

*Rupture of Times:
Luther's Relevance for Today*

by OSWALD BAYER

THE SECULARIZATION of Christian eschatology, one main feature of modernity since the Enlightenment, seems not to have lost anything of its vigor. This is at least the impression of a theologian from the European continent when looking at the North American way of getting ready for New Year's Eve of 1999. Whereas in Germany scepticism prevails, for the Americans the future seems to be the source from which to derive increasing optimism. The fascination of the big historical date increasingly overshadowed the other New Year's Eves of the old millennium, although historians argue whether it ought not to be celebrated one year later, since the Gregorian calendar skipped the year zero.

The party will be worldwide, of course, disregarding the fact that the majority of the world's population lives according to Chinese, Buddhist, or Islamic calendars. Some twenty-four-hour parties, trips to points as close as possible to the dateline (including Antarctica) and hotel reservations at the Pyramids or the Taj Mahal have been booked years ahead. A man from New Orleans who made his reservation in 1985 but has died in the meantime will have a chair kept free by his friends on the day. Another who booked in 1983 for New York's Times Square Marriott Hotel, two years before the hotel was actually built, simply explained: "I want to see those zeroes turn over."¹ It is the fascination of conceiving of time as a homogeneous phenomenon and always at our disposal, provided we have begun planning early enough.

Such attitudes and thoughts lead us to ask: what is today's news, the newest trend, or more precisely, the very latest? On the other hand, the oldest thing of all, one says, is yesterday's news. The swift shift from new to old brings up the question: What is really today's news? What is truly the very latest? Is the latest that which immediately becomes old again as those zeroes turn over?

The question can also be asked concerning the relevance of Luther for today. It is not his character, but his teaching and what he had to say that compels us to look critically at what we usually understand under the designation of the “latest.” Luther’s teaching challenges us to see with different eyes what appears to be the trend of the moment, to see with entirely new eyes what is marketed as up-to-date, in touch with present reality and entirely new. The real rupture of the times is not between the old millennium and the new, but between the old eon and the new.

In the Rupture of Times

“He feels the immense rupture of the times/and holds fast to his Bible-book” wrote Conrad Ferdinand Meyer in a poem from 1871 entitled, “Hutten’s last days.”² Clutching his Bible tightly, with defiant heroic gestures, upright in a flowing cassock, Luther was in those days consequently placed on a pedestal: Luther, the German. So far, the meaning of “the immense rupture of the times” has been understood as shaped by the following question: Do Luther and his work belong to the Modern Time (*Neuzeit*) or does he, as Ernst Troeltsch argued with strong reasons, belong to the Middle Ages?

This question unfortunately does not go far enough. On the one hand, the question succeeds in offering a perspective situating Luther between old and new. For this reason, it is perfectly appropriate to discuss the subject. The decisive issue is, however, something else. The immense rupture of the times is located, in truth, between the old and the new eon. The cross of Jesus Christ marks the site of the rupture. It is the rupture between the old world that has come to its end and the renewed creation, between the fallen creation and the new world that is so new that it will not become old any more; it is eternally new. True newness is ascribed to this new time alone; it is the newness of the present and the presence of the Spirit.

This rupture of times, and no other, determined Luther’s life and work. It moved him in his heart of hearts; it filled him completely, as Michael Mathias Precht has strikingly portrayed in the

painting, "Martin Luther, Full of Figures Inside."³ (See the reproduction on p. 34.) Once again, Meyer's Hutten says, "His spirit is the battle-field of two times/I am not surprised that he sees demons!"⁴

In Defiance of Evil

Demons! The evil of the old world that has come to an end on the cross rears its ugly head a last time: precisely against the gospel that overcame evil and continues to overcome it. "Therefore, we learn first from the gospel to know the devil rightly," Luther preached in a New Year's sermon in 1535.⁵ Luther's insights were themselves won in confrontation with evil. They cannot be outdone even by such masters of suspicion as Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Luther is certainly no dispassionate observer who describes his object from a polite distance. On the contrary, he is passionately involved, with body and soul, totally. His passion does not make him blind; rather, it opens his eyes. Luther sees solely through the word of the Holy Scriptures. For him, Scripture is not dry prose to be read; it is the word of life rich in emotion.

