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## ”Luther in French”

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## *Luther in French*<sup>\*</sup>

*Les numéros correspondant à la pagination de la version imprimée sont placés entre crochets dans le texte et composés en gras.*

by Matthieu Arnold

<337> In the 1520s, many works of Martin Luther were translated into French. For example, in 1525 there were publications of the preface to Luther's translation of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (1522) and *Le Livre tresutile de la vraye et parfaite subiection des chrestiens* (a translation of *De libertate christiana*, 1520). Between 1524 and 1528, a small selection of the *Betbüchlein* (1522), under the title of *Le Livre de vraye et parfaicte oraison* (*The Book of the Right and Perfect Prayer*), was also published. By 1530, there were around eighty editions of Luther's works in French, which attests to his influence in the kingdom of "the most Christian king," where Catholicism remained largely in the majority.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is a little surprising that we in France had to wait until 1957 (440 years after the *95 Theses*) for the beginning of a publication of a French edition of Luther's works of some magnitude.<sup>2</sup>

### *Martin Luther's Works (MLO)*

This edition, *Martin Luther, Œuvres* (*Martin Luther's Works*), was based upon the Weimar edition and was undertaken at the initiative of the National Alliance of Lutheran Churches in France (Alliance Nationale des Églises luthériennes de France, or ANELF) and the *Positions luthériennes* Review.<sup>3</sup> It appeared under the auspices of Labor et Fides (Geneva), a specialist publisher in theological literature. The MLO receives financial support from the ANELF, thus from Protestant churches. The team that presided over the edition was led by Pastor René-J. Lovy. There was no foreword to volume I <338> to explain the process of how they chose the texts – "a first sheaf of the principle texts from the master of Wittenberg."

Most translations in volume I were done by Pierre Jundt, with the exception of three *Disputations*, translated by Jean Bosc (faculty of Protestant Theology of Paris): *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517), *The 95 Theses* (*The Disputation on the Power and Efficacy*

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<sup>\*</sup> Matthieu Arnold, « Luther in French », *Lutheran Quarterly* 34 (2020), p. 337-345.

of *Indulgences*, 1517), and the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518). This volume also contains *The Seven Penitential Psalms* (1517), *A Sermon on Indulgences and Grace* (1518), *An Explanation of the Lord's Prayer* (1519), and the *Treatise on Good Works* (1520). The critical apparatus of this volume is fairly minimal, as in those that followed after it. One page – or even just a few lines – of introduction for each work, with notes to identify the bibliographical references, briefly highlights the translation or gives concise information about the historical persons cited by Luther. The translations in *Martin Luther, Œuvres* (MLO) are intended to privilege faithfulness to the original text over style.<sup>4</sup>

The ten volumes of the first series of the MLO did not all appear in order. Volume VIII, which presented a relatively representative selection of 155 letters (some are partially translated, like the 7 April 1542 letter, where Luther urges the Elector John of Saxony and Duke Maurice to negotiate peace), appeared in 1959. However, volume II, with *The Papacy in Rome*, as well as the three larger works of the Reformer (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *The Freedom of a Christian* – translated partially from the Latin edition) and Luther's discourse at the Diet of Worms (18 April 1521), appeared only in 1966. The translators were Pierre Jundt for the German and René H. Esnault (faculty of Protestant Theology of Montpellier) for the Latin; *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation...* was done by Maurice Gravier, professor at Sorbonne.<sup>5</sup>

Volume III (1964, Pastor Albert Greiner and René H. Esnault) translated four texts from 1521 to 1524: *Commentary on the Magnificat and translation into German* (1521), *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* (1521), *On the Estate of Marriage* (1522), *Preface to the New Testament* (1522) and the *Preface to the Psalter* (1524). Volume IV (1960) presented the treatises from 1523 to 1526. Besides *Temporal <339> Authority* (1523) and three writings relating to the Peasants War (1525), volume IV included *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523); *That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture* (1523); *To The Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524); *Trade and Usury* (1524); *The Mass in the German Language* (1526); and *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* (1526).

