

Luther on Monasticism

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“**A** monastery is a hell, with the devil as both abbot and prior, and the monks and nuns the damned souls.”¹ Thus wrote Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, in 1533. “When you hear the word ‘monk,’ it is as if you heard the word apostate Christian, betrayer of the faith, a disciple of the devil.”² These are harsh words, and a host of similar statements regarding monasticism are easily found, not just in Luther’s writings, but in those of other reformers as well. It was, therefore, not without reason that monastic life very soon came to an end where the Reformation took hold. Protestant churches were, and to a large extent are, churches without monasteries.

There are good reasons to regard monasticism and Protestantism as mutually exclusive. And yet this is not the whole truth. This can be inferred from the simple fact that Martin Luther himself, and with him a number of fellow reformers especially of the Lutheran confession, had been friars or monks. Among them were members of nearly all the great monastic families—Benedictines, Franciscans, Carthusians, Knights Templar, Dominicans and, first and foremost, Augustinian Hermits. It is no accident that the first martyrs of the Reformation were monks as well, two young mendicants who were burned at the stake in Brussels in 1523. Such are the bare historical facts. But this is not all; to a large extent these men owed to monasticism the spiritual impulses which made them reformers. The vision of the Christian life and of the church with which they confronted the church of their time was inspired by ideals and insights that had been shaped in the course of their monastic lives. In short, “no Reformation without monasticism.”³ We need to ask, therefore, whether the spiritual legacy the Reformers passed on to the Protestant churches is also not linked to the monastic tradition so closely as to render inadequate a simplistic opposition between monasticism and Reformation. Perhaps such a link between monasticism and Protestantism might serve as a new rationale for Protestant monastic life today. Those Protestant monastic communities that have come

into existence lately, although few and far between, may be proof of this.

This brief introduction outlines the structure of my essay. I shall first deal with Martin Luther and his monastic roots; then I shall give a sketch of his critique of monasticism; next I shall describe the monastic features of the Reformation and especially Lutheran churches. Finally I shall look at how the complex relationship between monasticism and the Reformation might afford us a fresh rationale for monastic life within Protestantism today.

Luther the Monastic Reformer

Martin Luther, the first and most important of the reformers, was a monk, or more precisely, a friar. For nearly twenty years, between 1505 and 1524, he was an Augustinian Hermit, until 1511 in Erfurt in Thuringia, afterwards in Wittenberg in Saxony. Luther, who lived to the age of sixty-three, wore the monk's habit between the age of twenty-two and forty-one, the most important years of his life and precisely the time that saw the beginning of the Reformation.

The significance of Luther's monastic roots for the Reformation becomes apparent when we look at other contemporary reform movements. None was as radical in the literal sense of the word; none went as deep, to the very roots of the church and the Christian life, as did Luther and the Lutheran Reformation. The fifteenth-century Hussites in Bohemia fought for better living conditions for the Czech people and for the restoration of the chalice to the laity. Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich aimed at an evangelical reformation of social and ecclesiastical life. Humanism was seeking remedies for grievances in education, church, and politics. All these elements are present in Luther's reformation, too. But they are not his first priority. What mattered most to him and the Reformation he began was the right relationship between God and humanity. In his view, the church no longer taught and preached according to the gospel; it thereby jeopardized salvation and made countless Christians fear for their souls. Such was his diagnosis. At this point he demanded that the church repent. It must preach and teach correctly about the relationship be-

tween God and humanity. It must preach and teach that God grants salvation in Christ alone through grace alone and that human beings receive this salvation through faith alone. This is the core of his call for reformation and the basis of his criticism of church structure, ethics, liturgy, and so on.

The radical, principled nature of Luther's diagnosis, criticism, and subsequent reform of the Christian life is directly linked to his monastic background. After all, for centuries the place for Christians who wanted to live a life "radically" in accordance with the gospel had been the monasteries. It was there that men and women strove to fulfill God's will in a special way by leading a life of humility and lifelong repentance, of incessant prayer and ascetic discipline. For this reason they endeavored to keep not just the Ten Commandments like all Christians; they also observed special "counsels" (*consilia*) like poverty, chastity, and obedience; this was the perfect "angelic" path, reserved for the few. The idea was to live a life in accordance with the words of the Sermon on the Mount, that great vision of the true Christian life described by Jesus himself, a life in perfect harmony with how God willed humanity to be.

It was this world that the young Martin Luther entered five hundred years ago this summer, in 1505. And he did so with great earnestness. In later years, after he had long since shed the monk's habit and after his acerbic criticism had swept away the monasteries, his adversaries would charge him with lax discipline as a monk and that for this reason he had decamped from the monastery. He was indignant at this charge and denied it emphatically: "The truth is, I was an observant and obedient monk. I kept the Rule so strictly that I dare say if ever a man entered heaven for being a monk, I would have entered it. All my fellow monks will confirm that this is the truth."⁴ And indeed several of his brethren affirmed, even after his death, that Luther had been a very conscientious monk who kept the Rule to the point of saintliness.⁵ The monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were never a problem for him. He did his share of begging for alms, which was part of life in a mendicant order. With particular dedication he observed his liturgical duties: the Mass, the canonical hours, the rosary, because he considered them to be the most important aspect of monastic life. He showed great integrity,

both human and spiritual; he was theologically competent and possessed leadership qualities, all of which very soon made him a figure of authority in his order. In 1509 he was made subprior in his monastery, then in 1515 he was put in charge of the convents of Thuringia and Meißen. In 1510/11 he was sent by the monastery in Erfurt for important negotiations in Rome with the Master General. In modern parlance: he was regarded as having a great career ahead of him.

A career, however, had not been Luther's motivation when he became a monk at the age of twenty-two. When he broke off the studies of law which he had just begun, and knocked on the door of the Augustinian friars in Erfurt, he had only one motive in his mind: to become acceptable to God, the Lord of life and death. To fulfill God's will totally and thus please the eternal Judge, this was Luther's aim, as it was the aim of so many men and women before and around him who had chosen the monastic path, because like them he was convinced that this aim could best be reached in a monastery.

Fulfilling God's will totally for Luther meant doing more than just keeping the Ten Commandments, which was everybody's obligation. It also meant (and Luther accepted the classic medieval distinction)⁶ observing those special "counsels" that governed the monastic life, namely, poverty, chastity, and obedience, as mentioned. They constitute the perfect (*perfectus*) path.⁷ It is especially through them that a Christian is enabled to develop those virtues (*virtutes*) which prevail over human vices (*vitia*). At the same time they effect correction and improvement with respect to the three dimensions of human life: the individual's relationship to God, his neighbors, and himself.

Humility, poverty, chastity against pride, the lust of the flesh and the eyes. For as by humility man disposes himself towards God and becomes pleasing to him, by poverty he disposes himself toward his neighbor and becomes pleasing to him, and by chastity he disposes himself toward himself and becomes pleasing to himself, so by pride he stands against and resists God, by avarice against his neighbor, and by intemperance against himself.⁸

As this passage shows, poverty, chastity, and obedience are not simply external kinds of conduct. Rather, through monastic discipline an inner attitude is to become outwardly visible, while at the same

time it is strengthened by that discipline. The demand for total obedience does not merely concern specific acts; it is directed at the person who acts, at his heart. This is what the Bible says, especially the Sermon on the Mount with its radical antitheses (Mt. 5:21-48) as the monastic tradition has always emphasized. For the monk Martin Luther it is a matter of course. Being obedient to God even in his innermost thought and will is what he strives for in his monastic life. In Jesus' words: "To love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind." But it is at this point that he comes up against an insuperable limitation, an experience that throws him first into despair and then leads him to a complete reorientation. Perfect obedience and perfect love is what he cannot achieve. He remains a sinner, never quite in accord with the will of God. He is able to follow the monastic Rule, to keep monastic discipline; as far as his outward behavior is concerned, he is a model monk. But the more perfect his behavior, the more oppressive the experience that he is not master of his will. Time and again there is selfishness and defiance, there is pride and lack of charity and thoughts that stray away from God. He seeks relief in the sacrament of penance and goes to confession as often as he can. His confessors tell him that he is creating problems where there are no problems; as long as he does not have to confess sins like murder, adultery, or theft, he need not worry; that what he is concerned about are "*Puppensünden*" ("a doll's sins"), sins that are small, childish, imaginary and trifling.⁹ Of course this is not a satisfactory answer. Luther need not have become a monk had he only wanted to steer clear of murder and adultery. For him being a monk is about a perfection in which the stirrings of the heart are not a children's game but are of the utmost significance.

