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Alyssa Lehr Evans

Turn to Reformation

Karlstadt's Commentary on
Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, 1517–1519

Mohr Siebeck

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To Peter

Preface

This study is the product of many years of work and constant support from mentors, colleagues, family, and friends. For a long time now, I have been interested in understanding the development of the early Reformation. This was part of my reasoning behind pursuing a PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary, where I was privileged to work with and learn from Prof. Kenneth Appold and Prof. Elsie McKee. I am thankful for the encouragement of friends and colleagues in Princeton, especially Lindsey Richter, Lindsey Hankins, and Stephanie Thurston. Thank you also to the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Powell McNutt for your mentorship – now friendship – and for your support to get to PTS. I entered the program thinking that I would work on Luther, but from early on in my coursework, Karlstadt kept popping up again and again. Long story short, I was eventually convinced that I could make my contribution to our understanding of the early Reformation with a project on Karlstadt, and I initially proposed a study exploring Karlstadt and Luther's break with one another. The encouragement of Prof. Amy Nelson Burnett is partly to blame for this turn to Karlstadt. She has consistently cheered me on since the first year of my doctoral program. I would also like to thank the late Prof. Ron Sider who generously shared many of his Karlstadt materials and translations with me as I was putting together my dissertation proposal.

Then, through both the Fulbright and DAAD exchange programs, I was privileged to be able to work at the Karlstadt Critical Edition in Göttingen. I joined their team as they were editing Karlstadt's early works, which included the complicated task of the Commentary on Augustine. My special thanks to Prof. Dr. Thomas Kaufmann, who very generously supported my stay in Göttingen then and still steadfastly supports me and my career now. That experience and especially working with the editors of the project – namely Harald Bollbuck, Stefania Salvadori, and Alejandro Zorzin – played such a large part in my growth and development as a scholar. I could not have done this project if it were not for my time there and all that I learned. I would not be the scholar I am today without Thomas Kaufmann's consistent and generous support.

After arriving in Göttingen, it quickly became clear just how much primary source material and German secondary literature there was to work through. I realized that in order to understand any kind of later break, there was still so much to understand about who Karlstadt was as a theologian, how he developed into a reformer, and his contributions to the movement in Wittenberg. At the Edition, the complexities of editing the Commentary on Augustine made it apparent there was a need for more work on it. I was attracted to the challenge the commentary presented, and I knew focusing on it would challenge me to grow. Once I returned to Princeton, I worked for a long time on translating this lengthy and difficult text. I am grateful to my colleague and friend, Charles Johnson III, for his invaluable help while working through Karlstadt's difficult Latin. Of

course, any mistakes that remain are my own. It has taken me a long time to feel like I understood what Karlstadt was doing in his commentary, and questions remain. I am thankful for the dissertation completion fellowships that funded this work, namely the Josephine de Karman Dissertation Fellowship and the P.E.O. Scholar Award.

I defended my dissertation, the basis of this study, at PTS in Spring 2021. My final year in the program was a difficult one, as it was for many, due to the pandemic. I was fortunate to have an outstanding dissertation committee that helped me to cross the finish line, which included Prof. Appold, Prof. McKee, Prof. Anthony Grafton, and Prof. Burnett as external reviewer. I want to say a special word of thanks to Tony Grafton for consistently supporting me ever since that “Early Modern Books and Their Readers” seminar. I have been so very fortunate to have such brilliant and generous mentors along the way. This brings Ulrich Bubenheimer to mind and all of his encouragement. I have cherished researching together at the Predigerseminar Bibliothek in Wittenberg, comparing Karlstadt’s Erasmus, Tauler, and Augustine volumes in Reutlingen, and our regular correspondence about Karlstadt and the commentary.

Finally, I want to thank the editors at Mohr Siebeck for their patience as I worked on preparing the manuscript for publication. My thanks especially to Volker Leppin, who provided helpful and constructive criticism that improved my manuscript. The Dorothea Schlözer Program in partnership with Kaufmann’s Lehrstuhl and Niedersachsen OPEN have generously funded this study’s publication both in print and open access. Prof. Kaufmann provided me abundant time and space in my Postdoc position to be able to work on the manuscript. I hope it proves useful for further scholarship.

In writing this preface, I could not help but think of Karlstadt’s conversion narrative. It causes me to question whether my narrative here, my turn to Karlstadt and the commentary, is what really happened or is simply the way I have learned to frame it for myself. I hope I do not come across as name-dropping or signaling like Karlstadt does. I have been incredibly fortunate to have brilliant scholars as my academic mentors. It is humbling to say the least. I am grateful to all who have helped me to get to this point, and I am thankful for the ways I have grown through this project.

I dedicate this book to my family. To my sons, Jude and James. But most of all, to Peter. Thank you for your constant support in what has been a long and sometimes difficult journey. I could not have done this without you.

