

This title-page woodcut for the German version of Luther's sermon (in 1520 German: *Predig*) on the two kinds of righteousness features the title of the sermon within a richly ornamented frame. However, the adjective *beautiful* (in German: *schön*) has been added to the title of the sermon, and it states that its author, Martin Luther, is an Augustinian friar attached to (the University of) Wittenberg.

Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness

1519

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INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther wrote two Latin sermons on righteousness,^a the *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness* (*Sermo de duplici iustitia*), which he composed first, and the *Sermon on Three Kinds of Righteousness* (*Sermo de triplici iustitia*), which he published first.^b It has been a matter of discussion whether Luther wrote the first text in late 1518 or early 1519, but it is most likely that the *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness* was originally preached on Palm Sunday, 28 March 1518, and then published in both an unauthorized and an authorized version in 1519. Luther wrote about the sermon, along with another sermon on matrimony, in a letter to Johannes Lang (c. 1487–1548) on 13 April 1519; since it is based on Philippians 2:5–11, the pericope for Palm Sunday, it is assumed that it was preached in 1518. There is no doubt that the text is one of Luther’s early reformatory works composed in the aftermath of his *95 Theses* in 1517 when he was forced to

^a Except where noted, the Latin words *iustus* and *iustitia* will be translated “righteous” and “righteousness,” not “justice,” which in current English usage denotes legal conformity to a legal principle.

^b Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, Volume 1: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 229–31.

1. Cardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534) was an Italian Dominican, general of the Dominican Order, and a Scholastic who specialized in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Cajetan was a leading spokesperson of the papal opposition to Luther and the pope's legate at the Diet of Augsburg in October 1518. He remained a zealous opponent of the Reformation till his death. For further details, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, Volume 1: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 246–62.

2. Johann Eck (1486–1543) was a German Scholastic and a strong opponent of Luther. He attempted to persuade Elector Frederick III of Saxony (1463–1525) to have Luther's work burned in public and also induced the authorities at the universities of Cologne and Leuven to condemn Luther's work. In July 1520, he returned from Rome to Germany as Pope Leo X's spokesperson, with the pope's bull *Exsurge Domine* ("Arise, O Lord"), which condemned forty-one propositions of Luther as either heretical or erroneous. Luther refused to recant and burned a copy of the bull on 10 December 1520 after having composed his appeal, *The Freedom of a Christian*, dedicated to the pope.

explain and justify his views, particularly in the disputations with Cardinal Cajetan¹ in 1518 and with Johann Eck² in 1519. The sermon was translated into German by Georg Spalatin³ in 1520, the year of some of Luther's epoch-making publications,



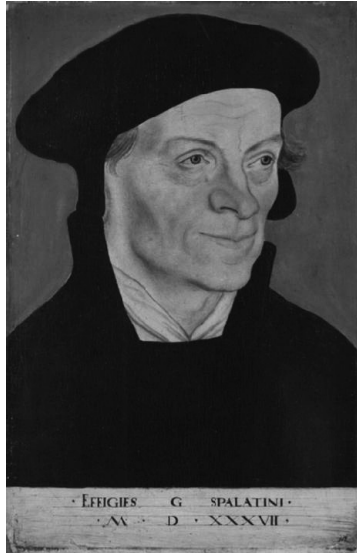
Cardinal Cajetan, baptized Giacomo de Vio, is best known for his interview of Luther at Augsburg in 1518, but he was also a prolific theologian in his own right who authored more than 150 works and would produce an influential—and controversial—interpretation of Thomas Aquinas.

Portrait of Johann Eck (1486–1543), a theologian and defender of the Catholic faith who opposed Luther.



natus in pago Eck. 13 Nov. 1486 Obiit 10 Febr. 1543 aet. 57
Procancelarius Acad. Ingolstadt.

Portrait of Georg Spalatin
by Lucas Cranach the Elder
(1472–1553).



such as *Address to the Christian Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*, where he unfolds many of the ideas developed in this sermon.⁴

The sermon, admonishing in character, is theologically far more complicated than its brevity might suggest. It can be divided into two main parts, each representing one of the themes that became vital first in Luther's reformation and later in the reception of Luther: the theme of righteousness and the theme of the two regimes. While the sermon as such takes its point of departure in Philippians 2:5f: "have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus,"^c it is only in the first part that Luther deals with the two kinds of righteousness of a Christian: the primary, alien righteousness (*iustitia aliena*) and the secondary, proper righteousness (*iustitia propria*), based on the servant Christology of the Philippian hymn.⁵ In order to

^c All Bible quotations follow Luther's original wording. Since Luther employed the Vulgate in 1518, it would make no sense to refer to the NRSV or any other modern Bible version when translating his biblical citations.

3. Georg Spalatin (1484–1545), captivated with Luther's reform cause, read all of Luther's writings to the elector, Frederick III of Saxony, and translated the Latin texts into German. Spalatin accompanied the elector both to the Diet of Augsburg in 1518 and to the Diet of Worms in 1521. Even though advising Luther not to publish books in opposition to the papacy, he nevertheless translated them once they were published. For further details on Spalatin's role, see Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 240–43.

