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Hieronymus Emser

To the Bull in Wittenberg

—ARMIN SIEDLECKI

INTRODUCTION

HIERONYMUS EMSER WAS BORN in Weidenstetten near the Swabian city of Ulm in 1478. He studied in Tübingen and Basel, where he received a humanist education, and in 1504 he lectured at the University of Erfurt, where Martin Luther was among his students. In 1509 he entered the service of Duke George of Saxony, of the Albertine line of the House of Wettin. In contrast to the Ernestine line, which included Frederick the Wise and John the Steadfast, who were among the earliest supporters of Martin Luther, Duke George favored the Catholic Church. Emser served as Duke George's court chaplain in Dresden until his death in 1527. He was succeeded in his post by Johannes Cochlaeus, another of Martin Luther's most vehement critics.¹

1. On Emser, see especially: Agostino Borromeo, "Emser, Hieronymus," in *OER*, 2:42–43; Hieronymus Emser, "An den Stier zu Wittenberg," in *Flugschriften gegen die Reformation* (1518–1524), edited by Adolf Laube and Ulman Weiss (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 221–28; Ludwig Enders, ed., *Luther und Emser: Ihre Streitschriften aus dem Jahre 1521* (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1890–1892); Marc Mudrak, *Reformation und alter Glaube: Zugehörigkeit der Altgläubigen im Alten Reich und in Frankreich* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Heribert Smolinsky, *Augustin von Alvelde und Hieronymus Emser: Eine Untersuchung zur Kontroverstheologie der frühen Reformationszeit im Herzogtum Sachsen*, RGST 122 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1983); Heribert Smolinsky, "Hieronymus Emser (1478–1527)" in *Katholische Theologen der Reformationszeit* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), 1:37–46; Christoph Volkmar, *Catholic Reform in the Age of Luther*.

Given their humanist training and approach to theology, there was much that Emser and Luther had in common, and their relationship was initially quite sympathetic. In his correspondence Luther himself had even occasionally referred to the other as “Emser *noster*” (our Emser). Even in the work translated here, Emser invoked his correspondence with Willibald Pirckheimer, Peter Mosellanus, Philipp Melanchthon, and Johannes Lang to contradict Luther’s claim that all scholars had turned against Emser, pointing to the continued existence of a network of biblical humanists with their own program of loyal reform within the church.² A change in the relationship between Emser and Luther came in 1519 with the Leipzig Disputation, where Andreas Karlstadt and Martin Luther debated with Johann Eck on the authority of the pope and questions of free will, divine grace, and the legitimacy of indulgences. Emser had attended the disputation and saw certain similarities between Luther’s argumentation and points raised by Jan Hus, who had been condemned as a heretic and burnt at the stake a century earlier. In an open letter to Johann Zack,³ church administrator in Prague, he issued a warning that the Bohemian church should not be led astray but at the same time expressed doubt that it was Luther’s intention to return the teachings of Hus to Bohemia. Luther took this concern to be a feigned expression of friendship, intended to back him into a corner and force him to either renounce his position or to acknowledge publicly that he shared Hus’s heretical views. He responded accordingly with a strongly worded open letter, *To the Goat Emser*,⁴ which Emser republished along with his original letter.⁵ Almost a year later, when Luther received (before its publication) the first few pages of Emser’s critique⁶ of his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,⁷ he wrote his arguably best known work against Emser—*To the Goat in Leipzig*.⁸ The appellation “goat” is a reference to the goat’s head in Emser’s family crest.

Duke George of Saxony and the Church, 1488–1525, SMRT 209 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

2. Mudrak, *Reformation und alter Glaube*, 89.

3. Hieronymus Emser, *De Disputatione Lipsicensi: quantum ad Boemos obiter deflexa est* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter the Elder, 1519).

4. Martin Luther, *Ad Aegocerotem Emserianum* (Wittenberg: Grunenberg, 1519); WA 2:656.

5. Emser, *De Disputatione Lipsicensi . . . Ad Aegocerotem Emserianum* (Augsburg: Otmar, 1519).

6. Emser, *Wider das unchristenliche Buch Martini Luters Augustiners an den Teutschen Adel außgangen* (Leipzig: Landsberg, 1521).