Luther learned about enmity between self, other, and God by constantly engaging the Scriptures. Above all, the Psalter taught Luther that I am at enmity with myself and how I am my own enemy. He learned that others are at enmity with me and what shapes they take as my enemies. Yes, he also encountered that God himself is at enmity with me and how God is my enemy: God becomes a demon to me if I do not look upon the crucified one. God is that omnipotence working life and death, love and hate. Both life-giving and life-denying, God works fortune and misfortune, good and evil. In short, God is all in all, entirely active in such a way that we cannot disentangle the opposites. "In short, God cannot be God unless He first becomes a devil."⁶

This is one of those difficult sentences of Luther, because of its theological density. "God cannot be God unless He first becomes a devil." God did become a demon, for example, as in the demon that attacked Jacob on the ford of the river Jabbok by night and

wrestled with him until daybreak. Jacob fought and “said: I will not let you go, unless you bless me” (Gen. 32:26). He won the blessing, was given a new name and was called “Israel” from then on. “Israel” means “God’s fighter”—“for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Gen. 32:28).

Luther’s understanding of evil provided him with the lens to perceive the world realistically. This realistic perspective distinguishes Luther sharply from the harmlessness of modern theologians of love. The theologians of love transform the original Christian confession, God is love, into a principle of both knowledge and systematic construction in order to build an internally coherent dogmatic system. The price paid for this transformation is to render harmless the enemies referred to in the prayers of the Psalms, to let them fade into paper tigers. They are allowed to disappear through the effort of subsuming evil under a theory of love.

Luther’s life and work, contrary to what modern theologians of love think, is determined throughout by the trials and temptations (*Anfechtungen*)⁷ suffered at the hands of these enemies and by the fight against them. An example representative of Luther’s encounter with temptation is offered in his interpretation of Psalm 119. In this text, it strikes the reader that Luther forcefully strengthens the motif already strongly coloring this Psalm of the “enemies” of the Word of God. Luther intensifies the motif and heightens it in accordance with the pressing issues of his times, above all with the polemic against both the Roman papacy as the personification of the Antichrist and against the enthusiasts. (The polemic against the papacy must be critically viewed today because Luther’s judgment of the papacy as the Antichrist no longer applies to the contemporary Roman Catholic church. Luther’s judgment was accurate in his day insofar as the papacy was bound to destroy the divine order of the world through a false understanding of the church, marriage, family, and economy as well as of the political realm.)⁸

Luther’s understanding of the world, of time, and of the Word cannot be subsumed under a contemporary existential theology, some theory of Christianity or a theory of universal history. In the

midst of the perspective extended from the beginning to the end of the world, Luther's understanding of these three themes is concentrated on his own day. Not abandoned to a momentary glimpsing with mystical or any other immediacy, Luther's focus is articulated entirely in the context and criticism of his time. In his picture of Luther, Precht hits the nail on the head by portraying knights with spears and peasants with threshing-flails, both groups fighting against each other. The artist illustrates the historical facts of the Peasants' War marking the circumstances of the year 1525. In this year, Luther saw the end of the world breaking in. During this ending of days, Luther perceived God's creative will and sought "to spite" the devil⁹ by marrying and having a family. Luther's decisions for his personal life were signs of his faith in God the Creator amid apocalyptic storm clouds. "If I can manage it, before I die I will still marry my Katie to spite the devil. . . . I trust they [the peasants] will not steal my courage and [my] joy. . . . In a short while the true judge will come."¹⁰ The coming of the last judge in judgment marks the consummation of the world.

Is Luther's situation in the face of apocalyptic in-breaking relevant for us? The singular historical experiences moving Luther, impelling him from the inside, extend to a meaning reaching beyond their original situation. This meaning becomes clear when we see in the figure of one of the peasants a soldier cited from the painter Otto Dix, and we are reminded of the hell of Verdun together with the entire horror of the wars of our century. The depiction of the army of knights opposite the peasants can be seen echoing Albrecht Dürer's "Riders of the Apocalypse" and his "Knight, Death and Devil." Citing Hieronymous Bosch's paintings of evil, Precht has intensified the scene by projecting these figures into the mythological. One of the knights carrying a blood-smeared sword has a scaly body; Behemoth and Leviathan are recalled.