4. A timeline of key Luther writings and events during the period.

1517 *95 Theses*

1518/1519 *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness* and its printing

1518 *Diet of Augsburg* (Cajetan)

1519 *The Leipzig Debate* (Eck)

1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility*,
The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,
The Freedom of a Christian

1520 The papal bull *Exsurge Domine*

1520 Translation of the sermon
into German

5. In his letter to the community in Philippi, Paul has placed the famous hymn, which in the first part, Phil. 2:6–8, depicts Christ's self-debasement by emptying himself, taking on the form of a servant and becoming like a human being, humiliating himself even to the death on a cross. The second part, Phil. 2:8–11, states that due to this total emptying of the form of God and taking on the form of servant, he is ultimately exalted.



Mein geliebter ist mein, und ich bin
sein, der vnder den Rosen gewendet
wird. Bis es tag werd, und die schat-
ten weichen. Cantic: 2.

L. del. 33. Melch. Küsell sc.

“My beloved is mine” (Song of Solomon 2:16).

explain the operation of this double righteousness, Luther uses the famous bridal imagery that he further employs in *The Freedom of a Christian*: Christ as bridegroom and the church as bride are one flesh (Gen. 2:24) and one spirit (Eph. 5:29-32). As the bridegroom’s alien righteousness is given to the bride against her alien original sin, it prompts the bride’s proper righteousness to sanctify her through faith. Hence, the marriage is consummated as the righteousness that seeks the welfare of the others in the exclamatory exchange of bridegroom and bride: “I am yours” (Song of Sol. 2:16).

The second part of the sermon demonstrates the earliest example of Luther’s idea of the two regimes. While differentiating between how justice works in the public and the private spheres (*vel publici vel privati*), Luther contrasts justice with injustice. On the basis of Romans 13:4, he states that in the public sphere, justice must be exercised through a worldly regime in the service of God and for the sake of order. Hence, his words on Christian righteousness and its servant form (*forma servi*) in the first part of the sermon do not apply to the public sphere or to those who act according to the law for the sake of themselves. They only apply to the private sphere and those who act according to the gospel for the sake of the other. The sermon’s message of benevolent righteousness and warning against mingling the justice of the two regimes thus stands in stark contrast to the double ban Luther received from both regimes when he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X (1475–1521) on 3 January 1521 and subsequently condemned as an outlaw by Emperor Karl V (1500–1558) on 25 May 1521.



SERMON ON TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS⁶

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,⁷ have the same understanding between you as that of Christ Jesus, who, though in the form of God, did not regard it a robbery to be equal to God” [Phil. 2:5-6].

Christians have two kinds of righteousness,⁸ just as there are two kinds of sins in humans.

The first is alien and infused from outside of oneself.⁹ This is the righteousness by which Christ is righteous and by which he justifies others through faith,¹⁰ as it is written in 1 Cor. 1[:30]: “Whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” In John 11[:25-26], Christ himself states: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me . . . shall never die.” Later he adds in John 14[:6], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” This righteousness, then, is given to human beings^d in baptism and whenever they are truly repentant. Therefore a human being can with confidence boast in Christ and say: “Mine are Christ’s living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did.”¹¹ Just as a bridegroom possesses all that is the bride’s and the bride all that is the bridegroom’s. For the two have everything in common. For they are one flesh [Gen. 2:24], just as Christ and the church are one spirit

^d Throughout the sermon Luther uses the inclusive term *homo*, which means “human being,” and will sometimes also be translated into “person” or, when in plural, “people.” The English translation in LW 31:297–306 inserted many male nouns and pronouns that are not found in Luther’s Latin text. Luther’s text is far more gender inclusive than the LW translation. In the same vein, Luther is unconventional in his—to use a contemporary term—*queering* use of biblical images, such as the nuptial imagery in the tradition of Origen (c. 185–c. 254) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153; see below, n. 23). Luther considered any Christian soul, irrespective of sex, could perform as the bride of Christ. This English version of Luther’s sermon is thus a corrective to the LW’s interpretative version by staying loyal to Luther’s Latin text and language.

⁶ The following translation of *Sermo de duplici iustitia* is based on WA 2:145–52 and is a revision of *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, trans. Lowell J. Satre, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 297–306. All notes and annotations are new.

⁷ Luther is quoting Paul verbatim. The Latin *fratres*, in plural, does not bear the meaning “brothers” only. It may also mean “siblings,” or “brothers and sisters” as it is rendered here, and as it was doubtless the case that Paul, who wrote the letter to the Philippians while in prison, was denoting dear and intimate friends and allies.

⁸ *Duplex est iusticia Christianorum*. Luther is here addressing a Christian righteousness, different from justice in a juridical sense.

⁹ Christ’s righteousness is infused into the Christian: *Prima est aliena et ab extra infusa*. Luther throughout the sermon uses this terminology of infusion. Cf. his terminology of intimate union, a consummated marriage, between Christ and the believer.

¹⁰ The very essence of Luther’s doctrine of justification is expressed in this formula: *Haec est qua Christus iustus est et iustificans per fidem*; “This is the righteousness by which Christ is righteous and by which he justifies others through faith.”