7. Luther, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter the Younger, 1520); WA 6:397.

8. Luther, *An den Bock zu Leipzig* (Wittenberg: Melchior Lotter the Younger, 1521);

The work translated here is Emser's reply to Luther,⁹ written before the publication of Luther's *To the Goat in Leipzig*. It appears that Emser had access to a draft of Luther's work, since he responds specifically to some of the points raised in it, such as Luther's reaction to receiving the first page of his critique of Luther's address to the Christian nobility. His reference to Tomasso Radini Tedeschi's book, on the other hand, responds to a charge made by Luther in his first letter in Latin, *To the Goat Emser*, but absent in the final published version of the German *To the Goat in Leipzig*. The controversy continued throughout 1521¹⁰—before Luther broke off all contact with Emser in 1522—but is perhaps best exemplified by a joint reading of Luther's *Goat in Leipzig* and Emser's *Bull in Wittenberg*.

TRANSLATION

As you, Brother Luther, have offered me your greeting at the beginning of your letter, there is little difference between your greeting and the kiss of Judas. For you let it be known far and wide that you are a spiritual father and Christian teacher, but your teaching resembles the gospel as much as an ass resembles a lion, for the gospel says that whoever calls his brother a fool is guilty of the fires of hell, and you call me not only a fool but also an ass. Since I do not have ears that would make me resemble a donkey, and Aristotle, Thomas [Aquinas], Bonaventure, popes, cardinals, and bishops—living and dead—would also be asses according to you, I shall prefer to remain in my ass' stable (in one of which even Christ was born) rather than your raven's nest. Formerly, I was hopeful that one would find in both our writings who was in fact the ass, but you were already set to take from this marksman festival (before it even occurred) the prize bull. Since, the first leaf had you up in arms and the goat had struck, what would a quarto or twenty of them that come after it do to you? In these I demonstrate to our lay brothers what kind of bird you are and how true to Christ and the holy Gospels your teaching is.

Allow me to defend myself before the reader against the affront you present to me in your letter, since you—as peasants often do—cut me off before I was finished speaking: just as God has given to each animal natural defenses and weapons to protect itself against other who would hurt it, talons to birds, tusks to boars, to vipers their tongues (of which you too have

WA 7:260, LW39:105–15.

9. Emser, *An den Stier zu Vuitenberg* (Leipzig: Landsberg, 1520).

10. See Enders, ed., *Luther und Emser: Ihre Streitschriften aus dem Jahre 1521* (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1890–1892).

one in your mouth), and the like, he has also given to this goat horns, which he is careful not to use against anyone except those who willfully provoke him. For God is my witness, that I am justified in defending myself against the unchristian, slanderous book that you wrote against me with no fault of mine and with no just cause. For I had resolved to keep my peace soon after Leipzig,¹¹ that I might devote myself to the holy scriptures and to my prayers. But you and many others who wished to curry your favor have since published no book in which Emser is not made sport of, and the goat becomes a scapegoat for you. Who would think ill of him, if he, following your example, should strike you on the head? For religious and civil law grant everyone the right to defense and protection.

But far be it from me to undertake this task or to write anything else against you because of your slander and taunting (in which no one takes pleasure), if I did not feel pity for the pious Christian people, whom you mislead so pathetically and divide and separate, and if my own conscience did not compel me to submit to you the Christian truth (for the sake of which every Christian should be willing to die). While you do not consider me worthy enough and say you do not hide even from those who have more ability and intellect in a single hair than I do in my entire body and soul, you would have done well to hear my words and then to judge. But your condescending spirit, with which you receive my quarts before the ink is dry, cannot tolerate that anyone says or writes anything contradictory, and does not want to hear anyone or to owe to anyone its attention or explanation, but itself. I will not speak of priests who from childhood on were no less accustomed than you to dealing with the scriptures, but even your Augustine was not ashamed to learn from a child. Therefore, it is not the spirit of the Lord that is upon you, but another [spirit], for the prophet says that the spirit of the Lord is upon no one except those that are humble, peaceful, and placid. Now it is well known throughout the land that you are like a wild beast, who day and night has neither peace nor rest himself, nor can he leave others in peace, but who like fortune and waves beating against a ship, you rub against one then another and search for what you shall eventually find.

