

HUGO RIPELIN OF STRASSBURG
COMPENDIUM THEOLOGICAE VERITATIS

Translated and Introduced
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HUGO RIPELIN OF STRASSBURG:

INTRODUCTION

1. Hugo Ripelin of Strassburg flourished in the second half of the thirteenth century. The exact dates of his birth and death (in Alsace) are unknown but are sometimes surmised to be around 1205-1268. Little is known of his life except that he is the author of the *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis*. And even this authorship was long in doubt, with the work being accredited, variously, to Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas—and others. But leading scholars—scholars such as Luzian Pfeleger, Martin Grabmann, Georg Boner, Heinrich Weisweiler, and Georg Steer—have now firmly established that the work was indeed Hugo's, although the exact time and place of the composition remains undetermined. The work is a compilation; and, presumably, the compilation was made during the last third of Hugo's life while he was in Strassburg.

Besides our now knowing that the *Compendium* was of Hugo's doing, we also know several other facts. Chief among these is that Hugo became a monk of the Dominican monastery in Strassburg at some time after its founding in 1224. During the 1230s-1250s he was sent to the affiliate Dominican Monastery in Zurich, a community instituted through the efforts of the Strassburg chapter. There he came to serve, for a time, as Prior before returning to Strassburg. Although during his lifetime he received no special acclaim, he is nowadays recognized as a theologian of importance, whose *Compendium* came to be widely disseminated throughout medieval Europe, with its breadth of topics making it serviceable even today. The work itself does not claim to contain original ideas but rather to draw together important teachings of others on what is taken to be the major theological issues. In this respect Hugo's manuscript is reminiscent of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.

2. The *Compendium* is indeed a monumental achievement. It impresses by its superb organization, its concise exposition of an amplitude of topics and of supporting rationales. It is also, for the most part, written in clear Latin, making it more easily accessible to clergy who may not have been as fluent in Latin as were the monks. The *Compendium* is divided into seven books, each having its own set of

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themes, as indicated by these books' titles: (1) *On the Nature of the Deity*; (2) *On the Works of the Creator*; (3) *On the Corrupting-Effect of Sin*; (4) *On the Humanity of Christ*; (5) *On the Sanctifying-Effect of the Graces*; (6) *On the Efficacy of the Sacraments*; (7) *On the Last Times and on the Punishments of Those Who are Evil and the Rewards of Those Who are Good*. Each of the books is sub-divided into a series of specific issues the development of which is meant to give guidance to preachers and to students of theology. The fact that these issues are so central to Christian belief helps to explain why there survive not only some 469+ Latin manuscripts¹ but also some 57 medieval German translations—and, later, some 59 printed editions.²

Already in Book I Hugo shows that his compilation does not, in its aim for conciseness, back away from tortuous theologizing. For example, he takes up the question of why God punishes eternally those who sin only for a relatively short lifetime. And he cites reasons why God's doing so is just. But he hastens to add that God's justice is always tempered with mercy. Indeed, God is so merciful, says Hugo (in I, 33), that He afflicts those in Hell even *less than* they deserve to be punished, even as in Heaven He rewards the redeemed *more than* they deserve to be rewarded. Hugo also maintains (in I, 32) that "God does not permit evil to be done unless he elicits from it some good." Students are expected to interact with the reasons advanced by Hugo—to interact by *qualifying* them or *supplementing* them or, even, by *rejecting* them. In discarding these reasons, students may possibly choose to rely upon authority, as do many pastors; and so, Hugo lists the Scriptural passages that teach everlasting punishment. In fact, Hugo's work is also useful to the laity precisely because it balances, throughout the seven books, appeals to rational considerations with appeals to Scriptural authority as well as with citings of clarifying illustrations from daily life.

3. Readers are quick to notice the many sources from which Hugo draws in making his compilation, for these sources are often explicitly named. Like other scholars either before him or contemporary with him he naturally draws upon Augustine, as when he turns to such topics as that of predestination. But he also relies upon Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, Albertus Magnus's *Summa de Creaturis*, William of Auxerre's *Summa Aurea*, Gregory the Great's *Moralia*, Pseudo-Dionysius's *De Divinis Nominibus*, Richard of St. Victor's *De Trinitate*, Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate*, Bernard of

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Clairvaux's *De Consideratione*, Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, St. Anselm's *Proslogion*—and a host of other writings, including those of Aristotle. In fact, the range of Hugo's familiarity with the main figures in the history of theology is immensely impressive—impressive in spite of the fact that Hugo is taking from secondary sources such as Lombard's *Sentences* some of his references to primary sources. Equally impressive is the fact that this broad range of knowledge is coupled with an admirable terseness that serves to spare the reader a sense of tedium, as Hugo himself acknowledges at the very outset of his Prologue.

4. The *Compendium's* influence on Hugo's successors is evident not only from the extensive number of times that his manuscript was copied and placed in monastic and other libraries but also from the examination of his successors' own works. To take but one example: we see in Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) clear traces of Hugo's influence.³ The most conspicuous point of contact comes, perhaps, when in *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 3 Nicholas repeats the thematic idea *infiniti ad finitum non proportio est*—found in Hugo's *Compendium* I, 16 as *finiti nulla est proportio ad infinitum*.

Finally, we should note that two other works of much lesser importance are also ascribed to Hugo: (1) *Commentarium in IV Libros Sententiarum* and (2) *Quodlibeta, Quaestiones, Disputationes, et Variarum in Divinos Libros Explanations*.

5. The present English translation is only of Book I, which contains sharp parallels with Nicholas of Cusa's views on God's incomprehensibility, ineffability, infinity, immutability, super-eminence, and super-eminent triunity. The translation is made from the printed Latin text edited by Auguste Borgnet and published in Paris in 1895. I have also consulted the Cologne printed edition of ca. 1475 and the Strassburg printed edition of 1489. Listed below are several publications that will point the reader to contemporary works that contain significant materials such as bibliographies, manuscript information, references to digitalized texts. I avoid here either duplicating or abbreviating such bibliographic material.

6. Pointers to further readings:

Georg Steer. *Hugo Ripelin von Straßburg. Zur Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte des 'Compendium theologiae veritatis' im deutschen Spätmittelalter*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1981. [A mammoth work of scholarship that contains a wealth of essential detail

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and crucial bibliography].

Christa Michler. *Le Somme Abregiet de Theologie. Kritische Edition der französischen Übersetzung von Hugo Ripelins von Straßburg Compendium theologiae veritatis*. Munich: Fink, 1982. (=Vol. XI of *Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie des Mittelalters*). [A critical edition and collation of the only two late-medieval French translations of the *Compendium*].

German Wikipedia article on Hugo von Straßburg. Located at: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Ripelin_von_Strassburg [Contains links to digitalized editions of the *Compendium*].

1. See Georg Steer's book (cited above), p. 454. The German Wikipedia article alludes (without documentation) to over one thousand manuscripts.

2. Georg Steer, *ibid.*, pp. 167-172.

3. Nicholas's library in his hospice in Kues (today Bernkastel-Kues) contains a copy of Hugo's *Compendium*. See Jakob Marx, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften-Sammlung des Hospitals zu Cues*, Entry # 103. Frankfurt a.M., 1966 (reprint of the 1905 edition). Marx indicates that the copying date is 13th/14th century; and he seems to be indicating that the cataloguing date is 16th century. Whatever be the cataloguing date, Nicholas would have been directly familiar with the contents of the *Compendium*.