

CHAPTER SIX

“AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?”: LUTHER’S “ON WHETHER ONE MAY FLEE FROM A DEADLY PLAGUE” (1527)

‘Fight or Flight’ is a dilemma all creatures share. For us humans, however, the anguish from advance notice of danger heightens the difficulty. People have always feared pestilence, yet today our fears are exacerbated by rapid communication; they are complicated by expectations that the government ‘do something.’ Recent fears are of communicable disease throughout the world—particularly, the H5N1 ‘bird-flu virus,’ which has been compared to the influenza epidemic of 1918—and terrorism using biological agents.¹ Previous generations, however, faced pandemics much more frequent and probably as virulent—at least as deadly, when factoring in the state of medical knowledge.²

¹ Tim Appenzeller, “Tracking the Next Killer Flu,” *National Geographic* (October 2005): 2–31. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is calling the threat ‘Avian Influenza (Bird Flu).’ <<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>>. (accessed 6 October 2005). Michael T. Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, School of Public Health, University of Minnesota, has continued through all of 2005 to sound an ominous warning of impending catastrophe: “This is a critical point in history. Time is running out to prepare for the next pandemic. We must act now with decisiveness and purpose. Someday, after the next pandemic has come and gone, a commission much like the 9/11 Commission will be charged with determining how well government, business, and public health leaders prepared the world for the catastrophe when they had clear warning. What will be the verdict?” (“Preparing for the Next Pandemic,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 4 [July–August 2005], <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050701facssay84402/michael-t-osterholm/preparing-for-the-next-pandemic.html>>, (accessed online 6 December 2005); idem, “Preparing for the Next Pandemic,” *NEJM* 352 (5 May 2005): 1839–1842; “A Weapon on the World Needs,” *Nature* 435 (26 May 2005): 417–418. Osterholm is quoted frequently in Jerry Adler, “The Fight Against the Flu,” *Newsweek*, 31 October 2005, 38–45 [cover story]; cf. Shane Harris, “The Bug Bloggers,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 62 (2006): 38–43; John J. Treanor et al., “Safety and Immunogenicity of an Inactivated Subvirion Influenza A (H5N1) Vaccine,” *NEJM* 354 (30 March 2006): 1343–1351; Gregory A. Poland, “Vaccines against Avian Influence—A Race against Time,” *NEJM* 354 (30 March 2006): 1411–1413; Katherine Hobson, “Are We Ready?” *U. S. News and World Report*, 1 May 2006, 57–62.

² While not yet able to be transmitted from human to human, those infected by the H5N1 virus—through contact with infected poultry blood or manure—have died at a rate of approximately 50 per cent.

In the late summer of 1527 plague struck northern Germany, arriving in Wittenberg around the end of July.³ The situation so concerned Elector John of Saxony that on 10 August he ordered Luther and his family to leave the city, for he had arranged to move the university from Wittenberg to Jena; it would remain housed there until the following April.⁴ Luther, however, refused to leave! He and Johannes Bugenhagen (1484–1558), pastor of the city church (and Luther’s longtime confessor), and chaplains Georg Rörer and Johannes Mantel stayed to minister to the sick and dying. Luther continued to lecture—on 1 John and then Titus—to a small group of students who also did not leave. Among Luther’s acquaintances, the plague claimed its first victims within days after its arrival.⁵ On 19 August he wrote to Spalatin that the wife of Bürgermeister Tilo Dene had that very day died virtually in his arms.⁶

Fear of plague began to spread in the city. By mid-September, additional deaths to plague began to take their toll on the populace. In response to reports that drunken gravediggers had been rude to grieving family members, Luther spoke out in the pulpit, admonishing listeners to show love for their neighbors. He also rebuked those who left their wives because of the plague.⁷ In early November things got worse for the tightly-knit circle of Wittenberg reformers: on 2 November the Luthers were shaken by the deaths of their good friend Georg Rörer’s wife and her newborn child.⁸ Bugenhagen and his family—in whose home the Rörer deaths had occurred—moved in with the Luthers, providing companionship as well as preserving resources and confining

³ *WABr* 4:227.14f. (Nr. 1126), Luther to Melanchthon (2 August 1527): “Pestem hic esse persuasi sumus.” By 15 August Melanchthon reported to Joachim Camerarius (1500–1574) in Jena that Wittenberg was definitely infested (“Urbs Witteberga infesta esse pestilitate”); cf. *WABr* 4:227, note 9.

⁴ *WABr* 4:227f. (Nr. 1127), Elector Johann to Luther (10 August 1527).

⁵ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:207.

⁶ *WABr* 4:232.16f. (Nr. 1130); Luther to Spalatin (19 August 1527): “Hodie Tilonis Deni vxorem sepeliuimus, que fere inter brachia mea expirauit heri, atque hoc primum funus in media vrbe.”

⁷ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:207. The record of these events comes from a letter of Urban Balduyn to Stephan Roth (15 September 1527), in Georg Buchwald, *Zur Wittenberger Stadt- und Universitäts-Geschichte in der Reformationszeit: Briefe aus Wittenberg an M. Stephan Roth in Zwickau* (Leipzig, 1893), 5–7.

⁸ *LW* 49:174, note 25; cf. *WABr* 4:276 (Nr. 1165), Luther to Justus Jonas (4 November 1527).

the disease.⁹ Also staying there (and seriously ill) was Margaret von Mochau, sister-in-law to Karlstadt. The Luthers' year-old son Hans was gravely ill, and Katy Luther was pregnant with Elizabeth. Luther called his home 'a hospital.'¹⁰

Moreover, from his former student Johann Hess (1490–1547)—leader of the Reformation in Breslau (Wrocław), capital of Silesia—came a letter, written on behalf of the evangelical pastors in Breslau, asking for advice on whether the clergy there should stay or flee the plague in their city.¹¹ Plague had arrived there on 10 August, a little over a week later than in Wittenberg.¹² Having written Luther about the same problem in 1525, Hess would not get a written response for nearly two years, due to Luther's own health problems.¹³ Luther's answer finally came in the form of an open letter to Hess and his fellow servants (*Dienern*).

Johann Hess was a native of Nuremberg, who was sent to school in Zwickau, Saxony. He became a well-educated pastor, having earned the bachelor of arts (1507) at Leipzig, the master of arts (1511) at Wittenberg, and a doctorate in theology (1519) at Ferrara. Upon his return from Italy to Silesia, Hess visited in Wittenberg; hence, a lifelong correspondence with both Luther and Melancthon ensued.¹⁴ Always appreciating the arts, Hess had been mentored by Johannes Turzo (1464–1520), the humanist bishop of Breslau, who had sent him back to Wittenberg for further study, only to send him first to Italy, where

⁹ Luther told a friend that Bugenhagen (Pomeranus) moved in “not so much for his sake as for mine . . . , so he could be a companion in my isolation” (*Salutat te Pomeranus quam officiosissime, apud me habitans, non tam sui quam mei causa . . . , scilicet vt solius solitudinis mea sit*); *WABr* 4:277.14–16 (Nr. 1166), Luther to Nikolaus Hausmann (7 November 1527), translation by Heinrich Bornkamm, in *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521–1530*, ed. Karin Bornkamm, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia, 1983), 562.

¹⁰ *WABr* 4:274f. (Nr. 1164), Luther to Amsdorf (1 November 1527): “In domo mea coepit esse hospitale.”

¹¹ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 562.

¹² *LW* 43:115f.

¹³ “Die Pest” was first reported in Breslau during 10 August to 19 November 1525. On 22 April 1526 Luther wrote to Hess that he had his request but would be unable to answer at that time (*WA* 23:323).

¹⁴ There are about twenty extant letters from Luther and thirty from Melancthon; cf. *OER*, s.v. “Hess, Johann,” by Manfred P. Fleischer. There are no biographical works on Hess in English; cf. Carl Adolph Julius Kolde, *Dr. Johann Heß, der schlesische Reformator* (Breslau, 1846).

Hess studied both theology and law.¹⁵ In 1523 Hess was appointed by the Breslau city council as preacher of St. Mary Magdalene's church. This bold move in support of reformation teaching led to a public disputation in 1524, which culminated in the council's ordering of evangelical teaching by all pastors in the city—despite pressure from the cathedral chapter, Pope Adrian VI, and the king of Hungary-Bohemia, to which Silesia belonged.¹⁶ In 1525 Hess pressured the city council of Breslau until they provided an All Saints' hospital for the care of the sick and the homeless.¹⁷ On 8 September 1525 (three months after Luther's marriage), Hess married Sara Jopner (d. 1531), the daughter of a Breslau city council member; in 1533 he married Hedwig Wahle. These marriages produced six surviving children.¹⁸

I. Structure of Luther's Book

Ob man für dem sterben fliehen muge was a popular pamphlet of fourteen quarto pages.¹⁹ Luther's response to the question about behavior in

¹⁵ According to Manfred P. Fleischer, "Humanism and Reformation in Silesia: Imprints of Italy—Celtis, Erasmus, Luther, and Melanchthon," in *The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe: Essays in Honor of Lewis W. Spitz*, ed. Manfred P. Fleischer (St. Louis, 1992), 27–107, here at 44, "Historians agree that Turzo was the only Renaissance prince Silesia ever had." Fleischer (63) points out Gustav Bauch's argument that Hess always remained under the influence of the Renaissance and followed his humanist inclinations throughout his life, being even closer to Melanchthon in friendship than he was to Luther; cf. Gustav Bauch, "Beiträge zur Litteraturgeschichte des schlesischen Humanismus," *ZVGS* 26 (1892): 213–225; idem, "Johann Thurzo und Johann Heß," *ZVGS* 36 (1901): 193–224; idem, "Zur Breslauer Reformationsgeschichte," *ZVGS* 41 (1907): 336–352; Julius Köstlin, "Johann Heß, der Breslauer Reformator," *ZVGS* 6 (1864–1865): 97–131; 181–265.

¹⁶ Werner Laug, "Johannes Heß und die Disputation in Breslau von 1524," *Jahrbuch für schlesische Kirchengeschichte* 37 (1958): 23–34. The disputation *Protokoll* can be found in Kolde, *Dr. Johann Heß*, 110–121. For a Catholic view on the Lutheran takeover of Breslau, see Fleischer's discussion ("Humanism and Reformation," 50ff.) of Kurt Engelbert's account; cf. also Fleischer's "Silesiographia: The Rise of a Regional Historiography," *ARG* 69 (1978): 219–247, especially 232f. on the disputation of 20–23 April 1524; cf. D. Erdmann, "Luther und seine Beziehungen zu Schlesien, insbesondere zu Breslau," *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 5 (1887): 1–75 (Schrift 19).

¹⁷ Fleischer, "Hess," in *OER*.

¹⁸ Fleischer, "Humanism and Reformation," 69.

¹⁹ Benzing, Nr. 2424–2433; *WA* 23:325–327 lists the ten German editions as: A^x, A^y, B^x, B^y, C–H. Printed in Wittenberg in four different editions in 1527 by Hans Lufft, the work was also published the same year in Augsburg, Nuremberg, Marburg, Magdeburg (in both High- and Low German), Zwickau, and Hagenau. Beginning with a Danish edition in 1534, there were also eleven later German editions published in the next several decades (1552–1631); Benzing, Nr. 2434–2435. *WA* 23:327–329 lists

the face of a deadly epidemic provides a glimpse of several important ethical issues of the day.²⁰ By the time he has added to it for printing, Luther's document contained three parts, including the Preliminaries: (I) discussion on the question (*LW* 43:120–134; *WA* 23:339–371) of whether one should flee from death due to plague; this section constitutes about 80 per cent of the document; (II) discussion (*LW* 43:134f.; *WA* 23:371–373) on how one should prepare his soul for death; this section constitutes about 10 per cent of the document and was also added for printing; (III) discussion on burial practices (*LW* 43:135–138; *WA* 23:373–379); this section constitutes about 10 per cent of the document and was added for printing.

The simple organizational macrostructure of part I is: 26 lines of preliminaries, followed by the heart of the case: A. Title, Signature, and *salutatio*: five lines (*LW* 43:119; *WA* 23:339.1–4); B. *Narratio*: twenty-one lines (*LW* 43:119f.; *WA* 23:339.5–25); C. Substance of the Case (*LW* 43:120–134; *WA* 23:339.26–371.4). In my analysis of the heart of the pamphlet I shall lay out the microstructure.

II. *Analysis of Luther's Book*

A. *Preliminaries*

The *salutatio* is the familiar Pauline formula that Luther often uses, “Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (*WA* 23:339.4f.).²¹ In the two-paragraph *narratio* Luther uses the first paragraph to state the question (*Frage*)²² that Hess sent to him and to explain his reasons for the delay in answering. In the second paragraph

the eleven later editions as: ‘a’–‘l’. I have not attempted to investigate to what extent plague activity coincided with the publication dates after 1527.

²⁰ The modern edition of the document Luther wrote is found in *WA* 23, and in *LW* 43. *WA* 23:339–379; *LW* 43:119–138, translation by Carl J. Schindler. The reader should bear in mind that the text of *WA* 23 that I cite will not be of sequential pagination; rather, the text is found on p. 339, 341, 343, etc. The text is found in two separate versions, printed on alternating pages; one version derives from Luther's manuscript and the other from the earliest print. I shall follow the print version, since it is more complete, by which I mean that it contains a second section that Luther later added to his original writing. The original section addresses the questions pertaining to plague, about which Hess had written; the later section discusses matters of Christian burial. This latter section was not included in the translation contained in Tappert.