Christ Crucified and the Word from the Cross

This history of the world is marked by the war of all against all. All fight to live or die in the struggles for mutual recognition. Into

this meat grinder, God has given himself through his Son. Laying down his life, God has emptied himself unto death, to death on the cross. God is man. He is among us, “with us in mud and in work, so that his skin smokes.”¹¹ Describing “God with us” in earthy pictures, Luther preaches on the name of Christ as “Immanuel.” By virtue of his love, the crucified God endures and overcomes the night of sin, of death, and of hell.

The pictures and scenes of sin, death, and hell may well exercise their power until the final moment of our earthly existence. They aim to captivate our focus. Luther, however, redirects our eyes to Christ crucified on the cross, who “was assailed by the images of death, sin, and hell just as we are.”¹² Focusing on the crucified one, Luther encourages us to “look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven.”¹³ In the sign and image of the cross, you will obtain victory and live, even when you die.

Precht the artist makes visible how the crucified Christ does not remain just a visible image, but expresses himself in language: Christ on the cross comes to us in the Word of biblical preaching. The stream of his blood opens up the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, discloses the testament as the Word from the cross. The testament bequeaths to our sinful time eternal life and it promises to us, through the forgiveness of our hellish history of life and world, eternal community with God.

Luther, as the minister of the divine Word, points to this Word from the cross. Luther promises forgiveness in the name of God, offers it, assures us of it. The book of the Bible is not tightly clutched and closed; it is no fundamentalist weapon, so to speak. Rather, the book lies open. It is opened by him who is alone able to open it: the crucified One who lives (Luke 24:30–32).

Luther’s index finger rests on a specific passage in the open book of the Bible. On which passage? Romans 3:25 may be recalled: the one who “FORGIVES SIN.”¹⁴ Of all the verses in his Bible, Luther distinguishes only this one phrase with capital letters. In a marginal gloss, he calls this clause “the main part” and the “central place of this epistle and of the entire Bible.”

The defiance and comfort of the Protestant faith rests on its

insistence on the literal word of the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Luther can even speak of this literal word in such a way that we should “presume” God’s promise for ourselves. He writes in the interpretation of Hebrews 4:16 in 1518 that we should come before God with the confidence of presuming the divine promise.¹⁵ An excerpt from the *Great Commentary on Genesis*, that can be considered to be Luther’s theological testament, corresponds to the theme from the earlier comment.

I have been baptized. I have been absolved. In this faith I die. No matter what trials and cares confront me from now on, I will certainly not be shaken; for He who said: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16) and “Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19) and “This is My body, This is My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” (cf. Matt. 26:26, 28)—He cannot deceive or lie. This is certainly true.¹⁶

In another passage found in the *Great Commentary on Galatians*, Luther writes,

The following is the reason why our theology is certain: because it tears us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves. It does this in order that we would not lean on our strengths, our conscience, our mind, our person, our works, but rather lean on that what is outside of us. What is outside of us is, namely, the promise and truth of God that cannot lie.¹⁷

The Course of One’s Life and the Course of World History

These citations from Luther clearly show why he judged his contribution to rest not on his person, but on his teaching alone. Goethe evaluated the relevance of Luther quite differently. Reflecting on the Reformation on its three hundredth anniversary in 1817, the poet wrote to Knebel on August 22, 1817: “Just between us, there is nothing interesting in this matter except for Luther’s personality. His personality is also the only thing actually impressing the masses. Everything else is confused rubbish.”¹⁸

Luther himself did not take such an interest in his person. Already in 1522, he pleads in *A Sincere Admonition to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion*:

In the first place, I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians not Lutherans. What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine [John 7:16]. Neither was I crucified for anyone [1 Cor. 1:13]. St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 3[4], would not allow the Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I—poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am—come to have men call the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians, after him whose teaching we hold. . . . I neither am nor want to be anyone's master. I hold, together with the universal church, the one universal teaching of Christ, who is our only Master [Matt. 23:8].¹⁹

Luther's interest in the story of his life and in the history of the world—in the course of his own life and in the course of the world—is entirely absorbed in an interest he has in common with the story of Acts. Luther and the apostles are completely interested in the course of the Word of God, in the *cursus evangelii*, in the history shaped and effected by the Holy Scriptures, in the history of suffering these effects. They are interested in the dramatic epic poem of the “divine Aeneade,” in the story of the inexhaustible book of experience, of which Luther wrote two days before his death in his last note. If it is at all appropriate to speak about Luther's life and his biography, if facts of the Reformation are to be written down at all, then one should learn from these stories, only how “the loving Word of God has fared, what the Word had to suffer under so many great enemies in these last fifteen years.”²⁰