¹¹ Luther employs Paul’s teaching on how the drama of Christ’s justifying suffering and crucifixion works in the human being who is baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in Romans 6.

12. Luther combines the nuptial imagery of Gen. 2:24 where Adam and Eve are one flesh, “*sunt enim una caro*,” with that of Eph. 5:29-32 where Christ and the church are one spirit, “*sunt unus spiritus*.” As in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther draws here on the biblical nuptial imagery typically utilized to explain the intimate union of God/Christ with human beings, namely: Genesis 2, Hosea 2, Jer. 7:34, Song of Songs, and Ephesians 5. Marriage is described as both a physical and a spiritual union, based on the biblical imagery of Gen. 2:24 and Eph. 5:29-32. In relation to the alien righteously of Christ, the marriage of Christ and the human being can be said to have begun, but it is not yet consummated. Cf. below, n. 24.

13. As Luther continuously emphasizes the abundance of divine mercy, God is not only the Father of mercy but the Father of mercies, *pater misericordiarum*.

14. Luther, in fact, combines two different Bible quotes from Paul’s letters. The first section of the citation is quite correctly from 2 Corinthians as indicated by Luther, whereas the second section, “who has blessed us in Christ . . .,” is taken from Eph. 1:3.

15. Luther understood the promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations would be blessed as a promise that was repeated, enhanced as part of his seed until the coming of Christ. Cf. *A Sermon on the New Testament*, where Luther drills on this promise with the “First Gospel,” God’s words to Eve in Gen. 3:15: a promise that was kept with the coming of Christ as a pact with all those who like Abraham believed the promise. They are Abraham’s children, from “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22f.; WA 6:356–58). Cf. also Luther’s

[Eph. 5:29-32].¹² Thus the blessed God and Father of mercies, according to Peter, has given us the greatest and most precious in Christ [2 Pet. 1:4]. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1[:3]: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies¹³ and God of all comfort, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”¹⁴

This grace and inexpressible blessing was once promised to Abraham in Gen. 12[:3]: “And in your seed (that is, in Christ) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”^{15,e} Isaiah 9[:6] says: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” “To us,” it says, because he is entirely ours with all his benefits if we believe in him, as Rom. 8[:32] says: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” Therefore everything which Christ has is ours, given us unworthy for free out of God’s sheer mercy, although we have rather deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also. Even Christ himself, therefore, who says he came to do the most sacred will of his Father [John 6:38], became obedient to him; and whatever he did, he did it for us and desired it to be ours, saying, “I am among you as one who serves”^f [Luke 22:27]. And furthermore: “This is my body, which is given for you” [Luke 22:19].^g Isaiah 43[:24] says, “You have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities.”

Thus, through faith in Christ, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has, rather, he himself, becomes ours. Therefore the Apostle calls it “the righteousness of God” in Rom. 1[:17]: For in the gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed . . .; as it is written, ‘The righteous lives from

^e Gen. 12:3 reads “in you,” not “in your seed.” Luther actually cites Gen. 22:18. Cf. also Gal. 3:8. The Latin *semen* can be translated either “seed” or “child” and is here rendered “seed” though “child” would correspond with Luther’s parenthesis.

^f Luther uses the Latin verb *ministro*, not *servo*. Cf. his understanding of ecclesial ministry as that of being a servant of the word, *ministerium verbi*.

^g Cf. 1 Cor. 11:24.

faith.”¹⁶ Finally, in the same epistle, chapter 3[:28], such a faith is called “the righteousness of God”: “We hold that a human being is justified through faith.” This is an infinite righteousness,¹⁷ and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, who trusts in Christ is attached to Christ, is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he. Thus, it is impossible that sin should remain in that person. This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source of any own actual righteousness.¹⁸ For this is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. It accomplishes the same as that original righteousness would have accomplished; rather, it accomplishes more.

It is in this sense that we are to understand the prayer in Psalm 30:2 [Ps. 31:1]: “In you, O LORD, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness liberate me.” It does not say “in my” but “in your righteousness,” that is, in the righteousness of Christ my God which becomes ours through faith and by the grace and mercy of God. In many passages of the Psalter, faith is called “the work of the LORD,” “confession,” “power of God,” “mercy,” “truth,” “righteousness.” All these are names for faith in Christ, rather, for the righteousness which is in Christ. The Apostle therefore dares to say in Gal. 2[:20], “I live, though not I, but truly Christ lives in me”; and in Eph. 3[:17]: “that Christ may reside^h in your hearts through faith.”

Therefore this alien righteousness, infused in us without our works by grace alone—while the Father, to be sure, inwardly draws us to Christ—is set opposite original sin, likewise alien without our works, inherited and caused by birth alone.¹⁹ Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien

Commentary on the Magnificat on Jesus Christ’s Jewish origins by his mother (LW 21:295–358).

