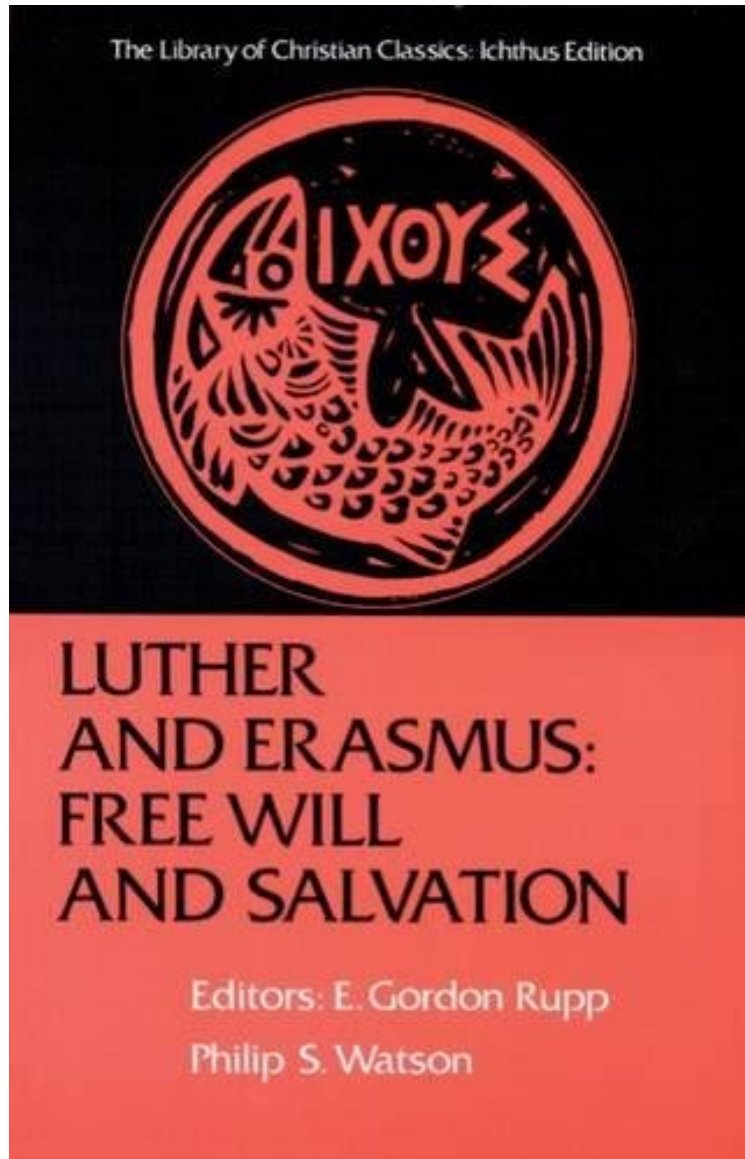


(Free) Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation (The Library of Christian Classics)

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Martin Luther, Desiderius Erasmus
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Martin Luther, Desiderius Erasmus : Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation (The Library of Christian Classics) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation (The Library of Christian Classics):