Luther concludes his preface to the first volume of his Latin writings (1545) with a gesture towards his reader. The gesture is no conventional phrase. It defines the appropriate frame of reference in which Luther's life and work should be fittingly perceived:

Farewell in the Lord, reader, and pray for the growth of the Word against Satan. Strong and evil, now also very furious and savage, he knows his time is short and the kingdom of his pope is in danger. But may God confirm in us what he has accomplished and perfect his work which he began in us, to his glory, Amen.²¹

Luther describes the space in which history is experienced. One's individual course of life, located in this space, is inextricably

bound together with the course of the Word of God. It is the divine Word that is contradicted, rejected and fought against. In the space of experience, time is tautly stretched while the passionate complaint and petition for the coming of the Lord and his Last Judgment are cried out. One can hardly call this scene anything other than “apocalyptic.”

Apocalyptic and the Courage to Face Life

Luther's apocalyptic understanding of creation and history opposes the perspective of a philosophy of history that has emerged in modernity; it opposes, above all, the modern idea of progress. In hindering the theme of modern progress, Luther's understanding does not imply that the justified human person moves around in a circle and cannot walk with firm steps in a specific direction. The contrary is correct. In fact, progress is made in the relation between the new and the old person. “We only begin to make some progress in that which shall be perfected in the future life.”²²

There is certainly progress, although not absolute, in the ethical domain and in the region of our works, of our cultural, social, and political activity. In its ethical sense, progress is relieved of the metaphysical pressure to be considered in absolute terms. The kingdom of God is not earned through work for the kingdom of God; rather, the kingdom has already been prepared (Matt. 25:34). The idea of ethical progress freed from metaphysical weight is no longer an idea of salvation. The idea of progress loses the religious fascination that it exerted as a perverted idea of salvation. Last but not least, it loses its fanaticism in the political region. As ethical progress relieved of the quest for salvation, it is truly progress in a worldly sense. It does not walk in the name of the absolute and the total, but in small and nonetheless distinct steps.

Modernity has forgotten about the distinction between ethical progress and a metaphysical progress. This kind of forgetting includes a forgetting of the meaning of baptism. Baptism is the place of rupture between the old and the new world, between the old and the new eon. There can only be ethical development in the

return to baptism. The progress from which we can expect what is truly good, and not only the good but the best of all, is accessible only in the turn and return to baptism. Together with the return to baptism is a turn towards a perception of the world in which the alternatives between optimism and pessimism, between a glaring fear of the future and a euphoric hope of the further evolution of the cosmos including an intensification of its possibilities, are shattered as truly as God the Creator works newness without ceasing.

Luther's distinctive courage to face life, courage that is beyond optimism and pessimism, flows from its grounding in baptism. There is a saying that, although it does not originate with Luther, fittingly applies to his understanding: "If the world would come to an end tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today!"²³

This saying captures two moments intrinsic to Luther's understanding. Faith in God the Creator is related to the hope for the end of the perverted world as the definitive victory of grace. Both moments of the saying are folded into each other, but in a way preventing the rounding out of fragments. Ruptures are not necessarily comprehended and averse variables do not appear to be ultimately meaningful. Guilt and forgiveness are not integrated in a worldly immanent way. Continuity is anticipated alone from the faithfulness of the One who does not abandon the work of his hands. Relieved of establishing theoretical coherence and practical continuity, I am freed from the coercion to pronounce a final judgment on myself and on others or to think the history of the world in terms of my ultimate judgment of the world.

In the space offered by such faith and hope, such courage to face life, one is not forced to escape from the present twilight between creation and consummation to the alleged clarity of a "hope for better times"²⁴ working its actuality out in inner-worldly history. A passage from Johann Georg Hamann dovetails well with Luther's intention: The coming of the Lord "will be like a thief in the night: then neither political calculations nor prophetic dividing up of time can bring on the day."²⁵

Until today, the Protestant church and theology has had its hands full in taming Luther's teaching. The cloudburst of this type of

theology needs to be drained off in as nicely packaged a way as possible. But by such a tamed version of Luther's theology, Christianity becomes trivial and boring. It loses its worldliness and its realistic insight into the human heart with its wicked thoughts and inclinations.