Göttingen, August 2025

Alyssa Lehr Evans

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Abbreviations

CCath	Corpus Catholicorum: Werke Katholischer Schriftsteller im Zeitalter der Glaubenspaltung. Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1919–.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Wien 1866–.
GW	Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, edited by Erich von Rath and Ernst Crous. Leipzig, 1925. gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de .
KGK	Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Schriften und Briefe Andreas Bodensteins von Karlstadt, Teil I–IX, edited by Thomas Kaufmann, et al. Göttingen: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2017–2025.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912–. Electronic Edition 2014–. www.loebclassics.com .
LW	Luther's Works. American Edition. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 75 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–.
PL	Patrologia Latina. Jacques Paul Migne. 221 volumes. Paris 1878–1890.
WA	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 73 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009.
WA.Br	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1930–85.
WA.Tr	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden. 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1913–1921.
WSA	Augustine, Saint. The Works of Saint Augustine (3rd Release). Electronic Edition. Edited by John Rotelle. Charlottesville, Virginia: New City Press, 1997–.
VD16	Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts. 25 vols. Stuttgart, 1983–2000. https://opacplus.bib-bvb.de .

All other abbreviations follow RGG 4th edition.

Introduction

The Commentary on Augustine as a Snapshot into Karlstadt in Transition

Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt's lectures and commentary on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, his *In Defense of Divine Grace*, comprise a handful of significant "firsts."¹ It is the first reformation commentary on a church father.² Further, the commentary was printed serially alongside his ongoing lectures, a first in the history of printing.³ These installments were developed and printed throughout the span of pivotal years in the development of the reform movement in Wittenberg: 1517–1519. The commentary is Karlstadt's first larger in-depth theological writing after his encounter with Augustine and his conversion.⁴ Alongside his *151 Theses*, we can finally see Karlstadt working as a theologian.⁵ In his dedication letter introducing the commentary, Karlstadt himself declares that he found this Augustine text to be "the handle and threshold into all of theology."⁶ So why has such an obviously important text not been given more attention?

¹ *Pro Divinae gratiae defensione. Sanctissimi Augustini de Spiritu .et. littera liber Magne Theologo commoditati. cum Explicationibus sive lectionibus. Domini Andreae Bodenstein Carolstatini Theologiae doctoris et Archidiaconi Wittenburgensis.* Wittenberg: Johannes Rhau-Grunenberg, 1518–1519. VD16 A 4237. Critically edited in *KGK* 1.2, Nr. 64:537–724.

² Martin Kessler, "Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt," in *Martin Luther in Context*, ed. David Whitford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 242. Kessler also names them the first lecture on a church father in Wittenberg, and perhaps this is the case with qualifications. There do seem to be prior lectures based on Jerome's letters, for example by Johannes Lang in 1515: QVAE HOC LIBELLO HABENT- TVR. DIVI HIERONYMI EPISTOLA AD magnū vrbis Oratorem elegantiss ... (Wittenberg: Johann Rhau-Grunenberg, 1515), VD16 H 3521. See also Thomas Kaufmann, "Einleitung," in *KGK* 1.2:559.

³ Ernst Kähler, ed., *Karlstadt und Augustin. Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De spiritu et littera. Einführung und Text*, Hallische Monographien, vol. 19 (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1952), 46–47*. Other cases of works being printed specifically alongside ongoing lectures and including the commentary along with the source text include Luther's *Operationes in Psalmos* (also Rhau-Grunenberg) printed from 1519–1521 and Melancthon's first *Loci Communes* (Wittenberg: Lotter, 1521). Cited in *KGK* 1.2:554n131. Both are later than Karlstadt's commentary.

⁴ The term *Bekehrung* has been established in the secondary literature by others, including Bubenheimer. For a summary, see Stefania Salvadori, "Der Augustinkommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zwischen der Stilisierung einer Bekehrungsgeschichte und der (Wieder-)Entdeckung der biblisch-patristischen Quellen," *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt und die Frühe Wittenberger Reformation. Eberburg-Hefte* 52 (2018): 8n3. See also Thomas Kaufmann, "Reformatoren als Konvertiten," *ZThK* 114.2 (June 2017): 149–176.

⁵ Karlstadt's *151 Theses* appear before the commentary around the same time as the beginning of his lectures on *De spiritu et littera*. Karlstadt's roles as a humanist, lawyer, and philosopher are clear from sources prior to Spring 1517, but his role as a theologian first becomes clear with this / these documents. Kaufmann, "Einleitung," *KGK* 1.1:xix.

⁶ *KGK* 1.2:563, lines 19–20, my translation: *Inveni illum librum ansam et limen ad totam prestare theologiaem*. He praises the work similarly in a 17 Jan. 1518 letter to Spalatin, *KGK* 1.2, Nr. 66:728.

This introduction provides a brief overview of the relevant research on Karlstadt and the commentary which addresses some of the possible reasons for this inattention and situates the present study. An overview of this project and its aims are then explained.

