

Instruction of Johannes Bugenhagen Pomer  
that the opinion concerning the sacrament  
that is read in the Psalter translated into  
German under his name is not his

Wittenberg 1526<sup>1</sup>

(p. 1) [Left margin: In Latin it is written *Auguste per Martinum Bucerum*. This is incorrect. It should read *Argentine per Martinum Bucerum, etc.*]<sup>2</sup>

Instruction of Johannes Bugenhagen Pomer that the opinion concerning the sacrament that is read in the Psalter translated into German under his name is not his.

1. The original is titled *Vnterrichtung Johan Bugenhagen Pomers/das die meynung von dem Sacrament/ so yn dem Psalter/vnter seinem nahmen gedeuschet/wird gelesen/nicht sein ist. Wittemberg. M.D.XXVi* [Herzog August Bibliothek 1034.4 Theol. 4°].

2. The correction is noted because *Argentine*, not *Auguste*, is the Latin word for Strasbourg.

My interpretations of the Psalter of David, which I have written in Latin, have been translated into German in Strasbourg by Martin Bucer.<sup>3</sup> They were first published in German and printed by Adam Petri in Basel in this year 1526. Several statements and opinions that are not mine are, indeed, mixed into this translation. Yet, I tolerate this gladly, for I am pleased that Christ is preached, in whatever manner it happens. However, I cannot tolerate that what I must truly consider to be godless and unchristian (God grant that Christ may truly help me) has been included among my opinions, which are based on Scripture, and are made public under my name. In the 111th Psalm which (p. 2) begins thusly, “LORD, I want to thank you with all my heart,” [Ps. 111:1a] an addition has been made regarding the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ as if I, too, were a defender of the opinion and of the sects who deny, also against the bright, clear, public words of Christ with which He instituted this sacrament, that in it the true body of Christ is<sup>4</sup> eaten and His true blood is drunk by the believers. The addition implies that one must thus fight against Christ’s word as one has, on account of God’s favor and grace, fought against human dogmas and against the godless, unchristian abuse of this holy sacrament.

It appears as if I had not made known and disclosed my opinion with plain, clear words, not only in other books<sup>5</sup> but also in a public,

3. Martin Bucer (1491–1551) was the leading reformer in Strasbourg. He sought to mediate between the Lutheran Reformers in Saxony and the German Swiss Reformers in his sacramental theology. In doing so, he preferred Huldrych Zwingli’s (1484–1531) symbolic understanding of Christ’s presence to the real-presence theology of the Lutherans. The translation to which Bugenhagen is referring is titled *Psalter wol verteutsch aus der heylingen Sprach. Verklärung des Psalters/fast klar vnd nutzlich/Durch Johann Bugenhag aus Pomern/Von dem Latein inn Teutsch/an vil orten durch jn selbs gebessert. Mit etlichen vorreden/am anfang/wol zu mercken. Vergattung der Psalmen/vnd Summarien/zu Christlichen brauch fast troestlich. Zeyger der materien vnd inhalt/so inn der auszlegung gehandelt. Der Psalmen anfang/zu Latein vnd Teutsch/mit ihren zweispeltigen zalen verzeychnet.* Gedruckt zu Basel/durch Adam Petri/im iar M.D.XXVI.

4. The original adds *nicht*, but that addition is contrary to the point that Bugenhagen is making.

5. See Bugenhagen’s *Von der Euangelischen Messz/was die Messz sey/wie vnd durch wen/vnd warumb sy aussgesetzt sey. Auch wie man Messz soll hoeren/vnd das hochwirdig Sacrament empfahren/vnd*

open letter to Dr. Johannes Hess,<sup>6</sup> issued against the opinion and sects.<sup>7</sup> Thereby I have also provoked this sacramental rabble to write little books against me in which some have misused their ability, but several have misused their inept incompetence and foolishness, not so much against me but against Christ's word. However, how could this translator of mine not have known this? Therefore, with what kind of conscience was he so bold as to deceive and dupe the world as though I held and taught this also? Do you also think that I would blab slander if I were to deal with this disloyalty and betrayal (p. 3) as they deserve, namely, with appropriate words? Truly, they would not be words of slander or rebuke but genuine truth, even if the world itself were to pass sentence and make a judgment concerning this matter.

