

## Luther, Conflict, and Christendom

Martin Luther – monk, priest, professor, or revolutionary – has been a controversial figure since the sixteenth century. Most studies of Luther stress his personality, his ideas, and his ambitions as a church reformer. In this book, Christopher Ocker brings a new perspective to bear upon Luther, arguing that the different ways people responded to him, for and against, mattered far more than who he may have been to himself. Providing an accessible, highly contextual, and non-partisan introduction, Ocker says that religious conflict itself served as the engine of religious change. He shows that the Luther affair had a complex political anatomy which extended far beyond the borders of Germany, making the debate an international one from the very start. This study links the Reformation to a vibrant pluralism within western religion and to the coexistence of religions and secularism in today's world. *Luther, Conflict, and Christendom* includes a detailed chronological chart.

Christopher Ocker is Professor of History at the San Francisco Theological Seminary and chair of the Department of Cultural and Historical Studies of Religions at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley. He is the author of *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* (2002), *Church Robbers and Reformers in Germany* (2006), *Johannes Klenkok (c. 1310–1374): A Friar's Life* (1993), and many articles on religious conflict, biblical interpretation, theology, and religious politics in late medieval and early modern Europe. He is co-editor of *Politics and Reformations – Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.* (2006), has been a managing editor of *The Journal of the Bible and Its Reception*, and is a member of the editorial board of *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*.

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# Luther, Conflict, and Christendom

*Reformation Europe and Christianity  
in the West*

CHRISTOPHER OCKER

*The San Francisco Theological Seminary  
and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley*



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Errors in the finer structure, having attained appreciable size, tend to induce errors in the coarser structure.

*Edward N. Lorenz, “Predictability; Does the Flap  
of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in  
Texas” (29 December 1972)*

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## Preface

This book describes the massive controversy that gripped western Christianity in the sixteenth century, and it surveys the variety of this controversy's outcomes. I do not approach the Reformation as the achievement of men and women, including Martin Luther. Rather, I view it as an entanglement of life-worlds that could never be contained by the space within one human being's skin or by an individual's desire or fantasy. And yet Luther runs throughout this book. I picture him as a figure produced by changing social, cultural, and political ecologies, in the sixteenth century and over the next 400 years. Drawing on exciting new and older research, I try to suggest patterns and conditions that account for Luther's multifaceted impact, because the effects of this controversy could not be contained by one time and place.

We are all debtors to our environments, and I am deeply aware of innumerable debts to the many teachers, students, colleagues, and friends who make up mine at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, the Graduate Theological Union, and the University of California at Berkeley (particularly the Berkeley Center for the Study of Religion). My abiding gratitude goes to Tom and Kathy Brady, friends, collaborators, and mentors for many years. Of the people who have answered questions, offered encouragement, given advice, corrected errors, performed practical favors, listened patiently, inspired, and pushed back, I especially thank Jana Childers, Arthur Holder, Brad Peterson, Kim Sang-Yoon, Peter Krey, Nancy Gutgsell, Michaela Scheible, Stephen Sheehi, Wendy Farley, Bruce Gordon, Tom Scott, Roy Vice, Augustine Thompson, Deena Aranoff, Naomi Seidman, Christopher Brown, Kathryn Barush, Clayborne Carson, William B. Taylor, Ralph Klein, Christoph Gutmann, Martin Schenk, David Hollinger, Matthew Johnson, Aaron Grizzell, Arthur John

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A note on the rendition of names and translations: in the case of high nobility, I generally translate prepositions in German names into English (Albrecht *of* Brandenburg rather than Albrecht *von* Brandenburg), but I leave first names in German (Albrecht rather than Albert). In the case of people of lower noble rank, whose names function more like the patronymics familiar in some German names today (Otto von Bismarck, Ursula von der Leyen), I leave prepositions untranslated (Ulrich *von* Hutten). In the case of cities and place names, I use the German, except where the English is very familiar, or seems to me to be very familiar from where I write in California (Nuremberg rather than Nürnberg and Basle rather than Basel, but Braunschweig rather than Brunswick). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I tried to remain close to the diction of the sources, hoping, especially in translations from pamphlets, to retain something of the abrupt style and intensity of the originals. Footnotes add small points of detail, technical information, or definitions where I thought it would be helpful, and provide documentation. When a date appears in a footnote without explanation, it refers to an entry in the chronological table of the Appendix.

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