Brief Overview of the Research on Karlstadt and his *Augustinkommentar*

Until the twentieth century, Reformation scholars largely viewed and discussed Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt through the negative lens of Martin Luther's later words and perception of him.⁷ Hermann Barge significantly challenged negative views of Karlstadt with a sympathetic interpretation of Karlstadt in his two-volume biography, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt* in 1905.⁸ Although certainly dated, Barge's biography remains an important source as it is still the most detailed presentation of Karlstadt's life and thought. This biography was published shortly after the discovery of Karlstadt's *Pro Divinae gratiae defensione*,⁹ so Barge was able to summarize and include several quotations of the commentary translated into German in his biography.¹⁰

Ernst Kähler's excellent 1952 edition of Karlstadt's commentary on Augustine made the commentary more available and known in the field and is the most thorough inves-

⁷ For an excellent discussion of the historiography of Karlstadt research, including prior to 1900, see Martin Kessler, *Das Karlstadt-Bild in der Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Kessler points to a pattern in research on Karlstadt, describing it as "progression in the cycles of a pendulum: positive theses on Karlstadt led to opposition and the corresponding antithesis" ("Methods of Karlstadt Research," Presentation at Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, New Orleans, LA, 17 Oct. 2014).

⁸ Leipzig: Friedrich Brandstetter, 1905. In this work, Barge even described Karlstadt as the originator of many of the early reform developments at the expense of Luther's traditional place of priority. This biography set off an extended scholarly debate with Karl Müller and others over Karlstadt's role in the Wittenberg Movement. Cf. Müller's *Luther und Karlstadt: Stücke aus ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1907). As late as 2000, Jens-Martin Kruse pointed to the significance of the Barge-Müller debate in his own analysis: "Karlstadt als Wittenberger Theologe. Überlegungen zu einer pluralen Darstellungsweise der frühen Reformation," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 57 (2000): 7–30.

⁹ See Ernst Freys and Hermann Barge, *Verzeichnis der gedruckten Schriften des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*. Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen Jahrgang XXI (1904). Compare *Verzeichnis* Nr. 12 (p. 161, showing that it was not yet found) and then the "Nachtrag" (p. 320). Barge's *Verzeichnis* relies on the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Bibliotheca Lindesiana copy (Crawford.R.38). See also Volker Gummelt, "Andreas Bodenstein's von Karlstadt Augustinvorlesung. Neue Aspekte im Lichte studentischer Nachschriften," in *Querdenker der Reformation – Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt und seine frühe Wirkung*, eds. Ulrich Bubenheimer and Stefan Oehmig (Würzburg: Religion & Kultur Verlag, 2001), 75. Gummelt describes briefly the history of the discovery of the seven extant copies after the discovery of the Edinburgh copy. Most recently, Martin Kessler discovered a ninth copy of the commentary in the Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München (Rar. 4568). See *KGK* 1.2:539n15.

¹⁰ Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, I:67–75. Here he specifically discusses the dedication letter to Staupitz to describe Karlstadt's development. Barge also brings in passages from Karlstadt's *Epitome de impii iustificatione* (Jan. 1519) to fill in aspects of the self-narrative that Karlstadt provides, especially chapter 8: *Quonam pacto deus primam impii conversionem operetur* (*KGK* II, Nr. 103:40–42), in which Karlstadt describes God's work in the process of *conversio*. Barge understands this chapter as filling out Karlstadt's own "soul searching" after his encounter with a specific Augustinian passage and compares his experience with Luther's: "Ganz in der Weise Luthers packte ihn unter heftigen Erschütterungen und Seelen-schauern die Sorge um sein ewiges Heil." Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, I:74. See also pp. 90–109 for Barge's further discussion of the commentary.

tigation into the commentary to date.¹¹ Kähler provided an introduction to the edition that is especially useful for its reprinting and discussion of Karlstadt's 151 *Theses* and their relationship to the commentary.¹² He helpfully established many of Karlstadt's Augustine sources and citations and pointed out areas where Barge and others had missed that Karlstadt was not using his own words but quoting Augustine. Kähler provides only a very brief discussion of Karlstadt's foundational theological ideas in the commentary.¹³ And here he leans too heavily on trying to find hints of "spiritualist" thinking in Karlstadt in order to preemptively discover and explain the later differences between Karlstadt and Luther on the sacraments.¹⁴ This points to the far too common trend in previous scholarship to see and study Karlstadt primarily in relation to Luther instead of understanding Karlstadt in his own right, a task that is challenging on its own.

There was an important surge in Karlstadt research in the 1970s when research on Karlstadt advanced, he began to appear in English literature, and more emphasis was placed on understanding the individuals surrounding Luther on their own terms as well as a growing emphasis on a Wittenberg Circle.¹⁵ Important works from this period that focused on understanding Karlstadt's development and which this project builds upon are Ronald Sider's *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: The Development of His Thought 1517–1525*,¹⁶ which remains the primary English work on Karlstadt's early development, as well as Ulrich Bubenheimer's *Consonantia Theologiae et Iurisprudentiae*.¹⁷ Both scholars correct Barge and subsequent literature that tried to demonstrate that Karlstadt was prior to Luther in advocating a Scripture principle – another instance where the priority placed on finding the differences or contrasting the two figures led to misguided conclusions. Both demonstrate that, unlike Luther, Karlstadt did not reject papal authority until as late as 1520. They also both demonstrate that Karlstadt gradually and consistently developed into a "radical" thinker as opposed to the impulsive and rash characterization he is often afforded, a thesis that this study also continues to support.¹⁸

¹¹ *Karlstadt und Augustin. Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De Spiritu et Litera*, Einführung und Text von Ernst Kähler (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1952).