16. According to Luther, it was exactly Rom. 1:17 that led him to his Reformation theology. Late in life (1545), Luther explained “how I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners” until he suddenly understood with Paul that the gospel of the righteousness of God is revealed through faith: “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (LW 34:336–37). Luther’s discovery thus was that the term “to be justified” does not mean judgment of the sinner but, rather, that God considers the sinner righteous (LW 34:167). Cf. Luther’s *Lectures on Romans* (LW 25:136). See, e.g., Heiko Oberman, *Martin Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 164–66.

17. Luther further states that God’s righteousness is infinite, *iustitia infinita*, thereby emphasizing the abundant mercy of God, recurrently titling God the Father of mercies. Cf. n. 13 above.

18. Luther is explaining how the alien righteousness, *iustitia aliena*, becomes the proper righteousness, *iustitia propria*, of any Christian.

19. Luther is referring to the Augustinian idea of original sin, according to which sin came into the world through Adam’s pride and desire (Genesis 3). This understanding of sin, already with the church fathers, developed from Paul’s Adam-Christ typology in Rom. 5:12–21, contrasts fallen Adam with Christ, the second Adam, who, due to his lack of sin, saved fallen creation. While Luther builds on this typology in his deliberations on human sin and Adam as the type of

^h Luther uses the Latin verb *habitare*, which could also be rendered to “live in,” to “inhabit,” or to “dwell.”

sinful humanity, in contrast to Christ's redeeming righteousness, he does not seem to employ the parallel Eve-Mary typology developed by Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) and popular among the church fathers as a parallel to the Adam-Christ typology.

20. Luther employs the traditional tripartite sequel of beginning, progressing, and becoming perfect (*incipit, proficit et perficit*), in death, about the life of the Christian believer. Righteousness is not a state obtained in this life, but a process, a justification, from outside (Christ's alien righteousness) and from inside (through faith) that continues through life.

21. This brief passage holds the essence of Luther's reformation theology: humans are made righteous through Christ's alien righteousness, which is infused (*iustitia infusa*) gradually and works by grace alone (*sola gratia*), while it daily drives out their alien original sin (*alienum peccatum originalis*)—instilled by birth alone—and through faith in Christ as it grows in the human being. Luther developed this thought in 1521 in his treatise *Against Latomus* (LW 32:137–260). Jacobus Latomus (c. 1475–1544) was a distinguished member of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leuven and an adviser to the Inquisition. With his colleagues, in 1520 he burned Luther's books and condemned a number of isolated sentences. Having published their condemnations and asked for the basis of their actions, Latomus's refutation against him prompted Luther to expound his doctrine of justification in June 1521 while at Wartburg.

22. Luther here presents us with the idea of cooperation between Christ's alien righteousness and humans' good

righteousness is not infused all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected²⁰ at the end through death.²¹

The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness.²² This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in mortifying the flesh and crucifying the self-centered desires, of which we read in Gal. 5[:24]: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” In the second place, this righteousness consists in love of our neighbors, and in the third place, in humility and fear toward God. The Apostle



Jacobus Latomus (c. 1475–1544) was a distinguished member of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leuven and an adviser to the Inquisition.

is full of references to these, as is all the rest of Scripture. He briefly summarizes everything, however, in Titus 2[:12]: “In this world let us live soberly (pertaining to crucifying our own flesh), righteously (pertaining to our neighbor), and piously (pertaining to God).”

This righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence, for we read in Gal. 5[:22]: “But the fruit of the spirit [i.e., of a spiritual person, whose very existence depends on faith in Christ] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentle-

ness, self-control.” For because the works mentioned are human works, it is obvious that in this passage a spiritual person is called “spirit.” In John 3[:6] we read: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” This righteousness goes on to complete the first, for it persistently strives to extinguish the old Adam and to destroy the body of sin. Therefore it hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists. For in that it hates itself and does not seek its own, it crucifies the flesh. Because it seeks the good of another, it works love. Thus in each sphere it does God’s will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God.²³

This righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect [1 Pet. 2:21] and is made to conform to his image (2 Cor. 3:18).²⁴ It is precisely this that Christ requires. Just as Christ in person did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only—and in this he was most obedient to God the Father—he desires that we would likewise set the same example for our neighbors.

We read in Rom. 6[:19] that this righteousness is set opposite our own actual sin: “For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.” Therefore through the first righteousness arises the voice of the bridegroom who says to the soul, “I am yours,” but through the second comes the voice of the bride who answers, “I am yours.” Then the marriage is consummated;²⁵ it becomes strong and complete in accordance with the Song of Solomon [2:16]: “My beloved is mine and I am his,” which means that my beloved is mine and I am his.²⁶ Then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others. Therefore the Lord of the Synagogue threatens through the Prophet, “And I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride” [Jer. 7:34].

This is what the theme proposed says: Have the same understanding between you, etc.; that is, have such a mind and affection towards each other such as you see that Christ is affected towards you. How? Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard it a robbery to be equal to God, but he emptied himself,

works (*opera bona*): the second kind of righteousness, the proper, comes about through human cooperation with Christ’s alien righteousness and Christ as example, in three manners: crucifixion of the self, love of neighbor, and humility toward or fear of God.

