

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 21

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(Sermons)

and

THE MAGNIFICAT

Edited by

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General Introduction

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; Weimar, 1883 ff.). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial — especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.
H. L.

Luther's Works on the New Testament

THE works of Luther contained in this volume and in those which follow are all expositions of the New Testament. Like those on the Old Testament, they cover a major portion of his career as a Biblical expositor. Some of them date from the years of his struggle for religious certainty, others are a reflection of the later and more mature stages of his thought. In his expositions of the New Testament, as in those devoted to the Old, Luther ranged all the way from brief notes that are frequently little more than paraphrase to extensive and detailed examinations of the text, from philology to exhortation and back again. And in both the philology and the exhortation, the latter-day reader can discern Luther the man, Luther the preacher, Luther the theologian, Luther the Reformer.

To the reader who has not thought or read very much about Luther's activity as an interpreter of Sacred Scripture, one of the striking features of these works will be their modest scope. The works on the Old Testament occupy twenty volumes — more than a third of the entire set, fully two thirds of the exegetical works. And certain works on the Old Testament are omitted from the series! The reasons for this preponderance of commentaries on the Old Testament over commentaries on the New Testament lie partly in Luther's estimate of the Old Testament (cf. Vol. 1 of this series), but the question deserves mention here because of its importance for an evaluation of the works on the New Testament. Not only do the commentaries on the Old Testament outnumber those on the New, but also several of those on the New Testament were originally series of sermons preached in Wittenberg and then drawn together into the form of commentaries. Others were lectures delivered very early in Luther's career as a theologian. Still others were special commentaries on individual chapters prepared for particular polemical purposes. Of Luther's mature works on the New Testament, the Commentary on Galatians in its various editions is perhaps the only one that parallels the many commentaries on books of the Old Testament that he continued to produce.

Part of the thought behind this situation is probably Luther's conception of the difference between the Old and the New Testament. The cliché that he was the restorer of Pauline Christianity has obscured not only the influence of other sections of the New Testament upon his thought, but also the way his interpretation of the entire New Testament drew upon his primary exegetical work as an expositor of the Old Testament. As Heinrich Bornkamm has pointed out, if Luther were a professor on a modern theological faculty, he would occupy not the chair of New Testament, much less that of systematic theology, but that of Old Testament. His works on the Old Testament, contained in the preceding volumes of this set, provide ample documentation of his work as an exegete of the Hebrew Scriptures. But it is also true that his works on the New Testament, beginning with this volume, may well be characterized as the sort of commentaries on the New Testament that could be expected to come from a man who dealt with the Old Testament as Luther did. The Old Testament was best handled in exposition, the New Testament was best handled in sermons. This was in keeping with his distinction between the Old Testament as "Scripture" in the more precise sense of the word and the New Testament as "preaching."

The very distinction, however, helped make it possible for Luther to open the meaning of the New Testament as few exegetes before or since. Using the resources of his own remarkable memory and the help that came from others, he frequently found and cited parallels from the Old Testament to clarify passages that meant very little otherwise. Even when he did not do this, he drew upon the perspectives of the Old Testament in expounding the New. It is really instructive and noteworthy, for example, to examine any of Luther's several excursions on the Biblical contrast between "flesh" and "spirit." The checkered history of that contrast in Christian history was due at least in part to the fact that the expositors of the New Testament had so often drawn upon classical rather than upon Biblical sources for their materials. Interpreting the New Testament in the light of such sources, they could even reinterpret the Old Testament that way — a process that had already been discernible in the Septuagint and, from it, was passed on to Christian exegesis. From his early monastic inclination to see the contrast between "flesh" and "spirit" as the distinction between man's "lower nature" and his "higher nature," Luther moved to his later realization that the contrast actually

lay between idolatry and the service of the living God, and that both terms were actually predicates of the same subject, the total man. By rooting his interpretation of the New Testament in his understanding of the Old Testament, Luther thus helped to break the exegetical habits of many centuries. He read the New Testament as the early church had apparently intended it, as an addition to the Scriptures which the church already possessed in the Old Testament. Far from being a Marcionite, as he has sometimes been portrayed, Luther did precisely what Marcion seems to have criticized. He read the Old Testament as Christian Scripture, and he read the New Testament on the basis of the Old.