We become aware of Luther's relevance for today when we take notice of his apocalyptic perception of the times. For Luther, that rupture of the times between the new and the old eon has occurred once and for all on the cross of Jesus Christ. No modern ideology of progress can be justified on the grounds of this rupture; neither can the postmodern arbitrariness of "anything goes!" be justified by a similar argument.

The crucial point of Luther's understanding of time consists of the folding into one another of pivotal events in time, it consists in an interweaving of times (*Verschränkung der Zeiten*). The last judgment, the consummation of the world, and the creation of the world are perceived simultaneously. The future of the world comes from God's present and presence. God's new creation establishes the old world as old and restores the original world. Salvation communicated in the present is seen in view of Christ on the cross. The salvation effected on the cross guarantees the coming consummation of the world. In between the times, the suffering and groaning of the creatures of the old world are experienced in painful contradiction to the creation originally created by the promise.

The Hidden and the Revealed God

As long as the believer is on the way, he or she lives in the midst of temptation. The pain of the aforementioned contradiction shapes the depth of the temptation encountered. The greater the promise and expectation, the profounder and more passionate the complaint and the question: "Why?" (Psalm 22:2). God's promise of life addressed to all creatures is contradicted by daily experience. In the face of the contradiction to the divine promise, the question emerges in a powerful way whether God keeps the promises he has made and is making. Experiencing precisely the opposite of

the promised response, we are hurt by the grieving of the world: injustice, innocent suffering, hunger, murder, and death.

Luther does not play down the situation of temptation in which God withdraws and hides himself. Rather, Luther perceives the rawness of this experience in its ultimate depth. The experiences of suffering are not misjudged, yet Luther refuses to acknowledge them with finality. By denying them their ultimacy, Luther flees away from the God hiding himself towards the God who has become man, to the God who, in the hiddenness on the cross, has revealed himself. It is necessary to “make [one’s] way to God against God and pray to Him,”²⁶ to the revealed God against the hidden one.

The hidden God is the God who is inaccessibly distant and yet simultaneously and intrusively near. This God has “not disclosed himself . . . in his Word” for you, rather, “God hidden in his majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life, death, and all in all.”²⁷

One can only complain about the crushing and incomprehensible hiddenness of God. With this complaint, the world is perceived in a significant way. The complaint does not give up faith in the “very good” creation (Gen. 1:31). Neither does it play down both evil and suffering; evil is not reduced to nothing. The complaint opens the space in which pain is suffered precisely in its profundity. It is the most profound temptation when the one who introduces himself in the promise of life and eternal community, vouching for it, does not mourn death or annul it, but works life, death and all in all.

Luther’s distinction between his ordering of the hidden and the revealed God has nothing to do with a speculative idea. He does not invent a strategy to turn what is unbearable into what is bearable and therefore conjure up suffering to appear as meaningful. In the complaint, the discourse of the hidden God is given an immediate context. Speaking about the hidden God is wrung out from temptation as complaint.

The complaint, however, is not born from itself. To it necessarily belongs the Word that has come to it beforehand. The complaint

requires the Word authorizing its expression. "Thou has said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to thee, 'Thy face, Lord, do I seek' " (Psalm 27:8). Complaint and petition are articulated only by virtue of the promise. And "call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). God is the one who addresses the human being, who hears and has heard him before he has even cried out to God; "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

The complaint is uttered only in the power of such a Word that has already come to it, in the power of such a response preceding it. By virtue of this Word and response, temptation teaches us to orient ourselves on the Word. By virtue of the response, the complaint cried out in the situation of temptation is moved to grasp the ungraspable God in the place where God allows himself to be grasped and touched: in the Word of his promise.

God's promise is given to be heard and to be tasted in an extremely concentrated way in the Lord's Supper. The Lord of the Supper is Christ crucified. He has "tasted death" (Heb. 2:9). He tells the story of death and, as the one now living, he speaks the last Word by virtue of his sacrificial death. From the center of life as it is perceived in the communal supper, suffering, and death are not excluded. They are included in the daily bread. The center, the gift-word of the supper, in which God gives himself to us completely, as God does in every other sermon, arouses the "Eucharist": thanksgiving and joy. From this thanksgiving emerges the new turning towards one's fellow creatures in a peculiar courage to face life. "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace . . . [It] makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures."²⁸ Faith is the courage to expect the deliverance of all things from judgment and death. God promises us this courage. In this promise God is, in a liberatingly incomprehensible way, revealed: as the crucified one who lives.