For years Luther felt anguished by his inability to attain the goal of monastic life. Never would he be so perfect as to be acceptable in the eyes of God. The redeeming solution revealed itself only after years of meditation on the Holy Scriptures. His dilemma was impossible to solve because his entire spiritual life so far had been based upon false premises, false with respect to God's relationship to him and to all human beings. God did not expect of him what Luther and his monastic and ecclesiastical environment thought: that he win God's approval through perfection, that he appease the eternal judge

through obedience and thereby earn eternal life. God knows that sinners will never achieve perfection. And God himself presents the solution; he grants forgiveness, accepts and loves the sinner in spite of his sin, freely (*gratis*). Or, more basically, God accepts the sinner for the sake of Jesus Christ, who died for sinners. He no longer looks upon the sinner as such, but regards him in conjunction with Christ, and Christ's perfection is taken as the sinner's in the eyes of God.¹⁰ On this the Christian can rely and find peace of mind in his trust in Christ. Such trust, which only the Holy Spirit can give, is what we call faith (*fides*). Thus faith in Christ replaces the struggle for perfection. In faith, and "only in faith" (*sola fide*), humanity is what God wants it to be. For it is in faith that we realize and accept that we owe everything to Christ; it is in faith that we live "by grace alone" (*sola gratia*).

The discovery that he was accepted by God through Christ alone through faith alone and that he had no need of that ever elusive perfection became for the monk Martin Luther the great liberating event of his life. And there was another aspect to this discovery. Paradoxically now, once he had entered into this new relationship with God, the desired obedience became attainable. Now it was possible to love God and his fellows wholeheartedly, without reservation or self-interest. Freed from the need to strive for perfection in order to gain something for himself, liberated from the pressure to score points with God, as it were, in order to become acceptable to him, Luther's will was now able to turn toward God and toward his neighbor for their own sake. Freed from the need to win God's love through his own love of God, his heart, which in Christ had received God's love as a free gift, was now free to return this love.¹¹ Perfect in the eyes of God through the perfection of Christ, he is able to show the corresponding signs of this perfection in his own life, at least up to a point. Of course, in this world he would never reach the state of being without sin like the angels. But the decisive change has occurred: His heart, the very center of his being and source of all his actions, has been changed. Rooted in faith, he has become a good tree that brings forth good fruit, the fruits of perfection which the Sermon on the Mount describes.¹²

The monk Martin Luther had arrived at his goal: No longer afflicted by erroneous assumptions of perfection demanded of him, he embarked on a life of true perfection granted to him through faith in Jesus Christ. However, during his long years of meditation on the Scriptures Luther had gained yet another insight. These matters are not the concerns only of the monastics. Perfect obedience, perfect love of God and one's neighbor are the concerns of all Christians. It is not only from nuns and monks that God wants absolute love and devotion, but equally from those who lead their lives in the world. Thus the traditional distinction between "commandments" and "counsels" can no longer be sustained. The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is not just for the few. It is God's will that all Christians "do good and suffer ill, and that they are able and willing to do both heroically and to the utmost limits, like the martyrs."¹³

Therefore what the monk Martin Luther had discovered as the prerequisite for undivided love and devotion is valid not only for monks and nuns, but also for every Christian. Undivided love and devotion are the fruit of faith. And since it is through the sacrament of baptism that Christ's becoming one with humanity (which finds its realization in faith) comes about, undivided love and devotion are the fruit of baptism. Luther had recognized fairly early that the decisive step is not entering monastic life, but baptism. It is in baptism that we receive holiness;¹⁴ holier we cannot become. Therefore it is baptism from which springs a holy life.¹⁵ When he receives the sacrament of baptism the Christian pledges to lead such a holy life: he promises "to slay sin and to become holy."¹⁶ This is true of all Christians. "In baptism we all make one and the same vow: to slay sin and to become holy through the work and grace of God, to whom we yield and offer ourselves, as clay to the potter. In this no one is in a better position than another."¹⁷ Hence the monk is not in a "better position" than he who leads a secular life; a Christian wife and mother pleases God no less than a monk, perhaps even more.¹⁸

If it is true that the secular Christian is no less holy than the monk because both have received the same baptism; if in faith the one has the perfection of Christ no less than the other, and if this perfection disposes the one no less than the other to lead a holy life according to the Sermon on the Mount, then does it not follow that the monas-

tic life loses all purpose? One might get the impression that it was Luther's intention to abolish monasticism. But that is not the case. None of his remarks quoted above are intended to call into question monasticism as such; rather, his intention is to give it its true place. Monasticism is one of a number of ways to "exercise" one's baptism.¹⁹ For while it is true that "in baptism we all make one and the same vow . . . and no one is in a better position than another," it is no less true that "for a life in accordance with baptism, for the slaying of sin, there can be no one method and no one estate in life."²⁰ Christians must choose the way in which they want to lead their Christian lives, each according to their individual dispositions and circumstances, and one of the choices open to the baptized is monasticism. Monasticism is for those who believe that this is the best way for them to "complete their baptism," that is, live up to the consequences of their baptism.²¹ It is "just as though two men went to the same city, and the one went by the footpath, the other by the highway, just as each thought best."²² One person may lead a Christian life in the estate of matrimony with its joys and pains, another within the framework of monasticism. In other words, instead of a hierarchical structure, which places monasticism "above" secular life, there are now two equivalent Christian lifestyles. Yet Luther still sees one minor advantage to monasticism: Because it involves more suffering than married life it is better equipped to prepare for death, and therefore there is "more exercise" of baptism because in baptism we die to the world.²³ Whatever the choice, what matters (which unfortunately contemporary Christianity has forgotten) is "our baptism and what it means, what vows we made there and how we are supposed to walk in its works and to attain its purpose." Therefore it is decisive for all estates within the church to know "how we are to act in them for the fulfilling of our baptism."²⁴

Luther against Monasticism

While the monk Martin Luther was struggling for perfection, he had gradually come to realize that such perfection is different from, and is to be achieved by other means than, what he had imagined when he first began life as a monk. Simultaneously he had come to

realize that this perfection and the way to find it is the same for every Christian, for Christians “in the world” no less than for monks and nuns, even though they have chosen different lifestyles.