²¹ “Gnad und fride von Gott unserm vater und dem HERRN Jhesu Christo.”

²² Tappert, 230; *LW* 43:119 translates *Frage* as ‘letter.’

he supplies a rationale for why he is now writing, giving permission also for the letter to be published.

In his first paragraph, the syntax of the opening sentence allows the explanation for the delay to register as fittingly sincere. Yet Luther is not merely apologizing, for he then supplies two reasons, each set forth through doublets, why he had not responded sooner: First, God had ‘disciplined and scourged [*zucht und staupe*]’ him so that he was unable to do much ‘reading or writing [*lesens noch schreibens*]’ (*WA* 23:339.10f.).²³ Second, Luther appears to flatter his reader, Hess, by delineating his gifts: he has been richly endowed with ‘wisdom and truth [*Verstand und Warheit*]’ in Christ and is well qualified to ‘decide and answer [*entscheiden und richten*]’²⁴ this matter in Christ’s ‘Spirit and grace [*Geist und Gnade*]’ without assistance. Yet more substantively, it is “God, the merciful Father, [who] has endowed you so richly.” The locution *der vater aller barmhertzikeit* is better rendered ‘father of all mercy’ (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3) and becomes a key phrase in this document.²⁵

In the second paragraph Luther relents, acknowledging that Hess has humbled himself by seeking Luther’s view. Luther then reciprocates, agreeing humbly to submit his own opinion for Hess and all devout Christians who ‘desire or use [*begeren und brauchen*]’ his instructions.²⁶ As a meaningful conveyance, the doublet is a natural stylistic tool, since Luther’s scriptural proof text for agreeing to supply an answer is a two-fold expression gleaned from Paul that is itself an extended doublet: “we may always agree with one another and be of the same mind.”²⁷ Indeed, the exigence is urgent, for the rumor of death is, or

²³ Intermittent bouts of fainting, dizziness, and ringing in his ears are well documented and discussed by Brecht. Luther believed that he was also under severe spiritual *Anfechtungen* during the summer of 1527, and Brecht agrees: “The combination of the psychological and the physical is unmistakable in this illness; Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:205. The period 1527–1529 was so marked by Luther’s poor health that Brecht discusses the open letter to Hess within the context of his section on Luther’s ‘Illness’ (205–210).

²⁴ “[D]ecide and answer” is Tappert’s translation (230); *LW* 43:119 ignores the doublet and renders it ‘decide.’

²⁵ Luther acknowledges that his opinion is subject to what God grants (*verleyhet*)—namely, that he might ‘understand and perceive [*begreifen mügen zuerkennen*]’—and is submitted for his readers’ own ‘decision and conclusion [*urteilen und richten*].’ Tappert (230) ignores *Barmhertzikeit*, rendering only ‘God the Father.’

²⁶ Fleischer, “Humanism and Reformation in Silesia,” (55), calls attention to Luther’s ‘forthrightness’ with Hess, especially in their correspondence.

²⁷ 1 Cor. 1:10; 13:11; Phil. 2:2. Tappert (230) translates *urteilen und richten* as doublet verbs (‘weighed and judged’).

will be, heard in ‘these and many other’ parts (*WA* 23:339.16–25). As it happens, Luther is not claiming sole credit for the ideas he is writing about: in paragraph one he uses the first person singular pronoun (*I, me*), but in the second he uses the plural (*we, our*). He wants Hess and other readers to take these ideas as representative of the Wittenberg teaching.²⁸

One final comment on the preliminaries is in order. In stating the question of Hess, and hence the issue he is addressing, Luther does not use the word ‘plague.’ As with the title of the document, the expression is ‘to flee death.’ Only later in the document does Luther use the explicit term *Pestilenz*.²⁹ So ‘rumor of death,’ the feared outcome rather than the precise cause, is certainly an accurate way to construe the situation people fear.

B. *The Substance of the Case*

Luther’s argument, in a nutshell, is that neither fleeing nor remaining is right or wrong per se; both positions have their problems. He shows the fallacy of fleeing to be that of violating one’s duties or one’s responsibilities to his ‘neighbor.’ He points out the error of remaining, if done so as to be thereby ‘tempting God.’ Luther’s strategy is to delay this latter argument until later in the piece, and when he gets there he grounds his position on Psalm 91:11–13. This is text used by the devil—the ‘middle temptation’ against Jesus in the Wilderness (Matt. 4:5–7 // Luke 4:5–8).

Luther essentially divides the question into two parts: (i) if one flees, is it right or wrong? and (ii) how should one decide whether to flee? I say essentially, because he makes no tidy distinction between the two parts; indeed, they intertwine throughout the piece. Yet he begins with the matter of (i) if one flees, by stating the two positions already being

²⁸ It is in the first sentence of paragraph two that Luther switches from singular to plural, leading his readers directly to the Pauline text: ‘writing to me . . . requesting our view.’ ‘[M]e’ is only assumed (correctly, I believe, from the prior context) by the *LW* translator, for it is not explicit in this sentence. Tappert, 230 does not use a singular pronoun, but he is definitely seeing not only the prior context as singular, but indeed also the rest of the paragraph. For he proceeds to translate all the personal pronouns (*unser / uns / wir / wir / uns / wirs / unser*) as singulars, perhaps taking Luther to be using plural pronouns editorially.

²⁹ Marius, *Martin Luther*, 9 points this out.

offered by some people, and then others. Thus, *WA* 23:339.26–341.2 (6 lines) is a *narratio* that lays out (a) the firm opinion—that one ‘need not and should not’ flee; and (b) the flexible opinion—that one, particularly if not holding public office, may properly flee. But Luther does not explicate these two positions with equal space.

Luther then renders a judgment about (a) the firm position (*WA* 23:341.3–10), for he does not censure but rather commends these folks for their excellent decision to uphold a good cause—namely, a strong faith; indeed, their ‘strong, firm faith [*starcken festen Glauben*]’ is one which they want all Christians to have. However, Luther characterizes this faith as rare, for most of the saints ‘have been and still are in dread’ of death. He contrasts this strong faith with an opposing neologism—the ‘milk faith’ most have. Yet he makes no criticism of this position; rather, he praises it highly, describing its firmness with respect to fleeing, and its disregard for death, with the same term (*Achten*). He also clearly sees this position as one of faith *toward God*,³⁰ for he also considers the plague to be sent from God, and thus one’s response toward it is also a response toward God. However, this strong faith is not only exemplary but also rare.

From *WA* 23:341.12–347.12 on, Luther pursues his own set of arguments, not abandoning the initial two positions but altering them to fit the contingent situation, with respect to people’s faith, as he sees it. He arranges his arguments about who must remain—and who might be excepted—into two categories: (1) those with obligations to ministry—first, sacred and second, secular—to subordinates, i.e., subjects they serve; and (2) those who have reciprocal social responsibilities to superiors above them or to subordinates below them. Luther provides evidence of strong and weak faith, and how each requires a commensurate treatment; he brings two examples from Scripture and elaborates upon them with lessons from experience.³¹ In these explanations, not only has Luther found the two texts to interpret each other; he has also used the conjunction *aber* three times to enact the contrast between

³⁰ *LW* 43:120 translates *starcken Glauben* as ‘strong faith in God,’ while Tappert, 231 does not.

³¹ A person of strong faith (*Ein Starckgleubiger*) suffers no ill effects from drinking poison (Mark 16:18), while one of weak faith (*Ein Schwachgleubiger*) would, however (*aber*), drink to his death. Peter walked upon water, when his faith was strong (*da er starck yn Glauben war*), but (*aber*) when he started to doubt and his faith weakened (*und schwach in Glauben ward*), he almost drowned (Matt. 14:30).

strong and weak. To add scriptural authority to the logic of these biblical examples, Luther then concludes (*Nu*)³² a principle from them, to which he also cites—without any quotation from—two Pauline texts (Rom. 15:1; 1 Cor. 12:22ff): “Christ does not want his weak ones to be abandoned” (*WA* 23:341.12–21).³³

Having thus argued that one cannot simply assert that all fleeing is wrong and having also established that Scripture recognizes that persons differ in their faith and that situations seem to affect that, Luther next shifts back toward a broader principle. He claims that there are two types of situation for which flight is wrong:³⁴ the first way is wrongful flight from death in disobedience to God’s ‘word and command.’ His example goes far beyond the ethically murky waters of plague, to the clear and uncontroversial case of renouncing the faith, where one is imprisoned precisely for the sake of God’s word. Here one ‘denies or repudiates’³⁵ God’s word in order to escape death. There is Christ’s plain ‘mandate and command’ not to flee but rather (*sondern*) to suffer

³² Neither Tappert, 231 nor *LW* 43:120 includes the concluding particle in their translation.

³³ Richard T. Rada, “Luther, Ethics and the Plague in Wittenberg: The Reformer’s Faith Approaches Disease and Suffering,” in *Let Christ Be Christ: Theology, Ethics and World Religions in the Two Kingdoms. Essays in Honor of the Sixty-Fifth Birthday of Charles L. Manske*, ed. Daniel N. Harmelink (Huntington Beach, Cal., 1999), 251–260 [here at 257–259], discusses Luther’s ethics in “Whether One May Flee” along three lines: teleological (‘What is the goal?’), deontological (‘What is the law?’), and relationalist (‘What is happening?’). He argues that Luther’s consideration of strong and weak faith inheres (‘shines brightly,’ 258) on the relationalist side, based “not on some law...but is completely grounded in the notion of personal responsibility in relationship with one’s neighbor” and that this consideration was intended by Luther for the ‘reassurance and comfort’ of his readers. While Rada’s conclusion is accurate, it is by no means complete. For, as already seen above, Luther grounds all his arguments in Scripture, and he strives to show how scripturally based arguments also resonate with lived experience. Rada, an M.D., has written the only scholarly article devoted solely to discussing Luther’s “Whether One May Flee” that I have found.

³⁴ When he claims to put it ‘briefly and concisely [*kurtz und eigentlich*]’ that there are two ways (*zweyley*) that ‘dying and fleeing death [*Sterben und Tod fliehen*]’ may happen (so Tappert, 231), Luther appears to suggest a tidy and clear structure to follow, but that is not the case. He gives the first instance immediately and transparently, but the second is by no means readily discernible. What he could mean is what he handles as exceptions to the responsibilities spiritual leaders have, or what he might mean by the second way is the secular office holders (*Amt*) that others had in mind earlier (*LW* 43:120; *WA* 23:341.2) and which he discusses after the spiritual leaders.

³⁵ For *odder* *LW* 43:120 uses ‘and’ instead of ‘or’; Tappert’s ‘denies or recants’ is apt (231), for my modern German dictionary prefers *widerrufen* for recanting religious belief.

death.³⁶ Then he offers a paraphrase of Matt. 10:33, 28a, putting Christ's words before his readers: "Whoever denies [*verleucket*] me before men, I will also deny [*verleucken*] before my Father who is in heaven" and "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, etc." (*WA* 23:341.22–30).³⁷ So Luther has established the most serious violation of flight—avoiding death by denying Christ—and he has done so quite concisely.³⁸ Next he turns to those sacred responsibilities that share similar scriptural admonition.

Likewise, those engaged in spiritual ministry—e.g., 'preachers and pastors [*Prediger und Seelsorger*]'—must 'stay and remain'³⁹ steadfast before the peril of 'dying and death.'⁴⁰ The argument for this group's responsibilities is obviously a contrast to the prior example (negative—the worst case, about what not to do), for this one is positive. What is similar, though, is the authority, which again comes from a plain command of Christ. The scriptural quotation is a combination of John 10:11a and 12b. As another antithesis, it provides first the positive, exemplary action, followed by the negative, which corresponds to Luther's prior category: "A good shepherd lays down his life for his⁴¹ sheep, but the hireling sees the wolf coming and flees." Not only has Luther here supplied scriptural command and human need; he has in addition offered

³⁶ Tappert, 231, reads 'rather to die'; a literal reading is 'to prefer dying.' We cannot miss three things here about this example: (1) Luther has used doublets to stress the severity of the offense and the authority of the rule being violated; (2) he has three times repeated *gotts wort* to hammer home the origin of the rule; (3) he has asserted that the rule is Christ's.

³⁷ In *SeptBib* it reads *bekennet*, but in 1534 Luther uses *verleugnet*. The first text clearly conveys threat against denial of Christ, which Luther obviously wants to establish as the most serious offense. The second text, in the form of an antithetical imperative, also maintains mild threat but in addition contains wisdom and promise, especially considering that Luther's 'etc' is invoking the broader context of Matt. 10, which is about God's provision and care.

³⁸ He could have used the scriptural example of Peter's denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:75 // Mark 14:30 // Luke 22:61), but that text may have been counterproductive for his readers. Luther's objective here is not to argue that flight from plague is the worst possible offense, but rather that it needs to be measured and weighed according to Scripture's teachings about duties and responsibilities—and about God's comfort.

³⁹ Tappert, 231; *LW* 43:121 misses the doublet.

⁴⁰ Both Tappert, 231 and *LW* 43:121 fail to translate the doublet. While the first doublet is complementary, designating different offices, the latter two are progressive; Luther will soon provide another complementary doublet.

⁴¹ *SeptBib*; both Tappert, 232 and *LW* 43:121 miss the second *seine*. In 1534 Luther will go with 'the sheep.'

promised reward to caregivers—not escape or success in this life but that which a Christian should value even more highly.