However, I am not dealing with this matter because I want to defend my name or to defame and soil that of another. Let God, who out of just and fair tribunal and judgment desires that they who do not love the truth be misled with lies, see to it. However, now I am only dealing with this, namely, that I do not want to allow that which I do not hold to be publicized under my name. Indeed, I hold the opposite because of Christ's institution. I am concerned that since there are always some who are eager to mislead and who always wish to follow human thoughts and dreams, that they do not say in contradiction to my public witness that I am an initiator, promoter, and participant in such misleading. For I am so far from wishing

*warumb man es empfecht. Wittenberg 1524; also Eyn sendebriefff herrn Johan Bugenhagen Pomern/ Pfarrer zu Wittenberg/vber eyne frage vom Sacrament. Wittenberg, 1525; and Etlich Christliche bedencken von der Mess vnd andern Cerimonien. Johan. Pomer. Philip. Melanchthon. Wittenberg, 1525. Translations of all three of these treatises are included in these volumes. See 463–79, 481–89, 501–9.*

6. See *An open letter against the new error concerning the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Johann Bugenhagen Pomer. Wittenberg. 1525. The translated treatise is also included in these volumes. See 491–99.

7. The original has a question mark rather than a period at the end of this sentence.

something malicious on Bucer that I am also greatly concerned about him because he has fallen into such error. I also say now what I must say with sorrow because this opinion concerning the sacrament was published and came to light not only under my name but also in the precious, exquisite book of the Psalter. I did not want to be part of and participate in this deception with my silence. Bucer himself should be my witness how high and precious I regarded him and how honestly (p. 4) I have behaved toward him so that I also entrusted my Psalter to his pleasure. He thus says in his preface to the Psalter that I wrote the following words to him, and he writes the truth thereby and no lies:

Translate this Psalter of mine as freely as you wish—change, add, delete, arrange it differently, put some things in their place, interpret some things more clearly or also differently so that it is consequently no less your Psalter than mine. From my perspective, everything should be fitting for you in this matter so that you may hope to be useful to our Germans in order that now also the unlearned and children might understand something about the Psalter which even the most learned doctors lacked in earlier times. Proceed. The LORD be with you. Amen.

These are my words, as he himself truthfully states, and concerning which words he says,

These are the words of our expositor, Johannes Pomeranus, which he wrote to me in his own hand, which I thus observed. I did not leave out anything that he wrote usefully in Latin for a proper, natural understanding of the Psalms. I did arrange it in a different order which, I hope, will be most helpful to the laity's understanding.

Those are Bucer's words. Now, if he did what he has promised, then I am pleased, because I did not examine everything. However, dear one, tell me, since when has this sacramental matter sneaked into my Psalter? (p. 5) Perhaps it was thought that this book precisely lent itself to this so that everything which some hold in opposition to us

could be sold under our name, even if we did not like it. Everyone knows well what kind of matter this is. I posit that Bucer did not want to confess and confirm our opinion concerning the sacrament for reasons of conscience, also not where he translates a work which is not his own. Why did he not leave it out entirely because he himself says correctly and surely that it is not necessary to speak about the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in this Psalm? I would truly have praised him as a godly person who did not dare present my error (which is what he wants it to be considered) to the Germans for the sake of his conscience, for we demand it from no one that he act or speak against his conscience, however he errs. Why did he seek cause and opportunity in this place, where it was also not necessary, to mix in his teaching as if it were mine so that he tainted my name in this manner and the office of the word, committed to me by God, and made the believer in Christ suspicious, since I, after all, thought the very best of him in this matter?

He can offer whatever excuse he wishes, and it will be considered to be ridiculous and foolish since I wrote few words about the sacrament in that work (p. 6) which, after all, say nothing against this new opinion. He could not only have translated these words accurately but might also have preached them openly with good conscience (of which all sacramentarians must also be my witnesses). However, I have testified with clear words in the previous Psalm which begins, "The Lord said to my lord," [Ps. 110:1] that I do not hold what the new opinions and sects teach for the sake of these words. I do not mention the fact that when I wrote this commentary it did not seem fitting to have a mistrust or suspicion that this conflagration against the institution of Christ would one day arise and rage.