In the course of the years during which Luther developed these insights, he became more and more critical of monasticism and of those who lived the religious life. For a long time, however, his criticism was not intended to reject monasticism but to serve it. He wanted monastic life to be theologically and spiritually correct. Yet, around 1519/20, nearly fifteen years after entering the monastery, his criticism becomes sharper in tone and content, and in 1521 it culminates in his programmatic treatise *De votis monasticis iudicium* (*Judgment on the monastic vows*) and its verdict that it was legitimate, even necessary, to leave the monasteries.²⁵ The monastic institution was nothing but “a Babylon of error and ignorance, of disobedience and perfidy, sacrilege and blasphemy.”²⁶ Or, in the words from 1533 which we cited at the beginning, a monastery is a hell.²⁷

At the time, Luther was not the only one to criticize monks and monasteries. Many others were no less harsh in their attacks and equally drastic in their choice of words. This is true of critics within the religious orders, for example, in the controversy between observants and conventualists. And this is true of critics outside, like the humanists Erasmus of Rotterdam and Ulrich von Hutten, or of voices generally criticizing ecclesiastical abuses.²⁸ Yet again there is an essential difference. While the majority criticized the behavior of monks and nuns, their moral failures, the decline of discipline, the emptiness of the rituals (they attacked the unchaste monk, the rich monastery, the liturgically and spiritually lax convent), Luther had a different aim. We do find such criticisms in Luther, too, but only marginally. His central interest is, again, theological. What is the relationship between God and humanity that lies at the heart of monasticism? His conclusion is devastating: the attitude toward God which was the prime motive of the majority of the religious in entering the monastery and which formed the basis of their monastic lives directly contradicted the Christian faith. That is why Luther calls monasticism a Babylon and demands that people desert their monasteries.

Luther argues that hardly a monk or a nun has chosen the monastic life as a free response to the free gift of God's love in Jesus Christ.

The majority do not understand their monastic lives to be the fruit of faith and the expression of the new relationship with God which they have received in Christ. They do not regard their religious life as a way to mirror the perfection of Jesus Christ which they, like all Christians, have received in baptism and own in faith. Few, if any, see their monastic estate as just one possibility among others to do what all Christians are called upon to do, that is, live out the consequences of their baptism. Such an attitude towards monasticism is nowhere to be found among the monks and nuns of the day, as Luther knows only too well from his own experience, nor is it taught by the authorities of the orders and the church. What is supposed to be the objective and purpose of the monastic life, the motive which leads people to adopt it and the attitude which characterizes it, are actually quite different. Instead of being understood as the free response to God's free gift of love in Jesus Christ, monasticism is perceived as being instrumental in earning and intensifying his love. Instead of being the consequence of salvation,²⁹ it is considered to be the best way of earning it.³⁰ Monastic life was being chosen because it was believed to be especially conducive to or even indispensable for winning God's grace and becoming acceptable in his sight,³¹ because it was believed to be singularly meritorious,³² because it was expected it would reap unique rewards. "Show me, I beg you, a nun or a monk who is content with the penny common to us all."³³

Thus, instead of being an expression of the freedom that humanity has received in Christ, monasticism leads straight into slavery. This is not to be understood in the superficial sense of submitting oneself to a specifically regulated life; any Christian is free to do so, and every Christian must submit to regulations, one way or another, in any case.³⁴ But it is true in the sense that monasticism, if conceived as a means of salvation, destroys the freedom that is intrinsic to the Christian faith, being free from the obligation to fulfill certain conditions in order to be accepted by God.³⁵ The paradigm of such renewed slavery is the perpetual vows. Even when they are taken in free response to God's unconditional love, the fact that they are a lifelong obligation changes their character and makes them a condition of salvation. "You cannot point out a single monk (apart from a miracle) who is not bound fast by this sacrilegious and blasphemous idea

that he will be saved by keeping the rules of his order and actually damned if he does not.”³⁶ Suddenly Christian freedom is no more, or, put differently, certainty is no longer established by the fact that it suffices to rely on Jesus Christ alone.³⁷

Instead of being a way to “exercise one’s baptism,”³⁸ monastic life was considered to be a higher state of grace, which is why the taking of the vows is referred to as a second baptism.³⁹ Consequently baptism is degraded: it is only through the monastic life that true holiness is achieved; the holiness received in baptism (which is Christ’s holiness) is considered insufficient.⁴⁰ The result is a two-tiered system⁴¹ within Christianity. Only those who choose the monastic path are considered perfect; the rest who live “in the world,” notwithstanding that in baptism they have received Christ’s perfection,⁴² belong to a different and lower class of Christian.⁴³ “Who among the religious would allow himself to be put in the same class as a married man, a farmer, or a workman in the sight of God?”⁴⁴ This means, as a third consequence, that Christians “in the world” are exempt from living according to the perfection of Christ which is already theirs in faith. They are only obligated to live according to ordinary civil standards of righteousness, that is, simply follow the commandments; not for them the perfect obedience which is only the “counsel” of the Lord.⁴⁵ In contradiction to the clear message of the gospel, this system ignores the fact that Christ enables and expects all who bear his name to live up to this perfection.⁴⁶

Martin Luther’s attacks on monasticism had an immense effect. Obviously he had hit a nerve among countless monks and nuns who recognized their own experiences in the words of the Augustinian Hermit from Wittenberg.⁴⁷ In large numbers they left their monasteries; before long houses and convents had to be closed all across the country. “Monks and nuns are melting away and disappear like snow in the sun,” Luther commented.⁴⁸ Of course, there were also some men and women religious in the regions now becoming Protestant who were not convinced by Luther’s words; in some areas monastic life was interfered with and convents were closed by Protestant princes, sometimes with the use of force.⁴⁹ At any rate, in those parts where the Reformation took hold, monastic life soon came to an end.⁵⁰

Luther for Monastic Ideals

The Reformation thus spelled the end of monasticism in the Protestant churches. But it was like the case of the kernel of wheat (John 12:24). In dying it brought forth new life. What was good and true about monasticism or could be obtained through it was destined to live on by ceasing to be monastic. Not an elite within the church but all Christians were to become in a sense monastic. As was explicitly stated in a sermon in 1618 by the Wittenberg theologian Balthasar Meisner, one of the leading representatives of Lutheran Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century: "The Church is like a monastery . . . We are the monastic people inside it, we are all brothers and sisters in a house of God, in an order of Christians."⁵¹ Or to quote a modern historian: "It could be argued that the Reformation understood itself as a new kind of monasticism, or at least could be understood as such."⁵²

What is meant by this can be summarized in two double slogans. On the one hand, the Reformation brings about a delimitation and a universalization of monasticism; on the other hand, it brings about a radicalization and interiorization of the Christian life. In other words, monastic ideals are no longer limited to specific groups of people but are applied universally, and Christian life as such is to be lived radically and "from within." Both aspects are present in the first of the famous *Ninety-five Theses* which initiated the Reformation before the eyes of the general public: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent!' (Mt. 4:17); he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."⁵³ Our entire life is to be a life of repentance, not simply single, isolated acts or deeds, because repentance includes both the attitude that governs a person inwardly and also the outward behavior which results from it. This is a classic monastic concept. Now it is to be applied universally; the life of every Christian is to be a life of such comprehensive repentance. In positive terms, delimitation and universalization means that every Christian, young or old, man or woman, married or celibate, is called upon to fulfill God's will perfectly; no member of the church may assume he is exempt. Radicalization and interiorization, on the other hand, mean that to fulfill God's will, to which all Christians are called, is

not simply a matter of keeping the Commandments and living a socially acceptable life. Christianity is about surrendering one's entire life from within as Jesus himself exemplified and as he described it, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, when he specified how to deal with property, sexuality and other people's lives.⁵⁴ The Christian is not only supposed to refrain from stealing; because of his love for his neighbor, he will go without and give to others. The Christian will not only refrain from killing his enemy; because of his love of his enemy, he will forgive him and not resort to revenge, and so on. "These words of Christ, though impossible to man's natural mind, are nevertheless necessary commandments which apply to all Christians."⁵⁵