Next (*WA* 23:343.6–16) Luther discusses exceptions to the command that spiritual leaders must stay.⁴² The resource exception can be granted when sufficient numbers of preachers are available and agreement is reached that some may leave in order to avoid danger. Luther does not consider such leaving sinful because spiritual services are provided⁴³ and because all are ‘willing and ready’⁴⁴ to stay if necessary. He then supplies one example from church history and two from the life of Paul, both of which are given scriptural attribution. First, is the example (*Gleich*) of Athanasius (296–373), who fled his church in order to save his life because many others were there to administer his office.⁴⁵ Next (*Item*), Paul was lowered over the city wall of Damascus in a basket so he could escape (Acts 9:25). Finally, Paul let the disciples keep him from risking danger in the marketplace (Acts 19:30), because it was not essential for him to do so. These examples, without commentary, are intended by Luther to show how key spiritual leaders were convinced to permit their lives to be spared, so they could live to serve another day and because sufficient spiritual resources were already in place. These exceptions uncover fundamental values (such as the will to live and to protect)—values that Luther will address later on in this document.

In *WA* 23:343.16–28 Luther moves to a second dimension of persons obligated to remain. Here he identifies the offices, duties, and dangers that scriptural principles—exclusively from Paul—indicate are relevant in the case of plague. Those in public office must stay because God’s word ‘institutes and commands’ secular authority so that ‘town

⁴² In his synopsis of “Whether One May Flee,” Rada, “Luther, Ethics and the Plague” (255–257), mentions Luther’s discussion of these exceptions. He could have perhaps discussed these under his rubric of teleological ethics, for Luther seems to ground these exceptions in what will provide the desired outcome, ‘other things being equal.’

⁴³ Tappert, 232 translates this clause as ‘an adequate ministry is provided.’

⁴⁴ Both Tappert, 232 and *LW* 43:121 reverse the doublet.

⁴⁵ The most likely incident—one of several in the career of this Bishop of Alexandria, all of it during the Arian controversy—Luther has in mind occurred on 8 February 356 (described by Athanasius in *Apol. de fuga* 24), when he escaped arrest at the Church of St. Thomas. He spent the next six years in exile in Upper Egypt, returning to his bishopric in 361. From this exiled period come some of his most important writings. See Cornelius Clifford, “St. Athanasius,” *Catholic Encyclopedia on CD-ROM*, <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02035a.htm>>, (Accessed 22 August 2006).

and country' be 'ruled, protected, and preserved.' Paul teaches this in Rom. 13.⁴⁶ The appeal to experience (fear) employs the asyndetic quadruplet—'fires, murder, riots, and every imaginable disaster'—as dangers to an entire community that one has been called to govern. Not only would such abandonment—leaving the *Gemeinde* without 'official or government'—be a great sin (*grosse Sunde*; in first position in the sentence);⁴⁷ it is just what the devil seeks (appeal to shame) when order is lacking.⁴⁸

In *WA* 23:343.29–347.12 Luther discusses social obligations of a reciprocal nature. Four categories are included: (1) servants-master and maids-mistress; (2) father-children and children to parents; (3) common public servants; and (4) orphaned children-guardians or friends. Not every category has the same level of reciprocity, however; Luther seems more interested in demonstrating a 'neighbor-principle' inductively than in being rigorously systematic. He begins with the principle: persons who stand in a relationship of 'service or duty' toward one another have the same responsibilities as the two offices already discussed—sacred and secular.⁴⁹

Luther's final category in this section (*WA* 23:345.14–23) begins with the somewhat precise 'children who are orphaned' but essentially broadens out to address any situation involving sick friends and the

⁴⁶ Luther's quotation is a conflated paraphrase from Rom. 13:3–6 (*WA* 23:343.16–25; *LW* 43:121). In *SeptBib* (and later), Luther uses *Dienerin*, but he does not use *Obrigkeit* until 1534; in *SeptBib* Luther uses *geweltigen*. The 'etc' makes clear that Luther has more than just v. 4 in mind, as *LW* 43:121 cites. *WA* 23:343 and Tappert, 232 both cite only Rom. 13:6.

⁴⁷ So Tappert, 232.

⁴⁸ Tappert, 232 reads 'no order there'; *LW* 43:121 uses the euphemistic doublet 'law and order.'

⁴⁹ In the following, I have underlined the key signal of an exception: A servant (*Knecht*) should not leave the master, nor a maid (*Magd*) her mistress, without 'knowledge and permission [*Wissen und Urlaub*]' of 'master or mistress [*Herrn oder Frawen*].' Accordingly, master must not desert servant—or lady her maid—unless suitable provision (*Versorgen gnugsamlich*) for care is made. These cases—'servants and maids [*Knecht und Megde*],' 'masters and ladies [*Herrn und Frawen*]'—are all mandated (*Gotts Gebot*): obedience (*Gehorsam*) by subordinates and care (*Versorgen*) by superiors. Parents also—'fathers and mothers [*Vater und Mutter*]'—are divinely bound (*Gotts Gebot*) to 'serve and help [*zu dienen und zu helfen etc*]' their children, and children, in turn, their 'fathers and mothers [*Vater und Mutter*].' Likewise (*Item*) those who are hired for 'wages or duty [*Sold und Lohn*]'—such as "city physicians, city clerks, constables, or whatever their titles [*Stad artzt, Stad diener, Söldener, und wie die mögen genennet werden*]" should not flee without 'proficient and able [*tüchtige und gnugsame*]' substitutes their employer will accept. There is no reciprocal responsibility mentioned here, because these are officials to whom no member of the populace owes any allegiance.

neighbor. Those who are ‘guardians or close friends’ of these folk are obligated to remain or to arrange for nursing care. Using a verbal doublet, Luther then repeats his principle: no one should dare leave his neighbor unless there are others who will take his place in ‘waiting upon and nursing’ the sick.⁵⁰

In *WA* 23:345.24–347.6 Luther summarizes his principles for the nonemergency and sufficient resources situations.⁵¹ He describes both the situations and the intentions of patient and caregiver: (1) where sufficient people are available ‘for nursing and attending [*warten und versorgen*]’ the sick, they can make provision for care services, and may leave; (2) those ‘bold and strong’ in faith can stay in God’s name, for it is no sin. Both decisions—to flee or to remain—are equally sound, when the conditions are met.

C. *Self-Preservation is Biblical*

Luther next moves to support the tendency for self-preservation (*WA* 23:347.6–349.8). Paul says this in Eph. 4 (*sic*), “No man ever hates his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes” it (Eph. 5:29). Luther then cites Paul at 1 Cor. 12:21–26, arguing that all people should ‘body and life’⁵² preserve and not neglect.⁵³ Luther next strengthens his argument about the biblical support of self-preservation and how that should inform

⁵⁰ So Tappert, 233. He uses a second doublet to wrap up this point, that no one may forsake (*lassen*) the other in his distress (*Nöten*) but is obliged (*schuldig*) to ‘assist and help [*beyzustehen und helfen*]’ him as he himself would like to be helped. In between these two doublets is Luther’s scriptural proof-text; he argues that we must respect (*zufurchten*) Christ’s word (*Spruch*), “I was sick and you did not visit me, etc.,” Luther’s paraphrase of Matt. 25:43. Both Tappert, 233 and *WA* 23:345.19 cite Matt. 25:43, which reads ‘sick and in prison’; *LW* 43:122 cites vv. 41–46, clearly in recognition of Luther’s ‘etc’ that invokes the entire passage, for *LW*—in an uncharacteristic move—inserts an ellipsis after ‘me.’

⁵¹ Doublets and a triplet help him itemize those cases for which caregivers have an equal choice either ‘to flee or to remain [*zu fliehen und zu bleiben*]’; the choice made is commensurate with the faith of the caregiver. Note that in this case Luther prefaces his doublet with ‘both’ (*beyde*) and uses the coordinate connector *und* rather than the disjunctive connector *oder*.

⁵² One wonders if *Leib und Leben* is not the German counterpart to ‘life and limb’ in English.

⁵³ My syntactically literal translation. As is his habit thus far, Luther uses abundant doublets—synonymous, antithetical, complementary, and progressive—and two Pauline texts to argue this point; the first is a nominal doublet within an extended verbal doublet: ‘to flee from dying and death and to save one’s life [*sterben und Tod zu fliehen und das Leben zuretten*]’ is *natürlich*, ‘implanted by God and not forbidden [*von Gott eingepfanzet und nicht verboten*]’—unless against ‘God and neighbor [*Gott und den Nehesten*].’

ethical decisions in the face of plague—for both how to act and how to respond to others' actions.

The argument (*WA* 23:347.13–349.8) responds particularly to the 'firm opinion' above—that one must not and need not flee. Luther's argument is a combination of reasoning from scriptural truths, bolstered by citation, and a series of examples from heroic persons in the Bible who protected themselves from harm, without censure.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is not 'forbidden but rather much more⁵⁵ commanded' to work to seek 'food, clothing, and all we need' to avoid 'destruction and disaster,' provided we do not neglect our 'love and duty' to our neighbor. In fact, it is more appropriate to seek to 'preserve life and avoid death,' if we can avoid harm to the neighbor.⁵⁶

Luther's second paragraph (*WA* 23:347.24–349.8) provides the exemplary illustrations from Bible history, while citing just one text. He begins by stating that to flee from death is not wrong in itself: Abraham was a great saint who 'feared death and escaped it [*furcht er den Tod und floch yhn*],' through pretending Sarah was his sister; Isaac did likewise. His conclusion: All of them fled death when it was possible, but they did so without depriving their neighbors and while first meeting their obligations toward them.

D. *Prolepsis: But Should One Try to Avoid Death from Plague?*

WA 23:349.9–351.10 is an extended rebuttal, in two stages, of the 'firm opinion': (1) it begins with the stated objection that the preceding examples only apply to avoiding death from persecution and do not speak to death from pestilence—this is the first occurrence of *Pestilentz* in the document; (2) it ends with a form of *reductio ad absurdum* that

⁵⁴ Luther uses several doublets, two triplets, and longer series, even incorporating anaphora. His first paragraph (*WA* 23:347.13–23) invokes Christ's statement (*sagt*) in Matt. 5 (*sic*) that 'body and life [*Leib und Leben*]' are more than 'food and clothing [*Speyse und Kleider*]' (Matt. 6:25); so Tappert, 234. *LW* 43:123, probably following Matt. 6:25, simply reads the doublet as 'life.'

⁵⁵ Neither Tappert, 233 or *LW* 43:123 translate *viel mehr*.

⁵⁶ Contrarily, the one strong in faith who can willingly suffer 'nakedness, hunger, and want [*Blosse, Hunger und Nol*]' "without tempting God and not trying to escape [*on Gotts versuchen, und sich nich wil eraus erbeiten*]" should forego flight and remain, but he must not condemn (*verdammte*) those who "will not or cannot do the same [*solchs nicht thun odder nicht thun können*]."

engages the “one [who] must remain in the face of death or else one would be resisting God’s will” position, what Luther had earlier referred to as tempting God (*WA* 23:339.10).⁵⁷

The rebuttal consists in Luther’s own reasoning from Scripture—namely, that death is death, no matter what form it takes. His immediate support is to remind his readers that in the Scriptures God sent four ‘plagues or punishments.’⁵⁸ Using a rhetorical question that implies an affirmative answer, Luther reasons analogically that flight ‘with God and with clear conscience’⁵⁹ from one form of dying should mean that flight from all four is permissible, and he proceeds to deal directly with three of the four—the fourth being pestilence itself.⁶⁰ However, Luther is not finished with his rebuttal of the firm position, for in *WA* 23:349.23–351.10 he engages in *reductio ad absurdum* against the firm opinion. Six times Luther will use ‘God’s punishment’ sarcastically to show how one cannot easily find the limits of such a concept. He momentarily ridicules his hypothetical interlocutor, then keeps up this line of ridicule, using rhetorical question, continuing to employ ‘God’s punishment’ strategically, and resorting to more frequent doublets to pile on the descriptions of perils and responses.⁶¹ Finally, Luther turns

⁵⁷ As he generally does, Luther signals his prolepsis with “‘Yes,’ you may reply [*Ja sprichstu*],” followed by the stated objection mentioned above. He does not develop the objection, but immediately moves to reply (*Antwort*).

⁵⁸ So Tappert, 234; *LW* 43:124 renders the doublet as ‘scourges.’

⁵⁹ Tappert, 234, reverses the doublet (‘with good conscience and with God’s permission’), while *LW* 43:124 omits God (‘in clear conscience’).

⁶⁰ He reminds readers that they have already learned in his previous examples that (1) the holy fathers (*lieben heiligen Väter*) escaped the sword; and that (2) the three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—fled the other scourge (*andere Plage*; Tappert, 234 reads the ‘second plague’), namely, ‘hunger and death [*Hunger odder Theurunge*]’ when fleeing to Egypt, as Gen. 40–47 tells (*lesen*). Again using rhetorical question, Luther then argues that, by extension, people should escape wild beasts. Then, using invented dialogue for the first time, he inserts the objection—pertaining to sword—that if ‘war or the Turks [*Krieg odder der Turck*]’ come, one should not flee from ‘village or town [*Dorffe odder Stedlin*]’ but remain for God’s punishment (*Straffe Gotts*), a phrase he will later use several times. Luther rebuts this objection on two grounds, although only using one—namely, by recalling his previous conclusion that such a firm opinion should pertain only to one who has a strong faith (*Wer so starck ist ym Glauben*). Those who flee should not be condemned (*verdammte*).