23. Luther may be inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux’s idea that God’s grace sets charity in order (Song of Sol. 2:4, Vulgate) in humans, the bride in three manners: how to will the good, how to fear God, and how to love God; see *On Grace and Free Choice (De gratia et libero arbitrio)* 6:17, *Sancti Bernardi Opera* 3 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 165–203.

24. Luther is quoting in part from the Vulgate, stating that humans will be conformed (*conformis*) to Christ’s image (*imago*) by following Christ’s example. However, his deliberations on Christ being in the “form of God” and humans becoming “conformed to God” are most likely inspired by Bernard’s *On Grace and Free Choice* 10:33–34, where Bernard explicates how Christ, the form of God, reforms the sin-deformed humans who will thus be conformed to the will of God.

25. According to canon law, *Decretals of Pope Gregory IX* (lib. 3, tit. 32, cap. 7), marriage is fully consummated and hence indissoluble only through carnal copulation (*copula carnis*). This rule is founded on Gen. 2:24 (adduced by Luther together with Eph. 5:29–32 at the opening of this text); Matt. 19:5; and 1 Cor. 6:16.

26. Luther combines justification and sanctification, employing the famous words of conjugal love from Song of Sol. 2:16 in tandem with Jer. 7:34 to depict the happy exchange between

Christ and the soul—different from above where he combined Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5 to depict the union of Christ and the church. Luther later employs the same nuptial imagery in *The Freedom of a Christian*, taken from Eph. 5:26-32 as above (adding a physical dimension); Hos. 2:19ff. (adding a grace-economical dimension), and finally, in the Latin version of the treatise only, from Song of Sol. 2:16 (adding a social dimension): *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi, q. d. dilectus meus est meus et ego sum sua*—“My beloved is mine and I am his, which means that my beloved is mine and I am his”—to stress the intimate relationship of bride and bridegroom as a way to explain what happens when sinful humanity is united with the justifying Christ. Cf. above, n. 12.

27. Luther briefly returns to Phil. 2:6-8, while quite obviously working intertextually through the sermon.

28. Luther contrasts the divine substance of Christ, *substantia Dei*, with human substance, *substantia humana*, accentuating that these should not be confused with Christ in the form of God, *forma Dei*, and in the form of a servant, *forma servi*.

29. The idea of Christ being God formed and becoming servant formed (*forma servi*) in the likeness of humans (*similitudo hominis*), an idea that reflects the kenotic Christology of Phil. 2:5-8, is fundamental in Luther’s treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* from two years later.

accepting the form of a servant [Phil. 2:5-7].²⁷ The form of God here does not mean the substance of God because Christ never emptied himself of this. Neither can form of a servant be said to mean human substance.²⁸ But the form of God is wisdom, power, righteousness, goodness, and, furthermore, freedom. Thus, though Christ was a free, powerful, wise human being,ⁱ subject to none of the vices or sins to which all other human beings are subject²⁹—preeminent in such attributes that are particularly proper to the form of God—he was not arrogant in that form; he did not please himself (Rom. 15:3); nor did he disdain and despise those who were enslaved and subjected to various evils. He was not like the Pharisee who said, “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people” [Luke 18:11], and who was delighted that others were wretched; at any rate he was unwilling that they should be like him. This is the type of robbery by which people^j are arrogant about themselves—rather, they keep and do not give back what clearly is God’s (as they should), nor do they serve others with it that they may become like others. People of this kind wish to be like God, sufficient in themselves, pleasing themselves, glorifying in themselves, under obligation to no one, and so on.

Christ, however, did not understand it that way; he did not think this way, but relinquished that form to God the Father and emptied himself, unwilling to use his status against us, unwilling to be different from us. Rather, for our sakes he became as one of us and took the form of a servant, that is, he subjected himself to all evils. And although he was free, as the Apostle says of himself also [1 Cor. 9:19], he made himself the servant of all [Mark 9:35], acting in no other way than as if all the evils which were ours were his own. Accordingly, he took upon himself our sins and our punishments, and although it was for us that he

i Luther’s Latin text reads *Christus homo*, Luther’s point always being that Christ became human, not that he became male. The traditional English translation of *homo* into “man,” also meaning “human,” tends to be misread by the modern reader as meaning “male.” The latter possibility, however, would presuppose that the Latin text read *vir*, which means “man” in the sense of “male,” and that Luther should have found Christ’s maleness rather than his humanity the decisive factor.

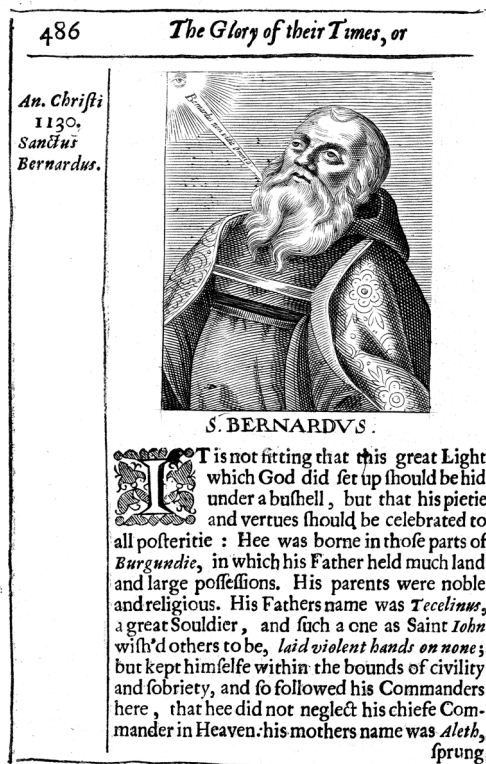
j The Latin text reads *homo*, in the singular. But since Luther shortly after shifts to plural, the whole sentence here is rendered in the plural for the sake of coherence.

