

Martin Luther's Movement toward an Apostolic Self-Awareness As Reflected in His Early Letters

By Timothy J. Wengert

On or about May 13, 1522 Martin Luther sent yet another letter to George Spalatin, his ardent supporter and a secretary at the court of Frederick the Wise. Measured by its content, the letter hardly stands out in their rich correspondence, by then eight years old and containing well over one hundred exchanges. He discusses mundane matters connected with some unnamed, old pastor in Seegrehna and Christoffel Pfaffenbeck. One item, however, gives this letter a much greater significance. Luther begins it with a new greeting to his old friend, »*Gratia et pax in domino*«. ¹ This subtle shift from the expected »*salutem*« in greeting his most trusted correspondent reflects an important change in Luther's presentation of himself in relation to the developing church of the 1520s.

No one denies that between 1520 and 1522 a dramatic shift in Luther's relation to the church took place. In 1519 he still presents himself as Rome's obedient servant, and he is in fact still an Augustinian friar, a citizen of the Empire, and a cleric within the church in communion with Rome. By 1522 Luther is none of these things. Von Staupitz has excused him from his order. The Pope has excommunicated him from the church. The Emperor Charles V has declared him an outlaw of the Holy Roman Empire. Willingly or not, Luther has been pushed to the center of a movement from which will arise the Protestant churches.

There is a variety of explanations for this change. Some have traced its roots in the late-medieval and Renaissance institutions that surrounded Luther: Empire and Church. Others have focused upon the theological underpinnings in the positions of Luther and his opponents. Still others have investigated the social milieu in which these changes took place. Another important component in this shift stems from Luther's own person. As in much of Luther research, we have Karl Holl (1866-1926) to thank for first posing this question. In an essay

1 WA Br 2, 526, 3 (489). A letter to Spalatin (445, 2 [453]), dated January 22, 1522, contains the same phrase but should be dated, as the WA editor notes, June 4, 1522; 13, 44.

written in 1903, Holl noted the two sides of Luther's views of himself: as self-deprecating and self-confident.² While attributing some of Luther's behavior to his personality, Holl also pointed out the overriding importance of Luther's vocation as Doctor and Preacher and his conviction that he became a reformer accidentally, compelled not by his own interests but by a God who had made him his chosen instrument. This conviction, which Holl called a »Werkzeugbewußtsein«, gave substance both to Luther's humility and to his confidence and sprang ultimately from his theology, which stressed the certainty of forgiveness. In an epilogue, Holl associated this trait with the work and life of the Apostle Paul.³

In subsequent research Heinrich Denifle (1844-1905), Hartman Grisar (1845-1932) and Erik H. Erikson (*1902), among others, focused on Luther's personality and proposed psychological explanations for Luther's behavior. This discussion quickly bogged down in debate over the applicability of modern psychological theories to historical research, over obscure references in the Table Talk, and over the role of scatological language in explaining »Luther, the man«.⁴

Hermann Steinlein (*1865) expanded Holl's emphasis of Luther's vocation as pastor and doctor of the Bible to explain his peculiar status in the events of the

2 Karl HOLL: *Luthers Urteile über sich selbst*. In: Karl Holl: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*. Vol. 1: Luther. 6th edition. Tü 1932, 381-419.

3 Ibid, 419: »Aber der wahre Schöpfer dieser aufs Letzte dringenden Selbstauffassung ist doch nicht Luther selbst. Wie überall wandelt Luther auch hier auf den Spuren eines Größeren. Von Paulus hat er es gelernt, sich zugleich vor Gott als Nichts zu fühlen und sich doch »törlisch« in Gott zu rühmen. Daß Luther auch dieses Persönlichste des Paulus in sich nachzubilden vermochte, bestätigt es, wie sehr er dessen ganze Art in sich aufgenommen, ja in sich eingesogen hat. Jahrhunderte hindurch lag freilich auch dieses kostbare Erbe des Paulus verschüttet. Erst einer, der die inneren und äußeren Kämpfe des Paulus selbst wieder durchlebt hat, war imstande, den Schatz wiederum zu heben.« As we shall see, this intimate copying of Paul extended for Luther to his epistolary style.

4 Heinrich DENIFLE: *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung, quellenmäßig dargestellt*. Vol. I I-II. MZ 1904; Albert Maria WEIß: *Lutherpsychologie als Schlüssel zur Lutherlegende*. MZ 1906; Hartmann GRISAR: *Luther*/ trans. by E. M. Lamond. 6 vols. StL 1916; Erik H. ERIKSON: *Young man Luther: a study in psychoanalysis and history*. NY 1958. For criticism of Erikson, see *PSYCHOHISTORY AND RELIGION: the case of »Young man Luther«*/ ed. by Roger A. Johnson. Phil 1977, especially the contributions of Roland H. Bainton and Lewis W. Spitz. See also Roland H. BAINTON: *A critique of Erik H. Erikson's »Young man Luther«*. In: Roland H. Bainton: *Studies on the Reformation*. Boston 1966, 86-92.

early Sixteenth Century.⁵ Without a doubt, Luther relied upon his calling as professor of the Bible and preacher in Wittenberg to defend himself against the charge that he lacked proper authority to advance his case against Rome and his Roman adversaries. He used it even more frequently in his battles with the »Schwärmer«. But that does not explain the entire scope of authority with which Luther mounted first his attacks on and later his reform of the church.

Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen (1903-1989), writing in 1940, and Wolfgang Günter, writing thirty-two years later, took as their starting point Holl's emphasis on Luther's theology.⁶ Von Campenhausen argued that not Luther's vocation but his position as (unwilling) initiator of the evangelical movement provided Luther with his clearest sense of his relation to reform. Luther thus recovered the view of history found in earliest Christianity. Günter focused instead on Luther's view of the »course of the Word«, within which Luther can see himself alternatively as completely unimportant or as uniquely called by God to the particular historical moment in which he lived.

Mark U. Edwards contributed another approach to Luther's personality that, according to the author's own admission, owed some small debt to modern theories of social psychology.⁷ He argued that Luther's strongest claims about himself, as Apostle or Prophet, arose gradually out of an ongoing struggle with »false brethren« within the evangelical camp and not directly with Roman opponents. Thus, only during the last half of Luther's career, particularly in the Galatians lectures of 1531, do we find a strong identification with the Apostle Paul. The events of 1522, particularly the unrest in Wittenberg, stood at the beginning of this process, long before dissonance within the evangelical camp led Luther to such strong assertions about himself.

5 Hermann STEINLEIN: *Luthers Doktorat*. L 1912. Steinlein argues that Luther's »doctor-consciousness« was strongest before Worms and after the appearance in 1524 of what Luther called enthusiasts. Heiko OBERMAN criticizes this approach to Luther in his »Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel« (B 1982, 134).

6 Hans Freiherr VON CAMPENHAUSEN: *Reformatorisches Selbstbewußtsein und reformatorisches Geschichtsbewußtsein bei Luther: 1517-1522*. ARG 37 (1940), 128-150; Wolfgang GÜNTER: *Die geschichtstheologischen Voraussetzungen von Luthers Selbstverständnis*. In: *Von Konstanz nach Trient: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kirche von den Reformkonzilien bis zum Tridentinum*/ ed. by Remigius Bäumer. PB 1972, 379-394.