However, perhaps those same words of mine through which I freely allowed him and gave him authority to add something to

my words, to delete, to change, and the like, will not only excuse him but also reprove me as one who deals unjustly because I accuse him on account of this addition. Yes, it is as if I did not fix a goal which he should not transgress and prescribe opinions from which he should not depart and from which he should refrain. Or should he for that reason publicize such opinions under our name which he surely knows are publicly condemned by us? In my opinion, another person could then have added these or similar sayings, that stone is bread, that water is fire, that the Turk is a Christian, that God does not rule, (p. 7) and other similar things, and then excused himself or even defended such assertions as if he did it justly and properly because I allowed and permitted him to add whatever he wished. Do you also think that he did masterfully and honestly what I entrusted to him and hoped from him?

Others may note and see my honest heart and spirit here. However, I fully blame my foolishness here. Indeed, I confess my sin that I have entrusted this treasure of God's word, commended to me by God, to the will and pleasure of a human being, even though I myself teach that one should trust in no one except in God alone, even if love is a servant of all, as it wishes. I must truly be the most foolish human being if I do not deal more cleverly and carefully in the future in these matters pertaining to faith. For through this foolishness of mine (which I freely admit), I have placed under suspicion not only myself but also the most excellent and most godly men who are here with us (who by the grace of God have deserved well-being and the very best for the sake of Christ's gospel), as if they also held this new opinion concerning the sacrament with me, which no one among us who teach publicly does, although one can easily advise and help regarding this pestilence and suspicion. However, I now want to recount how this happened.

(p. 8) As the German Psalter began to be sold, I was absolutely certain that everything had been done correctly and well, as I desired. That was the case until someone came from Augsburg nearly a half year later and showed me that this new opinion concerning the sacrament was mixed into the Psalter. At first I was startled, but then, when he said further to me, “And because it is said that you wrote this, it is said that the whole University of Wittenberg therefore also holds this opinion,” then I began to laugh and thought that he made fun of me or ridiculed me. Therefore I said, “What does this have to do with the whole University, even if the one Pomeranian held this and wrote it by himself?” However, when I considered the matter further, I found that this clamor was not totally in vain and that the devil, a father of lies, had a fine, comfortable appearance and adornment here whereby he might easily persuade everyone that all of us in Wittenberg held this opinion.

For at the beginning of the Psalter my preface to the most illumined sovereign prince and lord, Sir Frederick of highly praiseworthy memory, Elector and Duke of Saxony, etc.,<sup>8</sup> is also in German. In this preface I confess publicly that I have taught in our University what I have written in the Psalter. In addition, letters of praise and writings of commendation by Doctor Martin Luther and by Philip Melancthon,<sup>9</sup> with (p. 9) which they commend to the reader everything that I write in this Psalter, are also added. Therefore, since this godless opinion regarding the sacrament will

8. Frederick III (1463–1525), also known as the Wise, was the Elector of Saxony when Luther initiated the Reformation movement while he was teaching at the University of Wittenberg, which the Elector had established in 1502. Elector Frederick protected Luther after Pope Leo X (1475–1521) excommunicated him and after the Diet of Worms, under the leadership of Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), declared him to be an outlaw.

9. Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) was a colleague of Martin Luther and Johannes Bugenhagen at the University of Wittenberg. As a creative explicator of the evangelical theological heritage, the ecclesiastical diplomat of the Lutherans, the most important writer of Lutheran confessional materials, and leading educator and educational reformer during the sixteenth century, he stands second only to Luther as a leader of the Wittenberg Reformation.

be read in the Psalter, it will be said that not only Pomeranus holds this thusly but that this opinion is also confessed openly in our University and schools and that it is confirmed and strengthened through Dr. Martin and Philip with public witness. And because Pomeranus confesses that it is read and treated publicly in the University and these two most eminent men confirm all that Pomeranus has written in the Psalter, it follows that the whole school not only does not oppose Pomeranus in this matter but, at the same time, also teaches such with him. That is what the devil wanted and that is also what he sought. The clamor goes out that this Psalter will be printed in Latin and sent to France as well as to others who do not know German. If those people deal with God's work and business, what need is there of such importune and lying support?

