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Martin Luther and the Idea of Monasticism

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Monasticism was still a major issue in the first half of the 16th century in Europe. It played a definite role in the life of many men and women. Among the famous, Desiderius Erasmus and Ulrich von Hutten left the monastery easily, even eagerly; Martin Luther on the other hand only after immense inner difficulties. Inevitable as the final break was for Luther, it caused him great anguish of soul both before and after. Hence it is hardly surprising that throughout his numerous writings there are frequent references to what was surely one of the most stirring experiences in his exciting spiritual and intellectual history, the doffing—both literally and figuratively—of the monk's cowl.

Among the several important passages in which the former Augustinian reflects on the meaning of the idea of monasticism one of the more remarkable and haunting is found in his superb university lectures on the Forty-fifth Psalm, delivered in Wittenberg in 1532. It will always remain a matter of keen regret that these as well as many other noteworthy lecture series have not been preserved for us in Luther's own hand. All we have is (1) the notes on the lectures taken down by Georg Rörer, (2) the Latin edition of 1533—34 published without the editor's name but probably made by Veit Dietrich on the basis of Rörer's and his own notes, (3) the German translation of this made by Georg Major in 1537, and, (4) what may have been Luther's own scanty preparations, hastily jotted down, for these lectures. A redeeming feature in this unsatisfactory

situation is that the Latin and German editions appeared relatively soon after the lectures were given, during Luther's lifetime and in Wittenberg itself. While we have no record that Luther saw the proofs or directly supervised the printing in any way, it stands to reason that he must at least have looked at the books after they left the press. It is also fairly certain that he would have objected vigorously had they contained anything of importance that he had not himself said in the classroom. Moreover, Luther's very presence in Wittenberg would have made any tampering with his words, particularly any substantial watering down of them, a hazardous undertaking sure to arouse the hot displeasure of the great man. If one remembers the furor created by Veit Dietrich's only slightly later publication of Luther's Lectures on the Fifty-first Psalm, in which Dietrich used a single phrase capable of misinterpretation, it would seem that the versions of 1533 and of 1537, in Latin and German respectively, must have passed the censorship not only of Luther himself but also of the vigilant men around him. Finally, aside from the external evidence that Luther and his circle did not take exception to the published texts there is the internal evidence that the important lines on monasticism, while perhaps more personal than other relevant utterances, are in fundamental harmony with Luther's views expressed elsewhere. We are therefore reasonably safe in assuming that what we are discussing came from the lips of the Wittenberg master.

When Luther in his careful analysis of the text of Psalm 45 reached the 11th verse, a certain phrase apparently caught his fancy and induced him to reminisce in the classroom on his own monastic past and, beyond that, to consider the question of monasticism as a whole as well as some aspects of the papacy and of the left wing of the Reformation in addition. This significant phrase reads as follows in Luther's own rendering of 1531: . . . *vergiss deines volcks vnd deines vaters haus*. Somehow these simple words struck deep and caused him to talk about his own departure from his people and his father's house, that is to say, the Roman church and, more specifically, the monastery.

Students of Luther—and this includes I am happy to say recent Roman Catholic scholars—generally agree nowadays that he was a man of exceeding reverence and that his revolt against the papal church was not undertaken lightly or irresponsibly. The years of his advancing age, filled as they were with disappointment upon disappointment, abounded with hours when this ultra-conservative revolutionary became for the moment unsure of his hard-won ground: *Num tu solus sapiſ? . . . Tu unus es et vis diſſolvere illam pulcherrimam monarchiam. . . . Esto enim, quod ſint in Papatu errores et peccata, quid tu es? nunquid tu ſine erroribus et peccatis es?* (WA 40, 2, 571). With this moving preliminary confession Luther has arrived, in his lecture of October 28, at the decisive phrase: *Et obliſcere populum tuum et domum patris tui* (WA 40, 2, 572). On the baſis of the chriſtological interpretation of the pſalms this verſe meant to him that Judaism underwent, or ſhould have undergone, a radical change