¹² Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin*, 8*–37*.

¹³ Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin*, 37*–45*.

¹⁴ See especially 45*. "Das eine steht jedenfalls im Rückblick fest, daß man nicht weitgehend genug Augustin für das Verständnis der geschichtlich wirksamen Form K.scher Theologie heranziehen kann. Vor allem ist hier die Bahn für seinen im Spiritualismus begründeten Rationalismus frei, wie er namentlich in der Abendmahlsfrage hervortritt."

¹⁵ For a helpful summary of modern research (prior to 2000), see also Sigrid Looß, "Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541) in der modernen Forschung," in *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541). Ein Theologe der frühen Reformation*, eds. Sigrid Looß and Markus Matthias, *Themata Leucoreana*, vol. 4 (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien Verlag 1998), 9–23.

¹⁶ Leiden: Brill, 1974. I would like to thank the late Dr. Sider for his support and for generously sharing some of his Karlstadt materials with me.

¹⁷ Subtitle: *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt als Theologe und Jurist zwischen Scholastik und Reformation*, JusEcl 21 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1977). Both works were written concurrently, although Sider's was published three years earlier. They reached several corresponding conclusions about Karlstadt independent of one another, especially regarding his ecclesiological development. They both strongly recommend each other's work. See Bubenheimer, *Consonantia Theologiae et Iurisprudentiae*, vii–viii and Sider, *Karlstadt*, 48n13.

¹⁸ This influential characterization is held by scholars like Gordon Rupp, for example, in one of the first English essays on Karlstadt. *Patterns of Reformation* (1969): 49–153, includes a revised and expand-

A strength of Sider's work is his analysis of Karlstadt's theology. In his introduction, Sider lamented that there was still "at least as much contradiction as consensus" in the Karlstadt research conducted since Barge's monumental work.¹⁹ In particular, there were still contradictory views about Karlstadt's alleged mysticism, legalism, spiritualism, and revolutionary tendencies, or lack thereof, and no clear consensus on the horizon. In his study, Sider responded by focusing on an interplay of Augustinian, Lutheran, and mystical theological concepts as influential for Karlstadt and his development.²⁰ He concluded that Karlstadt's tendency towards "legalism" does not entail a "works righteousness" as some have claimed. Further, his spiritualism presupposes the *necessity* of the external word.

In *Consonantia Theologiae et Iurisprudentiae*, as the name suggests, Bubenheimer concentrates on Karlstadt's concerns as both a theologian and a lawyer. For Bubenheimer, it was ultimately Karlstadt's legal education in Rome and his program to unite the disciplines of theology and jurisprudence that led to his variant appropriation of the Reformation. A student of Heiko Oberman, Bubenheimer rightly emphasized the important work of properly placing Karlstadt within his historical context. Bubenheimer's work is also significant for clearing up aspects of Karlstadt's biography and filling in important gaps (e.g., the dating of Karlstadt's birth) as well as the discovery of new sources. The present project draws especially on Bubenheimer's discussions of Karlstadt's methods of harmonization. Moving forward, Bubenheimer "took the lead" in Karlstadt studies, as Amy Nelson Burnett puts it, and has published many illuminating essays on Karlstadt.²¹ Bubenheimer points to the complexities involved in understanding Karlstadt, that humanistic influences, Luther, Augustine and other church fathers like Bernard of Clairvaux, and the mysticism of Johannes Tauler are all authorities that worked together in Karlstadt's break with his scholastic past. My own thinking in this project builds upon his work and the understanding that Karlstadt's influences were many.

In addition to Bubenheimer, scholars such as Henrik Otto, Hans-Peter Hasse, and most recently Vincent Evener have demonstrated the importance of Tauler in the early Wittenberg Reformation and for Karlstadt specifically.²² We know he was reading

ed version of his 1959 article, "Andrew Karlstadt and Reformation Puritanism," *JTS* 10 (Oct. 1959): 308–26.

¹⁹ Sider, *Karlstadt*, 3–4.

²⁰ Ronald Sider argued that a "minor weakness" of Kähler's work is that more than the *151 Theses* and commentary are necessary for understanding Karlstadt's 1517–1518 theology. Sider, *Karlstadt*, 21n23.