As he did this in the interpretation of "flesh" and "spirit," so he worked from the Old Testament in interpreting other New Testament terms and concepts. Indeed, it could be maintained, though not without oversimplification, that the insight to which Luther attributed his great change was finally another case of this same exegesis of the New Testament in the light of the Old. The phrase "righteousness of God" had troubled him in Romans 1:17 and in the Psalms because he was conceiving of "righteousness" and of other divine attributes in a "passive" way, as that which God was and that which God possessed. Once he realized that "righteousness" and other divine attributes actually had to do with the divine activity and denoted that which God conferred as a gift, the gates of Paradise were opened to him. With a full awareness of all the other factors involved in this initial experience and discovery, we can still say that it was in part the realization of the Hebrew rather than Greek origin behind statements like Romans 1:17 that brought Luther to his "wonderful and new definition of righteousness" and of justification. There was a similar development throughout his growing and deepening grasp of New Testament vocabulary and usage. The term "church" was interpreted in the light of "the people of God"; the term "holy" recovered its connotation of transcendence after having been almost completely moralized in some of his predecessors; the title "Christ" became a title again, not merely a name. In literally dozens of instances, Luther's growth as an interpreter of the New Testament (especially as that growth is documented in his sermons) can be linked to the way his work as an interpreter of the Old Testament (especially as that work is documented in his lectures) provided him with the tools of theological lexicography he so frequently used in the exegesis of the New Testament.

Another marked feature of Luther's work on the New Testament is his continuing debate with his predecessors from both the patristic and the scholastic period. The vigor of this debate makes itself felt in the sharp language he sometimes used to criticize a particular interpretation, but the extent of the debate is not always equally clear. Sometimes, to be sure, Luther indicated the writer, if not always the book, from which he was quoting; since he often did this from memory, the identification of the source can often be difficult. But such an identification becomes vastly more difficult when, as so often, we are in the dark about the precise source from which Luther drew the interpretation he was condemning, and can only guess whether it came to him directly from a source we know now or indirectly through some source not available to us. And this is true even in those instances where it has proved possible to discover a source, whether direct or indirect, for the idea. In addition to the difficulty encountered in identifying the references and quotations Luther gives, there is the more subtle problem of identifying references and quotations where Luther gives no explicit indication that he is referring or quoting at all. Most scholars will acknowledge that when they have been able to make such identifications, it has only been by chance, from their other reading and study, and that it is therefore quite likely that many other references and quotations have escaped them. Scholarship in the history of theology will have to know vastly more than it now does about the theologians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries before it will be able to go beyond such chance in identifying the sources, negative and positive, of Luther's exegetical judgments.

The calculation of Luther's debt to his predecessors which such scholarship will make possible will probably be accompanied, however, by a new estimate of the many ways in which he diverged from those predecessors as well. Thus Beyschlag has suggested some of the contrasts between the use of the Sermon on the Mount in the Franciscan movement and the manner in which Luther went about interpreting it. Loewenich's study of Luther as an interpreter of the Synoptic Gospels makes it possible to see these and many other contrasts in the form and content of Luther's commentaries on the evangelists. Even between Luther's interpretation of Galatians and the way Augustine uses Galatians in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, one of Luther's favorite treatises, there are many sharp differences. Thus the more that is discovered of the work of his predecessors,

the more evident will it probably be that he had them in mind in his strictures on other interpretations. His one constant criticism of their New Testament exegesis, perhaps more generally distributed than any other, was that they had failed to comprehend the meaning of the "Gospel" and had therefore interpreted it as if it were another law. As a consequence, so he maintained, they had not grasped either the Gospels or Paul. The former had become new sets of rules rather than the proclamation of the words and deeds of God in Christ, and the latter had been deprived of the very center of his Epistles. Nevertheless, both the calculation of the debt and the estimate of the divergence will emphasize the prominent role that Luther's predecessors played in his work as an interpreter of the New Testament.