7 Mark U. EDWARDS: *Luther and the false brethren*. Stanford 1975, especially 2. 27. 113. 116-125 and 210, note 6.

Luther's correspondence contributes greatly to our understanding of his person. However, it contains more than subtle clues to neuroses or cognitive dissonance; it offers more than simply a store of theological positions regarding his understanding of his own vocation. Luther's letters, particularly though not exclusively his personal letters to Spalatin, John Lang (um 1487-1548) and, later, his wife, Katherine von Bora (1499-1552), give us a glimpse into Luther's person – his weaknesses and his strengths, his view of himself and of others. As we shall argue here, when in 1522 he changes his greetings in these letters, Luther has unwittingly provided historians a benchmark against which to measure how far his self-understanding and his identification with the Apostle Paul had evolved in those crucial months after the Diet of Worms.

Luther takes the common words of greeting seriously in his letters. Two well-known cases independent of the issue at hand demonstrate this. First, as is well-known, Luther engages in some delightful playfulness when writing to his family, especially his wife, whom in one instance he designates »frawen auff den neuen sawmarckt« and »gnedige frawe von Zulsdorff (und wie E. g. mehr heist)!«. ⁸ Second, in an instance that has also evoked much scholarly comment, Luther changes the spelling of his name and signs his name in several early letters, including a 1517 letter to Lang, »Frater Martinus Eleutherius«. ⁹ If Karl Stackmann and Bernd Moeller are correct, Luther's Pauline theology influenced his use of this title and how he spelled his name. However, in a more recent analysis of the problem Helmar Junghans has argued that this change is more clearly traced to Luther's own humanist predilections and to the circle of humanist friends with whom he employed the term. ¹⁰

Luther's concern for the greetings and closings of his letters reflects the high regard in which his generation held letter-writing. ¹¹ Here the rhetorical side of

8 WA Br 9, 168, 1-4 (3509), July 26, 1540. This is only one of many examples.

9 WA Br 1, 122, 56f (52), November 11, 1517. Bernd MOELLER; Karl STACKMANN: Luder – Luther – Eleutherius. Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen I: phil.-hist. Klasse (1981) Nr. 7, 177-203; cited in Heiko A. OBERMAN: »IMMO«: Luthers reformatorische Entdeckungen im Spiegel der Rhetorik. In: Lutheriana: zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers von den Mitarbeitern der Weimarer Ausgabe/ ed. by Gerhard Hammer and Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen. Köln; W 1984, 34, note 129.

10 Helmar JUNGHANS: Der junge Luther und die Humanisten. Weimar 1984; GÖ 1985, 307-311. Junghans also refutes the notion that the term »Eleutherius« meant for Luther »the Liberator«.

11 Ibid, 220-235. Junghans analyzes Luther's style using late-medieval letters, the proposals of Conrad Celtis and Nikolaus Marschalk, and the actual letters of Erfurt humanists.

humanism, building on, combining and changing both medieval and classical epistolary styles, exercised a profound influence over all the players in the Reformation. The same people who transformed their names from Hausschein, Schwarzerd and Luder to Oecolampadion, Melancthon and Eleutherius, took equal care with how they presented themselves in their letters.

Even before the change to »grace and peace«, Luther had developed his own forms for greetings and closings in his letters. Nearly every early letter from Luther's pen included the word »Jhesus« penned boldly at the center and top. This was not untypical for clerics.¹² At the same time, Luther sometimes followed the classical practice and addressed letters by putting his name in the nominative and the recipient's name in the dative. Until May, 1522 his personal letters almost all begin with the word »Salutem«, short for »salutem dicit«, occasionally abbreviated by Luther and others as simply »S.« or »S.D.«. Luther's letters close with the words »vale« or »vale et ora pro me«, or »vale in Christo«, to which is appended the date. Most letters begin with the recipient's name and close with Luther's name often followed by the title »Augustinian«.¹³

Like his contemporaries, Luther sometimes christianizes these conventions. Thus, in the invitation to the celebration of his first mass, written from Erfurt on April 22, 1507 to the priest John Braun (1470-1516), Luther writes, »Sancto et venerabili Christi Mariaeque Sacerdoti, Iohanni Braun, Isennacensi Vicario, suo in Christo charissimo. S[alutem] D[icit] [Martinus Lutherus] in Christo Ihesu Domino nostro«. The letter concludes, »Vale in Christo Ihesu Domino nostro«.¹⁴ Less than one week later he closes another letter, »Bene vale in Christo

12 Junghans: op.cit., 224. In WA Br 1 of 180 letters, 160 begin with this word. In WA Br 2 of 275 letters, 178 begin with this word. At the end of 1522 Luther abruptly halts this practice, using it only once in 1523 in a letter to Duke George of Saxony on January 3, 1523 (WA Br 3, 489, 2 [863]). Two later uses (414, 1; 489, 2 [813, 863]) are in letters the dates of which are highly suspect. In the former the WA dates it »before 1524« and in the latter »May 7, 1525?«, where the editor also notes the use of the word »Jesus« may mean it was written much earlier. In fact, its content may relate more closely to the Wittenberg Unrest than to the time of the death of Frederick the Wise.

13 Junghans: op.cit., 219-224, discusses changes in the order of receiver and sender and the presence or absence of the sender's name at the end of the letter. Despite the classical models, some humanists continued to use certain practices typical of medieval letters, such as the placing of the more highly ranked individual first in the address and placing the sender's name at the end of the letter.

14 WA Br 1, 10, 1-3. 35 f (3). Luther expands this puffery even further in another letter to Braun

et pro me ora«. ¹⁵ Such embellishments reflect the general piety and practices of Luther's generation and are hardly unusual for an Augustinian friar with humanist pretensions.

Before the phrase »grace and peace« penetrates his private correspondence, Luther uses it in dedicatory letters and in public letters to government officials. In fact, he employs it initially in the preface to his first published work, the translation and commentary on the penitential psalms. There he states, »Allen lieben glidmaßen Christi die diß puchleyn leßen. Gnade und frid von gott...« ¹⁶ Three years later in 1520, he again uses the phrase in prefatory letters to Nicholas von Amsdorf (1483-1565) and the German nobility in his tract, »An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation...« ¹⁷

After that tract, the phrase appears seven more times in dedicatory epistles during 1521. One interesting example comes from an open letter to all readers in Luther's defense against the papal bull condemning his work. There Luther not only greets his readers with the words, »grace and peace«, but also continues with a thanksgiving, »Gebenedeyet vnnd gelobt sey Gott der Vatter vnßerß herrn Jhü Christi«. ¹⁸ Besides a letter on March 3, 1521 to Elector Frederick, dedicating his Advent postil, ¹⁹ Luther's dedicatory letter for the tract, »On Penance«, addressed to Francis von Sickingen (1481-1523), opens with the phrase »grace and peace« and closes with the words, »Geben ynn meyner Pathmoß«. ²⁰ »De abroganda missa privata«, addressed to his Augustinian

dated March 17, 1509; 16, 1-5 (5). See Junghans: op. cit., 229-231, where he details the humanistic elements in this letter.