when Chriſt became man and abrogated the religion of law and uſhered in the religion of grace. After this central event of *Heilsgeschichte* the Jews were told to leave behind their people and the houſe of their fathers. They were inſtructed to forget their former modes of religious thought and practice and to enter a new religious realm. In the poſt-incarnation world they would have to come to terms with what amounted to a tranſvaluation of ſome of their moſt cheriſhed values: *nihil valet iuſtitia legis, cultus templi, religio ſacerdotum et Levitarum, veteris teſtamenti* (WA 40, 2, 573). The erſt-while glory of the righteousneſs of the law is gone with the advent of Chriſtianeity. *Iuſtitia activa* no longer works becauſe *iuſtitia paſſiva* has been inſtituted by God as the new order: *Aliud regnum, . . . ſacerdotium, cultum dei Rex ille inſtituet* (Ibid.). This new religion of grace is held by Luther to be ſo impatient with all other views that it requires man to leave them behind: *Ich wil des populi nicht mher dencken, cultus, religionis, iuſtitiae legis* (p. 574). No matter how difficult it may be for one to abandon an earlier ſtage of religious faith and to preſs forward to a new level of religious validity, it is imperative to move on in order to enter fully into the new world initiated by Chriſt.

Yet Luther, profoundly and painfully aware of the ſtrong grip which the religion of the Law has had and ſtill has upon mankind, does not really propoſe that it be ruthleſſly ſtamped out. Thinking of his own caſe no doubt he ſuggeſts rather that one ſhould remember one's own ſpiritual paſt and reflect on all its implications. In other words, while the old way ſhould no longer be preached or taught publicly

as valid today, we should nevertheless be mindful of where we came from, religiously speaking. Thus we shall even appreciate more and more fully the new dispensation in which we now move by the grace of God. What this remembrance of things past should primarily accomplish is an intensification of our perception and reception of the Christ in the fullness of His stature. Eventually we may live so thoroughly in the new order that the memory of having once lived in the religion of the Law will almost fade. Perhaps we shall some day reach a stage of religious development in which we may say that we have never been under the Law even in its finest flowering, monasticism. It is Luther's fervid hope that the spirit of the monk, which he regards as the highest form of the religion of the Law, will ultimately yield to that of true Christian living by grace and faith.

At this exciting point Luther makes his noteworthy digression into the meaning of the monastic period of his own life and of the institution of monasticism in the history of Christianity. In discussing his own religious development Luther is very much aware that he is speaking about a significant epoch in his personal history. Somewhat wistfully he sets forth his former life among his people, the Roman Catholics, and in his father's house, the papal church.

To begin with, he reminisces that he lived with extraordinary devotion and painstaking rigor: *Ego, cum Monachus, fatigatus maxime, vexavi me Jeuniis et orationibus extra ordinem* (p. 574). There is no reason to doubt the intrinsic truth of this confession; the meticulous investi-

gations of Otto Scheel¹ and others have abundantly verified Luther's claim so far as I can see. The printed Latin text of the lectures is here rather more explicit than Rörer's notes. Inasmuch as it provides us with a fuller picture of Luther's life in the monastery, it is quite helpful to cite this longer version in addition. Since, as I have pointed out, neither Luther himself nor any of his close associates objected to this passage when it appeared in print only about a year after the actual delivery of the lecture, and since it in no way contradicts but merely makes more personal the other pronouncements on his monastic past, we may be permitted to accept the following extended phrasing as essentially correct:

Ego quidem, cum essem monachus, valde defatigabar per quindecim fere annos quotidie sacrificando, macerando me ieiuniis, vigiliis, oracionibus et aliis longe gravissimis operibus, quia serio cogitabam de iusticia per mea opera adipiscenda. . . .
(P. 574)

This life was so exacting that Luther feels compelled to remark according to Rörer's notes: *Ich dachte nicht, quod vergessen würde, tamen oblitus sanguinis* (p. 574). One should mark the trenchant expression *sanguinis*, weakened in the printed text to *vitae*.

