
2. Luther, Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word, hymn, 1541-1542

1. Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word,
And curb the pope's and Turk's vile sword,
Who seek to topple from the throne
Jesus Christ, thine only Son.

2. Proof of thy might, Lord Christ, afford,
For thou of all the lords art Lord;
Thine own poor Christendom defend,
That it may praise thee without end.

3. God Holy Ghost, who comfort art,
Give to thy folk on earth one heart;
Stand by us breathing our last breath,
Lead us to life straight out of death.


3. Luther, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, hymn, 1527-1538

1. A mighty fortress is our God,
A sword and shield victorious;
He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod
And wins salvation glorious.
The old satanic foe
Has sworn to work us woe;
With craft and dreadful might
He arms himself to fight.
On earth he has no equal.

2. No strength of ours can match his might!
We would be lost, rejected.
But now a champion comes to fight,
Whom God himself elected.
You ask who this may be?
The Lord of hosts is he!
Christ Jesus, mighty Lord,
God's only Son, adored.
He holds the field victorious.

3. Though hordes of devils fill the land
All threatening to devour us,
We tremble not, unmoved we stand;
They cannot overpower us,
Let this world's tyrant rage;
In battle we'll engage!
His might is doomed to fail;
God's judgment must prevail.
One little word subdues him.

4. God's Word forever shall abide,
No thanks to foes, who fear it;
For God himself fights by our side
With weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house,
Goods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away,

[314] [315]
They cannot win the day.  
The Kingdom's ours forever!


1. Salvation unto us has come  
By God's free grace and favor;  
Good works cannot avert our doom,  
They help and save us never.  
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,  
Who did for all the world alone;  
He is our mediator.

2. Theirs was a false, misleading dream  
Who thought God's law was given  
That sinners might themselves redeem  
And by their works gain heaven.  
The Law is but a mirror bright  
To bring the inbred sin to light  
That lurks within our nature.

3. And yet the Law fulfilled must be,  
Or we were lost forever;  
Therefore God sent his Son that he  
Might us from death deliver.  
He all the Law for us fulfilled,  
And thus his Father's anger stilled  
Which over us impended.

4. Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone  
And rests in him unceasing;  
And by its fruits true faith is known,  
With love and hope unceasing.  
For faith alone can justify;  
Works serve our neighbor and supply  
The proof that faith is living.

5. All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise  
To Father, Son, and Spirit,  
The God who saved us by his grace;  
All glory to his merit  
O triune God in heav'n above,  
You have revealed your saving love;  
Your blessed name we hallow.
Chapter 13
The Spread of the Reformation

6. Matthias Gerung, Broadsheet, Lauringen, 1546

Source 6 from the Mitchell Collection, London.

7. Lucas Cranach, Pamphlet, Wittenberg (Germany), 1521

Source 7 from The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York/Art Resource NY.

[318] [319]
10. Anonymous German
Pamphlet, 1523

A dialogue between two good friends named Hans Tholl and Claus Lamp, talking about the Antichrist and his followers.

They are in a good mood while drinking wine and sit and discuss some ideas from the letters of Paul.

PREFACE

Dear Christians and brothers, if we want to recognize and know the Antichrist, we have to go to the brothers who can read, so that they will read us the second chapter of the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. There we will clearly find him, with his gestures and manners, how he acted and still acts, how he is now revealed so that we do not have to wait any longer but can know him despite his masks. How the devil sends his followers to knock us down, and how the old women and bards maids see him. We have long been blind to the lies and deceits of Satan, the devil. Because we have not paid attention to the divine warnings from Daniel, Paul, Christ, Peter, and the apocalypse of John, God has tormented us with ghosts and apparitions who will take us all with them to hell. Why should this cause God to suffer when He has offered you His holy word? If you don’t want it, then go to the devil, for he is here now. He sees, finds, and possesses.

It happened that Hans Tholl and Claus Lamp were looking for each other and finally found each other in the evening.

CLAUS: My friend Hans, where have you been all day? I’ve been looking for you. The innkeeper has a good wine for two cents, and I wanted to drink a glass of wine with you.

HANS: Dear friend, I’ve been in a place that I wouldn’t take six glasses of wine for.

CLAUS: So tell me where you have been.

HANS: I’ve got exciting news.

CLAUS: Well, what is it then? Tell me!

