Imperial government. This could have had important consequences, had the Imperial government insisted that the Edict of Worms (see p. 210) be enforced, or had it had the military power to execute it even against the Elector's will. Elector Frederick apparently was willing and courageous enough to deal with this problem. Nevertheless, he wanted to be careful so that he (still confessing the faith of the Roman church) did not publicly permit a heretic and outlaw to live in his territory. The Elector apparently felt that there was a great difference between tolerating Luther and his work (and protecting him from unfair treatment), and giving Luther explicit permission to return to public life in the Electoral domain.*

*Upon receiving Luther's letter (pp. 388 ff.), the Elector commissioned Jerome Schurf of Wittenberg (see p. 219, n. 2) to meet with Luther at once. Schurf was to request a letter from Luther "in which he [Luther] sets forth the reasons and motivations for his return to Wittenberg and the fact that this was without our permission; he is also to state his willingness to exercise some selfrestraint and to say that he does not wish to give anyone any trouble; and the letter is to be formulated so that we can forward it to some of our men [i.e., apparently the Electoral Saxon delegation to the Imperial government as a possible answer to the January 20 mandate; see p. 388], in order to maintain our honor." See WA, Br 2, No. 455, Document II; S-J 2, 96 f. Jerome Schurf apparently met with Luther on March 8 (see WA, Br 2, No. 456, Introduction), and this letter, No. 118, is the result of this meeting.*

*On Elector Frederick, see pp. 49 f.*

*Text in German: WA, Br 2, 459–462.*

Jesus

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen; and my humble service.

Most Serene, Noble Sovereign and Most Gracious Lord; I have very carefully considered that it truly would be a burden for Your Electoral Grace if I would return to Wittenberg again without Your Electoral Grace's wish and permission, particularly since it seems that this would cause great danger for Your Electoral Grace, the whole country, and all the people, but especially for myself, banned and condemned by papal and Imperial law as I am, and expecting death at any moment.

What should I do? There is urgent reason for my return and God compels and calls me. Therefore, it has to be this way and will be so; so let it be in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and death.

In order that Your Electoral Grace is not ignorant, however, regarding the reasons for my return, I will explain to Your Electoral Grace those [which I consider most important]. To begin with, I am returning not out of contempt for the authority of the Imperial Majesty or of Your Electoral Grace or of any other government. Human authority is not always to be obeyed, namely, when it undertakes something against the commandments of God;<sup>3</sup> yet it should never

be despised but always honored. Christ did not justify Pilate's verdict; but he did not depose him or the emperor, nor did he show any contempt for him.

The first reason [for my return]: I am called by the whole congregation at Wittenberg in a letter filled with urgent begging and pleading. Since no one can deny that the [present] commotion<sup>6</sup> has its origin in me, and since I must confess that I am a humble servant of the congregation to which God has sent me, I had no way of refusing [this call] without rejecting Christian love, trust, and obedience. Many may consider this commotion something demonic, many may criticize and condemn it; no doubt they don't consider this to be a reason for my return and instead might consider it only just that Wittenberg and the work that was begun there should be left to perish. This does not excuse me, however, because God will not judge me according to the belief or disbelief of others, be they many or few, but according to my own conscience. I know that what I have to say and what I have begun does not originate in me but in God; no death or persecution will teach me differently. It seems to me that one has to leave it this way.

The second reason [for my return]: on account of my absence Satan has intruded into my fold at Wittenberg. The whole world shouts it abroad—and it certainly is true—that Satan has injured some [sheep] which I cannot heal with any writing. I have to deal with them personally via mouth and ear. My conscience will no longer allow me to yield or procrastinate. Therefore I have to disregard not only Your Electoral Grace's pleasure or displeasure but even the whole world's wrath or good will. [The congregation at Wittenberg is,] after all, my fold, entrusted to me by God; they are my children in Christ. There has been no time for doubting whether I should or should not return. I owe it to them to lay down my life for them, as Christ requires, John 10 [:11], and by God's grace I will do that willingly and joyfully. Had I been able to help things by writing letters, as I did until now, so that it would not have been necessary to be called back, why should I not willingly consent to stay away from Wittenberg even for good, since it is also my duty to die for my neighbors sake?

The third reason [for my return]: I am rather afraid (and I worry that unfortunately I may be only too right) that there will be a real rebellion in the German territories, by which God will punish the German nation. For we see that this gospel is excellently received by the common people; but they receive it in a fleshly sense; that is, they know that it is true but do not want to use it correctly.<sup>9</sup> Those who should calm such rebellion only aid it. They attempt to put out the light by force, not realizing that they are only embittering the hearts of men by this and stimulating them to revolt. They behave as if they wanted themselves, or at least their children, destroyed. No doubt God sends this as a punishment.

**The spiritual tyranny has been weakened, and this was the only purpose of my writings. ...**

(PB supplied the bold and underline 😊)

There are certainly more reasons [for my return]; I do not yet consider them urgent enough, however, to point them out or think about them thoroughly. One reason is more than sufficient, namely, the [cause of the] gospel is in need, and therefore I could not take human matters into consideration.

With this I beg Your Electoral Grace to be gracious to me and not to hold against me my present stay in Your Electoral Grace's city; I know that this stay is without Your Electoral Grace's knowledge or consent. Your Electoral Grace is lord only of earthly goods and bodies, but Christ

is also lord of souls. ***To these he has sent me and for this [purpose] he has raised me up. I cannot abandon them. I trust my Lord Christ is stronger than our enemies and certainly can protect me from them if it is his will. If he does not wish to do this, then his blessed will be done. I certainly know, however, that I shall not suffer danger or harm from Your Electoral Grace.***

I commend Your Electoral Grace to God's mercy.  
Wittenberg, March 8, 1522

Your Electoral Grace's  
dedicated servant,

MARTIN LUTHER<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [\*Luther's works, vol. 48: Letters I\*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 48, pp. 393–398). Fortress Press.