¹⁵ WA Br 1, 15, 17-19 (4).

¹⁶ WA 1, 158, 1-3. For the influence on dedicatory letters see Helmar JUNGHANS: Die Widmungsvorrede bei Martin Luther. In: *Lutheriana: zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers von den Mitarbeitern der Weimarer Ausgabe/* ed. by Gerhard Hammer and Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen. Köln; W 1984, 39-65.

¹⁷ WA 6, 404, 4-9. In the interim he uses this greeting in a letter dedicating his sermon on »The sacrament of penance« to Margaret of Brunswick (WA 2, 713). The editors of the WA Br date this letter around October 15, 1519.

¹⁸ WA 7, 308, 7-11 (»Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. M. Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind«).

¹⁹ WA 7, 463, 3-8.

²⁰ WA 8, 138, 6; 140, 6. Luther also uses the phrase in prefatory letters to his exposition on healing of the ten lepers (8, 340) and to his Christmas postil (WA 10 I 1, 1). All three were written at the Wartburg.

brothers in Wittenberg, begins with the phrase, »gratiam et pacem Christi«, and closes with a benediction, »Dominus Ihesus confortet et conservet sensus et corda vestra in fide non ficta et caritate non simulata. Amen. Ex Eremo.«²¹

These characteristics in Luther's dedicatory letters show an increasing experimentation with an apostolic epistolary style, especially Paul's, who coined the phrase »grace and peace«, who used thanksgivings after his initial greetings, and who closed his letters with benedictions. This experimentation corresponds to Luther's explicit identification of his plight with that of the apostles in the letter to von Sickingen, where he calls the Wartburg his Patmos.²²

Nowhere do we find this identification expressed more clearly than in Luther's preface to his exposition of the 36th [37th] Psalm, dedicated to his congregation in Wittenberg. The title and introduction read:

»Der sechs und dreyssigst psalm David, eynen Christlichen Menschen tzu leren und trösten widder die Mütterey der bößenn unnd freveln Gleyßner. Dem armen heufflin Christi tzu Wittembergk Doctor Martinus Luther.

Gnad und frid von gott dem vatter unnd Jhesu Christo, unßerm herrnn. Amen. S Pau., da er ann vielen ortten gepredigt, nu gefangen war zu Rom, ließ er doch nit seyn sorgen fur die, ßo er bekeret hatte, mit bitten zu got, mit trosten und sterken yn schrifftten, wie das auß weyßen seyne Epistel. Dem selben exempel nach, Sintemal keyn zweyffel bey uns ist, das wir von gottis gnaden das recht, lautter Euangelium gehoret unnd erkennenet haben, wilchs got gefellig geweßen, eynß teylß durch mich, armen menschen, euch zu eröffnen, soll und kan ich auch nit on sorge seyn, das nit wolffe nach mir kummen yn den schafstall.«²³

Echoing J 10, Luther presents himself as an apostolic shepherd. The source of his apostolic authority is the gospel that he, like Paul, reveals to others. To be sure, in the same letter Luther acknowledges some restrictions in the comparison between himself and Paul, writing:

21 WA 8, 411, 3-6; 412, 27f.

22 In letters from that period he refers to it as »in regione avium« (WA Br 2, 333, 44 [407]), »in regione aeris« (335, 16, [408]), »in regione volucrum« (336, 17 [409]), »in monte [Zion]« (338, 67 [410]), »ex Eremo [mea]« (359, 134; 363, 70; 365, 35f; 366, 12; 369, 33; 386, 148 [418-421. 423. 428]), »ex insula pathmos« (355, 37f [417]). For Paul's epistolary style see the classic work of Adolf DEISSMANN: *Licht aus dem Osten*. Tü 1909. The first to notice this apostolic style in Luther was Hans PREUß: *Martin Luther: der Prophet*. GÜ 1933, 103-105. While noting Luther's warning that no one should compare himself to the Apostle, Preuß noticed a »secret harmony« in their epistolary styles (Preuß refers to Adolf LICHTENSTEIN: *Paulus und Luther: eine Parallele ihrer Zeit und Persönlichkeit*. L 1903).

23 WA 8, 210, 1-15.

»Aber die weyl ich nit der man byn, der als S. Pau. auß eygen geystis reichthumb kund schreybenn und trösten, hab ich mir fur genummen, die schrifft, die voller trostis ist, wie S. Pau. sagt Ro. 15., Nemlich den sechs und dreyssigsten psalm tzu vordeutschen und mit kurtzen glößen euch tzu senden, wilcher meynis dunckens fast eben tzu disser sach sich reymet.«²⁴

While he resists the temptation of equating himself fully with Paul, he contrasts himself directly to others who claimed to represent the apostles. In closing his letter he promises to pray and do what he can for his poor flock, »Auff das wir sie auß dem rachenn des seel morderß tzu Rom unnd seyner Apostellnn reyssenn mugenn.«²⁵ In this tract Luther's claim to have a special, apostolic position arise not in relation to evangelical opponents, as Edwards argued, but in opposition to Rome and out of a positive, pastoral concern for his Wittenbergers. Already in 1521 Luther wraps himself in a Pauline mantle of authority.

This Pauline example and authority insinuate themselves into Luther's communications with not only his poor flock in Wittenberg but also everyone else. Initially it colors how he addresses Imperial and local authorities.²⁶ We have already indicated how Luther revives the phrase »grace and peace« in the dedicatory letter dated June 23, 1520 for his »An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation ...«. Two months later, on August 30th of the same year, he sends a letter to no one less than the emperor himself. It begins with the now familiar grace and peace and concludes with a benediction: »Quam Dominus Ihesus nobis servet et magnificet ad gloriam euangelii sui sempiternam, Amen.«²⁷ In this letter Luther offers to stop writing if his enemies will instruct him better in the gospel. With a specific reference to Athanasius, Luther appeals to the Emperor for protection.

Nine months later, just after he had departed from Worms, Luther uses the phrase in a formal letter to Charles written from Friedberg. The same day he sends a nearly identical letter to the electors, princes and estates gathered at the diet of Worms, in which he outlines the reasons for his refusal to recant. In both

24 WA 8, 213, 2-7. He calls this a »Trostbriefle«. Despite this limitation, Luther calls himself an apostle in the »Warnung an seine lieben Deutschen« (WA 30 III, 393, 14-16).

25 WA 8, 214, 1f. He concludes with a benediction, 214, 2f.

26 For the content and types of such letters, see Karl TRÜDINGER: *Luthers Briefe und Gutachten an weltliche Obrigkeiten zur Durchführung der Reformation*. MS 1975.