HANS: I was in a place where a friend read to four of us from the Bible. He read in the second chapter of the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians about the Antichrist and how one is to recognize him.
Claus: Oh I would have given a penny to have been there.
Hans: I want you to believe that I haven't heard anything like this in my whole life; I wouldn't have given three pennies to miss it.
Claus: Can't you remember anything, Hans? Can you tell me something about it?
Hans: I think I can tell you about almost the whole chapter, and only leave a little out.
Claus: So tell me! But let's get some wine first. I'll pay for yours.
Hans: Here's to your money!
Claus: Innkeeper, bring some wine.
Hans: What does he get for it?
Claus: He gets two cents. Now, tell me! I really want to hear what you will say about the Antichrist.
Hans: I'll tell you, but it will seem strange to you.
Claus: Why?
Hans: It seemed strange and odd to me, too, that people or states are the Antichrist.
Claus: Go ahead, then, you're boring me.
Hans: Stop that. All right, here's what the chapter says: "Dear brothers," Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "We ask you in the name of the coming of Christ and our coming together for the same, that you not be moved in your senses (or from your senses), or frightened by the spirit or the word or by letters supposedly coming from us, saying that the day of the Lord has come or will be coming soon. Let no one deceive you in any way, it will come only when there is disagreement and disunity (even though they all say they are preaching and believing nothing but the Gospel and Christianity) and the man of lawlessness will be disclosed, the son of damnation, who is against the gospel. Then he will be raised up (here Claus Lamp began to understand) above everything that is called a god (or is worshipped as a god) until he sits in the temple of God and lets himself be prayed to as if he were God." Claus, what are you thinking about? Do you know this man of lawlessness?
Claus: Now all the devils will come for you! He is no other beast than the Pope and his realm. I would never in my whole life have realized that if you hadn't been there [to hear it]. I'll buy you a second glass of wine!
Hans: Be quiet! I want to tell you more.
Claus: My dear friend, still more?
Hans: Of course. First I'll tell you the reason why I was talked to for so long.
Claus: My friend, for God's sake keep talking!
Hans: So listen! Here is the text: Paul says: "Don't you remember the things that I told you when I was with you? And now you know what is holding him (or what you should pay attention to), and that he will be revealed in his time. I tell you, that now he is doing so many evil and underhanded things, that only those who stop it now will stop it when his time comes fully. And then he will be revealed, the lawless one"—listen here, Claus—"who the lord Jesus Christ will slay with the breath of His mouth and will totally destroy with the light of His coming. But the coming of the Antichrist is through the activity of Satan, the devil, with great power and supposed signs and wonders, and with misguided celebration of the evil of those who will be destroyed. Because they would not accept the love of truth" (this clearly refers to the Gospel) "and be saved, God sends them the results of their errors, a great delusion, so that they believe the lies and are all condemned who did not believe the truth but agreed to the evil (and took it on themselves)." See that, Claus! Now you have heard why God has allowed error. Even though we have long wanted not to do wrong, we still hard-headedly keep doing it.
Claus: That says a lot. I would set my life on it, if it were only half as important. Now I hear and see that God allows very little understanding.
Hans: Yes, and why? People don't want to know very much and don't go to the Bible. God has hardened them and we are so godless. God will make us suffer because we don't ask about the truth. If we only had half as much concern about the health of our souls as we have about material goods, we wouldn't have come so far from the right path. As you have just heard, it isn't God who sent the so-called preachers [to lead us astray]. Here, I'll say it to you straight: Paul goes on to say: "Dear brothers, we should give thanks to God at all times because he chose you from the beginning, and he called you through the Gospel" (and not through other fairy-stories, as people are now saying).
Claus: Unfortunately you are right. Right now I hear strange things about the beast of the Antichrist from priests and monks. God help us!
Hans: Yes, we need to pray earnestly to God to send us good preachers, that preach the pure Gospel and leave the fairy stories at home.
Claus: My friend, I am still thinking about the Antichrist, that he has begun so many devils and evil things and made the whole world to be his fool.
Hans: That astonishes me, too. But you have now heard from Paul, when he says: "God has allowed them to be deluded because they have not accepted the truth." We haven't noticed this, and the priests have hidden it from us.
Claus: I believe that the devil has possessed them all so that they haven't preached to us about these things.
Hans: They are afraid that people would recognize that their God, the Pope, is the Antichrist. People are supposed to honor and pray to him, just like Paul says about the Antichrist. So they are afraid.
Claus: That's really true. They've thought: If we tell the lay people this, they will notice and think about how they have to kiss the Pope's feet and call him "most holy." And some know-it-alls even say: The Pope can't do any wrong; he can't sin.
Hans: It's amazing that God has allowed this to happen for so long, that it hasn't been made clear that we have been so blind. What really matters is that we have deserted the truth, my dear Claus. Let's ask God for the true faith!
I see clearly that everything will soon be over, that the Last judgment stands right before the door!