⁶¹ ‘Freezing weather and winter [*Frost und Winter*]’ are also *Gottes Straffe* and can cause death. Why try to get ‘to a fire or into the house [*zum Feuw odder ynn die Stuben?*]’ (Tappert, 235; *LW* 43:124 reverses the doublet). ‘Be strong and stay outside [*Sey starck und bleibe yn frost*]’ until it warms up! With a clear signal that he is mocking the opponent’s view—‘According to this opinion [*Mit der Weisse*]’ (Tappert, 235; *WA* 23:352.2; *LW* 43:124 omits this phrase)—Luther continues to extend his line of reasoning. He offers the

to hypothetical blasphemy, reasoning *with* his reader.⁶² He then supplies his reasoning for the final claim, arguing that every kind of evil is also *Gotts Straffe*, so we would naturally want to stop seeking deliverance and even escape from it. He ends with the contemplative rhetorical question, “Where would all this end?”

E. *Positive Instructions for One’s Actions Toward Self and Others*

From his previous arguments Luther now advances guidance (*Unter-richt*), for both strong and weak in faith, about how to think and act in one’s own regard. Following that, he takes up one’s obligations to others. While he makes no explicit distinction between strong and weak, Luther first speaks to everybody and then allows for exceptions.⁶³ One must also note that the instructions here (*WA* 23:351.11–27) are spoken inclusively, for the personal pronouns are mostly first plural; only when using personal dialogue, which is extensive here, does Luther shift to first singular. As usual, the doublets are ubiquitous; not so usual is that there are no Scriptures cited. There are, however, two biblical allusions from the Gospels.

The first doublet is extended: we should pray against all evil and, to our best ability, guard against it, so we do not behave contrary to God—the ‘Do Not Tempt God’ argument previously advanced.⁶⁴ Luther’s invented dialogue is the prayer of Matt. 6:10b, taking the apostrophic ‘Lord, . . .’ and four times making emphatic (first position) use of the second person singular, intimate pronoun, breaking in but once with a variation. To preserve the parallelism I present here a

absurdity first—through polysyndetic triplet—and the reason last (= epistrophe): we then need no ‘apothecaries or drugs or physicians [*Apoteke noch Ertzeney noch Ertzte*]’ because (*Denn*) all illness is *Gottes Straffe*. Luther’s line of reasoning now becomes outlandish (= *reductio ad absurdum*): ‘Hunger and thirst [*Hunger und Durst*]’ are now ‘punishments and torture [*Straffe und Marter*]’; therefore, why ‘eat and drink [*issetu und trinckestu*]’ rather than submit to *Straffen* until they [i.e., hunger and thirst] abate themselves?

⁶² “[T]he Lord’s Prayer abbreviate and no longer pray [*abtheten und betten nicht mehr*], ‘deliver us from evil, Amen’ (literal translation). Here Luther quotes Matt. 6:13b (*WA* 23:351.7 and Tappert, 235 cite Luke 11:4).

⁶³ In fact, he indicates otherwise (“Everybody [*ein iglicher*] must take this to heart”). The exceptions: one free (*los*)—of commitments, presumably—and weak in faith.

⁶⁴ Accordingly, all statements of this section retain explicit orientation to God. If His will is that evil ‘come upon us and destroy us [*drynnen haben und weugen*]’, nothing can be done anyway. What one must resolve is to feel bound to stay and face death to serve one’s neighbor. The wherewithal to do this will only happen when one will ‘commend himself to God and say . . . [*so befehl er sich Gott und spreche*].’

syntactically literal translation: “Lord, in thy hands am I; thou hast me here kept; thy will be done; for I am thy lowly creature. Thou canst kill me or preserve me in this pestilence in the same way as if I were in fire, water, drought, or any other danger” (*WA* 23:351.16–20).⁶⁵ Having his argument culminate in a prayer of such scriptural language and style should certainly make it more compelling. Luther does precisely the same thing for the weak in faith.⁶⁶ He ends with an allusion to John 8:44:

Lord God, I am weak and fearful. Therefore I am running away from evil and am doing what I can to protect myself against it. I am nevertheless in thy hands in this and any other danger that might overtake me. Thy will be done. My flight alone will not succeed of itself because calamity and harm [*Ubel und Unsal*] are everywhere. Moreover, the devil never takes a holiday⁶⁷ and sleeps not. He is a murderer from the beginning [John 8:44] and tries everywhere to instigate murder and misfortune (*WA* 23:351.21–27).⁶⁸

Luther’s argument about how to regard and treat others (*WA* 23:351.28–353.12) invokes the same principle that informs the previous argument. By that I do not mean some ‘live and let live’ motto of insularity that our era might insinuate from what Luther has just said. On the contrary, when he says, ‘In the same way we must and we are obliged’ to our neighbor to accord him the same treatment, Luther means that other ‘troubles and perils’ must find us acting to aid our neighbor with the same attitude and energy with which we

⁶⁵ “Herre, ynn deiner hand bin ich, du hast mich hie angebunden, Dein wille geschehe, Denn ich bin dein arme Creatur. Du kanst mich hiern todtyn und erhalten so wol, als wenn ich etwa ym fewr, wasser, durst odder andere ferlickeit angebunden were.” In *SeptBib* Luther included ‘Thy will be done [*Dein Wille geschehe*]’ in Luke 11:2.

⁶⁶ He states that if one is, however (*Jst er aber*), ‘free and can escape [*los und kan fliehen*],’ let him ‘commend himself and say [*befehl er sich abermal und spreche*].’ Although, given that the dialogue is continuing what he already began—with its multiple deferential acknowledgements of deity—it continues to be centered around Matt. 6:10b but is more openly reflective.

⁶⁷ Tappert, 236 reverses the doublet and reads ‘does not sleep or take a holiday’; *LW* 43:125 misses the doublet and reads ‘never sleeps.’

⁶⁸ “Herr Gott ich bin schwach und furchtam. Drumb fliehe ich das ubel und thun so viel dazu als ich kan, das ich mich dafür huete. Abe rich bin gleichwol ynn deiner hand ynn diesem und allerley ubel, so mir begegen mugen, Dein wil geschehe, Denn mein flucht wirts nicht thun, Sintemal eitel ubel und unsal allenthalben ist. Denn der teuffel feyret und schleff nicht, welcher ist ein morder von anfang und sucht allenthalben eitel mord und ungluck an zurichten.”

protected ourselves.⁶⁹ In summarizing the argument I call attention to the syntax.⁷⁰

First, if a neighbor's house catches fire, love compels me 'to run and to help him [*zu lauffen und helfen*]'; if sufficient people are already there to help, I may 'go home or remain' to help. Second, should the neighbor fall into 'water or a pit,' I dare not turn away but (*sondern*) must rush to help, as I am able; if others are present to help, I am released. Third, when encountering one 'hungry or thirsty,' I cannot ignore him but (*sondern*) must offer 'food and drink,' whatever the personal cost.⁷¹ A man who does not 'help or support [*helffen und beystehen*]' another unless both 'his goods and his body'⁷² are preserved will never help his neighbor. He will always, as today we might say, be 'looking out for number one.' As immediate rebuttal, Luther then asserts that no neighbor can avoid risk to his own 'safety, property, wife, or child.'⁷³ He must run the risk that 'fire or some other accident' will 'come and destroy' him "bodily, or his goods, wife and child, and everything" (*WA* 23:353.6–13).

E. *Warnings to Those Who Forsake Their Neighbor*

Luther next returns to Scripture, using three biblical texts to anchor an argument of warning—essentially an appeal to shame—against those who violate the neighborly-responsibility principle, which is akin to the Golden Rule he has just stated and which he had concluded earlier: "According to this passage [Matt. 25:41–46], we are bound

⁶⁹ Then he supplies the examples of these perils, which he has earlier considered by way of what lack of responses would be ludicrous for one's self. Now he revisits these perils and models proper responses, using the first person singular. By doing so he puts himself in the forefront of what must be done, something that will make the speaker much more credible than if he used the confrontational 'you must.'

⁷⁰ Notice also the modals Luther uses—imperative or subjunctive—and the ubiquitous doublets—some synonymous or complementary, others progressive or even antithetical—for describing the range of activity or situation. Finally, notice the antithetical sentences that depict the wrong, then (using *sondern*) the right, action to take.

⁷¹ Luther uses another doublet to say this, literally: 'whether I become poor or puny [*ob ich arm odder geringer*]' (*WA* 23:353.5). Neither *LW* 43:125 or Tappert, 236 translates this as a doublet. At the half-way point in this argument Luther shifts into third person singular, for he is preparing to shift the discussion, in the next paragraph, to a somber warning about shirking these duties. As he prepares for this Luther employs longer, progressive series, in addition to the doublet.

⁷² Tappert, 236 reverses this doublet, as does *LW* 43:126.

⁷³ Luther uses the very epithet Jesus used in the Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:36, "Which of these three...*proved neighbor?*").

to each other...that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged...as he himself would like to be helped” (*LW* 43:122).⁷⁴ Luther’s third and final text in his warning here is a return to Matt. 25. He begins with 1 John, the very book he was lecturing on during the fall of 1527 (19 August to 7 November):⁷⁵ “Whoever does not love his brother is a murderer.”⁷⁶ Luther then turns to the Old Testament, finding in his cited quotation of Ezek. 16:49 the horrific accusation of sin like Sodom (who is made Israel’s sibling!) “Behold, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: idleness, abundance and sufficiency, and [her] hand did not aid the poor” (*WA* 23:353.20f.).⁷⁷ Luther then completes his scriptural evidence with a quotation of the final compound clause of Matt. 25:43, “I was sick⁷⁸ and you visited me not” (literal translation), which he asserts is precisely what Christ will say in condemnation on the last day to those murderers (*Mörder*, final position) of whom Ezekiel speaks. In a *gal wachomer* argument (*WA* 23:353.14–29) that is rife with progressive doublets, Luther uses rhetorical question to conclude some dire implications for those who neglect victims of plague and pestilence, neither of which term he has used for the last 75 lines.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *LW* 43:122 in fact cites Matt. 7:12.

⁷⁵ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 567. In his lectures on the epistle, Luther had said, “Of all the Epistles, this is the one most richly comforting since it buoys up afflicted hearts”; cf. *LW* 30:219 (*WA* 20:600.1f.).

⁷⁶ 1 John 3:15a. He quickly adds v. 17, which itself is built around a progressive doublet; I translate literally: “If anyone this world’s goods has and sees [*dieser welt Güter hat und sihet*] his neighbor in need, how abides God’s love in him [*wie bleibt die Liebe Gottes ynn yhm*]?” Here (v. 17) Luther has substituted neighbor (*Nehsten*) for brother (*Bruder*), which seems fair to the biblical context; in fact, both English translations of Luther read ‘brother’ here. But earlier (v. 15a) Luther changed the biblical text, which reads ‘hates his brother,’ toning down the language—although making the simple equation of ‘not love equals murder’—and fitting the wording of v. 15a more closely to v. 17.

⁷⁷ “Sihe das war die sunde deiner schwester Sodoma: Mussiggang, fulle und gnuge und reichten den armen die hand nicht.” Both Tappert, 236 and *LW* 43:126 fail to retain the first position of the triplet that follows ‘Sodom,’ and both make a doublet ‘poor and needy’ of *den Armen*. Both translators essentially have followed the biblical text rather than Luther. *LW* uses the RSV wording for the triplet.

⁷⁸ Luther drops ‘and in prison’ from the first clause of Matt. 25:43. In his subsequent application of the text, however, he says ‘poor and sick [*den Armen und Krancken*]’ (Tappert, 236).

⁷⁹ He reasons that if such judgment as those who failed the ‘poor and sick [*den Armen und Krancken*]’ when they did not ‘go... and help offer [*gehen und Hülffe anbieten*],’ what will become of those who ‘abandoned them and let them lie there [*lauffen und lassen sie liegen*]’ like ‘dogs and pigs [*die Hunde und Sevee*]?’ As readers contemplate that question, a second immediately follows. This one raises the stakes, beginning with Luther’s ‘Yes,...’: how will they fare who “rob the poor... and plague them in all kinds of ways [*nemen was sie*

G. *Caring for the Sick*

Having virtually completed part I—whether fleeing death, from all perils, is right or wrong—Luther now shifts to part II: how to decide whether to flee or stay; he argues for staying, and he offers many appeals to convince readers. Before he begins specific recommendations for handling an epidemic, Luther discusses, in a single paragraph (*WA* 23:353.30–355.8), two types of support system needed to care for plague victims. Both will require great personal sacrifice and commitment from all Christians: (1) the first, and ideal, system is for secular government (*Regiment*) in the ‘cities and states’ to operate ‘municipal homes and hospitals’ where sick patients could be sent to be cared for;⁸⁰ (2) since so few institutions exist, however, personal attention is needed. Luther argues that all must ‘for one another give hospital care and be nurses’ (literal translation)—in any need—or else risk loss of ‘salvation and the grace of God.’ Luther’s harsh stance here—which must be taken in the context of all he has said before about the flexibility due to adequate resources and weakness of faith—is then bolstered by the only Scriptures of this paragraph. Both come from Matthew and are set up by Luther’s rich citation formula, “Thus it is written [*stehet*] in God’s word and command.”⁸¹ With those strong texts Luther ends this part of the discussion and is ready for specific instructions and encouragement for staying to help care for the sick.