Volume V (1958, Jean Carrère) offered two very different texts: *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) and a pastoral treatise *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague* (1526). Three

German treatises were presented in volume VI (1965, Jean Bosc) for the years 1528 to 1530: *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530), and a commentary on Psalm 117 (1530). In volume VII (1962), along with the *Catechisms* (1529) which are the subject of a multipage introduction, Pierre Jundt rendered two writings related to prayer: *A Simple Way to Pray* (1535) and *An Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks* (1541). Jundt also translated *The Smalcald Articles* (1537-1538), and Jean Bosc translated two prefaces from Latin: the preface of the third dispute *Against the Antinomians* (1539) and the famous autobiographical preface of 1545 from the first volume of Luther's works in Latin.

Volumes IX (1961) and X (1967) contain, respectively, twenty and sixteen sermons.<sup>6</sup> In volume IX, we find mainly the sermons for special occasions (the funerals of Frederick the Wise and John the Constant, the marriage of Caspar Cruciger, etc., the last sermon he gave in Wittenberg on 17 January 1546). Further, volume X contains the famous *Invocavit Sermons* (9-16 March 1522) and writings which were not, strictly speaking, sermons from the pulpit. For example, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods* (1519) or *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School* (1530). Volume X also contains sermons for Advent and Christmas that came to be known as the *Wartburgspostille* (1521-1522).

Thus, in ten years, the editors of the MLO had succeeded in publishing these several volumes of Luther's works, and they announced in volume X ("Postface," p. 8) a new series of ten volumes, dedicated to Luther's biblical commentaries. The first of these news volumes <340> was Luther's commentary of 1535 on the Epistle to the Galatians (volumes XV and XVI, 1969 and 1972, René H. Esnault), then chapters 1-11 of his Commentary on Genesis (volume XVII, 1977). In the 1980s alone, while Marc Lienhard directed the committee of publication of the MLO, several volumes appeared. In 1983, Luther's commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (volume XI, 1983, René H. Esnault; volume XII, 1985, Georges Lagarrigue, Latinist at the University of Strasbourg) was published, then the *Sermons on the First and Second Chapter of John in 1537-1538* in 1987 (volume XIII, Pierre Jundt). Volume XIV, *Lectures on the Prophets Jonah and Habakkuk* (1526), appeared in 1993, and was the last one completed by Pierre Jundt. The critical apparatus was poorly developed in these volumes as in the MLO's first series.

Volume XVIII by Georges Lagarrigue and Marc Lienhard did not appear until 2001. Equipped with a long introduction, it contains Psalms 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13 (14), 18 (19) and 21 (22)

of the *Operationes in Psalmos*. In 2015, Matthieu Arnold (Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Strasbourg), who had taken over the direction of the MLO, published with Georges Lagarrigue and Marc Lienhard two *Polemical Treatises* (volume XIX) on ecclesiology: *Against Latomus* (1521) and *Against Hanswurst (Wider Hans Wurst, 1541)*. In 2018, Pastor Pascal Hickel published, under the direction of Matthieu Arnold, all of Luther's *Prefaces to the Bible* (volume XX), including the prefaces of the Bible of 1545 as well as the earlier prefaces.

Some of the translations published in the MLO have been revised and reedited separately. Albert Greiner published the *Commentary on the Magnificat* in the Catholic editions of *Nouvelle Cité* (1983; second edition 1997). André Birmelé and Marc Lienhard reedited the *Catechisms* and *The Smalcald Articles* in *La foi des Églises luthériennes* (Paris-Geneva: Cerf Labor et Fides, 1991; third edition, 2013). In 2015, part of the editions published by Labor et Fides were reedited, with *The Babylonian Captivity* (1520) and an introduction by Thomas Kaufmann (University of Göttingen). In 2017, the publishing house Labor et Fides reedited several translations of MLO (volumes I and X) in a small book, called *Martin Luther, Une anthologie 1517-1521*. This 2017 book included an introduction by Frédéric Chavel and <341> Pierre-Olivier Léhot (faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Paris).

#### *Luther in Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*

The edition of the MLO, supported by the churches, came from a publisher specializing in Protestant theological literature whose works have limited circulation. This limitation did not apply to the publication of Luther's works by Gallimard in the collection *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (The Library of the Pleiades)*. Gallimard is one of the most important French publishers in the domain of literature, and the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* is its most prestigious collection. This collection is printed on thin "Bible" paper and has covers gilded with fine gold. Other works in this collection are by great writers of the past and present – French (such as Rabelais, Pascal, Voltaire, Rimbaud, and Camus) but also foreigners (such as Jorge Luis Borges and Franz Kafka). Religious literature also has its place in *la Pléiade*, since one can find in the collection the Bible and the writings of Qumran (*Écrits intertestamentaires*, 1987), as well as the works of St. Augustine. Intended to educate the general public, the volumes of *la Pléiade* generally have a broad distribution with thousands of copies printed.