But I cannot remain silent that you as an insult to me make the common person believe that I wrote three books against you out of anger and such hatred that you are astonished, that I slanderously chastised you and spread lies about you, so that you can win people over to your side with artful speech and rhetoric and make them not want to believe this fourth one nor even read it. First I say by my priestly faith in place of an oath that I have not had nor have envy or hatred against you in my heart on account

11. The Leipzig Debate of 1519.

of your person, but leave it to the strict judgment of God, who shall judge you and me. But I have always been opposed to your presumptuous plans against our mother, the holy Christian church, your false teaching, and your obstinate interpretation contrary to all Christian teachers, and moreover you are concocting ever greater follies every day. So I have given you three brotherly warnings and have implored you for God's sake to spare the common people who are obviously bothered by this matter, and you responded eventually with these words, "May the devil strike! The matter was not begun for God's sake and it shall not end for God's sake."¹² Whether this is Christian or un-Christian talk (for the apostle says that whatever we do, we shall do and begin in the name of the Lord), I leave up to each Christian to decide, but it is to be understood that since this conflict did not begin with God, what good can come from it?

For I have already noted that you are going down the wrong path, to teach us Germans the long condemned heresy of Jan Hus and to inflame an old, extinguished fire from the ashes. For it brought the Bohemians little joy, and other poor Christian people of our faith who were among them were greatly despised and persecuted because of it, so that I recently comforted the remaining Christians with a Christian letter and let them know that the situation is not so bad and that you yourself admitted in the [Leipzig] Disputation that the Bohemians had done wrong and should not separate themselves from the holy see and its authority. In this letter I did not offend you in any way, but made greater allowances than you deserve, but that you vilified and mocked me without warning against God's honor and justice, when you received this letter, is well attested in your slanderous book and is still fresh in my memory. I refuse to believe that I, having presented the same book as a necessity in defense of my honor and have applied the same measure to it, have become the enemy of all scholars. For the letters that they wrote to me in response, namely Willibald Pirckheimer, Peter Mosellanus, Philipp Melanchthon, and Johannes Lang of your own order, contain nothing unkind but that they would all like to see that the two of us be at peace with each other. So, thus I have concluded on the basis of their writings alone, but you have since needed me in your books and have tried to coax me into a fight with your unchristian writings.

You accuse me of writing Thomas Radini's¹³ book against you and having it printed in Rome, so that no one would find out. I ask you first, how

12. This comment likely refers to a verbal comment made by Luther within the context of the Leipzig Disputation. Cf. Adolf Laube, ed., *Flugschriften gegen die Reformation: 1518–1524* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 226–27n15.

13. Tomasso Radini Tedeschi (1488–1527), a Dominican theologian, had written an oration in the style of Cicero against Martin Luther (*In Martino Lutherum . . . Oratio*

highly do you think of me that I should compose such an eloquent and noble book? Why then do you call me an ass, if this book contains more eloquence, rhetoric, philosophy, and correct theology as well as discipline, reason, and wisdom than can be found in all your books? Furthermore, while you conclude on the basis of these quartos (which made their way to you through treachery, before I could publish my book) how much I am afraid of you, why should I go through the trouble of sending it to Rome, if I have access to printers right here? Indeed, no one who is not completely deluded as you are would judge that it is my style or composition, and he who wrote it would undoubtedly come to you and would not be ashamed of his name.

Since you would like for me to stop lying and to write truthfully, you shall know for certain that all my life I have never favored a lying man, and no decent person can truthfully say that I have ever lied to him. As I have always written truthfully, so I write now and would like to keep it that way. I submit most respectfully to the consideration and judgment of any reasonable and impartial reader that if you think that I have offended you anywhere before my rightful judge and you are justified in accusing me, I shall answer you immediately. I ask in return of you that you submit to the same measure and not rebuke me with despicable falsehoods (which is not Christian, and which no decent person could abide). So that if one has made a human error in one's writing, it should be countered with reliable, documented reasons and not with insults and abuses.

