Nothing need be changed in this epitome of Michael Sachs written more than a century ago. He is still virtually unknown to historians of theology and church history, and his activity as a dramatist, unmentioned in the Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, has received no other attention than fleeting references by Karl Goedeke and Hans Rupprich. This activity is very limited — only one play by Sachs is known and there is no evidence that he produced others during his many years of writing (more than thirty titles) — yet his *Schöne Tragedia von Stephano dem heiligen marterer* is an ambitious piece that deserves notice. Sachs wrote the

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1 A. Schumann: Sachs, Michael. In: Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie. Vol. 30 (1890), pp. 129–30, here p. 129. See also vol. 33 (1891), p. 798, for a brief addendum. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information in this article on Sachs is derived from these entries.

play while schoolmaster in the Thuringian town of Remda, and dated its preface on his twenty-second birthday (Michaelmas 1564); it was published by Georg Hantzsch in Weissenfels in 1565, the same year that Sachs was elevated to the pulpit by his patron, the Count of Gleichen-Remda. The Tragedia von Stephano is an excellent example of the ways in which biblical narrative could be adapted to serve Reformation interests, and it embodies the vision of religious and secular order held by a young man as he embarked upon his vocation as a Lutheran confessor.

The title would appear to be a misleading guide to the content of this three-act play because Stephanus does not appear until II.4. The drama begins with the miraculous healing by Petrus and Johannes reported in Acts of the Apostles 3:1-11 and follows the narrative of Acts through the following chapters as far as the removal of the martyr Stephanus's body for burial in the last scene (III.3, cf. Acts 8:2). Study of the play must therefore entail close comparison with the biblical source. The actual stoning of Stephanus is perfunctory in the play (as it is in the Bible), which suggests that the corporeal death of the martyr was not the most significant part of his life for either the evangelist or Michael Sachs. The latter wrote in a period of heightened Lutheran interest in the phenomenon of martyrdom, which is crucial for the proper understanding of this drama in its time and will be discussed after analysis of the text itself.

Because its general subject is the persecution of God's servants by the ungrateful world, as stated on the title page, Stephanus's death provides a suitable main title, a logical end for the dramatization, and an easily-grasped paradigm for the sufferings of the martyr's successors in Christian history. Sachs understood these

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4 I cite the copy in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden, Sign. Lit. Germ. Rec. B 2043. In referring to the characters in Sachs' play I use their names as given there, but use the familiar English forms for other references (e.g., the biblical Stephen is the dramatic Stephanus).