A fundamental assumption of Luther's criticisms and of his exegetical work generally, as we have seen, is the unity of the Bible. It is also this assumption that separates him from many Biblical interpreters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially from interpreters of the Old Testament. But after driving a wedge between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Biblical interpretation of those centuries went on to drive similar wedges into the New Testament itself — between Jesus and Paul, between the Synoptics and John, eventually between Paul and Paul. Partly because they often found the origins of New Testament thought and language elsewhere than in the Old Testament, scholars who practiced such interpretation of the New Testament sought to explain the divergences within New Testament speech by reference to extra-biblical sources; and so they frequently ignored the possibility that differences of language and of emphasis between one writer of the New Testament and another could be part of a unity underlying and preceding the whole. For Luther, as for most of the theologians that preceded him, that was more than a possibility; it was one of the most consistent devices he employed in interpreting the New Testament. Sometimes he looked for synonyms or equivalent expressions by which one New Testament writer said what another writer had said some other way. Sometimes he proceeded on the assumption that the same term was used the same way by different writers, although he was also quick to notice the differing shades of meaning in various Biblical books. The New Testament formed a unit with the Old Testament, and it was also a unit within itself.

Because that unity had not yet become a problem in his time

as it has been in modern study of the New Testament, Luther was not forced to define its precise character and to formulate its detailed implications the way present-day scholars like Rowley or Hunter or Dodd have had to do. Yet he resembled these scholars in his effort to find such unity in two themes and sources – the Old Testament and the proclamation of Jesus. The first of these, as has been mentioned, provided him with his principal source of insight into the language of the Bible, enabling him to go beyond the initial divergences between one book of the New Testament and another to the imagery of the Old Testament behind those divergences. But because the essential content of the New Testament was a proclamation – it is noteworthy that present-day Biblical scholars are concentrating once more upon this “kerygma” – Luther could also relate these divergences to the several emphases present in that proclamation. He frequently suggested that this was so in the preaching *about* Jesus Christ because it has already been so in the preaching *of* Jesus Christ. Accepting the accuracy of both the Synoptic Gospels and John, he pointed to the variety among them as a demonstration of how varied had been the teaching and preaching of Jesus itself. As far as Luther could see, no contrast within the New Testament was any sharper than the contrast evident within the transmitted words of Jesus – except perhaps the contrast between Paul and James.

One additional element in the unity of the New Testament deserves mention: the unitive function of Christian experience and of Luther's own experience. A study of his commentaries on the Old Testament bears out how prominently experience figured in his discovery of Christ there, but experience was no less prominent in the way he worked with the Gospels and the Epistles. Identifying himself with the struggles of Paul and the parables of Jesus, he perceived the fundamental harmony between the two, even though Paul hardly ever referred to “the kingdom of God.” Experience performed this function for him because he believed it to be the product of the Biblical message, or, more precisely, of the power of the Holy Spirit communicated in the preaching of the Biblical message and in the administration of the Sacraments. And this was the same Holy Spirit who spoke to and through the Biblical writers. Thus the congruence of experience and exposition in the study of the New Testament, Luther believed, was not a subjective thing, but the creation of the Creator Spirit Himself.

But as the unity of experience in the Holy Spirit was anything but a uniformity, so the unity of the New Testament was something Luther affirmed with a sharp consciousness of the great variety among the books of the New Testament. More than most of his predecessors or his immediate successors, Luther realized and emphasized that variety; and as Holl says, what began as a religious insight eventually had implications in scholarship as well. As a commentator on Scripture, Luther frequently had occasion to point out the variety of language and emphasis in Biblical literature. As a preacher on the New Testament, he compared and contrasted Biblical forms of expression in an effort to clarify the implications of the text before him. As a translator of the entire Bible, he had to deal minutely with the uniqueness of each Biblical writer. Throughout his dealings with Sacred Scripture, therefore, Luther perceived the "diverse manners" of the prophets, evangelists, and apostles. That he was able to do this in the Gospels, accentuating distinctions and yet never losing the unity of the whole, is, as Ebeling has amply demonstrated, one of the great achievements of Luther as an interpreter of the New Testament. In the Pauline and the catholic Epistles, similarly, he traced the continuity with the primitive proclamation of Jesus, without blurring the particularity of each writer and book.

Thus Luther could construct a "miniature canon" of the New Testament, consisting of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul (especially Romans), and the First Epistle of Peter. And yet this did not diminish his regard for other books, nor prevent him from preaching and commenting upon them, as these works on the New Testament amply attest. Unity amid diversity, one Gospel and yet several evangelists, two testaments but only one Bible — and all this, as he frequently quoted in connection with the question, because there was "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism." The application of this theme to the material of Biblical interpretation was the motif of Luther's works on the New Testament.