In short, Christianity is about following Christ in perfect love of God and of one's neighbor. Such perfect love is to determine the life of all Christians; it is the ethical principle guiding all who are baptized. They are called upon to live by it each in their own station, as father, mother, or celibate, in every profession and social class. "If you are a manual laborer, you will find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them."⁵⁶ Namely, every one of these ought to be used as a medium of love. Thus, filled with the love of God and of one's neighbor, all work becomes a religious service—another monastic principle that is being applied to all Christians and the way they conduct their lives. But the central truth that Luther had come to understand in the course of his life as a monk is also valid for all Christians: such love, which touches every aspect of one's life, including self-denial, suffering, and being disadvantaged, is only possible as a fruit of faith, faith which joins the Christians to Christ and grants them Christ's perfection. "Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss."⁵⁷ This quotation is from one of Luther's best-known works, *The Freedom of a Christian (De libertate Christiana)*, which ends: "We conclude, there-

fore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.”⁵⁸

However, this raises an objection which I do not want to ignore. Admittedly, neither where the Reformation took hold, nor anywhere else, was public life fully ordered and lived according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. As always there were, and of course still are, the police, the military, and the judicial system, by which citizens are to be protected from violence, instead of simply suffering it. There are economic structures that are designed, at best, to ensure a measure of justice, not loving renunciation of all worldly goods. All this is quite obvious. So is the reason why: these structures serve to preserve the world in view of its present condition of sin. For a Christian is “a rare bird;” people with the new heart of faith are “not very common.”⁵⁹ This means not only that in absolute terms Christians are a minority. It also means that of all the baptized only a minority actually “use” their baptism. And even those who “earnestly desire to be Christians”⁶⁰ are no angels and are not yet free from sin. Given this state of things, all social order would collapse were it not for those who are called upon to fight against evil, if need be by the use of force. Otherwise not only would faithful Christians suffer (for whom suffering might be regarded as part of their life as Christians), but violence and murder, unchecked exploitation, and the law of the jungle would also destroy society in general. For this reason there is a need, as long as the world exists, for structures and actions designed to ensure safety and juridical as well as social justice. God the creator himself requires them in order to preserve his creation until he will bring about the new heaven and the new earth.⁶¹

But does this not lead back to a double standard, to two different moral codes for Christians, in other words, to exactly the concept which Luther had rejected in his critique of monasticism? Indeed, he does speak of two different ethical codes.⁶² But they are not meant to be applied to two groups of Christians, a more demanding standard for the more radical, and a more moderate standard for ordi-

nary Christians. Rather, all Christians participate in both, the “monastic” and the civil ethical codes. With regard to their own lives, they are bound by the principles of love, suffering, and self-denial, which Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. But when Christians find themselves in positions of responsibility, be it in politics or in their professions, they must contribute to ensuring safety and justice for all by way of social and civil order, thereby, as it were, leaving their specific ethical sphere for that of the world.⁶³ Participation in these two codes of ethics is a constant balancing act. Which path to choose, which principle to apply, which code to follow in a given situation is always a matter of decision, and no Christian can take this decision on behalf of another or allow another one to do so for him. Each new situation demands a fresh decision, which, like any other in a Christian’s life, must be made in one’s heart, before God.⁶⁴

This is a highly ambitious spiritual concept. There is no denying the fact that in reality Protestant Christianity more often than not settled simply for a bourgeois and middle class code of ethics. We may compare this phenomenon to those symptoms of decline which we see time and again in the life of religious orders. And just as in the history of the religious orders there have always been protest movements, reforms, and revivals having the true Christian life as their goal, so such reforms have occurred in the history of the Protestant churches, for example, Pietism or various revival movements. But these revivals were, generally speaking,⁶⁵ aimed not at the reform of individual groups of Christians, but at leading the whole church back to Christian integrity. The universalization of monasticism which the Reformation had brought about also characterized the Protestant reform movements that were to follow.

To conclude this section I would like to point out that the universalization of monasticism brought about by the Reformation was not restricted to the principles of ecclesiology and ethics.⁶⁶ It also found its way into spiritual practice. Two examples may illustrate this: the importance of the Psalter and the Lutheran form of morning and evening prayer.

The Psalter, of course, has always been *the* prayer book in monastic tradition. When Luther was a monk and also later, nothing was dearer to his heart than the Psalter; no other book of the Bible was

as often the subject of his exegesis. This passion became his legacy to that part of Christendom that came under his influence. The Psalter came to be regarded as the “layman’s Bible.” A host of small, separate editions were printed for the use of those members of the congregation who were able to read. Every Christian, not just nuns and monks, was supposed to meditate on the psalms regularly and to learn as many of them by heart as possible. Another way of increasing the popularity of the Psalter was to compose hymns in the vernacular based on psalms. Luther had invented this new genre,⁶⁷ and many poets and composers in the churches adopted it. These hymns were free renderings of the psalms set to music, to be sung by the congregation. Thus the Latin Psalter, which had formed the core of the monastic hours, was replaced with a Psalter in the vernacular, which became part of the liturgy of all Christians.

In the Small Catechism, the most important handbook of Christian instruction of the Lutheran tradition and a basic element in the official teaching of the Lutheran church, we find a short order for morning and evening prayer, the “blessing for the morning” (*Morgensegen*) and the “blessing for the evening” (*Abendsegen*). These prayers are designed to mark the spiritual beginning and end of each day for the whole family. They are combined with the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and a hymn: a small breviary for the Christian household. The idea behind this practice is undeniably monastic, and of monastic origin are especially those parts that form the center of the short liturgy: the blessings for morning and evening. The former had been a traditional monastic morning blessing, now used by Luther, with only slight alterations, as the standard morning prayer for “the world,” with a parallel version made up for the evening.⁶⁸ For centuries and up to the present day Lutheran families have thus started and ended each day with a prayer that originally had its place in the monastery.

Lutherans and Monasticism

Martin Luther’s critique of monasticism evoked an enormous response from monks and nuns in Germany and beyond. Where the Reformation was taking hold, monastic life more or less came to an

end. However, we must not overlook Luther's positive comments about individual monks and the religious life, even amid his sharpest criticisms. Time and again he refers positively to some of the great monks of the past, for example, the fathers of the Egyptian desert especially St. Antony,⁶⁹ St. Francis of Assisi,⁷⁰ and most of all the one monk who influenced his spiritual development more than any other, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.⁷¹ He exempted them from his criticism because in his eyes these fathers had been different from the monasticism he attacked, and even where they had participated in its more problematic features, they had been able, amid structures that were wrong, to live a life that was spiritually right.⁷²

Luther's admission that in the past there had been monks who were different from the mainstream he is now attacking so sharply is mirrored in the positive picture of monasticism that is also to be found in *De votis monasticis*. Side by side with his sharp rejection of lifelong vows we find suggestions for alternative vows which would be legitimate because they would not contradict the gospel: "Look, O God, I vow to thee this kind of life, not because I think this is a way to attain righteousness and salvation or to make satisfaction for my sins. . . . [But] I take this way of life upon myself for the sake of disciplining my body, of serving my neighbor, and of meditating upon thy word. I do this just as another man may take up farming or a trade—everybody for his own exercise (*exercitium*)—without any thought of merit or justification, which exists before all this in faith."⁷³ The monastic path is not a "higher path" of special value in God's eyes and does not bring man any closer to him than he is already in Christ. It is one of several choices of how to live the consequences of one's faith, choices that have equal value in the eyes of God and differ in form only, according to each Christian's individual gifts and inclinations. The insight that the difference between the monastic and the non-monastic path is a difference between two lifestyles on the same level and that the difference does not imply superiority of the one over the other (the insight the young monk Martin Luther had gained before he ever contemplated leaving the monastery) also runs like a thread through his positive comments long after he had ceased to be a monk. If you become a monk "because either your situation has brought you to embrace this kind of life, or it appeared

to be the best way of life for you, without your thinking thereby that you are better than he who takes a wife or takes up farming, in that case you are neither wrong to take vows nor wrong to live this way.”⁷⁴ Phrases like “because either your situation brought you to embrace this kind of life” or “it appeared to be the best way of life for you” imply that a Christian has found in himself a particular gift and decides to live accordingly. For everyone must serve God “with the gift he has.”⁷⁵