Luther’s instructions for caring for victims of plague (*WA* 23:355.9–24) begins, as did the document itself, by referring to dying—specifically

haben und legen yhn alle Plage an]?” The way Luther ends this section betrays a suspicion that he has overdeveloped this point and even digressed: “That is what the tyrants do to the poor who accept the gospel. But let that be; they have their condemnation [*Aber las gehen, sie haben yhre Urteil*]” (*WA* 23:353.27–29; *LW* 43:126).

⁸⁰ Luther claims that such was the ‘intent and purpose [*gesucht und gemeinet*]’ of those predecessors (*Vorfaren*) who planned for ‘foundations, hospitals, and infirmaries [*Stifften, Spitalen und Sieckheusern*]’ (Tappert, 237), so every citizen would not have to provide a hospital at home. However, such a ‘fine, commendable, and Christian [*wol sein, löblich und Christlich*]’ plan would take the ‘contributions and generous help [*müldiglich zu geben und helfen sollte*]’ (both *LW* 43:126 and Tappert, 237 reverse the doublet) of everyone, especially the government (*Öberkeit*).

⁸¹ “Was yhr wollet, das euch die leute thun sollen, das thut auch yhr den selbigen” (*WA* 23:355.7f.). His first text, “Love your neighbor as yourself [*Liebe deinen Nächststen dich selbs*]” is from Matt. 22:39, where Luther has dropped the initial ‘You shall’ and has placed the imperative verb in first position; thus, his quote matches that of Matt 19:19b. The second quote is Matt. 7:12a: “So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.”

here, as when dying begins. He ends the first paragraph (15 lines) with a Scripture quotation, and he does not use another until 44 lines later. Accordingly, Luther presses on—not digressing along medical lines—to reassert that the plague, and its insidious origins and pervasive means, is ‘God’s decree and punishment,’ and we must patiently submit, serving our neighbor and risking our lives, as John ‘teaches, saying’:⁸² “If Christ his life for us laid down, so ought we also, for the brethren, our lives lay down” (1 John 3:16, literal translation).⁸³

Now that he has framed the matter of instructions for caring for the dying as one of faith toward God and love of neighbor, Luther offers some extended counsel and encouragement for those of us—he continues in the inclusive first person plural—who will find such a self-sacrificial task difficult, particularly with regard to the unseemly symptoms plague victims manifest, and the risks they present to others. In other words, this section operates as prolepsis. The first paragraph (*WA* 23:355.24–357.10) uses no Scriptures but consists in Luther’s ubiquitous doublets and triplets as he juxtaposes two opposing forces: God and the devil. He will next offer his first answer to the devil (*WA* 23:357.11–359.2) in the form of extended dialogue.

H. *What One Should Tell the Devil*

Luther’s speech to the devil, which employs the first of two points (*zwey Stuck*) of attack against him, is 24 lines long and encourages the timid reader in two ways: (1) it heaps scorn on the opponent, the devil; (2) it multiplies praise to God and benefits to self. Showing the devil’s terrors to be *falschen*, the speech culminates in two final, parallel sentences. Moreover, the speech is almost perfectly bracketed (= inclusio) with apostrophe at beginning and end. Luther does not take on the devil alone; he keeps invoking Christ as at his side. Further, the language is confrontational: Luther speaks in first person singular, and even Christ is ‘my’ Christ; he addresses the devil directly in second person singular⁸⁴

⁸² Another doublet neither Tappert, 237 nor *LW* 43:127 translates.

⁸³ “Hat Christus sein leben fur uns gegeben, so sollen wir auch fur die brüder unser leben lassen.” Luther has paraphrased 3:16a (which says ‘he laid down’) but quoted 3:16b verbatim.

⁸⁴ He begins with apostrophe (“Get away, you devil, with your terrors [*Schrecken*]”) and continues with an onslaught of promises to be on the attack against the devil—by helping his neighbor. These promises then invite a bevy of doublets, nearly all of which are in praise of God and his resources: Because you hate it (*dichs verdreust*), I’ll spite

(“If you can terrorize, so can my⁸⁵ Christ strengthen;⁸⁶ if you can kill, so can Christ give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine”) [*WA* 23:357.27–29]. Luther then climaxes his speech with more parallelism, apostrophe, and more opposing epithets: “Should not my dear Christ, with his precepts, with his kindness and all that encouragement (*Trost*) be greater in my spirit than you, roguish devil, with your false terrors in my weak flesh?” Luther’s speech ends decisively—with two concise clauses to begin, one to close, and an emphatic, extended statement in the middle: “God forbid! Get thee behind me, Satan.⁸⁷ Here is Christ and I am his servant in this work. He shall prevail. Amen” (*WA* 23:357.32–359.2).⁸⁸

I. *God’s Mighty Promises for Ministers of the Needy*

In the next 60 lines (*WA* 23:359.3–361.20) Luther returns to Scripture in order to encourage Hess and other readers about the rewards for those who serve the sick. This he calls ‘the second’ point of attack against the devil,⁸⁹ the first being the invented speech he just gave to readers to use. He identifies his weapon with another rich expression,

you by helping my sick neighbor more quickly (*nur deste*); I’ll pay you no heed (*dich nicht ansehen*). I have two weapons to use, beginning with the certainty (*war weis*) that helping my neighbor is well-pleasing (*wolgefället*) to ‘God and all the angels [*Gotte allen Engeln*]; by helping my neighbor I do God’s will and render true ‘service and obedience [*Dienst und Gehorsam*].’ The more you hate and oppose this, the more I know it is particularly acceptable (*freylich gefallen*) to God. I would do this ‘readily and gladly [*willig und frölich*]’ to please just one angel. But I know it pleases my ‘Lord Jesus Christ and the whole heavenly host [*Herrn Jhesu Christo und dem gantzen hymlichen Heere*]’ because it is the ‘will and command [*Willen und Geopol*]’ of ‘God, my Father [*Gotts meins Vaters*].’ So how could fearing you spoil ‘such joy in heaven, such delight for my Lord [*solche Freude ym Hymel und Lust meins Herrn*]?’ How could I flatter you and give ‘you and your devils in hell [*dir mit deinen Teuffeln ynn der Helle*]’ cause (*anrichten*) to ‘mock and laugh [*gelechter und gespöt*]?’ No, your word will not be final. Since Christ shed (*vergossen*) his blood and died for me, how could some small dangers (*eine kleine Fahr*) for his sake keep me from facing the effects of a powerless pestilence (*amechtige Pestilentz*)?

⁸⁵ *LW* 43:128 misses ‘my.’

⁸⁶ Note the rhyme in the matching, oppositional verbs: *schrecken, stercken*.

⁸⁷ “...das volt Gott nymer mehr. Heb dich teuffel hinder mich” (*WA* 23:357.32). Tappert, 238 cites Matt. 16:23 in the footnotes.

⁸⁸ “Hie ist Christus und ich sein diener ynn diesem werck, der sols walten. AMEN.”

⁸⁹ *LW* 43:128. Luther says only *Das ander*, for this is his oral style, where a speaker often abbreviates, expecting his audience to supply the referents. Tappert, 238 reads, “The other point on which to attack the devil.”

‘God’s mighty promise,’ later saying ‘glorious, mighty⁹⁰ promises of God,’ still later ‘these comforting promises’ and ‘such promises and rewards of God.’ In addition to the doublet and triplet, Luther expounds on his topic by quoting Psalm 41 and 1 Tim. 4.

The first text, Psalm 41:1–3 (41:2–4 in the German Bible), is a nearly verbatim quote that captures two doublets (the second one is extended) in vv. 1–2—they essentially form a polysyndetic, apparently random series—yet, taken together with v. 3, the six actions prove climactic.⁹¹ As he moves to his second text, Luther uses two rhetorical questions to bridge the texts together, interpreting his quotation of Ps. 41 and preparing for 1 Tim. 4.⁹² His use of the passive voice in that sentence places the object of promise at the end of the sentence; God is the subject, the minister is the object. It is the minister, not the needy, who receives the blessing. Then Luther quotes Paul, “Godliness is of value in every way, and it holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:8bc).⁹³ The connections between texts—the terms, and their concepts of service and reward—require Luther now to justify the principal term of 1 Tim 4:8, ‘Godliness’ (used 6 times by Paul in 1 Tim.).⁹⁴ Then he appeals to experience (*Erfarunge*) and a repetition of Ps. 41:3 to argue that service to neighbor—now, specifically,

⁹⁰ Luther’s doublet is asyndetic, while both *LW* 43:128 and Tappert, 239 (‘great and glorious’) insert a conjunction.

⁹¹ “Blessed [*Wöl dem*] is he that considereth the poor [*Dürffügen*]: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive [*yhn bewaren und bey dem leben erhalten*]; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him [*yhm lassen wol gehen*] unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen [*erquicken*] him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt transform [*zandelstu*] his whole bed in his sickness.”

⁹² He asks, expecting an affirmation, if these declarations (of David) are not the ‘glorious and mighty promises of God’ heaped up upon (*mit hauffen eraus geschut auff*) those who minister to the needy? (Ps. 41:0: ‘To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David’ [Ps. 41:0, RSV]; *Ein Psalm Davids, vorsingen* [Ps. 41:1, *LB*]).

⁹³ The quote is verbatim from *SeptBib*, but in later editions Luther used *Frömmigkeit* in place of *Gottseligkeit*.

⁹⁴ He does so using a concise sorites, his premises established earlier in his quotation from 1 John 3:15, 17 (*WA* 23:353.17) and his strong connection between faith (acting toward God) and love (acting toward neighbor), which was grounded in his quotation of 1 John 3:16 (*WA* 23:355.13–23); the proof takes on chiasmic form, hence becoming a progressive chiasmus: Godliness [a] is nothing else (*nicht anders*) but service to God (*Gotts dienst* [b]). Service to God (*Gotts dienst* [b]) is indeed (*freylich*) service to neighbor (*man dem Nehesten dienet* [a]). *Gottesdienst* is the modern German word for the Protestant worship service.

the sick ('nurse the sick')—in fact does produce tangible reward.⁹⁵ However, only authentic service is positively rewarded; disingenuous service is commensurately punished.

J. *God's Attention and Healing Dwarf the Risks of Serving Plague Victims*

Luther next turns to a lengthy discussion of the fears people have of caring for plague victims. This section runs all the way to *WA* 23:363.31, and in it the writer employs all of the argumentative and stylistic strategies and tactics we have already seen, and some more besides. However, this section begins with Luther continuing to discuss the gracious promise (*tröstlich Verheissung*) for those engaging in authentic care. This short section (5 lines) alludes to one Scripture only, and the point of that text is peripheral to the main point of this brief part and the extended discussion that follows. Whereas the day laborer (*Tagelöhner*), according to Jesus, is worthy of his hire (*Lohns*),⁹⁶ the dominant reward is the great assurance that one will himself be cared for: this person's 'attendant and physician' will be God himself!⁹⁷ Luther's subsequent persuasion (*WA* 23:361.1–17) juxtaposes the mighty resources of God against the physical risks and fears that caring for plague victims poses. His argument is that no risk of harm can withstand the enormous and sure resources of God; the argument ends with a proof text from Psalm 91, the second of three texts that Satan used against Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–10). Stylistically, Luther begins in third person singular,

⁹⁵ Luther uses doublets and triplets to show (*beweist*) this process: those serving with 'love, devotion, and sincerity [*Lieb, Andacht und Ernst*]' are generally protected (*gemeinlich behütet*); although poisoned, they are unharmed, as the Psalm says (he quotes a conflation of 41:3a and 4b). Luther then explains the verse, claiming that the 'sickbed and recovery room [*Siechbette und Krancklager*]' are changed (*macht*) into a health room (*gesund lager*). Conversely, Luther immediately asserts that one serving in 'greed and expectation of inheritance [*Geitzs und Erbteil*]' should anticipate becoming eventually 'infected, disfigured, or even dying [*letzt vergiftt werde und beschmeist... sterbe*]' before realizing (*besitze*) the 'estate or inheritance [*das Gut odder Erbe*]' (*WA* 23:359.3–25).

⁹⁶ An allusion to Luke 10:7 (also quoted by Paul in 1 Tim. 5:8). Additional concession: although the servant of the sick can accept suitable reward (*zymlichen Lohn*) to which he is entitled (*wol bedarff*).