J. P.

Introduction to Volume 21

As a preacher, teacher, and writer, Luther was occupied with the interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels throughout his career. It is evident from Erwin Mühlhaupt's compilations of *Luthers Evangelienauslegung* (5 vols.; Göttingen, 1939–1954) that it would be possible to piece together practically an entire commentary on St. Matthew out of Luther's sermons (e. g., Weimar, XLVII, 232–627), his "Notes on Several Chapters of Matthew" of 1538 (Weimar, XXXVIII, 443–667), and his discussions of verses and themes from Matthew in other writings. But the two works presented in this volume are probably the most significant and influential commentaries to come from this lifelong preoccupation with the Synoptics. Separated by a decade, they indicate two of the several methods Luther followed in expounding Scripture; for the *Commentary on the Magnificat* was a devotional tract composed for a particular individual, and the *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* was based upon a series of sermons delivered in Wittenberg. Thus neither of them came from his lecture hall, which was the source of so many of his other commentaries.

The major portion of the *Commentary on the Magnificat* (Weimar, VII, 538–604; Saint Louis, VII, 1372–1445; Holman, III, 119–200) was composed amid the stormy days of the spring and summer of 1521. In fact, the writing and the printing were both interrupted when Luther left for the Diet of Worms on April 2 and were completed during his stay at the Wartburg. Perhaps the best way to follow the development of the composition is through passages in a series of letters by and about Luther.

The earliest reference to the commentary is in a letter written by George Spalatin (1484–1545) to Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, late in 1520; Otto Waltz, who edited the letter for the *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, dated it December 3, while Berbig gives the date as December 1. In it, Spalatin reports that Luther "has also begun to expound the Magnificat and to dedicate it to my gracious young lord." The "gracious young lord" referred to was the

Elector's nephew, John Frederick (1503–1554), who was to be a prominent supporter of the Wittenberg and Jena editions of Luther's works. During the weeks preceding Spalatin's letter, John Frederick had repeatedly and outspokenly indicated his support of Luther, interceding with his uncle on Luther's behalf and assuring Luther of his backing. On February 27, 1521, Luther wrote to Spalatin: "I am occupied with the exposition of Mary's canticle for the young prince, so that the book may be a reply, though a late one, to the letter he recently sent to me." And a week later, on March 6, 1521, he again wrote to Spalatin: "I am occupied with Mary's canticle, as I wrote to you earlier." Two weeks later, on March 19, 1521, he wrote to Spalatin: "The canticle Magnificat is being born in the press, but I do not know when it will be finished."

This accounts for the fact that the dedicatory preface of the commentary is dated March 10, 1521. Luther's hopes of finishing the commentary were indefinitely delayed by the summons to appear at Worms. On Easter Sunday, March 31, 1521, just two days before leaving for Worms, he sent what he could of the work to the young prince, accompanying it with a letter: "Enclosed I am sending your Grace the beginning of the Magnificat. The fourth quire is still lying in the presses. Now I must let this be postponed until my return. Your Grace knows that since I have been summoned to the Diet, I have to drop everything. If God helps me to return home, your Grace will have the whole thing in a hurry." Almost two months passed before Luther could begin to make good on that promise, months occupied with travel, with the Diet itself, and with the exile at the Wartburg. Writing from the Wartburg on May 14, 1521, Luther told Spalatin that a number of things were on their way from Wittenberg to him at the castle, "among which I also expect the unfinished Magnificat."

Within less than four weeks the work was done. On June 10, 1521, Luther wrote to Spalatin: "As you see, I am sending the completed Magnificat . . . to be printed as soon as possible." But there was so much printing to be done at Wittenberg that "as soon as possible" did not prove to be very soon. In a general mood of illness and despair, Luther wrote to Melancthon on August 3, 1521: "I am amazed that my Magnificat is not finished yet. . . . Who knows whether this may not be the end of my ministry? . . . Yet I have not lived in vain." A few days later, on August 6, 1521, he wrote to

Spalatin: "I implore you, is my Magnificat finished yet?" Apparently it was, then or soon thereafter. On September 6, 1521, Hans Pelt wrote to Thomas Münzer (cf. p. 107, n. 44 below), indicating that it had appeared; and on November 11, 1521, Johann von Botzheim wrote to Thomas Blaurer: "During these days I have seen two psalms translated into the vernacular by Master Martin, as well as something on the Magnificat." The commentary seems to have achieved rather wide distribution; the Weimar edition lists eight separate printings in the next five years, in addition to two printings of a Latin translation. Our translation of it is a revised version of the translation originally printed in the third volume of the Philadelphia or Holman edition, and is used here with the permission of the copyright owners, the Muhlenberg Press.