Therefore, Christian reader, I entreat and exhort you through Christ that you might admonish your good friends who might perhaps not receive this writing and instruction of ours with both words and writings, if they somehow come upon this German Psalter, so that they should not accept, under my name, this new opinion concerning the sacrament in which (p. 10) it is denied that the believers eat<sup>10</sup> the true body of Christ when they eat the bread of Christ and drink<sup>11</sup> the true blood of Christ when they drink the cup of the Lord. For even if their opinion were true, yet to say that Pomeranus holds this opinion and teaches it openly in this University of ours and has also written it in the Psalter to the

10. The original reads "do not eat." However, that is clearly an error, since it does not reflect the position of the Swiss reformers and those influenced by them. Zwingli and his allies rejected the Roman and Lutheran assertions that believers eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ when they eat and drink the sacramental elements. Bugenhagen is obviously concerned that readers of the Psalms commentary might accept the position of the Swiss with the mistaken opinion that it is also espoused by the Wittenberg reformers. Hence, he is urging that the sacramental theology of the Swiss, which Bucer had explicated in his addition to the Psalms commentary, be rejected.

11. The original reads "do not drink." This, too, is an error. Note the comments in footnote 10 above.

most illumined prince and lord, Lord Frederick, Elector and Duke of Saxony, etc., and that these men, Dr. Martin and Philipp, confirm the Pomeranian's opinion with public letters of praise is surely so godless and unchristian that, even if I were to be silent (Oh, had God wished that it had been proper for me to remain silent), all those who have heard and read about our activity, even if they are our adversaries, must shout that these are such shameless lies that nothing more shameless could be said.

I want nothing to do with those who sadden and confuse godly, good consciences for whose sake Christ died to rescue them and also with those who hinder and halt the progress of the gospel so that some are vexed on account of this discord. However, some do nothing other than deal with this sacramental matter as if the present revelation of the gospel were nothing and that the forgiveness of sins, or that we have received peaceful consciences through (p. 11) faith, and that we recognize how we have become children of God and, similarly, that the proper use of the sacraments of Christ has been shown to the world should be nothing at all. Those same people can, indeed, sadden the consciences and confuse them, but they can comfort no conscience, for they cannot make any conscience certain, not even their own, though they are judged to be the cleverest among them because of the tropes and clever talk which they devise here. The many books which they have published concerning this opinion are witnesses against them. And whoever seeks<sup>12</sup> this certainty in their books is worthy of reading nothing else but such books.

Therefore, I say that I want to have nothing to do with these sacramentarians and thereby turn away from the certain words of

12. The original reads *nicht suchet*. However, the context suggests that the inclusion of the *nicht* is an error. Bugenhagen clearly does not intend to be critical of those who do not seek certainty in the books of these sacramental theologians but of those who do seek such certainty in those writings.

Christ, who does not betray me, to doubtful human interpretations since I know, as the apostle Peter also admonishes, that the one who speaks, that is, who has an office of teaching, must be certain that he speaks nothing else but God's word [1 Pet. 4:11]. I am also not unaware that St. Paul says, "Whoever leads you astray will have to bear his judgment, no matter who he is" [Gal. 5:10b].

However, I am surprised that there is no honor among thieves<sup>13</sup> in that they say that all the ancient fathers since apostolic times have held and written down this opinion of theirs<sup>14</sup> regarding the sacrament. Perhaps they think that there is no one but they who (p. 12) has or will see the writings and books of the ancient ones. Tell me, dear one, with what kind of conscience can they confess this who, after all, boast in public writings that they have most diligently searched and rummaged through everything that the ancient ones have written? The ancient fathers have surely written much about spiritual eating and about the Christian use of this sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, just as we have also done to this point, both in our writing and preaching. Yet, in several opportune places they also confess Christ with clear words, as they have been taught by the institution and words of Christ, that the bread and the cup of the Lord (which are called the sacrament) are the true and not the imagined body and blood of Christ for the disciples of Christ who eat them.

However, I call those disciples of Christ who, taught by the gospel, confess or are considered to be confessing Christ and everything that belongs to Christ. Now, they may pretend to be whatever they wish before God who alone knows how to separate the real, true disciples from the false, since they are hidden. For all scandalous

13. Bugenhagen adapts a German proverb and states *sie wollen den krahnen die augen ausstechen*.

14. Luther is referring to the Swiss theologians and their supporters.

people, unbelievers, and evildoers will be bound together<sup>15</sup> out of this realm of Christ only at the end of time.