²¹ Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Eucharistic Pamphlets of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Early Modern Studies* 6 (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2011), 19. Especially relevant to this project, see Bubenheimer's "Augustinismus in der Reformationszeit," *TRE* 4 (1979), 718–721; "Zur vorreformatorischen Rezeption des italienischen Humanismus in Erfurt und Wittenberg bei Martin Luther und Andreas Karlstadt," in *Anwälte der Freiheit! Humanisten und Reformatoren im Dialog*, ed. Matthias Dall'Asta (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015), 105–113; "Luther, Karlstadt, Müntzer: soziale Herkunft und humanistische Bildung. Ausgewählte Aspekte vergleichender Biographie," in *Amtsblatt der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Thüringen* 40/8 (1987): 60–68; "Reliquienfest und Ablass in Halle. Albrecht von Brandenburgs Werbemedien und die Gegenschriften Karlstadts und Luthers," in *Buchdruck und Buchkultur im Wittenberg der Reformationszeit*, ed. Stefan Oehmig (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 71–100.

²² Henrik Otto, *Vor- und frühreformatorische Tauler-Rezeption. Annotationen in Drucken des späten 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), esp. 241–254; Hans-Peter Hasse, *Karlstadt und Tauler: Untersuchungen zur Kreuzestheologie*. Gütersloh, 1993); Vincent Evener, *Enemies of the Cross: Suffering, Truth, and Mysticism in the Early Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Tauler at the same time as Augustine. It is, therefore, noteworthy that Karlstadt does not explicitly mention or cite Tauler in the printed text of his commentary. There are, however, handwritten notes in the extant copies that reference Tauler's *Sermones*, which suggest that he may have discussed them at times in his lectures.²³ Tauler's importance for Karlstadt at this time should be noted, even if that is not the focus of this present study.

As far as scholarship after Sider and Bubenheimer related to the commentary on Augustine, Bernhard Lohse analyzed Karlstadt's commentary alongside Luther's and Staupitz's interpretations of Augustine for new material and information for understanding the "Wittenberg Augustine Renaissance."²⁴ This material is referenced, but this project is not primarily related to questions surrounding Oberman's "Augustine Renaissance" thesis that played an important role in the field for some time.²⁵ Instead, it draws more on studies of the reception and reading of Augustine in the late medieval and early modern period,²⁶ as well as developments in the history of reading,²⁷ and investigates Karlstadt's ways of working and reading in the commentary and his other 1517–1519 writings.

A conference at the end of the century resulted in two essays that touched directly on Karlstadt's commentary on Augustine. Volker Gummelt just begins to describe the student notes left in extant copies of the commentary,²⁸ and Markus Matthias analyzed Karlstadt's dedication letter to Staupitz as a conversion narrative (*Bekehrungsbericht*).²⁹ Matthias rightly points out that most scholarship has simply used this dedication letter for chronological purposes instead of dealing with Karlstadt's self-narrative and argumentation in an in-depth and serious way as a source for understanding Karlstadt's reformation development.

²³ For example, see *KGKI* 1.2:546 and n79. I have incorporated other examples throughout this study.

²⁴ "Zum Wittenberger Augustinismus: Augustins Schrift *De Spiritu et Littera* in der Auslegung bei Staupitz, Luther und Karlstadt," in *Augustine, the Harvest, and Theology (1300–1650): Essays Dedicated to Heiko Augustinus Oberman in Honor of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Kenneth Hagen (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 89–109, esp. 89–92.

²⁵ For a very brief overview, see Erik Saak, "Heiko Augustinus Oberman," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, eds. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 / online 2014). For another review of the literature, see also Phillip Anderas, "Augustine and Augustinianism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, eds. Derek Nelson and Paul Hinlicky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁶ For example, Arnoud Visser's excellent study: *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) as well as Erik Saak, *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁷ For example, see Jacqueline Hamesse, "The Scholastic Model of Reading," 103–118; Paul Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 120–131; Anthony Grafton, "The Humanist as Reader" 179–210; Jean-François Gilmont, "Protestant Reformations and Reading," 213–233 in *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

²⁸ "Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt Augustinvorlesung. Neue Aspekte im Lichte studentischer Nachschriften," 75–86. Bubenheimer provides the most up-to-date summaries and descriptions of these notes in *KGKI* 1.2:540–546, and Salvadori also describes the student notes in relation to Karlstadt's pedagogy in "Der Augustinkommentar," 257–263.

²⁹ "Die Anfänge der reformatorischen Theologie des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt," in *Querdenker der Reformation- Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt und seine frühe Wirkung*, eds. Ulrich Bubenheimer and Stefan Oehmig (Würzburg: Religion & Kultur Verlag, 2001), 87–109. I discuss this article in more detail in section 2.2.2 (chapter 2).

It is a particularly exciting time for Karlstadt research with the creation of the first full critical edition of Karlstadt's letters and writings, the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Schriften und Briefe Andreas Bodensteins von Karlstadt*, a project led by Thomas Kaufmann in Göttingen.³⁰ I was privileged to be a member of the Karlstadt Team in Göttingen from 2015–2017, and in many ways this work builds on and relies heavily on my time on the project and the work of the edition and its editors.³¹ It is fair to say that this current project could not have been accomplished without that foundation, and the Edition will continue to be a strong basis for further scholarship and a clearer understanding of Karlstadt and his thought.