Luther's correspondence is likewise our principal source of information on the development of the other commentary in this volume, the *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* (Weimar, XXXII, 299–544; Saint Louis, VII, 346–677); but the information is rather sketchy, and most of it must come by inference. From 1522, the pastor of the city church in Wittenberg was Johannes Bugenhagen, sometimes called Pommer or Pomeranus (1485–1558). One of his outstanding services to the cause of the Reformation was his reorganization of church life in several territories that joined the Evangelical cause. Thus in the spring of 1528, Bugenhagen supervised the organization of the church in Braunschweig, arriving there on May 20. In a letter to Wenzeslaus Link (1483–1547) on May 12, 1528, Luther said he expected that Bugenhagen would stay there "several days." It proved to be several months; and when he did leave Braunschweig, it was to perform a similar service in Hamburg, where he went on October 9, 1528. He did not return to Wittenberg until June 24, 1529. Meanwhile Luther was filling Bugenhagen's pulpit, amid his myriad other duties.

This account of Bugenhagen's work in Braunschweig and Hamburg helps to explain Luther's reactions late in the summer of 1530, when a delegation came from Lübeck, apparently to Augsburg, to request that someone from Wittenberg visit Lübeck to supervise the reorganization of their church along Evangelical lines. On September 11, 1530, Luther wrote to Melanchthon from the Koburg: "You will hear the rest [of the news] from the delegates from Lübeck, including your relative [a man named Jakob Krappe]. I would prefer not to have Pomeranus absent; but I do not see how we can

turn down their request, at least for a while. Both the church and our school need him greatly, especially since weariness over my age and my health, or rather over my very life, makes me think that I shall not have to watch and bear this accursed world much longer." In November 1530 Bugenhagen wrote to his friends in Wittenberg: "On the day of SS. Simon and Jude, by the grace of God, we arrived safely in Lübeck." Thus his arrival in Lübeck is to be dated on October 28, 1530. On November 13, 1530, Luther wrote to Veit Dietrich (1506–1549): "I have taken over Pomeranus' labors. I am preaching and lecturing, and I am distracted by cases," apparently marital cases. A few weeks later he complained to Link under the date of December 1, 1530: "I cannot find time to write to everyone. No longer am I only Luther, but Pomeranus, too, an official, a Moses, a Jethro, and what not? All things to all men. . . . Pomeranus is getting along very well in Lübeck."

Pomeranus continued to get along very well in Lübeck, not for "a while," as Luther had hoped, but until the spring of 1532. He did not return to Wittenberg until April 30 of that year. Thus Luther was his substitute in the pulpit for almost exactly one and one-half years. On Wednesdays he preached a series of sermons on St. Matthew, and on Saturdays a series on St. John. The series on St. Matthew was the origin of what is presented here as the *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, but there seems to be no way of determining who took down the sermons and who compiled them into this commentary. Both Georg Rörer and Veit Dietrich could have been involved (cf. LUTHER'S WORKS, 12, viii). Indeed, as Paul Pietsch says in his introduction to the Weimar text of the commentary: "When Luther began and concluded these sermons on Matthew, how many sermons he delivered, and finally whether he expounded only the three chapters from the fifth through the seventh or whether the editor trimmed the material down to the consecutive chapters, even though its beginning and end were determined by the accident of Bugenhagen's departure and return . . . about all this we know little or nothing."

Because the evolution of the work from the pulpit to the appearance of the finished commentary is so completely obscure, a certain amount of caution is necessary in referring to it as a source for our understanding of Luther's thought. We cannot be sure whether the editor or editors, whoever they may have been, took

certain liberties with the text of Luther's sermons as delivered. We know that this happened with other works (cf. Introduction to Vol. I of LUTHER'S WORKS). At the same time, there seems to be no warrant for the extreme skepticism of certain scholars regarding the reliability of this commentary. There are many parallels throughout Luther's works for most of the ideas and many of the terms that appear here.

