

Preface to the Weiss Hymnal

1528

Translated by Paul Zeller Strodach

Revised by Ulrich S. Leupold

The enormous popular response to the hymns of Luther and his friends resulted in countless reprints of his hymns and hymnals; almost a hundred Lutheran hymnals were published in Luther's lifetime. Without copyright laws, Luther's hymns were fair prey for every printer who wanted to cash in on the tremendous demand for them. Some of these reprints were done with care, but others, prepared in great haste to scoop the market, circulated the Wittenberg hymns in badly corrupted versions.¹

Luther dealt with this situation in his *New Preface by Martin Luther*. The earliest extant source for this preface is the hymnal published by Andrew Rauscher of Erfurt in **1531**. But Rauscher's hymnal is a reprint of Joseph Klug's Wittenberg hymnal of 1529, which is lost. Lucke² has made a good case for the assumption that Klug in turn borrowed it from Hans Weiss's Wittenberg hymnal of **1528**. The German text, *Ein neue Vorrede Marti. Luth.*, is given in **WA 35, 475-476**; the following translation is a revision of P. Z. Strodach's translation in *PE 6, 285-286*.

A New Preface by Martin Luther

Now there are some who have given a good account of themselves and augmented the hymns so that they by far surpass me and are my masters indeed. But others have added little of worth. And since I realize that there is going to be no end to this haphazard and arbitrary revision which goes on from day to day, and that

¹ Cf. the verse on the title page of Klug 1543 and Babst 1545, in this volume, p. 332.

² WA 35, 50.

even our first hymns are more and more mutilated with each re-printing, I fear that this booklet will ultimately fare no better than good books everywhere, namely, to be corrupted and adulterated by blunderheads until the good in it will be lost and only the bad remain. Similarly, we see in St. Luke 1 [:1-4] that in the beginning everyone wanted to write a gospel, until the true gospel was all but lost among so many gospels. The same thing happened to the books of SS. Jerome, Augustine, and many others. In a word, there must be mouse dirt with the pepper?

In order to prevent **this** as far as possible, I have reviewed this booklet again and printed the hymns of our group separately with the names of the authors, something that I had heretofore avoided for fear of vainglory, but that I **am** now forced to do, lest worthless hymns by others be sold under our name. I have placed other hymns which we think are good and the most useful in the second section.

I beg and admonish all who love the pure Word no more to “improve” or enlarge our booklet without our knowledge. But if it should be “improved without our knowledge, let it be known that such is not the booklet published by us in Wittenberg. After all, everyone can compile his own booklet of hymns and leave ours intact, as we beg, desire, and herewith declare to be our wish. For we would like to safeguard the value of our own currency, not begrudging anyone else the privilege of coining a better one for themselves, in order that God’s name alone be praised and not ours. Amen.

¹ A common proverb; cf. WA 51, No. 371.