As you continue to threaten me with many angry words and let your mind run unrestrained against me, a strong Christian faith shall serve me as holy water to exorcize an evil spirit, and before this threat I shall put on no other armor than the breastplate of faith and drive you back with my sword, that is scripture and the word of God, even if you have seven evil spirits in you. But you should not misconstrue my words, as you already begin to say that I hang scripture on goose feathers but the teachers of the church on chains. Save your truth, for with Augustine I give first place to the proven and canonical scriptures, the second to the tradition of the Christian church, and only the third and last to the interpretation of the upright and honest reason of the holy teachers, and I say again with Augustine: no Christian

[Leipzig: Melchior Lotther the Elder, 1520)]. In response, Philipp Melanchthon wrote an oration in defense of Luther: *Didymi Faventini adversus Thomam Placentium, pro Martino Luthero Oratio* (Basel: Petri, 1521). Radini then issued another oration: *In Philippum Melanchthonem Lutheranae haereseon defensorem oratio* (Rome: Mazochi, 1522), which Luther suggested was written by Emser.

would argue against scripture, no peaceful person against the tradition of the church, and no intelligent person against reason.¹⁴

Finally, you should not think that you are so pure and innocent or untainted that you were first tarnished by me, as your drunken verses claim; as your name Luther is not sincere,¹⁵ I also know that you are not worth as much as a false penny. Therefore, it was never my intention to go on arguing with you, as is the custom not of learned and devout, but of thoughtless people. I do want to convey to you in writing that you have turned your face away from your mother, the Christian church and have followed in the footsteps of Hus,¹⁶ Wycliffe,¹⁷ Dolcino,¹⁸ Faustus,¹⁹ Pelagius,²⁰ Vigilantius,²¹ Arius,²² Bardesanes,²³ the Armenians,²⁴ Lampetius,²⁵ and all other old and new heretics and wanted to instruct us in long condemned heresies and errors. I believe I have said this in plain enough language without hesitation or babbling. Leave me, therefore, alone and do not obstruct me with your interlocutions, for you do not intimidate me with them, even if—according to your words (I shall be repaid what was borrowed from me)—you or your followers would do me violence to prevent my writing, God would give his spirit to another and would not leave his church. Therefore, I counsel you in Christian love and faithfulness, give up this foolishness, and even if you

14. “*Contra rationem nemo sobrius, contra Scripturas nemo christianus, contra Ecclesiam nemo pacificus senserit* [Against reason no sober person would judge, against the scriptures no Christian and against the Church no peaceful person]” (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4,6).

15. A play on words (*dann deyn nam Luter, nicht lauter ist*), linking *Luter* (Luther) and *lauter* (sincere).

16. Jan Hus (ca. 1369–1415), Bohemian reformer, burnt at the stake during the Council of Constance.

17. John Wycliffe (ca. 1320–1386), English theologian and Bible translator, posthumously condemned as a heretic.

18. Fra Dolcino (Dulcinus; ca. 1250–1307), leader of the Dulcinian reformist movement, burnt at the stake on charges of heresy.

19. Faustus of Mileve (fourth century), a Manichean bishop and contemporary of Augustine.

20. Pelagius (ca. 360–418), British monk and opponent of Augustine.

21. Vigilantius (active around 400), presbyter of Aquitaine and opponent of Jerome.

22. Arius (256–336), North African presbyter, denied the consubstantiality of Father and Son for which he was condemned by the Council of Nicea.

23. Bardesanes (or Bardasain) (154–222), Syrian gnostic and founder of the Bardesanites.

24. Probably a reference to the adoption by Armenian Christians of Monophysitism, the doctrine that asserts Christ only had one nature, which was divine.

25. Lampetius (or Lampetius; fifth century), leader of the Euchites (also known as Messalians) an allegedly fanatical and ascetic sect in Syria and Armenia.

have made sport of faith on account of glory, envy, or any other reason (since you said yourself it is not for God's sake), recant it and the two of us shall be good friends, and I shall help you to work against the corruption that is rooted not only in the priesthood in Rome but also among us Germans, as I have written to you before. With this, I commend you to God.

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