was conquering those things, he acted as though he were conquering them for himself. Although he with respect to us could be our God and Lord, he did not want it so, but rather wanted to become our servant, as it is written in Rom. 15[:1, 3]: “We ought not to please ourselves, as Christ did not please himself”; but, as it is written: “the accusations of those who accused you fell on me” [Ps. 69:9]. The quotation from the Psalmist has the same meaning as the citation from Paul.

It follows that this passage, which many have understood positively, ought thus to be understood negatively: That Christ did not understand himself as equal to God means that he did not want to be equal to God as those do who through pride rob it and (as St. Bernard says) say to God: “If you will not give me your glory,³⁰ I shall seize it for myself.” The passage is not to be under-

30. Luther “cites” Bernard without adducing any exact reference to Bernard’s vast opus, which he knew quite well. Luther is most likely referring to Bernard’s *De diligendo deo* 2:4–6, SBOp 3, 122f. Instead of distancing himself from Bernard, Luther is echoing Bernard, with reference to Ps. 113:9, when admonishing those who give themselves the glory that belongs to God solely.

Bernard of Clairvaux, a contemplative monk and a busy abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Clairvaux from 1115 until his death in 1153 was one of the most influential theologians as well as a counselor of leading political and ecclesial figures of his century. Like Luther later, Bernard wanted to reform the papal church toward an apostolic church following the pattern laid out by Paul, with a focus on the gospel more than the canon law. Checkmated by Pope Eugenius III (c. 1080–1153) and the French king Louis VII (c. 1120–1180), who made him responsible for the failed Second Crusade (1146–48), Bernard wrote a letter treatise, *On Consideration*, to call the pope to discern between the two swords that were part of God’s order—the spiritual word, which the church should concentrate on using to serve, and the material sword, which should only be used by secular power; see *On Consideration (De consideratione)* 2,11 and 4,7, SBOp 3, 393–493. The popular treatise inspired many reformers, including Luther, who refers to it, e.g., in his letter sent to Pope Leo X along with *The Freedom of a Christian* (WA 7:10, 29).



Bernard of Clairvaux, monastic innovator and doctor of the Church.



Oil painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1525. Mary Magdalene was often portrayed with an oil jar as here.

According to Mark 16 and Luke 24, Mary Magdalene was one of the women who brought spices to anoint Jesus' dead body, and according to all the four gospels, she was the first witness to his resurrection. It was the medieval tradition of western Christianity since Pope Gregory I to conflate Mary Magdalene with the unnamed sinner anointing Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50 and with Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus' feet in John 11:1-2.

stood affirmatively as follows: he did not think himself equal to God, that is, the fact that he is equal to God, this he did not consider robbery. For this sentence cannot be properly understood since it speaks of Christ the human being. The Apostle means that the individual Christians shall become the servants of one another in accordance with the example of Christ. If they have wisdom, righteousness, or power, as if in the form of God, with which they can boast and excel others, they should not keep all this to themselves. They should surrender it to God and become altogether as if they did not possess it [2 Cor. 6:10], and become as one of those who have nothing.^k As a result, any one person^l who forgets and empties herself of God's gifts, acts with her neighbor as if the neighbor's weakness, sin, and foolishness were her very own in order that one does not boast or get puffed up, nor despise or triumph over one's neighbor as if being God to one's neighbor or equal to God. Since God's prerogatives ought to be left to God alone, such a stupid pride becomes robbery.

It is in this way, then, that one takes the form of a servant, and that the command of the Apostle in Gal. 5[13] is fulfilled: "Through love be servants of one another." And in Rom. 12[:4-5] and 1 Cor. 12[:12-27] he teaches, through the analogy of the members of the body, how the strong, honorable, healthy members do not triumph over those that are weak, less honorable, and sick as if they were their masters and gods; on the contrary, they serve them the more, forgetting their own honor, health, and power. For thus no member of the body serves itself; nor does it seek its own welfare but that of the other. And the weaker, the sicker, the less honorable a member is, the more the other members serve it. To use Paul's words [1 Cor. 12:25]: "that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." From this it is now evident how one must conduct oneself with one's neighbor in each situation.

^k This translation follows the Latin text, which has the subject in the third person plural.

^l The Latin text shifts to third person singular.