The newest edition of this complex commentary was published in 2017.³² The work of creating this new edition and the complexities that arose made it clear that there was still much to be done to understand Karlstadt's first major and lengthy theological text. To date there has been no prior monograph that focused on an analysis of the commentary. The introduction to this new *KGK* edition provided an excellent overview of the commentary that briefly outlines some of its content and calls for further research – a call that this book aims to answer.³³ The work of the Karlstadt Edition has also made it clear that Karlstadt's central role in the development of the Wittenberg Circle is becoming harder to refute or ignore.

Since the new edition in 2017, Stefania Salvadori has published an article that highlights aspects of her work on the edition and focuses especially on interpreting Karlstadt's dedication letter to Staupitz as a conversion narrative as well as insights that the commentary and the student notes give into Karlstadt's pedagogical practices.³⁴ Salvadori has also written on Karlstadt's understanding of Augustine ranging broadly from his *De intentionibus* (1507) to his *De canonicis scripturis* (1520).³⁵ She concludes that in the early 1520s, after the timeframe of the commentary, Karlstadt eventually uses Augustine

³⁰ This project took place from 2012–2025 through the support of the German Research Foundation (DFG) and was a cooperation between the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Göttingen and the Herzog-August-Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel (HAB). It is a hybrid edition, published both in print with Gütersloher Verlagshaus (2017–2025) as well as online (karlstadt-edition.org). PDFs of the volumes are freely available for download and use.

³¹ In addition to Prof. Dr. Kaufmann, I owe much to the editors of the project and their work, especially Harald Bollbuck, Stefania Salvadori, and Alejandro Zorzín.

³² Building on the work of previous editors Martin Kessler and Christian Speer, Stefania Salvadori led the edition to its completion. Salvadori along with Bubenheimer and Kaufmann wrote the introduction. This edition relies primarily on the copy in the Sutro Library of the California State Library (San Francisco), while Kähler used the incomplete Dessau print.

³³ *KGK* 1.2:547–559, especially 558–559: “Dass diese Entwicklungen Karlstadt, der im Zuge seiner literarischen Begegnung mit dem antipelagianischen Augustin sein eigenes theologisches Denken neu zu organisieren begann, zutiefst berührten, den Stil seiner Argumentation veränderten und sich auch auf seine fortlaufende literarische Arbeit am Augustinkommentar auswirkten, dürfte naheliegend sein. Die Veränderung seiner Theologie, sofern sie sich in der Entstehungsgeschichte dieses ersten reformatorischen Kommentars zu einem Kirchenvätertext im Einzelnen vollzog, herauszuarbeiten, bleibt eine Aufgabe der weiteren Forschung.”

³⁴ “Der Augustinkommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zwischen der Stilisierung einer Bekehrungsgeschichte und der (Wieder-)Entdeckung der biblisch-patristischen Quellen,” 7–30.

³⁵ “The Reception of Augustine in Karlstadt's Writings from 1517 to 1521” in *Totus Noster? Augustinus zwischen den Konfessionen*, eds. Günter Frank, Volker Leppin, Herman Selderhuis, and Klaus Unterburger, *Refo500 Academic Studies* 93 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023), 43–60, a result of the international symposium in Bretten (July 2020) entitled “Totus Noster? Augustinus zwischen den Konfessionen.”

to argue that Augustine is not the final authoritative source. This fits well with the larger frameworks of Sider's and Bubenheimer's understanding of his development on Scripture. This book affirms and further develops that Karlstadt continued to hold on to the authority of the Fathers (and even included church prayers) up to the Leipzig Disputation.³⁶ Karlstadt of course continues to develop and change after the timespan of this commentary that this project explores.

It is an opportune time to focus on analyzing this text in detail. There are other challenges to understanding the commentary including its length and traditional format as well as Karlstadt's difficult Latin that has not yet been translated into German or English.³⁷ Some of the aims of this project include translating these sources and secondary literature into an Anglophone context as well as to provide further access and analysis of the content of the commentary itself.

Focus and Aims of this Project

This project intentionally builds on several of these steps forward in scholarship. First, it analyzes Karlstadt on his own terms and not primarily in comparison with that of his colleague, Martin Luther.³⁸ It begins with the acknowledgement that Karlstadt's own conversion process and development as a reformer deserve a standalone treatment. His commentary on Augustine serves as an exceptional snapshot into a figure in transition as well as a showcasing of his encounter and working with Augustine's writings. It will become clear that Karlstadt was a self-aware and self-fashioning figure, and this work relies on his self-descriptions with a critical eye to this reality.³⁹ Karlstadt himself professes that he was "Learning by Doing" in his work on *De spiritu et littera*, so his commentary allows us to investigate not only the narrative of his conversion and its main features in action, but also his continued learning and development process in further detail.⁴⁰

³⁶ For example, Sider discusses how the Leipzig Disputation seemed to prompt Karlstadt to take an even deeper look at the problem of authority but that it was indeed an issue he had already wrestled with at length. Sider argues that we see Karlstadt taking a clearer stance on the Scripture principle through the course of his writings in late 1519–1520 in his response to the Debate, *Karlstadt*, 87–98. Martin Kessler also sees a significant shift in Karlstadt's thought post-Leipzig and in his *De canonicis*, "Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. De canonicis scripturis libellus (1520)," in *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 297–312.