⁹⁷ This prompts Luther to use anaphoric exclamatio (Tappert, 239 omits the interjection of exclamatio ('O')). Since the statements also have the same ending (*ist das* [= epistrophe]), the precise figure is symproce, the combination of anaphora and epistrophe: "O what an attendant [*Warter*] is he! O what a physician [*Artz*] is he."

and then he turns directly to the reader, in second person singular, for a sustained confrontation. The first half of the section is filled with doublets; both halves contain numerous rhetorical questions.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ In a rhetorical question inviting an affirmative answer, Luther suggests that one should be encouraged (*einen mut machen*) to 'go and serve [*zu gehen und yhn dienen*]' without regard for the patient's 'buboes and boils [*Druse und Pestilentz*],' though they be as numerous as body hair (*Hare am gantzen Leibe*) and though the caregiver lift many bodies (*hundert Pestilentz*) and be bent double (*feym halfe eraus tragen*). The doublet is translated by *LW* 43:129 as 'contagious boils' and by Tappert, 239 as 'pestilential boils.' *Dris* is the Early New High German word for *Beulen*, translated as *Pest*. In Alfred Götze, *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar*, 7th ed (Berlin, 1967), 57. In modern German *Beulen* means 'dent' or 'boil,' and *Beulenpest* means 'bubonic plague.' 'Bubo,' from the Greek word βουβων ('groin'), referring to an inflammatory swelling in the lymph gland, especially in the groin, is the nodule for which Bubonic plague got its name. In using this term I am, of course, engaging in conjecture. The epidemiology of bubonic plague has only recently been researched exhaustively by modern scholars. During the 1894 outbreak in Hong Kong the French scientist—and pupil of Louis Pasteur—Alexandre Yersin discovered the bacillus responsible for the disease. His discovery was that rats (*R. rattus*) carry the disease and that rat fleas (*X. cheopis*) then contracted the bacillus, which subsequently came to be called *Yersinia Pestis* (*Y. pestis*). Modern research has also identified three clinical manifestations of plague: bubonic, septicemic, and pneumonic; the first two are generally lethal, and all three forms are thought to have appeared during outbreaks. However, the literature—both historical and medical—on plague is massive, particularly on the fourteenth-century outbreak, and fraught with controversy. A strong consensus—up until the last twenty years—held that the Black Death of fourteenth-century Europe and England, and an earlier outbreak in the sixth to eighth centuries, were two pandemics of plague and were probably bubonic plague. It gets more complicated, however, for the historical sources up to the nineteenth century—including Luther's document—are virtually silent on the presence of rats or dead rats. Whether that is an indication that rats were simply not thought noteworthy at the time, or whether some plague outbreaks were for other diseases, is difficult to know; there is even question as to rat survival in colder European climates. It is characteristic of bubonic plague to occur in warm weather—and this coincides with the 1520s German plagues, whereas the pneumonic form usually develops in winter. The latter disease affects the lungs and spreads through airborne droplets when the victim coughs, sneezes, or even talks; its characteristic symptom is not the appearance of painful boils or buboes but the coughing or spitting of bloody sputum. 'Droplet Infection,' as the principal means of disease transmission, is one of several arguments of some recent scholars for their contention that the Black Plague of the fourteenth century, and intermittent plagues up through the mid-seventeenth century was not Bubonic Plague. Susan Scott and Christopher Duncan, *Return of the Black Death: The World's Greatest Serial Killer* (Chichester, U.K., 2004), argue that the aforementioned plagues were all spread from person to person via droplet infection, and that virtually everyone of those eras knew that. Scott and Duncan argue that Bubonic Plague is an Asian disease. The European plagues, they claim, were caused by viral agents, not by bacteria, and they label these plagues haemorrhagic plague, because extensive haemorrhaging is an important symptom (167). In their *Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historical Populations* (Cambridge, 2001), 330, Scott and Duncan list eight outbreaks of plague to strike Wittenberg during 1500–1549. On p. 55 of *Return of the Black Death* they show the major trade routes in Europe during the Middle Ages, along which came infected

Shame and more shame on you, you out-and-out unbeliever, that you are despising such great comfort and letting yourself become more frightened of a small boil or uncertain danger than emboldened by such Godly, sure, faithful promises (*WA* 23:361.5–8).

The series of rhetorical questions directs the reader to choose God above all else, and the last question suggests strongly that with God it is a ‘win-win’ outcome. Luther uses a final rhetorical question to lead into his quote from Psalm 91. Having prepared for and quoted Psalm 91:11–13, which is a fundamental text for this entire document, Luther expounds the consequences of failing to remain to care for plague victims—what he is thinking of as the ‘sin on the left hand’ (on the ‘worse side’). Following this, he will argue what he labels explicitly the ‘sin on the right hand’ (on the ‘better side’). Luther asks rhetorically, “If God withdraws his hand and forsakes” us, what can happen except “sheer devilment and every kind of evil?” He then answers his own question (= anthyphora), adding the stipulation that identifies precisely what is wrongful flight: that the result is obviously as he has just said, when

travelers bringing the plague to the important centers of commerce. Thus, according to their theory, the plague would have moved inland (i.e., southward), arriving in Silesia before Saxony. Some representative sources on the fourteenth-century Black Death are the Introduction to the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), in a critical edition by Mark Musa and Peter E. Bondanella (New York, 1977); cf. Shona Kelly Wray, “Boccaccio and the Doctors: Medicine and Compassion in the Face of Plague,” *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 301–322; Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York, 1969); Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1983); Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, 1986); John Henderson, “The Black Death in Florence,” in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. Steven Bassett (London, 1992), 136–150. Literature on plague in the sixteenth century is more difficult to find, but see Paul Slack, “Mortality Crises and Epidemic Disease in England 1485–1610,” in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Charles Webster (Cambridge, 1979), 9–59; A. Lynn Martin, *Plague? Jesuit Accounts of Epidemic Disease in the 16th Century*. SCES 28 (Kirksville, Mo., 1996). For sources that have called into question bubonic plague as primary cause of the Black Death, see Graham Twigg, *The Black Death: A Biological Reappraisal* (New York, 1985), who argues that the Plague of 1346–1350 may have been anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*), as does Chris Holmes, *Spores, Plagues and History: The Story of Anthrax* (Dallas, Tex., 2003); David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); idem, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*. London, 2002, reviewed by Jon Arrizabalaga in *Speculum* 79 (2004): 1053–1055. A recent, more popular treatment—by which I mean only that the work lacks documentation—is by the eminent medieval historian, Norman F. Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World That It Made* (New York, 2001). There are also economic studies that focus on population dynamics and what role plague might have played in them; e.g., John Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348–1530* (London, 1977).

one abandons his neighbor against ‘God’s word and command’—in emphatic final position (*WA* 23:363.4–8).⁹⁹

As he brings this section on wrongful flight to a close, Luther shifts to a different appeal—back to honor and shame. Among readers who would wrongfully flee, or who might remain to serve under false motives, Luther tries to create feelings of shame. Implicit in this appeal is another one to honor, for he tries to evoke in readers the desire to serve with proper motives, based upon their valuing the commands of Christ. In this appeal he uses ubiquitous doublets, two Scriptures from Matthew, and the confrontational second person singular again. Prior to the first quotation, however, Luther uses the third person to make his appeal to shame.

The signal with which Luther begins his appeal is the disjunctive¹⁰⁰ (*aber*), accompanied by his observation, ‘This I well know’ and then his hypothetical condition: if ‘Christ himself¹⁰¹ or his mother’ were sick. The hypothetical outcomes Luther projects consist in four—three positive and one negative. He then stays in the intimate, personal—even confrontational—second person singular.¹⁰² He comments (= *interpretatio*) on the commands of Christ, taking them in reverse order (Matt. 22:39; 25:40). His tone begins gently and becomes more stern:

There you hear that the command to love the neighbor is equal to the first commandment to love God: and that what you do or fail to do for your neighbor means doing the same to God. If you wish to serve Christ himself¹⁰³ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him, not outwardly but in his word. If you are unwilling to serve your neighbor, you can be sure that if Christ himself¹⁰⁴ lay there instead, you would do the same thing—run away and let him lie there.¹⁰⁵ Those are nothing but illusions on your part, which leave you in unprofitable ignorance,¹⁰⁶ namely, that you would really serve Christ if he were there in person. Those are nothing but lies; whoever wants to serve Christ in person [*leiblich*] would surely serve his neighbor as well (*WA* 23:363.15–26).¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ So Tappert, 240; *LW* 43:130 misses the doublet as well as the emphatic syntax.

¹⁰⁰ Neither Tappert, 240 or *LW* 43:130 translates *aber*.

¹⁰¹ So Tappert, 240; *LW* 43:130 appears to ignore *selbs*.

¹⁰² Not counting those implied in the imperative verbs, I count 11 second person singular pronouns in 10 lines (*WA* 23:363.16–25).

¹⁰³ Again, both Tappert, 241 and *LW* 43:130 fail to translate *selber*.

¹⁰⁴ So Tappert, 241; *LW* 43:130 fails to translate *selbs*.

¹⁰⁵ So Tappert, 241.

¹⁰⁶ So Tappert, 241.

¹⁰⁷ “Da hörestu, das der liebe gebot zum nehesten gleich sey dem ersten gebot der

The theme of serving Christ through serving one's neighbor is prominent in Luther's "Fourteen Consolations" (1519).¹⁰⁸

K. *Tempting God*

Luther now engages the opposite mistake—that of taking unnecessary health risks in ministering to plague victims. In this section (*WA* 23:363.30–365.22) he will open the subject of medical care and what should be a person's responsible attitude toward it before God. This will then lead to advice he gives plague victims themselves, in the next section. As argumentative strategies Luther again uses *reductio ad absurdum*, one bit of dialogue, and no Scripture at all. For stylistic tactics, the doublet and the third person pronoun are the weapons of choice; keeping the discussion centered on 'others' allows the speaker to prosecute without humiliating the reader. The key expression in this section is, again, 'God's punishment,' the term this position's advocates presumably use as *apologia*.

Those who sin on the right hand are too 'rash and reckless,' 'tempting God and disregarding' all that might counteract 'death and the plague.'¹⁰⁹ They forego medicine; they do not avoid 'places and persons' that are 'infected and overcome'¹¹⁰ by the plague; they 'trifle and play with it' to prove their independence. They call it God's punishment, which he will protect 'without medicines or our carefulness' (*WA* 23:365.4–8).

The remainder of this section is Luther's plainest arguments yet against what he has just twice called 'tempting God.' His argument parallels his *reductio ad absurdum* argument earlier (*WA* 23:349–51) in regards to natural emergencies, but here he extends the argument, applying it directly to medical care. He uses no Scripture; only analogies

liebe zu Gott: Und was du deinem nehisten thust odder lessest, sol heissen so viel als Gott selber gethan und gelassen. Wiltu nu Christo selber dienen und sein warten, Wolan so hastu da fur dir deinen krancken nehisten, gehe hin zu yhm und diene yhm, so findestu gewislich Christum an yhm, nicht nach der person, sondern ynn seinem wort. Wiltu aber und magst deinem nehisten nicht dienen, so gleube fur war, wenn Christus selbs da were, du thettest eben auch also und liessesst yhn liegen. Und ist nichts bey dir denn eitel falsche gedancken, die dir einen unnutzen dunckel machen, wie du Christo woltest dienen, wenn er da were. Es sind eitel lügen: denn wer Christo leiblich dienen wurd, der dienete seinem nehisten auch wol."

¹⁰⁸ *LW* 42:121–166; *WA* 6:104–134. See Chapter One in this book.

¹⁰⁹ Tappert, 241 reverses the doublet.

¹¹⁰ *LW* 43:131 misses the doublet; Tappert, 241 extends it into two clauses.

are employed. The style is all in the third person, and the doublets are still present. Luther completes the section with more dialogue from the opposition. The first argument (*WA* 23:365.8–14) is that refusing medicine—already labeled as tempting God—is tantamount to suicide (*selbs Mörder*), a term he uses twice. The second argument (*WA* 23:365.14–22) worsens the culpability, for now there are pragmatic results harmful to others: it is even more shameful to neglect one’s own body by failing to protect himself from plague (*die Pestilentz*) and then ‘infect and poison [*beschmeissen und vergifften*]’ others who might have stayed alive if he had taken care of himself. Luther then concludes the outcome of such negligence: that one is responsible for his neighbor’s death and is a murderer. He uses the house fire analogy, which he had previously used, to caricature the offense in the most ridiculous possible light: these people are acting like people who allow a burning house to go up in flames, doing nothing to stop it or to protect other homes. They allow the flames to grow into a citywide conflagration, their rationale being, “if it’s God’s will, he can preserve the city without water and without quenching the flames.”¹¹¹

L. *Instructions for Caregivers*

Luther turns his discussion of tempting God into prescriptions for counteracting it (*WA* 23:365.23–367.9). He addresses caregivers, about whom he has been speaking, who must develop a new attitude toward the disease and those who contract it—toward self and toward God. Still using no Scripture passages,¹¹² Luther first gives crisp, pithy instructions; then he follows them with dialogue that models what one ought to think in order to carry out such orders. Stylistically, Luther returns to the intimate second person singular pronoun, but he places his dialogue in the first person singular; it is meant for the community, though.

Notice how Luther uses triplet, doublet, compact and parallel phrasing, even rhetorical question, to redress the errors of mistaken readers:

Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a man who wants to

¹¹¹ So Tappert, 242.

¹¹² The gap between uses of Scripture is 63 lines.

help put out the burning city. What else is the epidemic but a fire that, instead of consuming wood and straw, devours body and life¹¹³ [*Leib und Leben*]? (*WA* 23:365.23–28).¹¹⁴

Since the rhetorical question invites an affirmative response, Luther then provides a progression of actions—in the form of soliloquy—to think (*dencke*); nearly all the successive actions are spoken with verbs in their normal, final position.

Very well, by God's decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to be gracious and preserve¹¹⁵ us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it.¹¹⁶ I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute [*vergifften und anzunden*] others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will feel free to visit and help¹¹⁷ him (*WA* 23:365.29–367.8).¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Tappert, 242; *LW* 43:132 reverses the doublet.