This news is, in eternity, the newest.

For Oliver K. Olson, on his seventieth birthday, with respect and gratitude.

NOTES

1. *New York Times*, December 29, 1995, editorial page; *New York Times*, December 29, 1996, sec. xx, pp. 7–10.

2. “Er fühlt der Zeiten ungeheuren Bruch / und fest umklammert er sein Bibelbuch,” in Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, “Huttens letzte Tage (1871), XXXII Luther,” (the conclusion of this section) in *Huttens letzte Tage. Eine Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Reclam U.-B., no. 6942, 1975), 39. (Hereafter cited as Meyer.)

3. “Martin Luther inwendig voller Figur.” Albrecht Dürer is quoted in the title. “Dann ein guter Maler ist inwendig voller Figur . . .” *Albrecht Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. E. Heidrich (Berlin: J. Bard, 1910), 308. Prechtel bases his 1983 painting on the picture of the aging Luther that Luther’s student, Johann Reifenstein, drew in 1545. Reifenstein’s picture is found in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, vol. 3, *Die Erhaltung der Kirche* (1532–1546) (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1987), table IX. Prechtel receives Reifenstein’s painting of the aging Luther by overlaying it with another painting of Luther, this time by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1533). The Cranach painting is found in the center panel of the winged altar of the city church in Weimar. From Reifenstein’s sketch, Prechtel cites the face; from Cranach’s painting, Prechtel quotes the collar, the stripe underneath it colored in conspicuous cardinal red and the position of the hands holding the open Bible. The figure of Christ on the cross, together with the stream of blood flowing from the wound in his side, is also taken from Cranach’s painting with the difference that Cranach has located Christ to Luther’s right and Prechtel has placed Christ inside the full figure of Luther. In Prechtel’s watercolor painting, there is no writing on the open pages of the Bible. However, in Cranach’s painting, the pages are turned to the observer and the writing on them can be clearly seen. There Luther’s index finger points to Hebrews 4:16 (see footnote 15 below). The German text reads, “Darum lasset uns hinzutreten mit Freidigkeit [Freiheit, Freimut; in Greek “parrhesia”; in English freedom, frankness, honesty, openness] zu dem Gnadenstuhl, auf daß wir Barmherzigkeit empfangen und Gnade finden auf die Zeit, wenn uns Hilfe not sein wird.

4. “Sein Geist ist zweier Zeiten Schlachtgebiet / Mich wunderts nicht, daß er Dämonen sieht!” Meyer, 40.

5. “Ideo discamus ex Euangelio Teufel recht kennen.” Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–), vol. 41:3.26 (Sermon on the Sunday after New Year, Jan. 3, 1535). (Hereafter cited as WA.)

6. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan et al. (Saint Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958–), vol. 14:31. (Hereafter cited as LW.) “Got kan nicht Got sein, Er mus zuvor ein Teufel werden.” WA 31/I:249.25–26 (*Commentary on Psalm 117*, 1530).

7. Translator’s note: the German word *Anfechtung* is translated in this text as “temptation.” The word also includes the sense of “attack.”

8. “On the three hierarchies: church, worldly regiment and household and that the pope is under none of these but is the enemy and persecutor of all of them.” The Latin text reads, “*De tribus hierarchiis: ecclesiastica, politica, oeconomica et quod Papa sub nulla instarum sit sed omnium publicus hostis.*” WA 39/II, 39–91 [*Circular Disputation on the Right to Resist the Emperor* (Mt. 19:21), May 9, 1539]. The sense in which Luther represents the pope as the Antichrist can be clearly seen from the full title of this disputation.