If we do not freely desire to put off that form of God and take on the form of a servant, let us be compelled to do so against our will. In this regard, consider the story in Luke 7[:36-50], where Simon the leper, pretending to be in the form of God and perching on his own righteousness, arrogantly judged and despised Mary Magdalene, seeing in her the form of a servant. But see what happens to this judge, how Christ immediately stripped him of that form of righteousness and then clothed him with the form of sin by saying: “You gave me no kiss; you did not anoint my head.” See, how many the sins that Simon did not see were! Nor did he think himself deformed by such a loathsome form that he had. His good works are not at all remembered. Christ ignores the form of God in which Simon was arrogantly pleasing himself; he does not recount that he was invited, dined, and honored by him. Simon the leper is now nothing but a sinner; he who seemed to himself so righteous sits deprived of the glory of the form of God, confused in the form of a servant, whether he wants it or not. On the other hand, Christ honors Mary with the form of God and, adding it to her, elevates her above Simon, saying: “She has anointed my feet and kissed them. She has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.” See how many were the merits which neither she nor Simon saw. Her faults are remembered no more. Christ ignored the form of servitude in her whom he has exalted with the form of sovereignty. Mary is nothing but righteous, elevated into the glory of the form of God, etc.³¹

In like manner, he will treat all of us whenever we, on the ground of our righteousness, wisdom, or power, are arrogant or angry with those who are unrighteous, foolish, or less powerful than we. For when we act thus—and this is the greatest perversion—righteousness works against righteousness, wisdom against wisdom, power against power. For you are powerful, not that you may make the weak weaker by oppression, but that you may make them powerful by raising them up and defending them. You are wise, not in order to laugh at the foolish and thereby make them more foolish, but that you may undertake to teach them as you yourself would wish to be taught. You are righteous so that you may vindicate and pardon the unrighteous,³² not that you may only condemn, disparage, judge, and punish. For this is Christ’s example for us, as he says: “For the child of humanity did not come to condemn the world, but that

31. Luther delivers a unique interpretation of Luke 7:36-50. He highlights Mary Magdalene as a prominent disciple of Jesus Christ, and also as a person being exalted in the form of God, *forma Dei*, and thus conformed to Christ. While deliberately following the medieval tradition of conflating Mary Magdalene (Matthew 27 and 28 with parallels, and John 20) with the anonymous woman who according to Luke 7 anointed Jesus’ feet (and with Mary of Bethany who, according to John 11, also anointed Jesus’ feet), Luther departs from the traditional portrayals of her as a sinful “woman of the city” and accentuates her as nothing but righteous. Both here and in his *Commentary on the Magnificat*, Luther notably highlights female figures as those who by way of their self-humiliation conform to Christ’s kenotic self-debasement (Phil. 2:6-8) and are exalted as true disciples who conform to Christ (Phil. 2:9-11).

32. Luther again emphasizes the merciful character of Christian righteousness and the justification in Christ, to make the point that righteousness is a redeeming process, not condemning in any way: “*Sic iustus es, ut iustifices et excuses iniustum.*”

33. Cf. John 12:47. Although the term *Filius hominis* came to bear the meaning “Son of man,” as the church fathers considered it a title and function of Jesus, it is here rendered “child of humanity,” the plain meaning also of the Greek *o uios anthropou*, to correspond with Luther’s point that Christ became human for the sake of saving the world. Cf. Luther’s *Sermon on Galatians 4:1-7*, in which he expounds on Paul’s wording that Christ was born by a woman and therefore became a true human being. Luther accentuates Christ’s human status with the terms “natural human” (Ger.: *natürlicher mensch*) and “child of humanity” (Ger.: *menschen kind*), and firmly states that what comes from a woman is a true natural human, whereas Christ, in order to stay free from sin, is not from a man, that is, not from a male, like other children (WA 10/1/1, 355–56). Cf. also Luther’s *Commentary on the Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), where his point is that Mary was chosen as the mother of Christ due to her low status as a poor and plain Jewish girl, for Christ “is born of the despised stump, of the poor and lowly maiden” (LW 21:357).

34. Lat.: *vel publici vel privati*. Here opens the second part of the sermon, on the public and the private spheres. The differentiation between the two, *vel publici vel privati*, is central to Luther’s—and Lutheran—teaching and is reflected in the way the *Augsburg Confession* is structured. Neither order in the church (CA XIV) nor civil government (CA XVI) are to be tolerated unless they are conducted correctly in public, namely, for the sake of others and for the sake of order.

the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).³³ He further says in Luke 9[:55-56]: “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the child of humanity came not to destroy souls but to save them.”^m But nature violently rebels, greatly delighting in punishment, glorying in its own righteousness and in the shame of its neighbors’ unrighteousness. Therefore it pleads its own case, and it rejoices that this is better than its neighbor’s. But it opposes the case of its neighbor and wants it to appear mean. This perversity is wholly evil, contrary to love, which does not seek its own good, but that of another [1 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 2:4]. It ought to feel pain that the condition of its neighbor is not better than its own and wish that its neighbor’s condition were better than its own; and if its neighbor’s condition is the better, it ought to rejoice no less than it rejoices when its own is the better. “For this is the law and the prophets” [Matt. 7:12].

But you say, “Is it not permissible to chasten the evil? Is it not proper to punish sin? Who is not obliged to defend righteousness? To do otherwise would give occasion for lawlessness.”