27 WA Br 2, 175, 1-3 and 178, 89-92 (332). Even before that, in one of his most famous letters (WA Br I, 110, 6 [48]), he addresses Albert of Mainz on October 31, 1517 with the words, »Gratiam & misericordiam dei & quicquid potest & est«.

letters Paul again furnishes Luther with a crucial, authoritative example to justify Luther's own behavior:

Hab mich auch des zu vil malen erpotten und nachmals erpeut, nichts vorbehalten, dann allein das götlich wort, darinnen nicht allein des menschen ewigs leben, wie Christus Matthei am 4. sagt, sunder auch der englen frewd und wunn steet, welches uber alle ding frei und ungebunden sein soll und muß, als sanct Paulus lert, und in keines menschen gewalt stet, desselben sich zu begeben oder in far zu setzen, wie groß und vil gelert und heilig si immer sein mügen, das auch sant Paulus zu den Galatern am ersten darf zweimal rufen und sagen.²⁸

Later in the letter he again returns to St. Paul's example and says: »Denn daher will s. Paulus kein engel von himel, auch nit sich selbst, auch ane zweifel keinen heiligen im Himel nach auf erden sollichs vertrawens wirdig achten nach geacht werden, ia auch vermaledeiet.«²⁹ Luther may well describe elsewhere how he felt as through the heavens opened when he discovered a more comforting way to understand Paul's theology in R 1, 17, but he shut himself against all attacks on earth by way of Paul's example in G 1, 8 f.

These two sides of Paul's example, as preacher bringing comfort to his flock and as defender of the gospel against all opposing authorities, impinge more and more on Luther's presentation of himself both publicly and privately from the Diet of Worms until his return to Wittenberg from the Wartburg in 1522. They merge during the unrest in Wittenberg, as Luther's letters to the Elector of Saxony vividly demonstrate. Before that time, Luther addressed the Elector in the respectful terms typical of his time. For example, in a public letter of May 7, 1520 he begins:

»Dem Durchleuchtigsten, Hochgeborenen Fürsten und Herrn, Herrn Friedrich, Herzog zu Sachsen, des Heil. Römischen Reichs Kurfürsten und Vicario etc., Landgrafen zu Thüringen, Markgrafen zu Meißen, meinem gnädigsten Herrn und Patron. Jesus. Durchleuchtigster, Hochgeborner, gnädigster Fürst und Herr, mein untertänige Dienste sein E.K.F.G. allezeit bereit zuvor.«³⁰

All this changes during the Wittenberg unrest of 1522.³¹ When alarming reports of Andreas Bodenstein from Karlstadt (1486-1541) and Gabriel Zwi-

28 WA Br 2, 307, 10f; 315, 51-316, 60 (401f).

29 WA Br 2, 316, 75-77 (402).

30 WA Br 2, 102, 1-7 (286).

31 For the details of this controversy, see Heinrich BORNKAMM: Martin Luther in der Mitte seines Lebens/ ed. by Karin Bornkamm. GÖ 1979, 56-80. See also Nikolaus MÜLLER: Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522. L 1911; and Edwards: op. cit., 6-33.

ling's (circa 1487-1558) activity and of the Elector's own uncertainty as to how to deal with the situation reach Luther, he instructs the Elector about the spiritual meaning of this unrest and informs Frederick of his intent to return to Wittenberg. The opening lines of this missive, dated around February 24, 1522, reveal his supreme self-confidence:

»Gnade vnnd gluck von gott dem Vater tzum newen heilighum! Solchen gruß schreybe ich nü, M. gnedigster herr, an statt meyner [üblichen] erbietung. E.f.g. hatt nü lange iar nach heylichthum ynn alle land bewerben lassen, aber nü hatt gott e.f.g. begird erhoret vnnd heym geschickt on alle kost vnnd muhe eyn gantzs creutz mit negelln, speren vnnd geysselln.«³²

Buoyed by the Elector's pusillanimous reply, Luther leaves for Wittenberg and on March 5, 1522 sends him an almost defiant letter from Borna. He begins: »Gunst und Friede von Gott unserm Vater und unserm Herrn Jhesu Christo und meine untertänigste Dienste.«³³ He then insists that, whatever the Elector may think, he is returning to Wittenberg. His reasons are a page from Paul's epistle to the Galatians:

»Von meiner Sach aber, gnädigster Herr, antwort ich also: E.K.F.G. weiß, oder weiß sie es nicht, so laß sie es ihr hiemit kund sein, daß ich das Euangelium nicht von Menschen, sondern allein vom Himmel durch unsern Herrn Jesum Christum habe, daß ich mich wohl hätte mügen (wie ich hinfort tun will) einen Knecht und Euangelisten rühmen und schreiben.«³⁴

He goes on to lament the fact that too much humility on his part will succeed only in debasing the Gospel since the devil will take a mile where given an inch. Thus, out of the anguish of his conscience he must do something else, namely, return to Wittenberg.³⁵ Luther links these two things: his apostolic call (cf. Paul's description of himself as servant) and his anguished conscience. Together they define Luther's presentation of himself within the burgeoning reform movement. As an evangelist, he must bring the Gospel to his poor flock. In Borna as in Worms he must defy this world's princes, even his patron, Frederick.

In a more measured letter, written from Wittenberg on March 7th or 8th at

32 WA Br 2, 448, 4-8 (454).

33 WA Br 2, 454, 5 f (455).

34 WA Br 2, 455, 39-43 (455).

35 WA Br 2, 455, 46-49 (455). The letter also includes Luther's willingness to go to Leipzig even if it rained Duke Georges for nine days, each being nine times more enraged than the real duke. Parenthetically Luther interrupts himself with the (Pauline) words, »E.K.F.G. verzeihe mir mein närrisch Reden«, (455, 63 f); see 2 K 11, 21.

Spalatin's behest and with the help of the lawyer Jerome Schurf (1481-1554), Luther outlines three reasons for returning to Wittenberg, the first two of which mirror Luther's understanding of his apostolic responsibility. First, the congregation in Wittenberg called him and to resist that call would place his conscience under judgment. »Denn ich weiß, daß mein Wort und Anfang nicht aus mir, sondern aus Gott ist, ...«³⁶ Second, Satan has fallen into his flock: »Sie ist je meine Hürden, mir von Gott befohlen, es sind meine Kinder in Christo; ...«³⁷ Third, Luther fears revolt.

Once ensconced firmly in Wittenberg, Luther defuses the unrest with his famous *Invocavit* sermons. Even his hearers connected his confident and comforting style to Paul. Albert Burer writes to Beatus Rhenanus (1485-1547) on March 27, 1522 that Martin, like Paul, knows how to feed the weak among the Wittenberg congregation with milk, until they mature.³⁸ Around the same time, on March 9, 1522 Jerome Schurf writes a letter to the Elector accompanying Luther's milder missive described above and expresses his hope that Luther's sermons would silence the »false prophets«. In the same letter he calls Luther »zu dieser Zeit wahrhaftigem Apostel und Euangelisten Christi, ..., und sines göttlichen Worts«.³⁹

The comments of Luther's contemporaries raise another question which deserves attention before we turn to an investigation of further developments in Luther's own apostolic self-awareness from 1522. To a certain extent it was not simply Luther himself or his situation but also the assessment of Luther and his situation by others that led to his being called apostle.⁴⁰ The letter of Crotus Rubeanus (circa 1480-1545) from 1519 recalls Luther's decision to enter the monastery during the storm near Stotternheim and compares it to Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, an association that could have already been

36 WA Br 2, 460, 33 f. The letter begins, as we have now come to expect, with an apostolic greeting (459, 1-3 [456]).

37 WA Br 2, 460, 43 f (456); cf. 1 K 4, 14-17.

38 DER BRIEFWECHSEL DES BEATUS RHENANUS/ ed. by Adalbert Horawitz and Karl Hartfelder. L 1886, 303 (220), cited in Bornkamm: op. cit., 76.