The commentary was published in the fall of 1532 for the first time by Joseph Klug in Wittenberg. It was published again in 1533, this time in Marburg. And a third edition, with certain revisions apparently intended by the editor to tone down the text, appeared in Wittenberg in 1534. We have noted all the significant textual variants throughout the commentary. An English translation by Charles Hay was published in Philadelphia in 1892.

THE SERMON
ON THE MOUNT

Translated by
JAROSLAV PELIKAN

LUTHER'S PREFACE TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

I am very happy to see the publication of these sermons of mine on the three chapters of St. Matthew which St. Augustine calls "the Lord's Sermon on the Mount."¹ May God grant His grace so that they may help to preserve and keep the true, sure, and Christian understanding of this teaching of Christ, because these are such common sayings and texts that are used so often throughout Christendom. I do not doubt that here I have presented their true, pure, and Christian meaning to my friends and to anyone else that is interested. It is beyond understanding how through his apostles the wicked devil has managed so cleverly to twist and pervert especially the fifth chapter, making it teach the exact opposite of what it means. Christ here deliberately wanted to oppose all false teaching and to open up the true meaning of God's commandments, as He emphasizes when He says (Matt. 5:17): "I have not come to abolish the Law." He takes it up piece by piece and tries to make it completely clear. Still the infernal Satan has not found a single text in the Scriptures that he has more shamefully distorted and into which he has imported more error and false teaching than this very one, which Christ Himself ordered and appointed in order to head off false doctrine. This is really the devil's masterpiece!

First, this fifth chapter has fallen into the hands of the vulgar pigs and asses, the jurists and sophists, the right hand of that jackass of a pope and of his mamelukes. Out of this beautiful rose they have sucked and broadcast poison, covering up Christ with it and elevating and maintaining Antichrist. According to them, Christ does not intend everything He teaches in the fifth chapter to be regarded by His Christians as a command for them to observe; but He gave

¹ From 393 to 396, Augustine was engaged in the composition of "De sermone Domini in monte secundum Matthaenum libri duo," *Patrologia, Series Latina*, XXXIV, 1229—1308. Under the title *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, it has been translated into English by John J. Jepson as Volume 5 of "Ancient Christian Writers" (Westminster, Md., 1948). Luther refers to it explicitly in his commentary (cf. p. 69, note 25); in addition, he seems to have had its interpretations before him throughout his work.

much of it merely as advice to those who want to become perfect, to be kept by anyone who pleases. This in spite of Christ's angry threat that no one will enter heaven who abolishes even one of the least of these commandments (Matt. 5:19); and He explicitly calls them "commandments." On this basis they have thought up the twelve "evangelical counsels," twelve bits of good advice in the Gospel, which may be kept by anyone who pleases if he wants to attain a perfection higher and more perfect than that of other Christians. Thus they have not only made perfection as well as Christian salvation dependent upon works apart from faith, but they have even made these works optional. I call that forbidding true and fine good works — which is just what these vulgar asses and blasphemers accuse us of doing.

They cannot deny this, and no amount of covering or glossing over will help them as long as this fifth chapter of Matthew stands. Their books and glosses are in public view, as is the impenitent life, past and present, which they lead on the basis of this teaching of theirs. In their circles these twelve "evangelical counsels" are commonly taught: Do not requite wrongdoing! Do not avenge yourself! Offer the other cheek! Do not resist evil! Give your cloak along with your coat! Go the second mile! Give to everyone that asks! Lend to him who borrows! Pray for your persecutors! Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate! Do the other things that Christ teaches here! "All this," so they spew out, "is not commanded." And the jackasses in Paris frankly admit their reasons when they say: "Christian teaching would have much too hard a time of it if it were loaded down with things like this."² In this way the jurists and sophists have been ruling and teaching the church till now, so that Christ with His teaching and interpretation has had to be their jester and juggler. Still they do no penance for this, but they eagerly defend it. They are trying to re-establish their cursed, shabby canons and to reinstate the crown on the head of their jackass of a pope. May God grant that I live to provide spangles and jewels for such a crown. Then, God willing, this jackass would be crowned right!