In 1999 and 2017 there appeared two volumes of *Luther's Works* in *la Pléiade*, under the direction of Marc Lienhard and Matthieu Arnold and fifteen contributors (theologians, Latinists, and Germanists), originally for the most part from Strasbourg.<sup>7</sup> This is a collection of almost 3000 pages and eighty-one texts – or series of texts – translated from German or Latin. Volume I (forty-three texts) covers the period of 1515 to 1523, volume II (thirty-eight texts) covers the years 1523 to 1546. The editors' choices, justified in the “note about the present edition” for each of the volumes, notably “reveals the diversity of writings and the central interests [of Luther]” (volume I, p. lxxvii). As well, all the literary genres in which Luther expressed himself are represented, with the exception of the *Table Talk* (“our choice [...] resolutely rejected the texts which were not from Luther's own hand”; *ibid.*). The translations were based <342> on the Weimar edition (even though the editors also consulted the *Studienausgabe* from Berlin, 1979ff.), with the exception of *The Disputation Concerning Man* (*Disputatio de homine*, 1538), which was based on the established version by Gerhard Ebeling (*Lutherstudien*).

Necessarily, we had to go back to a certain number of texts already published in the MLO, notably, the extracts from the *Lectures on Romans*; the *95 Theses*; the great Reformation writings of 1520; *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows, On the Estate of Marriage* (1522); *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523); *Temporal Authority* (1523); Luther's writings from 1523 about worship; his writings about the Peasants War (1525); his pedagogical writings from 1524 and 1530 (*On Keeping Children in School*); *The Small Catechism* and *The Smalcald Articles*; and the preface of the 1545 Bible written in Latin.

However, these translations borrowed from the MLO were revised, some of them thoroughly, and some of them were the subject of a new translation, such as *The Sermon on Indulgences and Grace* (1518; Nicole de Laharpe), *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague* (1526 ; Nicole de Laharpe), *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* (1526; Albert Greiner),<sup>8</sup> and finally *Letter on the Intercession of the Saints* (1530; Hubert Guicharrousse). Many of these works had previously not been published in French. In particular, this was the case with all of the hymns (Patrice Veit), *Trade and Usury* (1520; Annemarie Lienhard), *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* (extracts, 1524 ; Hubert Guicharrousse), a certain number of letters (*To the Community of Esslingen*, 1523; *Letter...on the subject of seditious spirits*, 1524; letters to his family; Matthieu Arnold), the *Warning to His Dear German People* (1531; Albert Greiner), the *Thesis Concerning the Right Resistance to the*

*Emperor* (1538; Gustave Hentz and Georges Lagarrigue), and excerpts from *On the Councils and the Church* (1539; Daniel Olivier).

For financial reasons, we finally had to abandon the publication of the *Large Catechism*, which Matthieu Arnold had prepared for printing. Because of its length, the treatise *De servo arbitrio*, along with Erasmus's *De libero arbitrio* to which Luther was responding, was the subject of a publication in 2001, as part of the Gallimard pocket editions (new translation by Georges Lagarrigue). Volume II published a letter from Luther to Josel of Rosheim (11 June 1537), <343> but not his hostile writings to the Jews in 1543. *On the Jews and Their Lies* was published in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

The critical apparatus (for each text an introduction, notes about the text, bibliography, and notes), printed in a small font at the end of each volume, is on a scholarly scale without precedent in any French edition of Luther's works. We note that Daniel Olivier, Roman Catholic specialist on Luther, introduced and annotated the treatise *On the Councils and the Church*.

The editors were not responsible for the long delay between the publication of the first and second volumes. In 2004, Marc Lienhard and Matthieu Arnold gave the print-ready text of Volume II to the publisher, who, however, waited until the Jubilee of 2017 to publish it. (During that time, a single volume of the *Works* of John Calvin appeared in *la Pléiade* in 2009.) However, Volume I sold over 8,000 copies; also, thanks to the publication of that volume in 2000 and 2001, Luther was the subject of the German teaching qualification (agrégation d'allemand), the prestigious competition for professors of secondary education in France. As for Volume II, it has already sold 3,000 copies.