39 WA Br 2, 463, 8-10 (456).

40 For a broader study of this issue see Junghans: op. cit., 288-318 and Robert Kolb: Martin Luther: Prophet, teacher, and hero/ forthcoming. Hans Preuß: op. cit., 36, uncovered a host of contemporaries who associated Luther with the apostle Paul, from Crotus Rubeanus in a 1519 letter to Luther (WA Br 1, 543, 105-109 [213]) to a 1524 medallion which named him an apostle.

made at the time Luther bade farewell to his friends in 1505.⁴¹ In December, 1518 Christopher Scheurl (1481-1542) in letters to Spalatin and von Staupitz calls Luther a preacher through whom alone Paul speaks.⁴² Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) describes Martin Luther in 1520 as »homo dei et Christi apostolus, noster est; ...«⁴³ After the Leipzig debates Luther receives a letter from Wenzel von Roždalowsky of Prague in which he describes John Hus as »Bohemorum apostolus«.⁴⁴ It is little wonder that the egg Hus laid should be called by his contemporaries the Apostle of Germany.

Already during the time Luther resided at the Wartburg, Melanchthon referred to him as apostle in a letter addressed to Johannes Heß of Breslau, dated 30 September 1521.⁴⁵

After Luther's return from his Patmos in 1522 several of his correspondents address him as apostle. On August 20, 1522 John Lohmüller († before 1560) of Riga writes to Luther as »Christi vocato Apostolo«. Otto Brunfels (circa 1488-1534) uses the term in the address of a letter from around August, 1524.⁴⁶ In what may be a spurious letter, Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493-1541) calls Luther, Melanchthon and Bugenhagen »die apostolischen Männer«.⁴⁷ And at the beginning of the controversy over the Lord's Supper two letters from Strassburg contain the phrase, one from Nicholas Gerbel (circa 1485-1560) and the other from all the city's evangelical preachers.⁴⁸

41 Junghans: op. cit., 289. He also refers to the remark of Luther's teacher, John Nathin, who called Luther a second Paul.

42 Christopher SCHEURL: Briefbuch/ ed. by Franz von Soden and Joachim Knaake. Vol. 2. Potsdam 1872, 63, 65 (178, 180).

43 Ulrich von HUTTEN: Schriften/ ed. by Eduard Böcking. Vol. 3. L 1862, 467, 2. A comparison between Luther and the apostles is also made by Helius EOBANUS HESSUS: In evangelici doctoris Martini Lutheri laudem defensionemque eligias IIII. Erphvrdiae: Matheus Maler, Mai 1521, Eligia tertia: De concione Lutheri. The author is indebted to Helmar Junghans for pointing out these references.

44 WA Br 1, 419, 20 (186).

45 MBW T 1, 351, 9f (169); see also 411, 11-14 (189), a letter to Wolfgang Capito dated December 11, 1521.

46 WA Br 2, 591, 1 (532) — for Luther's response, see below note 66f —; 3, 333, 1 (770).

47 WA Br 3, 466, 2 (850).

48 WA Br 3, 378, 1 (796), dated November 22, 1524 and addressed to »adflictae Germaniae apostolo«; 381, 1 (797), dated the following day from Wolfgang Capito, Matthaeus Zell, Kaspar Hedio, Symphorian Altbießer, Theobald Schwarz, Antonius Firn und Martin Bucer.

Not only Luther's friends, but also his enemies were aware of Luther's apostolic identification. When Luther appeals on December 21, 1525 to Duke George of Saxony that he cease his persecution of evangelical preachers in his territory, Duke George and his court produce a long rebuttal. It begins with a wish for Luther's grace and peace – here he is consciously imitating Luther's own style – but adds »und darzu erkenntnis deyn selbest«.⁴⁹ The duke claims he is writing »dich zu erkenntnis deyn selbst zu brengen« and insists he will not do what many hypocrites now are doing, »do man dich eyn propheten, eyn Danielem, eyn aposteln der Dewczschen, eyn ewangelisten nennet; ...«.⁵⁰ The letter closes by suggesting Luther repent of his lust from fame as St. Matthew did: »... und bis dan eyn apostel und ewangelist!«⁵¹ This letter confirms that Luther's use of the apostolic greeting in his letter and his contemporaries' unabashed praise of him as apostle did not go unnoticed even in one of the places most hostile to his message.

Returning to the situation confronting Luther upon his reappearance in Wittenberg, we discover another aspect of Paul's influence over Luther's presentation of himself in Luther's contacts with the city council of Altenburg. Under ordinary circumstances the preaching benefice of the St. Bartholomew's church in Altenburg was filled by a nominee of the local Augustinian monastery, with the city council having the right to appeal that choice to the territorial prince. When in 1522 the citizens find the preaching of the present office-holder unevangelical, they request a hearing from Elector Frederick, who names a commission to investigate the affair. In the meantime, the town council also asks Luther to nominate a new preacher and to come to Altenburg himself and preach. On April 17, 1522 Luther responds by suggesting, of all people, Gabriel Zwilling, who had earlier stirred things up in Wittenberg while Luther was at the Wartburg, to fill the post. Luther's letter to the city council begins with an apostolic greeting and ends with an apostolic blessing.⁵²

Luther's letter to Zwilling, also dated April 17th, is even more revealing. Luther begins, »Gratia et misericordia et pax a Deo Patre nostro et Domino Ihesu Christo, Amen«, and ends with a blessing and the words »gratia tecum,

49 WA Br 3, 646, 3 (956) as a response to 637-644 (954).

50 WA Br 3, 646, 7. 12f (956).

51 WA Br 3, 650, 186 (956).

52 WA Br 2, 505, 4. 23-25 (477).

Amen«. ⁵³ These are the very words Paul uses to open and close letters to his younger co-worker, Timothy, in 1 T 1, 2; 6, 21; 2 T 1, 2! Luther even informs Zwilling of his nomination in apostolic terms. »Quare rogo, suscipias hoc meum consilium et factum, in nomine Domini nostri Ihesu Christi, qui te per me et Philippum [Melanchthon] vocat, ...« ⁵⁴ He also instructs Zwilling about the nature of the gospel and his need to avoid confusing the preaching of Christ with externals, something Zwilling had done earlier.

The Elector can scarcely believe that Luther nominated Zwilling. Thus, again at the request of the Altenburg council, Luther writes directly to Frederick on May 8, 1522, after Zwilling had already started preaching in the town. Not only does he affirm that he and his friends in Wittenberg had nominated Zwilling, but he also takes the opportunity to argue the city council's case. He bypasses the historical and legal questions and focuses upon the congregation's evangelical right to hear the gospel. No one can usurp God's authority in the matter, and thus the citizens of Altenburg must, like Peter, obey God rather than human beings or seals of approval. The letter begins with »grace and peace« and concludes with a benediction. ⁵⁵ Letters to the mayor of Altenburg and to Zwilling, informing them of Luther's appeal to the Elector, also begin with the apostolic »grace and peace«. ⁵⁶ The form and content of Luther's letters in this affair betray his conviction that in matters regarding the church, he functions as Saxony's apostle. What Edwards found explicitly in Luther's second lectures on Galatians and attributed to years of confrontation with »false brethren«, had already come to sharp expression in his correspondence of 1522, connected with the positive context of church administration.