This is done by the monk who lives in accordance with the Gospel “freely” (*gratis*),⁷⁶ without any claim to gain “an advantage . . . in [his] relationship with God,”⁷⁷ that is, without expecting to get any closer to God or to gain a greater share of salvation through monastic life. The decision in favor of the monastic life is taken “without any thought . . . [of] justification,” that is, of being thereby accepted by God.⁷⁸ Those who choose this way of life have received salvation and justification already, through faith in Christ; justification “exists before all this.”⁷⁹ Thus their monastic life is a lifestyle which their faith “uses”; it is an “exercise” of their faith,⁸⁰ as Luther puts it in a slight modification of the phrase “exercise of baptism” which we quoted earlier. Like all other ways of exercising one’s faith, this way is free before God; no one must be coerced or feel bound to remain within the monastic estate, as if otherwise there were the risk of falling into sin or from God’s grace. Permanent vows therefore are not compatible with legitimate monasticism. The decision in favor of this particular way, “if godly, must include the freedom to retract the vow.”⁸¹ Should circumstances change, whether external or personal, anyone who has chosen the monastic path must be free to renounce it, with no fear of God and no reproaches from others. The only principle that must never be violated is every Christian’s commitment to love.⁸²

If these are its governing principles, then monasticism is a good thing. Then monks and nuns pursue this path simply “because by virtue of this Spirit of freedom it brings them joy,”⁸³ because the Holy Spirit moves them to live in this and no other way.⁸⁴ If monasticism were practiced like this, there would be no reason to abolish it. If it had been like this, Luther says in a letter to the aged Benedictine abbot Heino Gottschalk of Oldenstadt, he would have remained in

the monastery.⁸⁵ He goes on to defend and to encourage monks, nuns, and convents who have reorganized their monastic life according to the principles of the Reformation, like Heino and his fellow monks have done. Because Heino was distressed by the anti-monastic measures taken by his Duke, Luther writes to him. A monk who, like Heino Gottschalk, leads his life in accordance with the Gospel, may “with great benefit remain in the monastery,” and indeed should do so “in the freedom of the Spirit.”⁸⁶ In several other cases Luther makes similar statements.⁸⁷ The best known is his defense of the Brethren of the Common Life of Herford. They, too, had changed their monastic life according to the principles of the Reformation. Yet they were attacked by Protestant pastors, and the local council threatened to close their house. Asked for his support, Luther wrote to the council “such communities are extraordinarily pleasing to me,”⁸⁸ and observed that at Herford the old monastic habit and Christian freedom were joined in a happy union.⁸⁹ To the Brethren themselves he wrote in a similar vein: “Your way of life, since you teach and live according to the Gospel, pleases me no end.” If only “there had been, and today there were more convents like yours! . . . Abide by your way of life and use it to spread the Gospel (as you do)!”⁹⁰

Some convents and monasteries of this kind were indeed able to live on.⁹¹ These communities followed strict rules in the tradition of the old orders,⁹² which included obedience towards the abbot/abbess or prior/prioress, celibacy, monastic hours, and a monastic habit. There were no vows. Any supposed superiority of the religious life over life in the world was rejected.⁹³ Here Luther’s ideas of a legitimate religious life were indeed realized, but these convents were few and far between.⁹⁴ Practically none of them have survived, or, if they have, they have changed almost beyond recognition.

But for several decades now there has been a change. We observe a “*mouvement de communautés*” in the churches of the Reformation, a movement to rediscover life in religious communities.⁹⁵ There are a number of contributing factors. On the one hand, there is a new development within the Protestant churches themselves. Quite a few Protestant Christians feel that something is missing in the church if there are no monastic communities, no possibilities of re-

alizing this particular way of life. On the other hand, there is the modern ecumenical movement which has brought many Protestants into contact with male and female religious (monastics) from other denominations, in particular, Roman Catholicism. The spiritual attitude shown by many of them, especially after Vatican II, has little in common with the monasticism Luther criticized. Many Roman Catholic monks and nuns will readily concede that the religious life is not superior to other ways of being a Christian, but one particular way of living the faith common to all.⁹⁶ Thus it is much easier today for Protestants to see the positive side of this way of life and to ask whether their own church might not, in this respect, find something to learn.⁹⁷ Both factors have directed attention to Luther's more positive comments on monasticism, which at other times had been overlooked in favor of his more critical judgments.⁹⁸

After the nineteenth century had already seen a massive revival of a kind of Protestant monastic life, namely, the flourishing houses of deaconesses (*Diakonissenanstalten*),⁹⁹ a host of new religious communities have come into existence in the Protestant churches since World War II. They call themselves "communities" (*communautés*), thus indicating that they have a regulated communal life without being simply Protestant copies of the traditional orders.¹⁰⁰ The best known are those of Reformed provenance, like Taizé or Grandchamps. But there are quite a few Lutheran communities, too. The latest report of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland lists no fewer than 27 religious communities, mainly Lutheran, some of which have several branches and subdivisions.¹⁰¹ Similar developments can be observed elsewhere, such as in Scandinavia or in the United States.

This is a most welcome development. It provides Protestant churches with a type of Christian lifestyle which, although it obviously had to be sacrificed in the sixteenth century for the sake of the integrity of the faith, in our time can greatly contribute to their spiritual health. This is true in several ways; here I only mention two. First, the existence of a monastic beside a non-monastic lifestyle takes into account the individual variety among Christians, the multiplicity of spiritual inclinations and capacities, the diversity of charisms within the church. This aspect had been stressed in Martin Luther's reflections on monasticism referred to above.¹⁰² But it was largely for-

gotten in the history of the Lutheran as well as in that of the other Protestant churches. To rediscover it today is all the more important as modern society tends towards ever greater diversity of life. Monasticism can give spiritual depth to this phenomenon while, at the same time, keeping it from leading to destructive fragmentation.

Second, the rediscovery of monastic life in Protestantism today concerns not only individual Christians, but also the church as a whole. Monastic life, if lived and understood in the right way, can be a symbolic realization of the essence of Christian existence precisely as the Reformation had rediscovered it, and can thus help all believers to realize this essence in their own lives. In concrete terms, monasticism is a specific way of living out that which characterizes Christian life as such: perfection in Christ, a perfection which is substantially that of the incarnate Son of God, but is made ours in faith and lived out in a life of unreserved love. Members of monastic communities do not have more of this perfection, which would be a contradiction in terms. But they realize it in their own way, in a symbolic one-sidedness, a conscious reduction of complexity. By limiting their participation in common social life, they renounce the fullness of the human dimension that is given to all people for living out their lives, and given to Christians as the arena in which to live their faith and to express their love. Yet they concentrate on lending visible expression to the completeness of trust in Christ, which is at the heart of the Christian faith, and to the freedom of letting go and giving away which is at the heart of Christian love.¹⁰³ Such one-sidedness is at the same time easier and more difficult than the "ordinary" Christian life. It is easier because monastic life with its limited range of involvements and responsibilities requires less of that arduous task of deciding on the right code of behavior in given contexts and situations, and involves perhaps less of that danger of falling back into a complacent middle-of-the-road Christianity mentioned above. It is more difficult because renouncing vital dimensions of life is, of course, not congenial to human nature. At the end of the day, however, it is a matter of spiritual inclination and spiritual choice. Those choosing the conscious one-sidedness of monastic existence are living symbols of that radical belonging to God that is the core of every Christian's life. Thus they are a con-

stant reminder to their fellow Christians of the spiritual center that keeps them focused in the middle of their own manifold lives: Jesus Christ.