CLAUS: My dear brother Hans, I've thought that for a long time. Shall we go home?

HANS: Yes, let's drink up and go.

CLAUS: I don't want to drink any more, because I have been so seized by pity and compassion. I see that things will end soon. My dear Hans, I want to take this thing to its end with you, so I have to ask: what do you think about the fact that there is such a commotion now about Luther and his writings?

HANS: I think it's because he has discovered the Antichrist. He can't stand it, and I believe he will make many martyrs. I've heard that it has already started in some places; in Antwerp three people have been burnt because of his teachings. And I've heard that in some places they are imprisoning people and hunting them down.

CLAUS: If that's true, that's what's supposed to happen. I have always heard that the Antichrist will make martyrs and will pay money so that people will kill those who do not believe in him but instead preach the word of God.

HANS: I've heard that, too. Now to the next thing: when I want to hear more things read, I'll tell you.

CLAUS: My dear friend, I'll let everything be open to you, because I see clearly what will come out of it. I see clearly, if I want to be saved, I have to come back to the true faith, from which without a doubt the Antichrist and his horde have led us. God give you a good night!

HANS: Same to you! See that you don't forget what I've said.

CLAUS: I won't for the rest of my life. God be praised.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

In exploring how the Reformation movement grew and took root throughout Europe, many scholars point to the printing press as the key factor in explaining why Luther's reforms had a much greater impact than those of Wyclif and Huss. After examining the sources, would you agree? What difference did it make that Luther's sermons were not only delivered but also printed? That hymns were taught not simply to choirs of monks or clergymen but to congregations of laypeople, out of hymnals that were printed and might be purchased by any fairly well-to-do member? That small pamphlets such as the one reproduced here were written in German and appeared in paperback?

Several historians have also pointed to the opposite effect, that the Protestant emphasis on individual reading of the Bible dramatically increased the demand for books. Judging by the language, what sort of person might have bought Luther's sermon or the pamphlet? What effects would you expect the Protestant Reformation to have had on literacy? The religious conflict itself was also a spur to book production and book buying, and religious works were the best sellers of the sixteenth century. What techniques did the pamphlet writer use to make his work more appealing to a buyer? How might including some of the woodcuts have affected sales?

Of course, the great majority of people in the sixteenth century could not read, so it may be wrong to overemphasize written sources of communication. As you noticed in the dialogue, however, people who could not read often turned to their neighbors who could, and so printed pamphlets were often read by many who could not read them themselves. This dialogue itself was probably read out loud and may even have been acted out, which we know was the case with more elaborate dialogues containing stage directions and a whole cast of characters. Do you think this dialogue would have been effective read aloud rather than silently? The printing press also increased the circulation of visual images; woodcuts such as those reproduced here often became best sellers. Why did so many people purchase these woodcuts? If a person's only contact with Protestant thinking were images such as these, how would his or her beliefs have differed from those of a person who could read Luther's words as well?

To answer the second question—how the Protestant message was made attractive to people—look at your list of frequently repeated ideas and images. Which seem directed to all Christians? For example, what do the sources say about the role of good works in helping a person achieve salvation? The role of faith? Why might these ideas have been appealing? What was wrong with the Catholic clergy? In contrast, what did "good preachers" do and emphasize? Why might the contrast have made Luther's ideas attractive?

Though ideas and images were often repeated, not everyone understood them in the same way, or was attracted to them for the same reasons. Different groups within German society responded to different parts of the Protestant message and must be examined separately. Begin with the peasants. How are they depicted in the various sources? Why did the pamphlet writer and the artist of Source 9 choose to make their characters peasants? In the heaven and hell woodcuts, where are peasants and poor people? Why would peasants have been particularly attracted to the criticism of indulgences? Why would Luther's ideas about the value of good works have appealed to them? Source 5 shows nobles in fancy feathered hats near hell, and Source 8 depicts rulers as geese; how would peasants have responded to these images? In the dialogue, Claus and Hans both agree that the Last Judgment is near. Why might sixteenth-century peasants have accepted this idea of the imminence of the end of the world?

Now consider the nobles and rulers. We have already noted that several of the woodcuts portray them...