It is highly interesting in this connection that Luther has not forgotten other more pleasant aspects of his monastic existence or, more likely, that of many a fellow-monk. He grants, in retrospect, that life in the monastery was in some ways a good deal easier than life in the world: . . . *car-naliter loquendo non est carcer, sed deli-*

¹ Otto Scheel, *Martin Luther: Vom Katholizismus zur Reformation*. Tübingen, 1921—30.

catum vitae genus, remotum ab omnibus illis molestiis, quas vel Politia vel Oeconomia habet (p. 574). Thus to some people, chiefly the more easy-going kind, the monastery was probably a haven of refuge from the troubles of the harsh world. But Luther is quick to add that it was a veritable prison and torture-chamber to those few spiritually sensitive men *qui non tantum de ventre cogitabant, sed cupiebant salvari* (p. 574). These *boni homines* tried by every conceivable exertion to merit their salvation. Luther is ready to admit that some of them did find some peace some of the time.

However, when all is said and done, Luther takes special pains to point out that the true Christian life as he has rediscovered it is actually more difficult than the doubtless hard but occasionally pleasant life of the monk. Life lived within the framework of the religion of *sola fides absque omnibus operibus* is, when properly understood, infinitely more demanding and hazardous despite its seemingly greater ease. In fact, as he himself has learned to understand ever more deeply the exacting and intricate religion of pure faith, he has become uncomfortably aware that he too casts longing looks in the direction of his monastic period as toward the fleshpots of Egypt: . . . *cor nostrum semper respicit ad "Aegyptias ollas"* (p. 574). The ex-monk, inwardly estranged from the highest form of Roman Catholicism—monasticism—nonetheless feels the constant pull of what is, despite its obvious severity, the easier way of life. He is ever tempted to re-embrace the ultimately less arduous way of the monk and to surrender the subtle and tenuous freedom of a Christian. Luther is frank enough to admit to his students

that he is often almost irresistibly drawn toward what one might call the *religio monachi: magno impetu rapi sentio ad iustitiam carnis* (pp. 574—5). Although he has long since broken with monasticism, he finds in himself, if he but thoroughly examines his heart, the inner attitude of the monk, of the very summit of Roman Catholic piety. The spirit of monasticism, Luther freely confesses, has remained with him as an ever-present danger, always threatening to undo the *libertas christiana* so dearly gained in lengthy and intense spiritual struggle. Although he has definitely left monastic life behind, he is far from having totally emancipated himself from the underlying spirit of the monk because that had been part and parcel of him for many years: *Si non monachus, tamen velim invenire opus, quo fiderem: ego hoc et hoc feci* (p. 575). Luther is painfully conscious of secretly wishing that God would pronounce him righteous at least in part on the basis of his own *opera* whether *supererogata* or not.

Recognizing within himself the persistent danger of yielding to the righteousness of the flesh, *iustitia activa*, Luther is not really surprised to see the recrudescence and re-emergence of the spirit of monasticism in some of the non-Lutheran Protestant groups around him: *Anabaptista mus das et das thun; . . . reiectis operibus monasticis repullulat [sic!] opinio de aliis* (p. 575). The printed text puts it even more clearly and simply: *Sic reiectis operibus monachorum veterum reducunt novos monachos* (p. 575). The real problem is that man, including Christian man, cannot free himself from the obstinate hidden wish to contribute something to his salvation, from the apparently invincible human

desire to present *sanctitas aliqua*, some degree of holiness to God. Solemnly Luther warns everyone without exception against being too sure of what is still newly won ground: . . . *ne simus nimium securi ab hac peste, unusquisque gestat in sinu suo magnum monachum, . . .* (p. 575). It is the inner monk that constitutes the greatest peril, especially for the most serious and religiously sensitive. Martin Luther, first and most eminent vanquisher of the idea of monasticism, was also the first to recognize and admit the ever threatening possibility, nay the fact, of its rebirth in his own life and thought:

Ecce hoc feci, Satisfeci hodie Deo meo orando, benefaciendo, ero igitur animo magis ocioso. Nam mihi quoque accidit hoc, quod, cum feci opus vocationis meae, multo sum letior, quam si non fecissem (p. 575). Luther is quick to add that joy in and of itself is of course no evil, but the sort of joy (*leticia*) just spoken of is basically *sine fide et non pura* and really a *vicium presumptionis* (p. 575). In the realm of Luther's refined and delicate religious values let no man feel that he is forever secure; it rather behooves him, if he is indeed a serious Christian, to walk in fear and concern about the immense monk deep in the hearts of all of us, particularly the most responsible and devout. Martin Luther, ever utterly honest with himself, confesses bluntly: *Ego trag stultiam et carnalem opinionem operum, ein grossen munch, velim in Albi* (p. 575). With delightful local color he is going to drown the *ingentem et deformem Monachum* (p. 575) in the river Elbe! Words like these, coming as they so clearly do from the heart and lips of the greatest foe of

the *religio operum* since the days of Paul himself, cannot but call to mind two justly famous lines from the Second Part of Goethe's *Faust* as *mutatis mutandis* applicable to the Lutheran situation (except of course for the word *verdient!*)

*Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,
Der täglich sie erobern muss.*

The religion of grace and faith is simply not a permanently safe possession. On the contrary, it has to be won or rather received every day, every hour all over again. It is so delicate and fragile a thing that it may be lost any minute. Although it is, in the profoundest sense, a *κτῆμα ἐξ αἰεί*, a lasting possession, of the highest religious life so far as Luther is concerned, it is ever open to attack both from without and from within. Its greatest representative in post-apostolic times, the ex-friar of Wittenberg, found it necessary, for good reason, to insist again and again on the supreme difficulty of preserving it intact against all foes.

Luther was aware of the high place he occupied in the intellectual history of Christianity as the chief restorer of basic aspects of Paul's religious thought. He knew what he was asking his contemporaries to give up. It was clear to him that he was requesting the finest minds of his age to surrender what they prized most as their highest religious possession: the *cultus, religio, iustitia legis*, modified and tempered as this was to be sure by elements of the *religio gratiae et fidei*, especially in Augustine and to some extent also in Thomas Aquinas. What Luther expected from the most sincerely religious people of the 16th century was that they leave behind their cherished religious

home and embark with him on the perilous journey of a much more demanding religion.

Martin Luther, bold religious thinker and *Umwerteter* that he was, had "left his people and the home of his father" in the words of the Psalm he is discussing in these Lectures. All the implications of this decisive step were fully clear to him, so clear in fact that he himself was always able to survey the long road he had traveled in his search for the quintessence of Christianity. What he had found amounted, so far as his contemporaries were concerned, to nothing less than a thorough transvaluation of the religious values of a thousand years, or even of fourteen hundred years as he once put it in an inspired moment of the most searching reflection and self-examination.

The fundamental question he asked himself and his generation was this: Where do we now stand in the realization of the religion we have reestablished after leaving behind, uneasily and with a heavy heart to be sure, our people and our father's house? In answering this question Luther is filled with satisfaction and even pride over the results already attained and at the same time with sadness and modesty at the sight of the tasks still awaiting execution. He is understandably proud that in *externo ministerio* (p. 575) a place has been reached where, by the grace of God, *iustitia operum* is no longer officially preached. He is very proud indeed to be able to announce to his students: *docemus iustitiam puram, gratiam; Sacramenta pura* (p. 575). In the important realms of public preaching and teaching Luther feels very strongly that the purity of the Word of God has been completely restored and

that the spirit of monasticism, the very acme of Roman Catholicism, has been done away with: *In ministerio verbi, docendo plane sum oblitus huius monachi nec quisquam nomen eius ex me audit.* (p. 576)