With this it comes as no surprise that at nearly the same time, around May 13th, Luther for the first time greets his close friends Spalatin with the same words. With that Luther's change in presenting himself is complete; he now writes to everyone as an apostle! What began as grand greetings in Luther's dedicatory letters, has become integral to Luther's presentation of himself in all situations. It stems from his concern to comfort the simple Christians of Wittenberg and Germany with the gospel and from his understanding of his

⁵³ WA Br 2, 506, 2f. 19f (478).

⁵⁴ WA Br 2, 506, 6-8 (478).

⁵⁵ WA Br 2, 520, 7; 521, 61f (485).

⁵⁶ WA Br 2, 522, 4 (486); 523, 19f (487). In 523, 1-3 Luther refers to Zwilling as »Euangelista Ecclesiae Aldenburgensis«.

authority to preach that gospel before the Emperor and the estates of Germany. Here Luther's identification of his message with that of Paul allows him to invoke the Galatians in defense of his stubborn refusal to recant.

The Wartburg is Luther's Patmos, where he hears God speak not in visions but in exegesis and translation of the Scripture. In this apostolic exile, the Wittenberg unrest has the effect of solidifying this view of authority, both by forcing him to choose between obedience to the Elector and obedience to the proclamation of his gospel and by sharpening his awareness of his enemies. As a result of the request from Altenburg, Luther must, like the Paul of 1 Corinthians, consider problems inherent in the day-to-day running of the church. Luther's contemporaries reinforce his amazing claims of authority both by what they say about him and by turning to him for apostolic advice. Any attempt to understand Luther's role in the reform of the church must reckon with this apostolic claim that permeates Luther's work. When it spills over into his private correspondence, we can no longer dismiss such words as mere whimsy but must see them as reflecting a developing perception of his special relationship to the people and events that surrounded him. »Grace and peace« is not simply a greeting; it is a claim of Luther's apostolic authority.

This apostolic epistolary style does not lessen after 1522. The phrase »grace and peace« becomes a permanent fixture in his letters. Moreover, other Paulinisms also creep into Luther's public letters of comfort. In very short order Luther produces a variety of open letters to Christians in, among other places, Erfurt, the Netherlands, Riga, Worms and Eßlingen.⁵⁷ The Pauline aura is unmistakable. Each letter begins with several variations of the now familiar »grace and peace«. He uses affectionate terms of address similar to those employed by Paul, calling his readers »dear brothers« (Erfurt), »dear brothers in Christ« (the Netherlands), »dear lords and brothers« and »the elect dear friends of God« (Riga), »dear lords and friends in Christ« (Worms and Eßlingen), and »my dearest in Christ« (Eßlingen).

In three of the five letters (to Erfurt, the Netherlands and Worms) Luther begins with extensive, unmistakably Pauline thanksgivings. For example, his letter to the Netherlands starts, »Lob und danck sey dem vatter aller barmhert-

57 WA 10 II, 164-168 (July 10, 1522); 12, 77-79 (July or August, 1523). 147-150 (August, 1523); WA Br 3, 138-141 (651), August 24, 1523; WA 12, 154-159 (October 11, 1523); Preuß: op. cit., 103f, gives other examples.

zickeyt, der uns zu dißer zeyt widderumb sehen lesst seyn wunderbars liecht, ...»⁵⁸ Luther also picks up another characteristic of Paul's style, the double benediction.⁵⁹ All five letters end with one benediction, but three have two. In this regard, Luther's conscious imitation of Paul is striking. For example, when writing to Erfurt what he calls an epistle or instruction concerning the saints, the title of which alone reveals his apostolic pretensions, Luther ends with these blessings:

»Aber unßer herr Jhesus Christus sterck euch sampt uns ynn aller fulle seyner selbs erkenntnis zu ehren seynem und unßern vater, der gebenedeyet sey ynn ewickeytt. Amen

Grüsset Johannem Lange, Georgium Vorcheym, Johannem Culßamer, Antonium Musam, Egidium Mechlerium, Petrum Bamberger sampt allen ewerenn. Er grüsset euch Philippus und Jonas und alle die unßernn. Gottis gnade sey mit euch allen. Amen.«⁶⁰

Most importantly, the body of these letters betrays Luther's apostolic style. We find in Luther's letter to the Christians at Erfurt the phrase, »Es ist auch fur mich komen, lieben bruder, wie unther euch tzanck ... entsprungen sey«, which Luther uses to introduce the main issue of the letter, preaching against the worship of saints.⁶¹ Luther translates the introduction to the body of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1, 11): »Denn myr ist furkomen, lieben Brüder, ... das Zanck vnter euch sey.«⁶² From this beginning Luther goes on to emphasize his (Pauline) concern for the weak and his avoidance of the stiff-necked, citing in the latter instance Tit 3, 10. He then describes how, without sword or rebellion he himself slew the papacy, whom Christ killed with the sword of his mouth (2 Th 2, 8).

In a closing paragraph he ties himself to Paul even more closely. In the beginning he states: »Es sind ettliche prediger, die meynen, sie müßen nicht prediger seyn, wo sie nicht ettwas mehr denn Christum unnd uber unßer prediget leren.«⁶³ He then describes them in terms of Paul's opponents in Athens and closes with the Pauline comment: »Hüt euch fur den selben und

⁵⁸ WA 12, 77, 6f; see also 10 II, 164, 5-13; WA Br 3, 139, 9-14 (651).

⁵⁹ See 2 K 13, 11-13; G 6, 16, 18; E 6, 23f; Ph 4, 20-23; 1 Th 5, 23, 25-28; 2 T 4, 18-22. In R 15, 33; 16, 20-24, 25-27 we find three blessings.

⁶⁰ WA 10 II, 168, 15-22. Letters to Riga (12, 150, 9-17) and Worms (WA Br 3, 140, 81-86 [651]) also contain double blessings.

⁶¹ WA 10 II, 165, 13f.

⁶² WA DB 7, 88f. The September Testament omits the words »lieben Brüder«.