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Both Sides of the Debate, plus superior notes and indices. By B. Marold Desiderius Erasmus (De Libero Arbitrio) and Martin Luther (De Servo Arbitrio), Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation, Translated and Edited by E. Gordon Rupp, Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1969) Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, translated by J. I. Packer O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1959) The exchange on the issue of free will between Erasmus and Luther may be one of the best known theological exchanges in the history of Christian literature. If for no other reason, it is memorable for being the impetus behind Luther's writing what he considered his best theological work. Both works were written in Latin, and both are peppered throughout with references to a wide range of both theological works and classical Greek and Latin authors. Both were linguists of the first order. Erasmus had St. Jerome as his hero, while Luther was especially devoted to the thought of Jerome's contemporary, Augustine of Hippo. Both works cited above contain very good translations of Luther's work, which is about four times longer than Erasmus' Diatribe. Both works also contain very good introductions by the editor / translators; however the Rupp/Watson volume is clearly superior in that it contains both works, with an introduction to both works. It also has superior footnotes and combined index to their introduction, Erasmus' work, and Luther's work. In the first few years of Luther's career as a reformer, beginning in 1517, with the publication of the 95 Theses, most of Europe perceived Erasmus as an ally of Luther. Some, such as the papal legate, Jerome Aleander, thought Erasmus actually wrote Luther's works. In 1524, influential friends, got Erasmus to write a tract against Luther. Erasmus chose the issue of freedom of the will, as Luther posed the issue in his Heidelberg Disputation, Theological Theses Nr. 13 `Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin'. Erasmus correctly affirms from the outset that this issue is difficult, and that even with all the `labor' expended to address the issue, that effort has born less fruit. This immediately alerts us to observe whether the great Erasmus can succeed where so many others have failed. He also immediately points out that his `diatribe' was solicited by two of Martin Luther's more dedicated enemies, Johann von Eck (1486 - 1543) and Andreas Carlstadt (1480 - 1541). With this, Erasmus quiets any surprise by saying that he has never been an adherent to Luther's doctrines. In these opening statements, Erasmus seems to be performing a graceful ballet of words around the disputants who are discussing things with literally deadly seriousness. He also, very early on, simply says that I don't agree with Luther. `I think there to be a certain power of free choice.' He goes on to state the problem as: `By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them'. Before embarking on the argument over this issue, Erasmus suggests that this is not something which should be discussed in an open forum. He also gives credit to the findings in the traditions of the church, and the heritage of an `unwritten gospel', not unlike the authority the Jews give to their Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrashic writings. Erasmus main argument against Luther's statement of the problem (Luther agrees with Erasmus' restatement) is his trotting out a large number of scriptural passages from both the Old and New Testaments which he says supports the notion that there is no sense to `sin' unless people have the free will to avoid committing sin. He also addresses in some detail a few passages which are commonly cited to argue against free will, and he claims to show how these passages don't make the case against free will. In both Erasmus tract and in Luther's reply, it is truly amazing to see the extent to which they make personal attacks on one another's positions. About a quarter of the way through Luther's work, we stops addressing Erasmus and begins, in a consistently sneering tone, addressing the female Diatribe, a short title of Erasmus work. My Latin dictionary does not have diatribe, so I don't know if it is a masculine, feminine, or neuter noun, but Luther certainly has a lot of sport with the gender. Luther, I believe, actually argues against two different senses of `free will', and seems to not let on that he is doing so. Early in the book, when he is countering Erasmus' scriptural examples, his sense of `free will' is that absolutely nothing that a person can do is free of sin, unless they have the faith of grace. In some sense, it totally sidesteps Erasmus' point that people have a choice in what they do. Luther tacitly agrees they have a choice, but states that everything they choose will be sinful, because everything they do will arise from their sinful nature borne of the flesh. On the other hand, I believe Luther is correct in saying that Erasmus has not make his case that one's behavior contributes to their salvation. He even goes so far as to say that Erasmus has stated the evidence for Luther's case. After Luther dismisses Erasmus' scriptural arguments, with quite a few attacks on Erasmus' metaphorical interpretations of statements (plain reading of scripture is one of Luther's themes throughout his career), plus attacks on Erasmus' hero, Jerome, Luther seems to switch gears and provide evidence for the sense of `free will' which is denied by God's omniscience. St. Paul is famous for this argument, primarily in Romans and Ephesians. The argument is simplicity itself, which makes its absence in Luther's earlier discussion all the more evident. If there is an omniscient God, then He will know everything which will happen in the future, meaning that there is nothing that humans can do by their will to choose to differently than what God foreknows. It is also convenient that Luther postpones elucidating this position until after he dispatches Erasmus' argument on discussing this issue openly. The inescapable consequence of this position, which Luther does not shirk, is that the image of God presented in the introduction to Job is entirely correct. God saves or damns people entirely based on his own reasons, which are a complete mystery to us. Our proper response is to praise his greatness as our LORD. Just as Erasmus may not make his case, it is believed that Luther also did not effectively address Erasmus' points. One may leave the discussion feeling this was a tempest in a teapot, but it was not. In 1785, 260 years

after Luther's work, Immanuel Kant opened his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* with the statement 'It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will.' From this, virtually straight out of Luther, Kant adduces his categorical imperative, one of the most durable criteria for judging moral statements. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An eye opener for those who think they are morally ...By GEMAn eye opener for those who think they are morally able to make a decision to receive or believe in Christ.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy laptop userGreat reference for Theology students

This volume includes the texts of Erasmus's 1524 diatribe against Luther, *De Libero Arbitrio*, and Luther's violent counterattack, *De Servo Arbitrio*. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip Watson offer commentary on these texts as well. Long recognized for the quality of its translations, introductions, explanatory notes, and indexes, the Library of Christian Classics provides scholars and students with modern English translations of some of the most significant Christian theological texts in history. Through these works--each written prior to the end of the sixteenth century--contemporary readers are able to engage the ideas that have shaped Christian theology and the church through the centuries.

About the AuthorE. Gordon Rupp was Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Cambridge in England. Rupp also served as President of the British Methodist Church in 1969. Phillip S. Watson has served as Professor of Systematic Theology at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.