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NOTES

1. *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 60 vols. J.F.K. Knaake, et al., eds., (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 38:148, 30-32 [Hereafter WA]. "Ein Kloster ist ein Helle, darinn der Teuffel Abt und Prior ist, Munch und Nonnen die verdampften seelen."
2. WA 38:147, 1-3: "wenn du das wort Munch horest, das es gleich so viel sey als horesttu das wort Verleugnetter Christ, Apostata vom glauben Christi, Ein bundgenos des Teuffels."
3. Johannes Schilling, *Gewesene Mönche. Lebensgeschichten in der Reformation*. Vorträge 26 in *Schriften des Historischen Kollegs* (München: Stiftung Historisches Kolleg, 1990), 33.
4. WA 38:143, 25-28.
5. Otto Scheel, ed. *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung*, 2nd edition (Tübingen: Mohr, 1929), no. 534.
6. For example, WA 4:202, 29-31; WA 2:168, 6f.; *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, eds., (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 44:9 [Hereafter LW]. WA 56:62, 29-63, 19; LW 25:55.
7. WA 56:62, 29.
8. WA 4:155, 20-25: humilitas, pautertas, castitas, contra superbiam vitae, concupiscentiam carnis et oculorum. Sicut enim per humilitatem ad deum, per paupertatem ad proximum, per castitatem ad seipsum disponitur et placet: ita per superbiam deo, per avaritiam proximo, per intemperantiam sibi dissentit et resistit.
9. WA TR 6, no. 6669.
10. Cf. WA 2:495, 2-4 and 10-13; LW 27:227-228: "While he [sc. the believer] is being justified and healed, the sin that is left in his flesh is not imputed to him. This is because Christ, who is entirely without sin, has now become one with His Christian and intercedes for him with the Father. . . Therefore all such statements praising the righteous are to be understood in the same way, namely, that the righteous are not wholly perfect in themselves, but God accounts them righteous and forgives them because of their faith in His Son Jesus Christ, who is our Propitiation." Cf. also the way Luther puts it later, e.g. WA 37:57, 23-25: "Whatever we do in this life, God does not [want to] regard it as impure in itself, but everything is to be holy, precious and pleasing through this child [sc. His Son] who through His life makes the whole world holy!" WA 46:44, 34-38; LW 24:347: "This is a peculiar righteousness; it is strange indeed that we are to be called righteous or to possess a righteousness which is really no work, no thought, in short, nothing whatever in us but is entirely outside us in Christ and yet becomes truly ours by reason of His grace and gift, and becomes our very own, as though we ourselves had achieved and earned it."
11. WA 7:23, 30-32; 24:9-15: "The commandments teach us and prescribe manifold good works, but this does not get them done. . . Then comes the other word, the divine promise, and says. . . be-

hold, believe in Christ in whom I declare you to have all grace, justice, peace, and freedom. If you believe, you have; if you do not believe, you have not. For what is impossible to you by all the works of the commandments, . . . you receive easily and at once by faith."

12. WA 7:32, 13-27: "Just as the tree has to come before the fruit, and the fruit makes the tree neither good nor bad, but rather the tree makes the fruit, thus man first has to be good or bad in his person, before he does good works or bad. . . . But just as faith makes [sc. a person] good, in the same manner good works are made by faith."

13. WA 4:286, 37f.: "bona facere et mala pati, utrumque heroico more et extremo et summo posse atque velle, ut in martyribus." Obviously these maxims echo the Sermon on the Mount, and Luther says (*ibid.*, 35) that these are "mandata," i.e. commandments which are valid for all, not "consilia" which represent the special ethics of those who choose a higher path.

14. WA 57:194, 2-8.

15. WA 2:735, 19-38; LW 35:40-41: Such a holy life is "the consequence of baptism."

16. WA 2:735, 35f.

17. WA 2:34-37; LW 35:41.

18. WA 56:427, 26-428, 6; LW 25:419-20.

19. WA 2:736, 12-18; LW 35:41. It is an "exercise" (*Übung*) of baptism.

20. WA 2:735, 37-736, 1; LW 35:41.

21. WA 2:736, 3-7; LW 35:41. "It is true, then, that there is no vow higher, better or greater than the vow of baptism. . . . Over and above this vow, a person may indeed bind himself to an estate which will be suitable to him and helpful for the completion of his baptism."

22. WA 2:736, 7f.; LW 35:41.

23. WA 2:736, 12; LW 35:41. This is even more true, however, of those who hold ecclesiastical office because they also suffer on behalf of those for whom they are responsible (see also lines 18-22).

24. WA 2:736, 25-29; LW 35:42.

25. WA 8:658, 12f.; LW 44:383: habes hic autoritate Christi, ut liceat, immo oporteat redire [from the monastery back into the "world"].

26. WA 8:638, 33-35; LW 44:351. Babylonem quandam errorum, ignorantiarum, inoboedientiarum, perfidiarum, sacrilegiorum, blasphemiarum.

27. See above, footnote 1.

28. For example, the Gravamina-movement.

29. Salvation (*salus*) must come before works, even monastic works (WA 8:605, 21; LW 44:264). And this means, for example, in the case of chastity: "It is therefore Christ's intent that chastity should be a servant of the kingdom of heaven (*serva regni coelorum*), and a willing servant, not something which earns the kingdom, for it already possesses the kingdom (*non quae illud mereatur, sed iam habet*)." (WA 8:585, 24f.; LW 44:264).

30. WA 8:598, 19-22; LW 44:285. WA 38:159, 26f.

31. WA 8:596, 7-9, 15f.; LW 44:281.

32. WA 8:611, 3f.; LW 44:305.

33. WA 8:610, 27f.; LW 44:305 (cf. Mt. 20:11f.)

34. WA 8:609, 38f.; LW 44:303.

35. It is important not to misunderstand what Luther means by freedom. Freedom does not mean moral indifference or abolishing Christian ethics. What it does mean is freedom from all conditions in our relationship with God. See e.g. WA 8:606, 30-32; LW 44:298: "Christian or evangelical freedom, then, is a freedom of conscience which liberates the conscience from works. Not that no works be done, but no faith be put in them" (*Est itaque libertas Christiana seu Evangelica libertas conscientiae, qua solvitur conscientia ab operibus, non ut nulla fiant, sed ut in nulla confidat*). Good works are an integral part of the Christian life; since faith in Jesus Christ cannot be without fruit, "these can be no more omitted than can faith itself" (*non possunt magis omitti quam ipsa fides*), "nor are they less necessary than faith" (*nec sunt minus necessaria quam fides*), WA 8:608, 31f.; LW 44:301.

36. WA 8:619, 39-620, 2; LW 44:320. See also WA 8:618, 33-35; LW 44:319: A monk who has taken eternal vows is a prisoner to the idea that "you cannot be saved unless you keep the rules of your order, and you can only be saved if you do!"

37. WA 8:619, 9-13; LW 44:319-320. Especially see line 13: The monk who believes that he can only be saved if he keeps his eternal vows relies on "works and merits over and above the works and merits of Christ."

38. See above, footnote 19.

39. WA 38:158, 7f.; see also WA 38:147, 23-34; 151, 26f.; WA 38:595, 29-31; 618, 10f.

40. WA 38:149, 33-150, 9.

41. WA 8:584, 23f.; LW 44:262.

42. See above, footnote 10.

43. WA 38:159, 3-9.

44. WA 38:610, 17f.

45. WA 38:610, 11-18.

46. WA 8:581, 19-582, 36; LW 44:257-58. Luther notes with approval that St. Francis of Assisi declared the Gospel itself to be the Rule of his order (WA 8:579, 26f.; LW 44:255). But that is exactly the reason why he should not have made it a Rule only for one order, because thereby "he made the universal gospel intended for all the faithful into a special rule for the few. What Christ wanted to be universal and catholic, Francis made schismatic." (WA 8:579, 40-580, 1; LW 44:255). Besides, to select only the three monastic vows from the entire range of perfect obedience we find in the New Testament is nothing but arbitrary; as can be seen from the Sermon on the Mount, there are many more maxims that ought to be included in the "counsels" for those who seek perfection (WA 8:586, 6-12; LW 44:265).