Dear brother, let this preaching of mine be of service to you,

² On April 15, 1521, the theological faculty of Paris issued its condemnation of 104 theses and propositions from Luther's writings; this was an outcome of the Leipzig debate, almost two years earlier. The condemnation is printed, together with comments by Luther and Melancthon, in Weimar, VIII, 267—312, and IX, 717—761.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW

1. *Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.*
2. *And He opened His mouth and taught them and spoke.*

HERE the evangelist opens with a preface stating how Christ prepared Himself for the sermon He wanted to deliver: He went up on a mountain, sat down, and opened His mouth, to make it evident that He was in earnest. These are the three things, so to speak, which every good preacher should do: First, he takes his place; second, he opens his mouth and says something; third, he knows when to stop. "Takes his place" means that he presents himself as a master, a preacher with both the ability and the responsibility, one who comes with a call and not on his own, one to whom it is a matter of duty and obedience. Then he can say: "I am not coming because my own purpose and preference impel me, but I must do so because it is my office." This is said against those who have been causing us so much toil and trouble and still are, the schismatic rascals and fanatics who roam all over the country. They poison the people before the clergy and the government can discover it; and so they defile one household after another, until they have poisoned an entire city, and from the city an entire country.

To guard against such sneaks and cheats, one ought not to let anyone preach unless he has been appointed and commissioned for it. Nor should anyone take it upon himself, even though he is a preacher, to preach against a lying preacher whom he hears misleading the people in a papal or other church. Nor should anyone sneak around into the houses and set up private preaching-meetings. He should stay at home and mind his own official business and pulpit. If he neither will nor can enter the pulpit publicly, he should keep quiet. God does not want people running all over the place with His Word as though they were driven by the Holy Spirit and had to preach, or were seeking nooks or corners or pulpits to preach where they have no official call. Even though St. Paul was called as an apostle

by God, he did not want to preach in places where other apostles had preached before (Rom. 15:20). Therefore it says here that Christ went up the mountain openly and publicly when He began His preaching ministry. A little later He said to His disciples (Matt. 5:14, 15): "You are the light of the world. Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, to give light to all in the house." The office of the ministry and the Word of God are supposed to shine forth like the sun. We should not go around sneaking and plotting in the dark, as when we play blind man's buff,¹ but deal openly in broad daylight, to make it perfectly plain that both preacher and hearer are sure about the propriety of the teaching and the legitimacy of the office, so that concealment is unnecessary. Act the same way if you are in the ministry and have the commission to preach. Take your place openly, and fear no one; then you can boast with Christ (John 18:20): "I have spoken openly and freely before the world, and I have said nothing in the corner."

But you say: "What? Does this mean that no one should teach anything except in public? Should not the head of a household teach his servants in his house or keep a pupil or someone there who recites to him?" Answer: Of course that is all right and in its proper place here. The head of every family has the duty of training and teaching his children and servants, or of having them taught. In his house he is like a minister or bishop over his household, and he has the command to supervise what they learn and to be responsible for them. But you have no right to do this outside your own household and to force yourself upon other households or upon your neighbors. Nor should you put up with it if some such sneak comes to you and sets up a special preaching-meeting in your household for which he has no authorization. If someone comes into a house or city, let him be required to furnish proof that he is known, or let him show by letter and seal that he has proper authorization. Not every vagabond is to be believed who boasts that he has the Holy Spirit and who uses this to insinuate himself into this or that household. In short, this means that the Gospel or proclamation should not be listened to in a corner, but high up on a mountain and openly in the free daylight. That is the first thing that Matthew wants to show here.

¹ The version of this universal game with which Luther was acquainted was called "The Blind Cow."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

1. *Beware of practicing your charity before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*
2. *Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagoges and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward.*
3. *But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,*
4. *So that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

So far the Lord Christ has been denouncing the false teachings and interpretations of Scripture which had led people to refrain from sinning with their fists while their hearts remained completely impure within, and He has been demonstrating and emphasizing the true interpretation of the Scriptures and the Law. Now He goes on from their teaching to denounce their life as well. He attacks their good works, and He refuses to concede that they have anything good either in their teaching or in their works. This in spite of the fact that, as holy people, they taught the Scriptures every day, that they did good works, and that they had a reputation as the finest kernel of the whole Jewish people and the holiest people on earth. The whole world had to look to them as the mirror and pattern according to which they should live, just as the only place to look for true doctrine and life until now has been among our clergy, the priests and monks. Yet now they are being rebuked by the Gospel; and everyone sees that neither their teaching nor their life has been right, but that they have been misleading and deceiving both themselves and the people.