⁶³ WA 10 II, 167, 32f.

bleybt mit Paulo, der nichts wissen wollt, denn Jhesum Christum den gecreutzigten.«⁶⁴

We find similar Paulinisms in Luther's letter to the Christians in the Netherlands, where he paraphrases 1 K 4, 20 and R 12, 12 in order to apply the texts directly to his readers.⁶⁵ In his letter to the Christians in Riga Luther interprets his readers' situation in Pauline terms. »Und auff's erst, sehet drauff, das nicht Galater aus euch werden«, who began in faith and ended with works.⁶⁶ In his conclusion Luther takes on an authoritative tone, instructing his readers, »Also leret und thut, meyn liebsten, und last euch keynen andern wind der lere bewegen [E 4, 14], er webe von Rom odder von Jerusalem.«⁶⁷ For Luther there is little difference between Paul's Jerusalem opponents and Riga's Roman ones. His letter to all Christians in Worms begins with a justification for his writing to them taken straight from 1 K 12, 4-7. Luther writes because of his participation in the gifts of the Spirit distributed for the common good.⁶⁸

Besides these apostolic letters of comfort, Luther was not beneath sending apostolic warnings. On January 3, 1523 he sends a blistering missive to Duke George of Saxony which, in place of the expected words of service, begin, »Auffhoren zu toben vnd zu wüeten widder Gott vnd seynen Christ anstatt meynes diensts zuuor! Vngnediger furst vnd herr!« He signs the letter: »Martinus Luther von gottes gnaden Euangelist zu Wittemberg.«⁶⁹ It may be just such claims to authority that are still echoing in Duke George's letter three years later. At the same time that Luther is molding his letters on the basis of Paul's authority, he also is making other changes in them, as he invents a form unlike the humanist and medieval models used earlier by him. As mentioned above, the word »Jesus« drops out of the heading by the end of 1522. Another change arises from his legal case. Shortly after his abduction to the Wartburg, Luther stops referring to himself as an Augustinian.⁷⁰ As we have seen, in 1523 he

64 WA 10 II, 168, 1-3. The last phrase is from 1 K 2, 2.

65 WA 12, 78, 25-30.

66 WA 12, 148, 10-12.

67 WA 12, 149, 26f.

68 WA Br 3, 139, 15-24 (651).

69 WA Br 3, 5, 31-33 (567). In WA 10 II, 105, 6f, Luther also refers to himself in »Wider den falschen genannten geistlichen Stand des Papsts und der Bischöfe« as »Ecclesiastes von Gottes Gnaden«.

70 One of his last uses of the term seems to be in a letter to Spalatin dated April 29, 1521 and written from Friedberg just after his appearance at the Diet of Worms (WA Br 2, 318, 8 [403]). He

occasionally uses the term »Ecclesiastes«, preacher, to describe himself.⁷¹ Other changes arise from variations in Luther's greetings to his friends. Luther calls Spalatin »Christ's servant« or even »Christ's evangelist«, thereby giving to his friend a title which he himself used.⁷² From the Wartburg he describes Melancthon as »theologian«, »doctor of the church of Wittenberg«, and even »evangelist of the church of Wittenberg«.⁷³ Still other changes come from expansions of his letters' closings. On January 21, 1521 he uses a Greek phrase to say farewell in Christ our Lord to Spalatin.⁷⁴ A week earlier he advises von Staupitz to »pray for me and the word of God«.⁷⁵ Throughout the period under investigation Luther occasionally closes personal letters with benedictions, reminiscent of Paul's own closings.⁷⁶

Luther's use of Paul's style of greeting is formed in the crucible of his own experiences before the Emperor, at the Wartburg and in Wittenberg and by others' expectations of him in these situations. To stand before the emperor at Worms and confess his faith, to become an outlaw of the empire as an excom-

then lets it slip one last time in another letter to Spalatin from the Wartburg, dated September 17, 1521 (392, 37 [431]).

71 Luther uses this term to designate himself as reader of lessons during meals at the monastery (WA Br 1, 72, 6f [28]) and to designate other preachers in Zwickau, Nuremberg and Breslau (resp. 130, 40; 157, 2; 177, 1; 3, 143, 2 [55. 65. 76. 653]). In a letter dated April 1, 1525 and attesting to the legitimate birth of a former monk, Luther gives this as his title (3, 468, 31 [851]). Others also occasionally address him as such (WA Br 3, 192, 2; 476, 1 [684. 858]). In a letter dated June 15, 1522, addressed to Claus Storm, Mayor of Magdeburg, and written to defend his attacks on prelates, Luther connects the role of preacher to that of Christ and the apostles when he writes: »...; aber ein Prediger soll nicht darumb schweigen, ... Also haben die Propheten, Apostel, Christus selber getan, ...« (2, 563, 27. 29f [510]).

72 For example WA Br 2, 337, 1 and 480, 1 (410. 463). Already on December 5, 1520 Crotus Rubeanus calls Luther an evangelist given by Christ to the church in these corrupt times (226, 2-4 [851]). Ulrich von Hutten also address a letter to Luther as »Euangelistae invictissimo« in letters from April 17, 1521 (WA Br 2, 301, 1) and April 20 [25?] (WA Br 2, 301, 1; 303, 1 [398f]). Luther uses the term of himself in several instances, including in his angry letter to Duke George. A woodcut in the New Testament published in Wittenberg in 1530 by Hans Lufft depicts Luther as the Evangelist Matthew; vgl. Albert SCHRAMM: Die Illustration der Lutherbibel. L 1923, Taf. 107 (190).

73 WA Br 2, 332, 1f; 347, 1f (407. 413).

74 WA Br 2, 251, 17f (369). See also 338, 66-68 (410), where Luthers uses both Greek and, according to one manuscript, Hebrew.

75 WA Br 2, 246, 31f (366). See also his letter on the same day to Wenceslaus Link (248, 14f [367]).

76 For example WA Br 2, 189, 39f (339).

municated heretic, to be separated from the demands of pulpit and classroom at the Wartburg while still being asked for advice and counsel regarding reform, to face there the challenge of turning Paul's words into his native tongue, to break with his Augustinian superior and to reconcile himself with his father, and finally to defy the prince who had abducted and protected him – all these experiences, combined with the way others perceived him, paved the way for Luther's identification with the Apostle.⁷⁷

Luther's awareness of this style, however, arose out of the much cooler environment of his study and his attachment to humanist literary techniques. Luther himself calls attention to Paul's epistolary style in his sermons on 1 Peter in 1522. He notes the return address, inside address and greeting and then adds: »Da hellt S. Peter des Apostels Paulus weyß mit dem grüssen, wie wol nicht gar, ...« Of the words »grace and peace« themselves, Luther concludes: »Solchs wunscht nu S. Peter den glewbigen, und das ist eyn rechter Christlicher gruss, mitt wilchem sich alle Christen grüssen sollten.«⁷⁸ His sermons on 2 Peter contain similar observations, as do marginal notes in the September Testament.⁷⁹ The humanist's love for imitation of styles, combined with Luther's deep respect for and knowledge of Paul's theology gave impetus to his change in epistolary form.

However, Luther seems to have initially recognized the importance and uniqueness of the phrase in Paul's letters much earlier, during the time he was lecturing on Paul's letter to the Romans. In 1516, around the time he received a copy of Erasmus' Greek New Testament, Luther experiments three times with the Apostle's form of greeting. The first comes in a letter dated April 8, 1516 to George Spenlein (1485/86-1563). It begins »Gratia et pax tibi a Deo Patre et Domino Ihesu Christo«.⁸⁰ Besides dealing with some trivial matters, Luther

77 For a new look at the psychological impact of these events, especially in light of Luther's break and rapprochement with his father, see Scott HENDRIX: Luther's contribution to the disunity of the Reformation. In: *Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und Debatten*/ ed. by Hans R. Guggisberg and Gottfried Krodol. GÜ 1993, 53-57.