This delay has had unfortunate consequences for the collaborators. Albert Greiner, Daniel Olivier and Georges Lagarrigue passed away before the publication of Volume II. On the other hand, it allowed Matthieu Arnold and Marc Lienhard to improve the corpus of translations, and it forced them to update the critical apparatus.

### *Other Editions and Projects*

It is not possible to discuss all of the translations of Luther's smaller works which were published in theological reviews like *Positions luthériennes* (Paris), *Revue d'Histoire et Philosophie religieuses* (Strasbourg), and, for the 2017 Jubilee, the *Études théologiques et religieuses* (Montpellier). However, one publication we will mention is the 1996 (Paris, Seuil)

French-German edition of the treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* and several prefaces of the Bible (Old Testament, New Testament, Romans), by the philosopher Philippe Büttgen. Also, there is an edition published in 2004 (Strasbourg, Oberlin; edited reissue in 2016, Lyon, Olivétan) of the *95 Theses*. Luther's anti-Jewish treatise <344> *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi (Of the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Christ, 1543)* was published in the Champion editions in 2019 (Paris; translation by Hubert Guicharrousse, annotation by Mathias Morgenstern – Tübingen) under the title: *Martin Luther et la Kabbale (Martin Luther and the Kabbalah)*.

Labor et Fides publishing originally planned to finish the MLO series with 20 volumes, but this does not exclude the possibility of another volume, notably relating to Luther's pastoral writings (*Trostschriften*). It is also missing a scholarly edition of the *Table Talk* in French.

By editing over a hundred texts or series of texts (letters, sermons), the editions of the MLO and *Works (la Pléiade)* allowed French readers to become acquainted with a significant and representative part of Luther's writings. Has the image of the Reformer been profoundly changed? In the larger public and in the French media, it is always Luther's anti-Jewish writings that garner more attention than the pastoral treatises and his message which comforts and empowers individuals.

The editions of MLO and *Works* were carried by theologians, but Protestant Germanists and Latinists played an important part. While the MLO series was first published by the faculties of theology at the Universities of Paris and Montpellier, after the 1980s the center of gravity for editing Luther's works was moved to Strasbourg. This evolution testifies, without a doubt, to the decline of Lutheranism in France – with Alsace as an exception. This also meant a brake on the steady pursuit of a large edition of the Reformer's works in France; the readership is very small in number, despite the interest that many Catholics demonstrate for Luther. Moreover, due to ever heavier administrative burdens, the universities labor more and more to find the time (and the money) for these major editorial enterprises. The translation of Luther's works into French will continue, but at a slower pace than the first MLO series and more modestly than the edition of *Luther's Works* in *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*.

*Translated by Andrea Odegaard.*



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<345><sup>1</sup> See Francis Higman, *La diffusion de la Réforme en France* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1992), 18 and 37f.

<sup>2</sup> In 1934, Henri Strohl, professor of the Protestant Theology Faculty at the University of Strasbourg, edited a small anthology of Luther's writings – often given in the form of extracts. This anthology was called *La Substance de l'Évangile (The Essence of the Gospel)* (Paris: La Cause, reissue, 2016). In 1945, the Germanist Maurice Gravier published, in a bilingual edition (German-French), *Les Grands Écrits Réformateurs (The Great Writings of the Reformers)* (Paris: Aubier, reissue, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> See the foreword of volume 1, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Many “Alerts” or “Forewords” from the translator testify to this concern for faithfulness, which leads to a very (if not too) literal translation: “Working with the Weimar edition of the text, we endeavored to strictly enforce faithfulness to the rule adopted by the translation team, to the detriment – we must admit – of style” (Albert Greiner, vol. III, p. 7). “[...] very closely following the German text. If this method undoubtedly harms the elegance of the French, it permits more respect for the movement and the originality of Martin Luther's phrasing” (Jean Bosc, vol. V, p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> See note 2.

<sup>6</sup> The translator of these two volumes (Pierre Jundt?) was not mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> Originally, there was a question about publishing a third volume of Bible commentaries, but the project was abandoned after the publication of volume I.

<sup>8</sup> This translation of the title “*Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem stande sein können*” to “*Les soldats peuvent-ils accéder au salut*” is more pleasing than that of the MLO, volume IV.

<sup>9</sup> The critical edition by Johannes Honigmann (translator) and Pierre Savy (University of Paris-Est), Paris, Champion.