Yet despite this more external and objective victory over the monastic view of life, Martin Luther, sensitive ex-monk, feels keenly that in the more subjective world of his own heart the way of the monk still reasserts itself: *Sed in corde meo non servo verbum meum, quod pure per os doceo, sed obrepit nonnunquam monachus imprudenti* (p. 576). It goes without saying that Luther is exceedingly grateful to God for the inestimable gift of the purification of doctrine that has undeniably taken place. Earnestly he asks his hearers ever to bear in mind that *purissima fides* (p. 576) has been re-established after these many centuries. Still more earnestly, if that were possible, he admonishes them (and himself) that their personal faith measure up to the pure doctrine so recently rewon: . . . *ut, quam pura est doctrina, tam pura quoque sit fides in apprehendo et tenendo Christo* (p. 576). Taking a long look into his own heart, which still toys with the best Roman Catholicism has to offer, he uneasily realizes that the inner heart finds it ever so difficult fully to appropriate the new freedom: *Sed hoc* (that is, the apprehension of Christ) *non fit* (p. 576). It has become abundantly clear to Luther that the individual soul's struggle against the spirit of monasticism lasts as long as life itself: . . . *quo ad vivimus, luctamur contra istum monachum* . . . (p. 576). Only through the action of the Holy Ghost can man learn to change his heart from its

natural monasticism to a firm grasp of the anti-monastic essence of true Christianity:

. . . spiritus sanctus . . . , quia videt naturam nostram sic monachatum, adest monendo et hortando, ut audiamus, ut discamus oblivisci omnium . . . operum, etiam optima iustitiae nostrae, ut, sicut doctrina oblita est monachi huius, ita quoque nostrum obliviscatur omnium et hereat pura fide in unius Christi iusticia. (p. 576)

The substance of *religio monachi* is trust, at least some trust, in *optima iusticia nostra*; the essence of *religio Lutheri (et Pauli)* is utter trust without any reservation whatsoever in *unius Christi iusticia*. Luther's head and heart are unceasingly engaged in trying to comprehend and apprehend the full meaning of *iustitia passiva*. That and that alone was the exceedingly precious pearl for the finding and possessing of which he was willing to leave behind the high calling of the monk who, as the greatest of all ex-monks knew only too well, was also seeking God with all his heart and mind.

Luther was deeply shaken by the necessity of burning his spiritual bridges behind him. Basically most conservative, he had been ever so reluctant to make the final move. What he gave up himself and what he asked the men and women of his age to give up he knew to be the best and highest Roman Catholicism had to offer. It should always be remembered that the command to forget one's people means that the Christian is to break not with impious people who do not care but with pious people who are determined to live up to the Law. What he is asked to leave behind is not a morally inferior or reprehensible way of life but one that with its insistence on inner and outer discipline

appeals to the most devout and ardent souls. What is to be abandoned is not a way of life easily recognizable as sinful and unclean but the very way, the, humanly and rationally speaking, excellent way that for centuries has been held to be the very heart and the giddiest height of the Christian religion. Luther realizes as fully as it is humanly possible to realize that the idea of *iustitia activa* is most attractive to superior minds. Still, no matter how difficult the step from a *religio legis et iustitiae activae* to a *religio gratiae et iustitiae passivae*, it must needs be taken, for *lex . . . est abrogata . . .* (p. 576). In his consuming desire for utmost clarity on this crucial point Luther embarks on one of the most sweeping denunciations of the Law known to me: *. . . abrogatae et reiectae sunt non solum traditiones humanae, set universa lex divina, ut retineatur ille rex Christus purissima fide* (pp. 576, 577). The fatal retention of legalism in religion Luther does not hesitate to call "persecution" of the Word of God. Every trace of this anti-Christian attitude is to be eradicated. Utter relegation of the religion of the Law is required if one is really serious about getting out of the old homestead and setting out for the new so brilliantly and dynamically erected by the masterbuilder or rather, since the edifice is not really new at all, by its chief restorer. Though wholly convinced that this radical step is necessary, Luther again and again warns his audience to be sure they know what they are doing. To leave one's people and one's home is no trifling matter: *. . . nolite gerere auctorem* (p. 577). Again he cautions: *Nec sunt extenuenda haec vocabula: Populus et Domus. Sunt enim summae res in hoc*

orbe, nec ulla alia res in tota creatura est cum his conferenda (p. 577). Moving away from one's people is the gravest matter. To request someone to leave his home may very well appear to the uninitiated as downright seditious preaching. Luther admits this freely. He does not mince words when he speaks of the revolutionary nature of the command to forget one's religious heritage: *Er kund nicht greulichet setzen quam: "domus patris."* (p. 578)