78 WA 12, 261, 8; 264, 22f. 25f; 264, 33-35. Luther's understanding of apostolic greeting here compliments his understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

79 WA 14, 15, 11. 27-31; WA DB 7, 28. 88.

80 WA Br 1, 35, 1-4 (11). Although Erasmus makes no note of Paul's epistolary style in his annotations on Romans or Galatians, he does mention it in connection with the pastorals. In comments on Tit 1, 4 (Desiderius ERASMUS ROTERODAMUS: *Opera omnia emendatiora et auctiora*/ hrsg. von Joannes Clericus. Bd. 6: *Novum testamentum*. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Lugdu-

discusses his understanding of the joyful exchange between Christ and the sinner. Seven weeks later, on May 29th, Luther uses a similar greeting with John Lang.⁸¹ There he discusses mundane issues connected with running the Erfurt monastery's guesthouse.

A final early experimentation with greetings occurs less than a month later in a note to Michael Dressel, the Augustinian prior in Neustadt a.d. Orla, dated June 23, 1516. Here the Pauline tone is less evident in the greeting itself, although the words echo Paul's blessing in Ph 4, 7. He sends »*Salutem et pacem, sed non manifestam secundum hominum sensum, sed sub cruce absconditam et omnem sensum exsuperantem in Domino*«.⁸² Outside of these three letters, we find nothing more of such Paulinisms until Luther's publication of the penitential psalms and his letter to Albert of Mainz in 1517. Only in 1522 does this Pauline style again penetrate Luther's private letters.⁸³

What does this apostolic claim add to our understanding of Luther? First, it hints at a model of ministry that stands in sharp contrast to Luther's Roman opponents. Luther does not merely reject papal authority, he also constructs an opposing authority out of the words of the Apostle. Luther's encounter with Paul's pure gospel creates for him an apostolic authority, which a humanist's love for stylistic imitation allows him to reflect in his letters.

Second, this claim was taken up by other Protestant letterwriters soon after Luther had adopted it. An examination of the correspondence of Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, Martin Bucer and Ulrich Zwingli reveals that none uses the phrase prior to 1523. However, by the end of 1524, all four have begun to use it more or less regularly as a greeting in private and published letters.⁸⁴ In

ni, 1705. Hildesheim 1962, 966) we read: »... Origenes in Epistolam ad Romanos annotans ac distinguens formas salutationum, quibus Paulus usus est in singulis epistolis loquitur hunc in modum: Ad Timotheum prima et secunda gratia, misericordia & pax, &c. Ad Titum vero, gratia & pax a Deo Patre.« Neither Luther's lectures on Romans or Galatians, nor his first commentary on Galatians make any reference to this style. For all Melancthon's concern for rhetorical analysis, his early lectures on Romans and 1 & 2 Corinthians also make no mention of this fact.

81 WA Br 1, 41, 4 (15).

82 WA Br 1, 46, 4f (17).

83 Whether these three letters are in fact »private« is debatable. In fact, even the letter to Lang but certainly the other two letters are written in connection with Luther's duties as administrator of Saxony's Augustinian monasteries.

84 DR. JOHANNES BUGENHAGENS BRIEFWECHSEL/ ed. by Otto Vogt. Stettin 1888, 20 (9); DER BRIEF-

contrast, Melanchthon never uses the phrase. But for these four reformers, the ideal of an apostolic life supported by Peter's successor in Rome has been exchanged for an apostolic age in which Luther stands first among the apostles.⁸⁵

Third, Luther's apostolic usage is not the only language Luther uses to assert his authority, especially in later struggles with the enthusiasts. There Luther will reemphasize the external call and reject the notion of private revelation. To be sure, Luther's understanding of his apostleship already contains the seeds of his insistence on the external word, as his comments to his flock in Wittenberg make clear. Moreover, as the comments from his sermons on 1 Peter make clear, all Christians have the authority to use the Pauline greeting. At the same time, as Edwards has demonstrated, Luther sees these internal opponents in Pauline terms as well, calling them »false brethren« (G 2,4f). Luther also understands his role more broadly than simply as apostle, seeing himself alternatively as God's prophet, preacher, and instrument.

Fourth, the claim to have received the pure gospel from God also entails other risks, the chief being *Anfechtungen*. Luther's question, »Am I alone right«, stems not simply from an external call as teacher or pastor, but also from his conviction that, like Paul in Galatians 1, no one can convince him that his message is not from God. That is precisely what Luther thinks the devil is trying to do. His presentation of himself in his letters as an apostle contributed to such struggles.

Finally, this apostolic claim also affected Luther's relation with his contemporaries. To take one notable example, some scholars speak of Melanchthon's »vocational crisis«, which developed around the time Luther returned from the Wartburg and centered on whether Melanchthon would teach in the arts faculty or become a theologian. They write as if it were brought on by changes and uncertainties in Melanchthon's own theology and personality. A careful reading of Luther's letters to Melanchthon from the Wartburg shows how Luther

WECHSEL DES JUSTUS JONAS/ ed. by Gustav Kawerau. Vol. 1. Halle 1884, 87 (79); CORRESPONDANCE DE MARTIN BUCER/ ed. by Jean Rott. Vol. 1. Leiden 1979, 227, 1; 238, 1f (63f); Huldreich ZWINGLI: Sämtliche Werke. Vol. 8 $\triangle$ CR 95. L 1914, 101, 1 (311). Zwingli also receives several letters with similar greetings during the same time (see 49, 1; 65, 1 [289. 297]).

85 At the beginning of the Eucharistic controversy, Francis Kolb calls Luther an apostle of Christ and himself »apostolorum minimus«. See his letter of August 27, 1524 (WA Br 3, 329, 1; 331, 76f [769]).

imposes a grandiose vocation upon his younger colleague, calling him theologian and evangelist of the Church in Wittenberg and later making him a co-worker in nominating Zwillinger for a position in Altenburg. Such sweeping claims could not have helped but exacerbate pressures. Melanchthon also felt during these tumultuous times and, more to the point, distort later historians' assessment of his position in Wittenberg.⁸⁶

Luther's rich correspondence offers readers many insights into his personality, theology and experiences. His letters during this crucial period adumbrate an important facet of Luther's presentation of himself to his contemporaries – not merely as teacher of the church or preacher in Wittenberg and never as reformer – but as apostle in the mold of the Apostle Paul. That understanding develops during his journey from theological disputant to excommunicated outlaw of the Empire to returning exile, and it provides him with an authority with which to do battle with Pope, Prince and Emperor. At the same time, it allows him to speak to the day-to-day problems of the emerging evangelical congregations with apostolic authority, supported in no small part by his humanist training and the adulation of those around him. Luther's correspondence confirms Holl's final statement and focuses it more clearly: Luther walks consciously in the steps of the Apostle and takes cues not just for theology but for action from him.

⁸⁶ See particularly Wilhelm MAURER: *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*. Vol. 2. GÖ 1966, 419-428, and the refutation of his arguments by Heinz SCHEIBLE: *Luther and Melanchthon*. LQ 4 (1990), 317-339.