You will see all of this clearly in the ancient fathers. In addition, they write with such certainty concerning this sacrament that one may see how they also did not think (p. 13) or somehow imagine that their descendants would hold something else than that the body and blood of Christ are present here. Indeed, also the very oldest after the apostles, Tertullian<sup>16</sup> (whom these,<sup>17</sup> as well as the others,<sup>18</sup> greatly misuse against us), confirms our opinion in the book concerning the resurrection of the flesh where he says this: “Our flesh is nourished with the body and blood of Christ so that the soul is also fed by God and becomes fat.”<sup>19</sup> What could be said any clearer? Examine the place of the citation itself so that you may see what Tertullian calls the figure or form of the body in another place and that Tertullian does not speak about the figure that these have imagined and dreamed up. Therefore it is just as true that the ancient ones are supposed to have said that the body and blood of the Lord are not in the sacrament as it is true that the University of Wittenberg supposedly teaches this.

However, this is not the place to deal with this matter. Whoever believes, believes; whoever argues, argues. Rather, through what I have said up to this point I desire that everyone know what is known most of all, namely, that this opinion about the sacrament which is read as ours in this German Psalter, about which we have

15. While one might expect that Bugenhagen would state that such people will be expelled or separated from the realm of Christ, he uses the word *zusammenbinden*. He may be using this word to suggest the imagery of the binding together of the weeds at the harvest or at the last judgment.

16. Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225) was the most influential theologian in the western part of the Mediterranean world before St. Augustine. He was the first significant theologian of the church to write in Latin. While he himself was attracted by Montanism, he was a diligent apologist of the Christian tradition against the Greek, Roman, and Jewish traditions. He is particularly remembered as an early proponent of the doctrine of the Trinity.

17. Bugenhagen is referring to the Swiss theologians and their supporters.

18. The reference is, no doubt, to the Roman theologians.

19. See Tertullian’s *De resurrectione carnis*.

spoken, is not mine. God knows that I have spoken according to my conscience. I will easily forgive all if they will only cease making the consciences sorrowful and confused (p. 14) which they cannot comfort with their opinion and belief.

However, for the sake of the Latin Psalter, which was first published in 1524, I want to assure both the sellers and the buyers not to fear that I intend to improve it in the future so that they do not believe the printers who are always in the habit of adding these or similar words to the front page, “improved; reviewed again,” and whatever other words they use. As far as I am concerned it shall remain as it was published initially so that it may be a remembrance of this noble gift of God through which He granted me the ability to reach the very end of the Psalter without another guide or a predecessor even though I was also burdened with the daily responsibility of teaching others.

In addition, I do not ascribe so much solely to myself so that I desired to indicate to others everything in the light and glow of the gospel that requires a different or even a clearer interpretation in my Psalter, as if others did not see something as well and as if it were not enough simply to point out cause and convenience to a clever man, especially now that the Psalter is so clearly and purely translated into the German language by Doctor Martin Luther so that his translation could well be considered to be an exposition.

In addition, even if there were no other reason, I still do not want to change anything in it for the sake of those who want to be masters of a strange book (p. 15). If it is only fitting that they find something to chide, I do not want to yield to them. Rather, I want to allow anyone to judge and form an opinion freely about the meaning of the Psalms. Why do they not rather address some prophet who has not been interpreted in our own time and interpret him so that we might actually see their expertise? If they would read my preface,<sup>20</sup>

they would see that through Christ I have accomplished in the Psalter what I promised. I surely know how limited my abilities are, for God has given me a heart that I can stay within my abilities and not seek to transcend them too far.

It may surely be that the printers will perhaps publish my Psalter in the future that is printed more beautifully, desirably, and also with greater diligence, but it will not happen that I will add more to it. However, if it, indeed, pleases me sometime in the future to add something, I will do it with a specific little book so that I do not burden those financially who have already bought the book by forcing them to buy it again.

Printed in Wittenberg by Joseph Klug in the year 1526.

20. See the preface to *Iannis PomeraniBygenhagii in Librum Psalmorum Interpretatio*. Excvsā Anno. M.D.XXIII. Mense Ivlis.