Luther writes so eloquently of the intense inner conflict involved because he himself had experienced it so keenly. It is very important to see the larger background against which this monastic drama takes place: God by the very act of sending his only-begotten Son into the world has declared the religion of the law to be invalid and consummated the only valid way of approaching Him. There is thus a battle royal between an antiquated form of religion and the new one put in its place. No matter how intimately the old order may have coalesced with every fibre of one's being, one really has no choice but to venture forth into the new realm of religious validity. It is required to obey God rather than man.

At this moment of great inner tension Luther utters, in the heat of the argument, some of his most memorable words about the papacy. Inasmuch as the pope clings to and defends, or has his scholars defend for him, the religion of the Law, a major part of the conflict between *iustitia activa* and *iustitia passiva* is actually fought out in the region of one's relation to the Roman pontiff.

Luther again pours out his whole reverent and pious heart. He was not eager

to leave his old spiritual home. Only the tremendous crisis in his religious life and evolution forced his hand. He more than once yearned to return to the rich ancestral halls, especially after the emergence of the left wing of the Reformation with its surrender of almost everything Luther held dear. He was almost as unhappy about the religious stand of the radicals as about the unchanging views of the pope. Luther would have recognized his own situation in two famous verses from Goethe's poem *Ilmenau*, where the German poet draws the line between himself and the *Sturm und Drang*:

*Ich brachte reines Feuer vom Altar;
Was ich entzündet, ist nicht reine Flamme.*

Caught between the unreformed and apparently unreformable old church and the rashly and recklessly unorthodox left-wing reformers, Luther felt his bonds with the pope and the papal church to be even stronger than he had originally thought. In his distress over the radicals he finds words expressive of the unhappy state of mind of a motherless child. Would that he could return home! Wistfully the man of almost fifty recalls that he too grew up in the pope's church: *Sum . . . baptisatus in domo Papae, sum catechisatus, didici scripturam, . . .* (p. 579). Baptism, the catechism, and the Scriptures, however inadequately the Bible in particular may have been presented, are indispensable religious values for the receiving of which Martin Luther will be forever grateful to the papal church. He will always remember the house in which he was baptized. Never will he or can he forget his religious beginnings. The memory of this past is sometimes so vivid and overwhelming that Luther all but declares his readiness to

honor the pope and also any scholastic philosopher, on one condition: the pope and the other inhabitants of his house must permit him to retain his idea of God and of Christ: . . . *sinat, ut credam in Christum solum, . . . relinquat mihi primam tabulam . . . mihi (permittat) doctrinam sanam sequi* (pp. 578, 579). For him to return home would require the pope's willingness to let Martin Luther keep *conscientiam liberam ab omni onere* (p. 579). The pull homeward is strong, but the one condition on which he could go back has thus far remained unfulfilled. Therefore Luther, lonely but heroic, knows beforehand what the answer will be. The pope cannot grant him liberty of conscience but will continue to put the intolerable burden of *iustitia activa* upon him. Thus the pope forces him to neglect what cannot be neglected under any circumstances: the Word of God as Martin Luther understood it.