¹¹⁴ “. . . sondern brauche der ertzney, nym zu dir was dich helfen kan, reuchere haus, hoff und gassen, meyde auch person und stet, da dein nehester dein nichts bedarff odder auffkomen ist, und stele dich als einer, de rein gemein feur gerne wolt helfen dempfen. Denn was ist die Pestilentz anders den nein feur, das nicht holtz und stro, sondern leib und leben auffrisset.” In his letter to Jonas (10 November 1527) one can find Luther himself practicing these recommendations. He mentions a surgical procedure performed on Margaret von Mochau, draining pus from an abscess (“Margarithae Mochinnae apostema heri incisum est, et pure pestilente emisso incipit melius habere”); he discusses quarantine procedures that confined her—and little Johannes Luther [*‘Henschen’*]—to a different room than others who are still healthy (“includi eam hybernaculo nostro usitato, nos in anteriore magna aula versamur . . . in meo hypocausto”); and he stipulates that the sick wife of a local physician (Augustine Schurf, teacher of medicine in Wittenberg since 1521) is staying with them (“Augustini uxor in suo”). Undoubtedly these strategies and precautions were taken in consultation with the physicians; cf. *WABr* 4:280.29–33; *LW* 49:174 (Nr. 1168).

¹¹⁵ So Tappert, 242.

¹¹⁶ Tappert, 242 translates the doublet; *LW* 43:132 does not.

¹¹⁷ So Tappert, 242; *LW* 43:132 does not translate the doublet.

¹¹⁸ “Wolan der feind hat uns durch gotts verhengnis giffi und tödliche geschmeis herein geschickt, so wil ich bitten zu Gott, das e runs gnedig sey und were. Darnach wil ich auch reuchern, die lufft helfen fegen, ertzney geben und nemen, meiden stet und person, Da man mein nichts darff, auff das ich mich selbs nicht verwarlose und dazu durch mich villeicht viel andere vergifften und anzunden möchte und yhn also durch meine hinlessickeit ursach des todes sein. Wil mich mein Gott daruber haben, so wird er mich wol finden: so hab ich doch gethan das er mir zu thun gegeben hat, und bin wider an meinem eigen nach ander leute tode schuldig. Wo aber mein nehester mein darff, wil ich wider stet noch person meiden, sondern frey zu yhm gehen und helfen.”

Luther finishes this section with what he calls a God-fearing faith (*Gottfurchtiger Glaube*), a key expression that is meant to counter—and conquer—the misguided ‘God’s punishment.’

M. Instructions to Plague Victims and Potential Disease Carriers

Luther now stays in the third person, addressing his readers about what victims, potential victims, and particularly survivors should do to protect and provide for their own health and that of others. Some of what he says here will remind readers today of another infectious disease—the AIDS epidemic—and the situations, and responsibilities, of persons who are HIV-positive. This section is more discussion about tempting God in one’s care-giving, yet is not as vitriolic and is more concretely about plague. Luther seems to be responding to people’s customs and to rumors he has heard about behavior in the face of an epidemic. He gives what he believes is sound advice, informed by analogical reason and the biblical example of leprosy. The style continues to be filled with doublets and qualifying phrases.

Luther argues that he who ‘contracted the disease and recovered’ should ‘keep away from others and not admit them’ into his presence, unless necessary (*on Not*). One should not risk others’ lives by exposing them unnecessarily (*on Not*) to danger; Luther then paraphrases Ecclus. 3:26b as his proof text. Everyone should help ward off contagion as best he can (*kiindte*), for then the death toll would be moderate (*gnedigs*). As he continues this section (*WA* 23:367.27–371.2) his argumentation gets more negative in tone. He now moves on to examples of repulsive behavior that is probably no longer hypothetical. Since he is writing to pastors with administrative responsibilities in their congregations, which would include secular rulers having oversight over others, Luther appears to find that the dire situation warrants such stern language. Eventually he will recommend the death penalty for the worst offenders, and his reference to the case of leprosy in the Old Testament is meant as a more practical and effective—since preventive—measure. Stylistically, doublets are the chief weapons, and Luther uses several key expressions—all of which are negative.

He reports having heard of some who are so incredibly vicious that they go about ‘among the people and into homes’¹¹⁹ because they regret that *Pestilentz* has not yet arrived and wish to bring it. Luther

¹¹⁹ Tappert, 243.

characterizes this horrendous behavior with two analogies designed to render the plague-spreading behavior more reprehensible by virtue of its dissimilarity with the analogies: they operate as though this behavior is a prank (*Schertz*), along the lines of—out of malice (*zur Schalckeit*)—‘putting lice into fur garments or flies into someone’s living room’ (*WA* 369.1–8). Yet Luther then admits that such persons are a minority but still the work of the devil, who is never idle. He suggests that the judge should take any such people by the hair¹²⁰ (*Kopffē*) and turn them over to the hangman, as ‘real, malicious murderers and scoundrels¹²¹ [*die rechten mutwilligen Mörder und Bösewichter*].’ Then Luther projects out some shared details that the analogy reveals. Because the analogy leads to more epithets, I quote him at length:

Here and there an assassin will jab a knife through someone and no one can find the culprit. So these folk infect [*schmeissen*] here a child, there a woman and can never be caught. They go on laughing as though they had accomplished something. Where this is the case, it would be better to live among wild beasts than with such murderers. Such killers I do not know how to preach to. They heed not. I appeal to the authorities to take charge and turn them over to the help and advice [*Hulff und Rad*], not of physicians but of the hangman [*nicht der Ertzte, sondern Meister Hansen*] (*WA* 23:369.14–20).

Luther’s concluding remarks (*WA* 23:369.29–371.4) about whether to flee a deadly plague bring an assessment of the current situation in Wittenberg, and then succinctly Luther closes this portion of the document with a postscript. He claims that *unser Pestilentz hie zu Wittemberg* has been caused by nothing else but such contagion.¹²² He thanks God that the Wittenberg air is still ‘clean and pure’; he charges that because of ‘foolhardiness and neglect’¹²³ that some few have been infected; he concludes that the devil enjoys himself at the ‘terror and flight’ he has caused among us. He closes with a malediction, “May God thwart him! Amen.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Tappert, 243.

¹²¹ Tappert, 243.

¹²² Tappert, 244.

¹²³ Tappert, 244.

¹²⁴ “Gott wolt yhm weren. AMEN.” Tappert, 244 reads, “May God hold him in check. Amen.” Luther’s postscript is a terse summary and a benediction: This is what ‘we think and conclude [*unser Verstand und Meynung*]’ on the subject of fleeing from death. “If you are of a different opinion, may God reveal it to you. Amen.”

N. *Brief Instructions on Preparation for Death*

In both the manuscript and the printed editions, Luther's document—what he calls this letter (*brief*)—continues without any major break, other than a new paragraph. Yet it is clear that Luther added this section later,¹²⁵ for he signals his intentions with a two-sentence (5 lines) *narratio* (WA 23:371.5–10).¹²⁶ He then explains in such a way as to suggest that preparing for death from plague is not essentially different from preparing for other kinds of death.¹²⁷ For he says, “This, orally from the pulpit, we have done and daily still do in fulfillment of our¹²⁸ ministry [*Seel sorgern*] to which we have been called as pastors” (WA 23:371.8–10).¹²⁹ Based on what Luther says in his summary at the end of this discussion, it becomes more evident that he intended these remarks first for the people of Wittenberg and Saxony. Here was an opportunity to make some concentrated remarks against those who put off concern for their souls, or those of loved ones, until their eleventh hour on their deathbeds.

The major discussion of preparation for death is organized into three enumerated parts. The first two fill a paragraph each; the third uses two paragraphs. Logically they proceed deductively—from general to particular, from all to some, from more time before death to less, from routine readiness through daily living to special preparation as death approaches. In other words, Luther argues that in order to know how to die one must know how to live. This is consistent with his “Sermon on Preparing to Die” (1519).¹³⁰

First: Always Attend to God's Word: Luther argues that all must stay close to God through attention to the word—which is available primarily in church. The urgency and seriousness with which Luther holds this claim is demonstrated immediately in his first part (WA

¹²⁵ Tappert ends his translation without including this section or the last one.

¹²⁶ He uses the first person singular in the first sentence, the plural in the second. He states that since the letter will be printed for ‘our’ (LW 43:134 omits the pronoun) people to read, he thought it useful to include brief instructions on how to ‘care and provide for [*schucken und halten... leufften*]’ the soul in time of death. With *ynn solchen* we understand Luther to have in mind death from plague.

¹²⁷ Rada, “Luther, Ethics and the Plague in Wittenberg,” does not discuss this section in his synopsis (255–257).

¹²⁸ LW 43:134 omits the pronoun.

¹²⁹ “...wie wir denn die selbigen auch mündlich auff der Kantzel gethan und teglich thun, damit wir auch unserm ampt gnug thun, die wir zu seel sorgern beruffen sind.”

¹³⁰ LW 42:99–115; WA 2:685–697. See Chapter Two of this book.

23:371.10–22). The argument operates as a mandate from Scripture (‘Do this, or I will...’). Such a strategy downplays the crisis nature of ‘how to die,’ putting it into a larger context of ‘how to live.’ For argumentative evidence Luther uses one Scripture passage. Stylistically he uses many doublets and one instance of anaphora. His stance uses the third person to speak of the people, and the first person plural to include other pastors—his target audience. Thus Luther speaks about parishioners while addressing their pastors.

People must be admonished, Luther maintains, ‘to attend church and listen to the sermon’ so they learn from the word ‘how to live and how to die.’ That is the goal; everything else Luther says on this subject pertains to failure to reach the goal, and what pastors should do about it.¹³¹ Then the writer resumes his criticism of the wicked, arguing that one living like ‘a heathen or dog’ and not repenting publicly should not expect we would “administer the sacrament nor have [us] count him a Christian” (*WA* 23:371.17f.). Let him die as he lived and see that “we shall not throw pearls before swine nor give to dogs what is holy” (*Matt.* 7:6).¹³² The many doublets contribute to a coherent argument; aided by parallel syntax—that, particularly in the example of how *not* to live and die—dying and living are inseparably fused.

Second: Constantly Prepare Through Obedience: As time may grow shorter before one contracts the disease, one should use the opportunity to ‘prepare in time and get ready for death’ by ‘confessing and taking the sacrament’ ‘weekly or biweekly’ (*WA* 23:371.23–25). With those three doublets Luther lays out a lifelong program of obedience. However, as he proceeds, the urgency becomes ever more apparent: not only can one not predict when she or he may become sick, but there

¹³¹ Those so ‘uncouth and wicked [*rohe und rauchlos*]’ as to despise the word while in good health—by this Luther undoubtedly means, at the least, people who frequently miss church—should be ignored (*lassen liegen*) when they become sick. Before continuing to lambaste the derelict, however, Luther mentions the exception to what he has just declared: when they show ‘remorse and repentance [*Rew und Busse*]’—‘with great earnestness, with tears, and lamentation [*mit grosse Ernst, mit Weinen und Klagen*]’; with the series in final position, the signs become as important as the actions they accompany.

¹³² “Denn wir sollen den sewen nicht perlen fur werffen noch den hunden das heilighum” (Luther has quoted the verse backwards). Luther closes with a sad (*leider*) observation—that there are many ‘churlish, hardened [*grobs verstocks*]’ ruffians (*Pöfels*) who care nothing for their souls ‘when they live or when they die [*ym leben noch sterben*]’; these simply ‘lie down and die like hulks’ that have ‘neither sense nor thought [*Synn noch Gedancken*]’ (*WA* 23:371.18–22).

are only so many pastors to go around. In addition to confession and sacrament, there are the matters of reconciliation (*versune*) with one's neighbor and the making of a will (*Testament*).¹³³ Then Luther provides the reason why the three-fold action on the parishioner's part—and the continuing routine of confessing and partaking of sacrament—is necessary: with many dying and 'only two or three' pastors (*Seelsorger*) on duty, they cannot get to everyone 'to give instruction and to teach' what one must know in the anguish of death.¹³⁴

Thus far, Luther's instructions are highly consistent with what he recommended in "Sermon on Preparing to Die" (1519). There he set forth instructions in 20 sections, the first five of which are parallel to what he has said here, particularly in his second part, containing four instructions (confession, sacraments, reconciliation, last will).¹³⁵ The order varies between these two documents because the situations are slightly different. "Sermon on Preparing to Die" was written by request for readers who are presumably already ill and dying; "Whether to Flee" was written to those facing the possibility of becoming ill.

Third: Clergy Must Be Called While Patients Are Still Alert: Luther addresses the situation here of *when* the pastor should be called to the bedside of the dying. His argument makes a definite distinction between Lutheran and Catholic practices at the deathbed. This part is twice as long as either of the previous two, for he addresses specific problems in trying to minister to people who are already comatose or incoherent; there is exasperation in the writer's language. As with the previous part, no Scripture is used, doublets abound, and a couple of longer series are found. In addition, Luther uses some dialogue and utters one strong expression that characterizes the attitude of the negligent—an

¹³³ The reason for these is that if "the Lord knocks and he should depart [*der Herr anklopffet und er ubereilet wirde*]" before the 'pastor or chaplain [*Pfarher odder Caplan*]' arrives, the sick person will have: "his soul provided for, nothing undone left, but rather to God himself committed]" (*WA* 23:371.27f.).