Now, a sermon is really a vexing thing if it comes into the world in order to deprive these holy people of their claims to everything right and good, and it earns the opposition and the intolerance of the world. But this does not embarrass the Holy Spirit. He goes

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right ahead with His denunciation of both teaching and life, in keeping with His office, wherever He may come. Both need to be denounced. It is true that where teaching is not right, there it is impossible for life to be right and good either, since life must let itself be controlled and directed by teaching. Whatever is done and accomplished on such a basis will be only a bypath and a detour, aggravated by the fact that the teaching persists in the impression and the notion that it is a true and divine teaching that points and leads to heaven, and that the works keep the title "good works," though they pay attention only to the action of the hands. Thus they imagined that their life was satisfactory and good if only they did the works, contributed alms generously, fasted, and prayed, regardless of how their heart stood in relation to God. In addition, they were polluted by the filthy habit of doing it all only to have the people see them and give them honor and glory for it. That is why Christ here rebukes and completely rejects it.

First of all, He denounces their alms-giving, which is still the best among all the outward works. It simply means helping the poor and needy; and it includes not just giving a piece of bread to a beggar at the door, but all sorts of kind deeds and good works done to a neighbor. The little word "alms" is derived from the Greek word *ἐλεημοσύνη*, which means mercy, just as we also generally speak of "works of mercy." Therefore the Scriptures give these works higher praise than they do to all the others, even to the works in relation to God, like sacrificing, praying, and the like. Thus Christ Himself says (Matt. 9:13) on the basis of the prophet Hosea (Hosea 6:6): "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." So also in Isaiah 58 He rebukes them and says they caused Him anguish because they fasted and whipped their bodies, and He demands these works instead: they should do good to the poor, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. But how is it, then, that here He is denouncing the Pharisees for doing precisely these good works?

Answer: He is not denouncing the work itself, but their purpose and aim in doing it. In itself the work would be good; but they ruined it by smearing their filth all over it, because by it they were seeking only their own glory and honor before the people and were not doing it for the sake of God or their neighbor. Therefore He pronounces a short and severe judgment, that all such alms, regardless of how great or abundant or expensive they may be, are useless and valueless.

THE MAGNIFICAT

Translated by
A. T. W. STEINHAEUSER

THE MAGNIFICAT

*Translated and Expounded by
Dr. Martin Luther, Augustinian*

JESUS

To his Serene Highness, Prince John Frederick, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, my Gracious Lord and Patron.

SERENE and high-born prince, gracious lord! May your Grace accept my humble prayer and service.

Your Grace's kind letter has lately come into my hands, and its cheering contents brought me much joy. By way of reply I send you this little exposition of the Magnificat. I promised it to you long ago, but the troublesome quarrels of many adversaries have repeatedly interrupted it. If I put it off any longer, I shall have to blush for shame. It is not proper for me to make any more excuses; otherwise I may retard your Grace's youthful spirit, which inclines to the love of Sacred Scripture and which might be stirred up and strengthened still further by more exercise in it. To this end I wish your Grace God's grace and help.

And this is really necessary. For the welfare of many people lies in the power of so mighty a prince, once he is taken out of himself and graciously governed by God; on the other hand, the destruction of many people lies in his power if he is left to himself and ruled by God's displeasure. Although the hearts of all men are in God's almighty hand, it is not without reason that only about kings and princes is it said (Prov. 21:1): "The king's heart is in the hand of God; He turns it wherever He will." Thus God would instill His fear in the mighty lords, to teach them that they can think nothing without His special inspiration. The actions of other men bring gain or loss upon themselves alone, or upon just a few others. But rulers are appointed for the special purpose of being either harmful or helpful to other people; and the more people, the wider their domain. Therefore Scripture calls pious and God-fearing princes "angels of God" (1 Sam. 29:9) and even "gods" (Ps. 82:6). But harmful princes