I answer: A single solution to this problem cannot be given. Therefore one must distinguish between humans. For people are either public or private individuals.³⁴

The things which have been said do not pertain at all to public individuals, that is, to those who have been placed in a responsible office by God. It is their necessary function to punish and judge the evil, to vindicate and defend the oppressed, because it is not they but God who does this. They are his servants in this very matter, as the Apostle shows at some length in Rom. 13[:4]: “He does not bear the sword in vain, etc.” But this must be understood as pertaining to the cases of others, not to one’s own. For no person acts in God’s place for the sake of herself and her own things, but for the sake of others. If, however, someone has a case

^m This quote of Luke 9:55-56 is from the Vulgate in older editions and can also be found in the King James Version. It cannot be found in new editions of the Vulgate or in the NSRV, and it is adduced in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament in the note apparatus only. Luther’s Latin text plainly follows the Vulgate and reads “souls” (*animas*), not “men’s lives” as it is rendered in LW 31:304. As in his employment of the nuptial imagery, Luther here speaks about the relationship between Christ and the individual human beings by using the term *soul*.

ⁿ The Latin text plainly reads “nature” (*natura*) without defining this as “carnal” or as being “of man” as it is rendered in LW 31:304.

of her own, let her ask for someone else to be God's representative, for in that case one is not a judge, but one of the parties. But on these matters others speak in other places, for it is too broad a subject to cover here.

Private individuals with their own cases are of three kinds. First, there are those who seek vengeance and judgment from the representatives of God, and there are quite a few of these nowadays. Paul tolerates that, but he does not approve of it when he says in 1 Cor. 6[:12], "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful." Rather, he says in the same chapter, "To have lawsuits at all with one another is a defeat for you" [1 Cor. 6:7]. But yet to avoid a greater evil he [Paul] tolerates this lesser one lest they should vindicate themselves and one should use force on the other, returning evil for evil, demanding their own advantages. Nevertheless, such persons will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless they have changed for the better by forsaking things that are merely lawful and pursuing those that are helpful. For that passion for one's own advantage must be destroyed.

The second kind is those who do not desire vengeance. On the other hand, in accordance with the Gospel [Matt. 5:40], to those who would take their coats, they are prepared to give their capes as well, and they do not resist any evil. These are children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, heirs of future good things [Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:7].^o In Scripture, therefore, they are called "orphans," "minors," "widows," and "poor" because they do not avenge themselves. God wishes to be called their "Father" and "Judge" [Ps. 68:6]. Far from avenging themselves, if those in authority should wish to seek revenge in their behalf, they either do not desire it or seek it, or they only permit it. Or, if they are among the most advanced, they forbid and prevent it, prepared rather to lose their other possessions also.

Suppose you say: "Such people are most rare, and who would be able to remain in this world if acting like this?" I answer: This is not a discovery of today, that few are saved and that the gate is narrow that leads to life and those who find it are few [Matt. 7:14]. But if none were doing this, how would Scripture, which proclaims the poor, the orphans, and the widows the people of

^o Luther is again employing Paul's terminology, and again *fratres* should be understood inclusively as "brothers and sisters" (or "friends") along with the terms "children" (*fili*) and "heirs" (*haeredes*) of God.

35. Cf. Luke 6:27-28.

36. The zealots, *zelosi*, form a diverse group in Scripture, but mostly the term denotes a group of overanxious Jews with ultra-nationalist affinities in opposition to Rome (e.g., Acts 5:37). Luther here utilizes the term to designate those who overeagerly pursue a legal justice in order to improve an offender at the expense of a Christian righteousness, the purpose of which is forgiveness of one's neighbor. Luther regards such zealous righteousness a result of a mistake, if not a perversion so subtle that it can only be discerned by the most "spiritual."

Christ, stand? Thus, those of this second type feel more pain over the sin of their offenders than over the loss or offense to themselves. And they do this that they may recall those offenders from their sin rather than avenge the wrongs they themselves have suffered. Therefore they put off the form of their own righteousness and put on the form of those others, praying for their persecutors, blessing those who curse, doing good to evildoers, prepared to pay the penalty and make satisfaction for their very enemies that they may be saved [Matt. 5:44].³⁵ This is the gospel and the example of Christ [cf. Luke 23:34].

The third kind is those who in affect are like the second type just mentioned, but in effect are different. They are the ones who demand back their own property or seek vengeance to be meted out, not because they seek their own advantage, but through this vengeance and restoration of their own things they seek the betterment of the one who has been stealing from or offending them. They discern that the offender cannot be improved without punishment. These are called "zealots"³⁶ and the Scriptures praise them. But no one ought to attempt this unless one is perfect and highly experienced in the second manner just mentioned; otherwise they could mistake wrath for zeal and be convicted of doing from anger and impatience what they assume is done from love of justice. For anger is like zeal, and impatience is like love of justice, thus they cannot be sufficiently distinguished except by the most spiritual. Christ exhibited such zeal (as narrated in John 2[:14-17] when he made a whip [1 Cor. 4:21] and cast out the sellers and buyers from the temple; and similarly Paul, when he said, "Should I come to you with a twig," etc. [1 Cor. 4:21]. FINIS