Thus he is brought face to face with the unavoidable alternative of choosing between the Christ-estranged home of his father and the true *vita Christiana* he had rediscovered. The two cannot be combined, in spite of his irrepressible wish to see them reconciled. Homesick though he is in a world filled with radical Protestants throwing nearly everything traditional overboard, he cannot rejoin the pope's household. Steadfastly he refuses to budge an inch from the religious position he has gained, and, despite his growing isolation, he will remain loyal to himself and his deepest insights. In a statement every whit as great as his immortal words at Worms before the emperor, he completely rejects the temptation to seek refuge in the papal church, his home church, from the flood of

non-Lutheran radicals which he himself has been so largely instrumental in letting loose: *quoniam non possum ambo retinere, domum patris et Christum, Maneat mihi Rex meus Christus, et domus patris cum toto populo abeat, quo velit* (p. 579). The break with Rome is irreparable: papal and Lutheran views of the essence of religion are irreconcilable. Though Luther feels increasingly homeless in a world fast becoming more and more estranged from his ideas, if indeed it ever really held them to any great extent, and though the yearning to return whence he came is almost insuppressible at times, he is fully determined to remain outside as long as the pope does violence to the Word of God as interpreted by Paul and Luther: *Das wort sie sollen lassen stan*, even if this decision means as it did a life of increasing loneliness. The fight for the preservation of sound doctrine must go on. The gauntlet which he once hurled at the pope's feet he hurled just as defiantly at the feet of the left wing of the Reformation. The religious thinker who with keen insight saw the common bond between Roman Catholicism, liberal and radical Protestantism, and the extra-Christian religions he knew has made up his mind to stick to his understanding of the fundamental difference between his restoration of the Pauline interpretation of Christianity and all other forms of religion within his ken. He has rejected and he will continue to reject all ideas of righteousness, Christian and non-Christian, theological and philosophical, save the *iustitia dei passiva* which he has rediscovered. Whatever deviates from this basic fact of the divine-human encounter Luther holds to be *rein hin weg* (p. 579), gone all the

way. . . . *omnes religiones, omnes iusticiae, omnes leges, etiam gentium, Philosophorum et Iurisperitorum — Omnia ista abeant tanquam inutilia ad hoc regnum, Imo noxia . . .* (p. 579). Luther for one is determined to persevere on his path to the very end: he will adhere to the full Christ rather than to what he terms the diluted Christ of the Roman church and of the other Protestant groups springing up and multiplying around him.

We have reached the end of Luther's discussion of verse 11 of Psalm 45. It is surely one of the most intimate and moving revelations of his rich mind. Luther is very much aware of the subtle temptations which monasticism or, more accurately, the spirit of monasticism still has for him. We have seen his deep yearning for his ancient spiritual home, the old church with its pinnacle of monasticism. But with adamant resolve based on a superior understanding of what is really at stake, Luther emerges victorious from this difficult struggle with the monastic spirit. He takes his place in the history of Christianity: a religious genius of the first rank, he has brought about the restoration of Pauline Christianity and he has made it abundantly clear for all who care to listen that this is fundamentally and irrevocably different from Roman Catholicism, radical Protestantism, in fact, all non-Lutheran Protestantism whether liberal or conservative, Judaism, Mohammedanism, and all

other forms of high religion with which his age chanced to be acquainted. Luther is the staunch and, so far as I am concerned, convincing defender of the Pauline interpretation of the Christian religion. He did all he could to restore and keep intact the profoundest of all interpretations of Christianity. No man could have done more. May he always be listened to with the respect he deserves, even and especially at a time when a very old man again asks the non-Roman world to return to his fold. The voice from Rome is softer than before, but what it expresses has not changed. Luther's stand in essentials is as inevitable now as it was in the 16th century.² I realize these are the views of a layman. I also realize that in the magnificent Lutheran tradition the lay scholar is not only permitted but expected to speak out. This I have tried to do as a "profane" student of Martin Luther.

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² Much if not indeed everything depends upon whether one *really* understands what Luther is all about. Luther and Lutheranism — I have learned this the hard way — have not always been identical. I would like to bring them closer together. This will not and cannot be till every Lutheran pastor and layman embarks upon the exciting adventure of reading Luther himself. With a really solid knowledge of Luther, who's afraid of Thomas Aquinas? Nobody need have fears about pitting the ex-Augustinian against the Dominican. I wish I could have heard a debate between them!