9. "... zu trutz" in WA 18, 277, 35 (*Christliche Schrift an Wolfgang Reußenbusch, sich in den ehelichen Stand zu begeben*, 1525).
10. LW 49:111–112 *Letter to John Rühel*, May 4 (5?), 1525. [= WA BR 3:482.81–83, 93–94.]
11. "... bey uns Im Schlam, und arbeit, das Ihm die haut rauchett." WA 4:608.32–609, 1 (Sermons from approximately 1514–1520).
12. LW 42:107 (*A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, 1519) WA 2:691.25–26.
13. Ibid., 103. WA 2:688.35–36.
14. "SVNDE VERGIBT" See: Martin Shloemann, "Die zwei Wörter. Luthers Notabene zur Mitte der Schrift, in *Luther* 65 (1994) 110–123.
15. The presuming of the divine promise is shown paradigmatically by the Reformation breakthrough in Luther's theology as he interprets Heb. 4:16 (see footnote 3) in March, 1518: "This faith alone makes them pure and worthy. This faith does not prop itself up on those works, but on the most pure, reliable and firm word of Christ who speaks: 'Come here to me all of you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' In short: in the presumption of these words [In praesumptione igitur istorum verborum], one should come near, and those who approach in this manner will not be confounded." The Latin text is found in: WA 57/III:171.4–8 (Scholion to Heb. 5:1, 1518). See: Oswald Bayer, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie*, 2nd ed. Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 24 (Darmstadt: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 206–212, esp. 208–209.
16. LW 8:193–94 (to Gen. 48:21, 1545); WA 44:720.30–36.
17. "Atque haec est ratio, cur nostra Theologia certa sit: Quia rapit nos a nobis et ponit nos extra nos, ut non nitamur viribus, conscientia, sensu, persona, operibus nostris, sed eo nitamur, quod est extra nos, Hoc est, promissione et veritate Dei, quae fallere non potest." WA 40/I:589.25–28 (to Gal. 4:6, 1531). The line immediately following this passage reads: "hoc Papa nescit." WA 40/I:589.28.
18. "... Denn unter uns gesagt, ist an der ganzen Sache nichts interessant als Luthers Character, und es ist auch das einzige, was der Menge eigentlich imponiert. Alles übrige ist ein verworrener Quark." Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke*, vol. 21, *Briefe und Gespräche*, 2nd ed. Ernst Beutler (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1965), 241. Goethe can also refer to Luther in an entirely different manner. In a letter written to Zelter on Nov. 14, 1816, Goethe plans to write a Reformation cantate and agrees wholeheartedly with Luther's teaching, the "central concept of Lutheranism" ["Hauptbegriff des Luthertums"], that "rests on the decided opposition between law and gospel" ["auf dem entschiedenen Gegensatz von Gesetz und Evangelium"]. See Ibid., 195–198.
19. LW 45:70–71 (*A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion*, 1522); WA 8:685.4–16.
20. "... wie es mir, ja dem lieben wort Gottes gangen sey, was es hat müssen leiden von so vielen grossen feinden jnn diesen funffzehken vergangen jaren." WA 38:134.6–8 (*Vorrede zum Catalogus oder Register aller Bücher und Schriften Luthers*, 1533).
21. LW 34:338 (*Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, 1545); WA 54:187.3–7.
22. LW 31:358 (*The Freedom of a Christian*, 1520); WA 7:59.31 (Latin); compare with WA 7:30.5–6 (German). Compare with WA 39/I:203.16–39; 204.1–38 (theses 17–45, *Doctoral Disputation of Palladius and Tileman on Romans* 3:28, June 1, 1537).

23. “Wenn morgen die Welt unterginge, pflanzte ich heute noch ein Apfelbäumchen!” See: Martin Schloemann, *Luthers Apfelbäumchen? Ein Kapitel deutscher Mentalitätsgeschichte seit dem Zeiten Weltkrieg*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994.

24. See Philipp Jakob Spener, *Behauptung der Hoffnung künftiger besserer Zeiten* (1693).

25. “. . . gleich einem Diebe in der Nacht sein wird: dann können weder politische Arithmetiken noch prophetische Chronologien Tag machen.” Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 4, ed. Arthur Henkel. (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1959), 315, 3–5 (Letter from Hamann to Häfeli, July 22, 1781).

26. LW 19:72 (*Commentary on Jonah 2:2*, 1526); WA 19:223.15–16.

27. LW 33:140 (*The Bondage of the Will*, 1525); WA 18:685.27, 21–23.

28. LW 35:370–71 (*Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, 1546). The German text from 1522 reads, “eyn lebendige erwegene zuuersicht auff Gottis gnade, . . . macht frolich, trotzig und lustig gegen Gott, und alle Creaturn.” WA DB 7:10, 16–19 (*Preface to the Letter to the Romans*, 1522).

Translated by Christine Helmer. In the original German text, this essay, minus the opening paragraphs, marked the official opening of the Luther Year in Nuremberg on February 18, 1996, the 450th anniversary of Luther’s death. It was first printed in *Luther* 68(1997):55–67.