³⁷ Here I would like to note the support and collaboration of my colleague, Charles Johnson III, who consistently double-checked and helped me with difficult passages in the commentary and especially with the translation of chapters ten and eleven. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

³⁸ While there is more work to be done to understand their later break with one another, I think the first step is getting a better handle on how they were working together in the early years of the movement, which requires understanding Karlstadt and his development as a reformer himself. For previous scholarship on Luther and Augustine, see Bernhard Lohse, "Die Bedeutung Augustins für den jungen Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte. I. Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, eds. Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller, and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 11–30, as well as Reihart Staat's "Augustins *De Spiritu et littera* in Luthers reformatorischer Erkenntnis," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, ed. Bernhard Lohse (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988), 365–385.

³⁹ Here I have been influenced by works like Lisa Jardine's *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print*, Updated Edition. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ For example, he explains in the introductory materials that he knew lecturing and teaching on *De spiritu et littera* would make him wiser, *KGK* 1.2:563, lines 20–22: *verum cum scirem docendo me fieri*

Karlstadt's development as a reformer in his own right and his individual struggles with the material provide important insights for understanding the Reformation as a whole and should be treated as such.

This project also seeks to understand Karlstadt's commentary on Augustine by analyzing his thought and theology rooted within the details of his historical context. Part of what makes this commentary so challenging to decipher is the necessity to place it within the context of his activity and writings in these years of dynamic change in Wittenberg (Easter 1517 to Spring 1519) as well as alongside an understanding of the theological and methodological issues at stake in his first theological writings. The commentary's production in installments throughout these pivotal years and the simultaneous development of controversies against the Wittenberg theology faculty make this context essential. In summary, the aims of this work are to understand and trace the main features of Karlstadt's conversion and continued process of development through a close reading and analysis of his commentary on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* alongside other Karlstadt texts within the same period. That other authorities played a role in Karlstadt's complex conversion is assumed based on the advancements of scholarship discussed above. The focus intentionally remains on Karlstadt's reading of Augustine, and not on analyzing potential causes for his conversion that lie outside his engagement with Augustine. Further, Karlstadt's relationships with his interlocutors such as Eck and Prierias are not investigated in an in-depth manner here, except insofar as their exchanges further illustrate Karlstadt's own development.

To this end, the work begins with the first chapter, "The Commentary in Context: Karlstadt as Reformer in Wittenberg 1517–1519," which shows that Karlstadt's commentary on Augustine is closely related to understanding his central role in the emerging reform movement in Wittenberg. It reconstructs the timeline of Karlstadt's lectures and the commentary installments on *De spiritu et littera* and places them in the context of Karlstadt's reforming activities and other writings in the same time period (ranging from his *151 Theses* to his *Epitome*). This chapter focuses especially on Karlstadt's role as an early and consistent propagandist and disseminator of the developing Wittenberg Augustinian theological program. It highlights Karlstadt's instigation of the Leipzig Disputation with Eck, and how his work with and on Augustine was central to his early reforming activity.

The second chapter, "Karlstadt Encounters Augustine" dives into the commentary material itself and focuses on an analysis of the introduction materials, especially Karlstadt's self-portrayal of his conversion process. In his dedication letter to Staupitz, Karlstadt narrates how his encounter with Augustine, as well as the influence of Luther and especially Staupitz, led to a dramatic break with his scholastic past and a turn instead to a new emphasis on the church fathers and the Bible. Karlstadt specifically renders this powerful transition in his life in an explicitly anti-scholastic way, as a move away from specific sources and methods. Beginning with his explications of Staupitz's motto, the commentary displays the "first fruits" of his new conversion.⁴¹ The introduction

doctorem interpretationem eius publicam subivi. Cf. also Stefania Salvadori's "Der Augustinkommentar," 7–30, where Salvadori also uses the phrase "Learning by Doing."

⁴¹ *KGK* 1.2:564, lines 6–7: *Ideo has meas precoces forte tibi primicias esse dedicandas arbitratus sum et constitui.* "I deemed that my perhaps premature first fruits should be dedicated to you [Staupitz] and so I did so" (translation mine).

materials are placed in two contexts. First, a discussion of Karlstadt's "before" is provided, namely his early scholastic career and publications pre-conversion. Then, Karlstadt's self-narrative is placed in the larger context of other contemporary Wittenberg conversion narratives. This comparison further highlights the anti-scholastic focus of Karlstadt's conversion narrative and shows that Karlstadt's is an important early example of a developing Reformation literary trope. Putting these narratives together shows just how deliberate these accounts are and suggests an intentional framing of their positions in Wittenberg.