47. Cf. the reports of former monks and nuns in Schilling, *Gewesene Mönche* (see footnote 3).

48. WA TR 2, no. 2359.

49. Such measures, "i.e. secularization, reorganization, even the closure of convents were nothing new or unheard of... they were actually quite common occurrences in line with late medieval church government and policy." See Werner Ziegler, *Reformation und Klostersauflösung in Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, Kaspar Elm, ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 585-614, esp. 594. In the late Middle Ages, both secular and ecclesiastical authorities resorted to these measures for various reasons. Mostly the motive was to lay their hands on the monastery's property. In his own time, Luther was sharply critical of this practice, see e.g. WA TR 2, no. 1947.

50. For the few exceptions see below.

51. "Die Kirche ist gleich als ein Kloster... Wir sind die Kloster-Leute darinnen / wir allesamt sind Bruder und Schwestern in einem hause Gottes / in einem Christen-Orden." *Geistreiche / Wolgegründete Predigten Über das Edle teure Buch der Augspurgischen / nunmehr vor Hundert Jahren übergebenen Confession. Gehalten zu Wittenberg / in der Schlos-Kirchen / im 1618. und folgenden Jahren / Durch Balthasarem Meisnerum... Aufgesetzt / von M. Johanne Lucio. I. Teil. Wittenberg 1630, 3.*

52. Schilling, *Gewesene Mönche*, 28.

53. Dominus et magister noster Iesus Christus dicendo, 'Penitentiam agite etc.' omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit. WA 1:233, 10f.; LW 31:25.

54. See Luther's sermons on Mt. 5-7 (WA 32:299ff.; LW 21:3). See also WA 11:248, 32-250, 9; LW 45:87-89. WA 28:282, 19-24; WA 39/II:189, 29f.; LW 34:306.

55. WA 8:581, 31f.; LW 44:258. Cf. WA 11:245, 20-25; LW 45:81. WA 11:249, 14-18; LW 45:87-88. WA 28:282, 19. WA 32:299, 28; LW 21:3. WA 39/II: 189, 29f.; LW 34:306.

56. WA 32:495, 29f.; LW 21:237.

57. WA 7:66, 7-10 (and 36, 3f.); LW 31:367: Ecce sic fluit ex fide caritas et gaudium in domino et ex charitate hilaris, libens, liber animus ad sponte serviendum proximo, ita ut nullam habeat rationem gratitudinis, ingratiutinis, laudis ac vituperii, lucri aut damni.

58. WA 7:69, 12-16 (and 38, 6-10); LW 31:371: Concludimus itaque, Christianum hominem non vivere in seipso, sed in Christo et proximo suo, aut Christianum non esse, in Christo per fidem, in proximo per charitatem: per fidem sursum rapitur supra se in deum, rursus per charitatem labitur infra se in proximum, manens tamen semper in deo et charitate eius.

59. WA 18:310, 16, 15, and 15, 13f.; LW 46:29.

60. WA 19:75, 5; LW 53:63.

61. WA 11:251, 22-253, 18; LW 45:91-93. WA 15:302, 14-29; LW 45:258. WA 15:306, 28-36; LW 45:263. WA 17/1:333, 17-29.

62. These are the two ethical codes of the two realms, the two ways in which God rules the world ("Zwei-Regimenten-Lehre"). On the one hand there is God's government of the world by means of those structures and mandates which God has given to all mankind in order to preserve the world. On the other hand there is God's government by the Holy Spirit in faith, whose standards apply only to Christians. Luther obviously is inspired by Augustine's concept of the two *civitates*, but in contrast to the North African theologian he insists that the realm of the world, too, has to be characterized primarily as governed by God.

63. WA 11:253, 19-35; LW 45:93-94.

64. WA Br 3, no. 861, 484, 5-485, 1 and 22-24.

65. In the case of Pietism the matter is more complex. After Lutheran Orthodoxy had upheld the ideal of the "general reformation of the church," Philipp Jakob Spener, the father of Pietism, propagated the idea of concentrating on the spiritual edification of those members of the parishes "willing" to be edified, in order to improve the spiritual condition of the whole church in this way (see the preface to his influential program *Pia desideria* from 1675). August Hermann Francke aimed directly at the improvement of the church's condition by way of fostering a spiritual élite, namely, spiritually mature pastors. Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf again propagated the edification of "the pious ones" as a means of reforming the church from within. But there were also radical pietistic groups who had given up the ideal of reforming the whole church and chose the way of a separate life for the perfect Christians.

66. Even on the principle level, there are a number of other examples. For example, the idea of the Church as a spiritual community instead of a hierarchic structure, an idea dear to the Reformation, has monastic roots. See Reinhard Schwarz, *Luthers unveräußerliche Erbschaft an der monastischen Theologie in Kloster Amelungsborn 1135-1985*. Gerhard Ruhbach and Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, eds. (Hannover: Kloster Amelungsborn, 1985), 209-231, esp. 217-220; "Luther's unalienable inheritance of monastic theology" *American Benedictine Review* 39 (1988): 430-450, esp. 443-446. Karl Holl points out that Luther's idea resembles that of St. Basil the Great, except that Basil believed that his ideal of the Christian community could only be realized in a monastic framework, while Luther applied it to the whole church. See Karl Holl, *Die Entstehung von Luthers Kirchenbegriff in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte I. Luther*, 6th edition (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932), 288-325, esp. 300f. The same is true for the high regard for the Christian's work "in the world" as a true "calling" (*Beruf*); before Luther the only "calling" of value was that to monastic life. Cf. Karl Holl, *Die Geschichte des Wortes Beruf in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte III. Der Westen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), 189-219, esp. 214-219. We could also mention Luther's existential, experience-related understanding of theology which puts him much closer to the monastic than to the scholastic tradition. Cf. Ulrich Köpf, *Monastische Traditionen bei Luther in Luther—zwischen den Zeiten. Eine Jenaer Ringvorlesung*, Christoph Marksches and Michael Trowitzsch, eds. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 17-35, esp. 30f.

67. The most famous example being, of course, the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God," based on Ps.46.

68. The original prayer came from a Latin collection of late medieval texts and spiritual instructions by the Dutchman Johannes Mauburnus (d. 1501/02). Here, too, it was to be combined with other liturgical elements, of which Luther kept only the first, an invocation of the Trinity together with the sign of the cross (in Mauburnus the invocation was christological, followed by the above-mentioned prayer, a petition to the Blessed Virgin Mary asking her blessing, a psalm of praise and a hymn to the Virgin which referred to her as the source of our salvation and our praise). In Luther's version the prayer is in German, therefore shorter and stylistically more simple than the original, but in other respects more specific. E.g., Luther gives thanks for "protection during the night from all perils and dangers" (where Mauburnus has only a general thanksgiving for protection at night), he asks for protection from "all sin and evil, that my entire life and work my please thee" (where Mauburnus asks that "my service [servitus] may be pleasing to thee"). Luther also added a formula of commitment which

entrusts one's whole life to God, and a plea for protection by God's guardian angel. See WA 30/I:394, 3-5. Cf. Mauburnus, Rosetum . . . , Basel 1504f. VIIIrv (to be found in parts in E. Sander, "Miscellen zum frühen und späten Luther als Ergänzungen und Berichtigungen zur Weimarer Ausgabe" *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 56 (1937):593-604, esp. 599.

69. WA 8:578, 16; LW 44:253. See also WA 8:646, 11; LW 44:363, where Luther refers to "the old monks and hermits," and WA 8:612, 8; LW 44:308, his reference to the *Vita Patrum*.

70. WA 8:587, 32-588, 2; LW 44:268. In Luther's eyes, St. Francis' good impulses were corrupted by those who came after him. Cf. also above footnote 46.