With his introduction materials, Karlstadt declares that he is doing something new with his work on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*. He himself is "Learning by Doing," while he is also teaching his students in Wittenberg how to operate within their new theological program and work out the implications of it. The remaining chapters are an investigation into how exactly he follows up on his declarations in his conversion narrative by focusing on his new understanding of authoritative sources as well as his attention to hermeneutics and reading methods in the commentary. The reader can also witness developments in his theology and writing style and particular theological emphases throughout the various installments. In other words, this project uses Karlstadt's own self-description to investigate throughout the commentary whether he undergoes a conversion and analyzes its main features.

The third chapter, "Sources," investigates Karlstadt's claim that he has changed his use of sources now that he has forsaken scholasticism and embraced the church fathers and the Bible. It gathers and examines the sources we know Karlstadt used pre- and post- his encounter with Augustine to look for changes, with a look at the particular editions we know he had access to from his detailed bibliographic citations. This chapter also shows how questions and problems of authority were front and center in Karlstadt's mind, including his interest in the authorship questions of his day and his development of the use of the church's universal prayers as an authoritative source for theological argumentation. This is followed by an exploration of Karlstadt's likely use of compilation books and a reconstruction of his no longer extant *Explanations* of the 151 *Theses*. Karlstadt's way of working, his continued *modus operandi* to excerpt, collect, and harmonize evidences is observed, revealing how he continued to use some of his traditional methods in the commentary. The chapter demonstrates how Karlstadt continued to hold on to the promise of the harmonization of Augustine and Scripture throughout the timeframe of the commentary, although with a noticeable shift towards focusing more and more on scriptural authorities.

While chapter three looked at his sources and some of his working methods, chapter four, "Karlstadt Reads Augustine," examines Karlstadt's reading methods and his hermeneutical thinking in the timespan of the commentary.⁴² This chapter argues that Karlstadt's conversion was not only to a focus on using the authorities of the church fathers and the Bible, but also involved *how* these sources should be read. Karlstadt's development in this regard can be observed. One of Karlstadt's central concerns throughout the commentary is the "right" reading of Augustine and teaching this to his audience,

⁴² Ulrich Bubenheimer has also called for a closer investigation of Karlstadt's hermeneutic in his *Consonantia Theologiae et Iurisprudentiae*, 130n238.

especially in opposition to contemporary misuse and false interpretations. In order to ensure this, Karlstadt often interpreted Augustine by Augustine and also sought to imitate Augustine, especially in Augustine's interpretation of the Apostle Paul. This imitation is an important aspect of Karlstadt's developing hermeneutic and style in these years.

In addition to Karlstadt's interest in reading and imitating Augustine correctly, this chapter explores how he was working to develop a new post-conversion hermeneutic consistent with Wittenberg's emerging theological program. As early as his *151 Theses*, Karlstadt began rethinking hermeneutical foundations and these interpretive principles are further developed and articulated in the hermeneutical "rules" (*regulae*) that Karlstadt presents in the commentary. Finally, Karlstadt's thoughts on Scripture and his developing understanding of the Spirit / Letter dynamic at the heart of this text and his hermeneutical understanding are explored in detail. All of this demonstrates how central his reading and interpretation of Augustine was to his continued development and his work of creating a new hermeneutic and a path forward after his conversion.

Finally, the fifth chapter argues that his encounter and working with Augustine played an important role not only in his initial "conversion," but it also led to continued development in both his writing style and in his theology. Karlstadt's attempts to imitate the Fathers led him to a self-aware abandonment of his traditional writing style in the last scholium of the commentary. His theological development is noticeable throughout the course of the commentary installments in its increasing polemical tone and shift in content, particularly in the last installment. Although it has a clear anti-scholastic tone from the beginning, especially in his stance against scholastic concepts such as congruent merit and *quod facere in se est* (to do what is in one's power), his growing literary duel with Eck as well as Prierias' public criticisms of Luther and Wittenberg must be understood in the background as the installments of the commentary progress. This chapter also investigates Karlstadt's developing understanding of the role of the will, the role of the law, and his understanding of the cult of the saints and highlights the importance of his reading of Augustine alongside these growing polemical controversies.

It will be shown that Karlstadt's commentary on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* provides a significant and important snapshot into Karlstadt's conversion and his continued development into a reformer in these pivotal years in Wittenberg. The commentary allows the reader to observe in action his intentional turn to the Bible and the church fathers – especially Augustine – and how Karlstadt was "Learning by Doing" within the commentary and developing new ways to move forward, even while still holding on for a time to a traditional format and methods. It shows that Karlstadt was a methodical, careful, and self-aware theologian. This project explores how he worked throughout the commentary on central questions about authorities and sources and how they ought to be read, and how his reading and reception of Augustine affected his theology and even writing style during this period. A better understanding of this commentary provides a deeper understanding of Karlstadt's early thought and working methods, his own wrestling with Augustine, as well as his central and active role in the propagation and defense of the early Wittenberg theological program.