71. WA 8:601, 18; LW 44:290. WA 8:612, 27; LW 44:308. WA 8:617, 9; LW 44:316. WA 8:622, 28; LW 44:325. WA 8:628, 25; LW 44:334.

72. WA 8:617, 9-13; LW 44:316. WA 8:658, 15-20; LW 44:383.

73. WA 8:604, 10-22; LW 44:294.

74. WA 8:610, 7-10; LW 44:304.

75. WA 8:612, 4f.; LW 44:308.

76. WA 8:612, 4; LW 44:308.

77. WA 8:610, 6f.; LW 44:304.

78. See above, footnote 73.

79. Cf. WA 8:604, 22; LW 44:294, prior. See the full quotation in footnote 73.

80. WA 8:604, 33; LW 44:295: *usus et exercitium*.

81. WA 8:614, 11f.; LW 44:311. Heinz-Meinolf Stamm, *Luthers Stellung zum Ordensleben* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980), 161, who looks at Luther's critique from a Roman Catholic point of view and emphasizes its positive aspects, and claims that Luther did not in fact reject eternal vows but only a specific understanding of them. But Stamm misses the point; Luther says quite clearly that "the monastic vow is by its very nature (*ex natura sua*) contrary to the word of God, the gospel, faith, Christian freedom and the commandments of God." See WA 8:640, 25f.; LW 44:354, and WA 8:612, 34; LW 44:309. Quite another matter is the *res votorum*, that is, the way of life to which monks and nuns commit themselves, which is not to be rejected. See WA 8:161, 36f. LW 44:316. But committing oneself to it by lifelong vows is in contradiction to the Gospel, to faith, and to freedom, because the monk will believe that his standing in the eyes of God depends on keeping the vows, that his salvation would be in jeopardy if he revoked them, and because he would abide by his choice not "for the joy it brings" (cf. below footnote 81) but because he has vowed to do so; otherwise there would be no need of their irrevocability. Besides, the actual practice of dispensations showed that irrevocability was not always insisted upon, with significant inconsistencies in granting exceptions to the rule. See WA 8:633, 36-639, 24; LW 44:343-352. In view of this distressing practice the appropriate and legitimate form of taking the vows, e.g. regarding celibacy, could only be something along the following lines: "I vow to thee chastity as long as I can; but when I find I cannot keep this vow that I be allowed to marry." WA 8:633, 1f.; LW 44:341-42.

82. WA 8:664, 22f.; LW 44:393. There may even be cases in which love actually demands that the monastic life be given up. WA 8:610, 10f.; LW 44:304.

83. WA 8:655, 3; LW 44:377.

84. WA 8:654, 37f.; LW 44:377.

85. WA Br 4, no. 1228, 391, 37f.

86. WA Br 4, no. 1228, 391, 18 and 32f. Abbot Heino in fact remained a protestant monk to the end of his life. Significantly, he had no objection to the Duke seizing the monastery's property; at last, so he said, he was free from all concerns of money and possessions. See Stamm, *Luthers Stellung zum Ordensleben*, 151f.

87. For example, in the case of abbess Elisabeth of Gernrode, also a Benedictine. See WA Br 5, no. 1425, 84, 73.

88. WA Br 6, no. 1900, 255, 16f.

89. WA Br 7, no. 2144, 113, 7f.

90. WA Br 6, no. 1901, 255, 8-256, 1 and 14f.

91. The majority were transformed into institutions which showed at least some monastic features: Some monasteries were joined with schools and became responsible for their liturgical life, others were simply transformed into schools in which pupils and teachers lived together along monastic lines. Cf. Johannes Halkenhäuser, *Kirche und Kommunität. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und zum Auftrag der kommunitären Bewegung in den Kirchen der Reformation* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1978), 68f., esp. 90, 102. That many monasteries closed completely need not be delineated here; geographically the picture varies considerably.

92. They adapted the rules of the Augustinians, Cistercians and, generally, the Benedictines. See Halkenhäuser, *Kirche und Kommunität*, 90-103.

93. Halkenhäuser, 91-95 and 99-102.

94. There were a small number of convents in northern Germany, mostly for women, which survived because they continued the medieval tradition of offering a way of life to unmarried female members of the aristocracy. See Halkenhäuser, 82-105.

95. See, for example, Giovanni Miegge, "Monachesimo protestante," *La Luce* 35 (1945), n. 49, 3, and Halkenhäuser.

96. The official Roman Catholic position according to Vatican II is not quite as unproblematic. Although some documents (*Lumen Gentium*, 44) make an attempt to concede that it is a mark of every Christian's life to follow Christ, others speak of "perfection" (e.g. the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, which deals with the religious orders) in close connection with the three Counsels (*Perfectae Caritatis* 1), and refer to those who live in a monastic setting as living "wholly for God" and in renunciation of the world (*Perfectae Caritatis* 5). On the other hand the same document says that the religious life is only of an symbolic nature (Art. 5, quoted below in footnote 103; see the edition in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* and its critical comment on the apparent ambivalence). Another problem for Protestants is the fact that the same word, "consecration" (*consecratio*) is used both for baptism and the taking of vows, even though the second is conceived as rooted in the first. And finally there remains the special difficulty of the permanent vows.

97. The new Roman Catholic view of monasticism has in turn led to a new understanding of Luther's critique among Roman Catholic theologians. Thus e.g. Otto Hermann Pesch: "The exciting thing about Luther's critique of monasticism is that we read it today with realistic hope for a religious life of the future, in view of which all his criticism would be not only unjust, but totally unfounded." See his *Luthers Kritik am Mönchtum in katholischer Sicht in Strukturen christlicher Existenz. Beiträge zur Erneuerung des geistlichen Lebens*, Heinrich Schlier; Emmanuel von Severus; Josef Sudbrack; A. Pereira, eds. (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1968), 81-96 and 371-374, esp. 96). Cf. also René H. Esnault, *Luther et le monachisme aujourd'hui. Lecture actuelle du De votis monasticis iudicium* (Geneva and Paris: Labor et Fides, 1964). In this context also belongs Stamm's *Luthers Stellung zum Ordensleben* cited above (footnote 81).

98. For example, Luther's letter to the Brethren of Herford "is frequently cited in protestant convents." See Halkenhäuser, 65 and footnote 91.

99. I can only make a passing reference to earlier developments, for example, the occasional spiritual communities of 18th-century Pietism (the pilgrims' hut of G. Tersteegen and his followers, the monastery of Ephrata in Pennsylvania).

100. Cf. E. Müller-Gangloff, "Korrespondenz über 'Kommunität,'" *Quatember* 20 (1955/56):158: "community" is an excellent term, because, on the one hand, it is richer than the term 'brotherhood,' on the other hand, it is more modest and less pretentious than 'order' . . . Community means more than brotherhood, less than monastery, and characterises more accurately than order what these new Protestant monastic groups are about." One should not put too much emphasis on terminology, however; after all, there is some variation as to how protestant communities refer to themselves. Some actually use terms like "ordo," "brotherhood," "sisterhood" etc.

101. "Die evangelischen Kommunitäten." *Bericht des Beauftragten des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland für den Kontakt zu den evangelischen Kommunitäten*, written by Ulrich Wilckens (Hannover: Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 1997), Text 62. p. 36-38. There are also

about thirty communities whose members do not live together permanently and which in some cases include couples and families.

102. See p. 144.

103. This understanding converges with the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* 5 of Vatican II insofar as here, too, monastic life is referred to as an "expression," namely, of baptism. But with regard to the qualification of this "expression," it states the exact opposite. According to *Perfectae Caritatis* monasticism is a "fuller expression" (*plenius exprimit*) of baptism, not a lifestyle of conscious onesidedness as presented here.