¹³⁴ Luther's instruction culminates in more sad declarations for those who fail to heed: the 'careless and negligent [*lessig und seunig*]' must account for themselves; it is their own fault. A 'private pulpit and altar [*sonderlichen Predigstuel und Altar*]' cannot be set up just because they have despised the 'public pulpit and altar [*gemeinen Predigstuel und Altar*]' to which God 'has summoned and called [*beruffen und gefoddert hat*]' them (*WA* 23:371.32–373.2).

¹³⁵ The differences from "Sermon on Preparing to Die": (1) there his very first section dealt with the surrender of possessions (*LW* 42:99)—what he listed here in fourth position; (2) there his second instruction was to forgive and seek forgiveness (*LW* 42:99), while here it was third in order; (3) there, in section four (*LW* 42:100), he instructed his reader to confess and receive sacrament while here he listed them first and second.

issue pervading all four paragraphs of this topic. In paragraph one he continues to use the third person; in the final paragraph he switches to first person plural, as he had begun with in the *narratio*.

Luther explains the importance of notifying the ‘chaplain or pastor’ soon enough, before the illness overwhelms the patient and one still has ‘sense and reason’¹³⁶ (*WA* 23:373.3–5). Luther’s purpose for asserting this is the negligent practice of those who ‘make no request or’¹³⁷ send no message’ until the patient is on the last breath¹³⁸ and is no longer ‘able to speak or be rational.’¹³⁹ Worse, Luther says, the family then begs.¹⁴⁰ With a rhetorical question exhibiting exasperation, he depicts in harsh terms the behavior of families like the one described:

What should a diligent pastor do with such people who neglect both body and soul? They live and die like beasts. Such folks at the last minute want the Gospel taught and the sacrament administered as when they lived under the papacy, when nobody asked whether they believed or understood the Gospel but just stuffed the sacrament down their throats as if into a bread bag (*WA* 23:373.11–17).

Luther’s second paragraph comments further on this behavior that he considers so wrongheaded and contrary to Reformation teaching. In addition to the improper behavior already described, he now offers first an account of what positive signs in the patient must be seen by a pastor.¹⁴¹ Luther continues to assert that pastors are commanded not to give the holy sacrament ‘to unbelievers but rather to believers’ who can ‘state and explain’ their faith.¹⁴² In closing, he stays in

¹³⁶ *LW* 43:135 misses the doublet.

¹³⁷ *LW* 43:135 translates *odder* as ‘and.’

¹³⁸ *LW* 43:135 reads literally, “the soul is perched for flight on the tip of their tongues [*die Seel auff der Zungen sitzet*]” (*WA* 23:373.7), noting (n. 17) that popular belief held that the soul left the body at death through the mouth.

¹³⁹ *LW* 43:135 reverses the doublet.

¹⁴⁰ “‘Dear Sir, say the very best you can for him,’ etc.” Such behavior from the family might be understandable (and excusable), were it not for what Luther then says the same family did: “But earlier,” he reminds his readers, “when the illness first began [*ansehet*], they wanted no visit but would say, ‘Oh, there’s no need. I hope it will get better.’”

¹⁴¹ If someone cannot ‘talk or indicate by signs [*reden odder zeichen geben*]’—particularly if he has willfully neglected it—that he ‘believes, understands, and desires [*glaube, versehe und begere*]’ the sacrament, “we will not give it to him just anytime he asks.”

¹⁴² He further urges that the others (*andern*)—i.e., those unbelievers—be left alone (*faren*), to continue believing as they do. “We are guiltless (*entschuldigt*),” he declares, “for we have not neglected [*feylet*] preaching, teaching, exhortation, consolation, visitation, nor anything else [*predigen, leren, vermanen, trosten, besuchen noch an yrgent*] that pertains to our office or ministry [*unsern ampt odder dienst*]” (*WA* 23:373.18–25; [*LW* 43:135 reverses

the first person plural, in which he has already begun ('We are guiltless'), addressing his readers in Breslau once again, using for the first time the second person plural to address them. He clarifies what he has briefly written as 'our instruction, what we practice here.' Luther then offers a disclaimer—that what he has written in this section was not intended for folks in Breslau (but presumably for people closer to Wittenberg). His reason is that Christ is with them and that, without aid of Wittenberg He will amply instruct them and supply their needs with His own ointment (*Salbe*). "To him be praise and honor together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen" (*WA* 23:373.25–29).

O. *Advice about Burial Practices*

In what Craig Koslofsky calls "apparently the first discussion of the subject in the context of the Reformation," Luther's second subject of the additions to the document—and the third topic overall—is burial practices (*Begrebnis*).¹⁴³ More specifically, his concern is not with the funeral, burial preparation or rites, prayers for the dead, or the state of the dead; his concern is strictly with the burial site. Thus, Luther participates in a growing movement in the early sixteenth century toward extramural burial, where the rationale driving efforts to relocate cemeteries outside of city walls was not necessarily an effort to expunge Catholic beliefs in the merit of *ad sanctos* burial, but rather was nearly always health reasons, particularly plague.¹⁴⁴ As it happens, Luther also advocates extramural burial for health reasons, but he does not stop there. He divides the topic in two: (I) location of the cemetery (*Kirchhoff*),¹⁴⁵ (II) behavior within the cemetery. Following discussion of these two topics, Luther concludes the entire document. He does not

the last doublet). That series of six pastoral functions takes roughly the same order as Luther has followed in this discussion on care and provision for the soul for death.

¹⁴³ Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 47. He stipulates that Luther was the first theologian to argue that the place of the dead should be determined by medical rather than religious considerations. Rada, "Luther, Ethics and the Plague in Wittenberg," does not discuss this section in his synopsis (255–257).

¹⁴⁴ See Koslofsky, "The Rise of Extramural Burial in Sixteenth-century Germany," 41–46, in *The Reformation of the Dead*, where he discusses documented extramural burial initiatives occurring in the first two decades of the sixteenth century. Koslofsky mentions five cities, starting with Freiburg/Breisgau (1514) and ending with Zwickau (1521). Munich is a case where the initiative came in 1480.

¹⁴⁵ In this document Luther does not use *Friedhof*, the more common term for cemetery.

summarize, in particular, any of the three parts, however. Instead, he uses plague terminology metaphorically to ask for prayer support in battling Satan's attack on the sacrament.

Location of Cemeteries: Luther organizes his remarks about cemetery location into three steps: (A) possible health risks of intramural cemeteries (*WA* 23:373.31–375.10)—to whose authoritative word he defers to medical experts; (B) precedents in antiquity (e.g., biblical times) for burial (*WA* 23:375.11–23), which Luther argues are clearly supportive of extramural cemeteries; and (C) brief concluding recommendation (*WA* 23:375.24–27). Taken altogether, these three steps constitute an argument for changing burial policies. As he begins to address the health issue, we must note that in this final topic of burial Luther uses only two short quotes from Scripture. Yet, as already noted, he draws upon biblical material for evidence.

Luther claims to submit to doctors of medicine and others with greater experience on the issue of possible danger of cemeteries that are intramural—within the city limits (*ynn Stedten Kirchhofe*). Accordingly, he twice stipulates his lack of knowledge in this area: 'I do not know and do not claim to understand,' he avers, whether 'vapors or¹⁴⁶ mists' emanate from graves and pollute the air. Yet, on the chance that this danger is likely, Luther concludes that his previously stated warnings are sufficient grounds to move the cemeteries outside the city. He says all people are responsible to ward off the poison, to our best ability, because of God's commandment to us to care for our bodies, that we 'protect and nurse' them so we are not needlessly exposed. However, emergencies require that we be bold enough to risk our health, if necessary. Preparing to quote Scripture, Luther concludes that we must be ready 'to live and to die [*zu leben und zu sterben*],' according to His will.¹⁴⁷

Now that he has drawn upon Scripture quotation, Luther turns to ancient burial practices to lay a foundation for concluding ultimately that extramural burial should be used. He uses three examples—two from the life of Christ and one from the Old Testament. Using anaphoric doublets, he begins with a general assertion that it was the custom of the ancients, "both among Jews and pagans, both among saints and

¹⁴⁶ *LW* 43:136 translates *odder* as 'and.'

¹⁴⁷ Altering Rom. 14:7, Luther employs anaphora in quoting Paul in Rom. 15 (*sic*): "No one lives to himself, no one dies to himself" (*WA* 23:375.9f.). Luther has substituted *niemand* for *unser keiner* ('none of us'). *LW* 43:136 follows the biblical text in its translation. The wording of Luther's quote downplays 'us' in deference to the other.

sinner,” to bury their dead outside the city. Luther then asserts that the reason for such practice was prudence (*Klug*), suggesting that we should be equally wise. Such a strong suggestion becomes the strategy for this argument—a strategy informed by exegesis. He then moves to the biblical examples, each of which he draws upon by calling attention to the notion that people put distance between their dwellings and their buried dead: First, in Luke it thus shows that Christ raised the widow’s son from the dead, ‘at the gates of Nain.’ Having put that phrase of location (*ym Stadthor zu Naim*) in emphatic (final) position, Luther then quotes Luke 7:12, “He was being carried out of the city to the grave, and a large crowd from the city was going with her” (*WA* 23:375.15f.).¹⁴⁸ Luther’s second, brief example is very similar to what he has just said about the first: he links it to the preceding example by a connector (*Also*), implies special significance to Christ’s tomb itself, and finishes with the location being prepared outside the city (*aussen fur den Stad bereit war*).¹⁴⁹ The third example is one that Luther will use to base philological significance upon—a point that would not be lost on Hess and his humanist colleagues.¹⁵⁰

The example is Abraham’s burial, signaled as similar to Christ’s, but explained so simply, with clues about (a) remoteness of location (in the field of Ephron near the double cave),¹⁵¹ (b) broader approval—a cave where all the Patriarchs later wished to be buried. Yet somehow the example seems incomplete, leaving the reader hanging—ready for further development.¹⁵² Luther compiles—from all three examples, I believe—two claims: (1) that the Hebrews not only carried the dead

¹⁴⁸ “Man trug hyn zur stad hinaus zum grabe and gieng viel volcks mit yhr.” With one final statement about location—thus, three times he has said it—Luther then comments on the Lucan text, saying that it was to bury the dead outside the town (*ausser den Stedten die Begrebnis zu haben*, in final position) that was the custom in that country.

¹⁴⁹ *WA* 23:375.18 cites John 19:41 in the margin.

¹⁵⁰ Fleischer, “Humanism and Reformation in Silesia” (80), reminds us of Hess’s strong relationship with Melanchthon, who had high regard for the humanist Hess. Melanchthon accompanied the career of Hess from ‘cradle to grave’ with his epigrams. He bid him farewell as Hess left Wittenberg for Breslau (1520) with a Latin *Propentikon* (in Greek letters), “assuring him of God’s guidance and their ‘sweet’ friendship. . . . Finally, the twelve Greek lines by Melanchthon on Hess’s epitaph on a pillar of the church summed up his life and work as a biblical scholar and ecclesiastical reformer.”

¹⁵¹ “. . . auff dem acker Ephron bey der zwisachen hule” (*WA* 23:375.19f.). Gen.23:9 is cited by *LW* 43:136 and *WA* 23:375.19.

¹⁵² Indeed, Luther then extracts from the Vulgate text the clues about remote location, as he explains that the Latin language employs the term *Efferri*, which means ‘to carry out [*hinaus tragen*]’ and that Germans would similarly say ‘to carry to the grave [*zum grabe tragen*].’

out (*sie trugen... hinaus*) but also burned the corpses to powder; (2) they did so in order to keep the air as pure as possible. Thus, putting those twin claims both in final position, Luther has summarized the common features of all three examples: they took the dead outside of town. He has also used the final example's historical details (a double cave for repeated burials, plus his unsupported assertion that cremation was the practice) to try to anchor the examples to the previous suggestion that health concerns warrant extramural burial (*WA* 23:375.19–23). His conclusion is clearly signaled (*Darumb*), duly constrained as advice (*mein Rat*), and succinct: follow these examples and bury the dead outside the town.¹⁵³ Then he labels the rationale for following his conclusion: necessity should induce us to provide a public burial ground outside the town. Yet necessity is only one rationale; he mentions two others also—'piety and decency.' It is those needs to which he next turns (*WA* 23:375.24–27).

Behavior Within Cemeteries: Luther's discussion follows a problem-solution format, in three steps: (a) the ideal; (b) the sorry status quo; and (c) the remedy. He uses doublets abundantly—plus a couple of triplets—to argue that the Wittenberg churchyard (*Kirchhoff*) is far from what the ideal cemetery (*Begrebnis*) ought to be. His remedy is no specific plan but rather several complaints that attempt to show how far from the ideal Wittenberg has fallen, how far she has to go.

The ideal cemetery should rightfully be a 'fine, quiet place' that is separated from other places. Its purpose is to provide for the living: to be a place one 'can go and can reverently meditate' upon 'death, the Last Judgment, and the resurrection, and pray.' Such a place should properly be 'a decent—yes, almost hallowed place,' one entered with 'trepidation and much reverence [*Furcht und allen Ehren*]' because, without doubt, there are saints resting there. One might even arrange to have religious 'pictures and portraits [*Bilder und Gemelde*]' painted on the walls (*WA* 23:375.28–34).

I point out that Luther's ideal cemetery says nothing about dead saints who need the prayers of the living; conversely, neither does he mention the prayers of the saints being needed by the living. Thus, his argument flies directly in the face of traditions that highly valued access to graves, which for centuries had deliberately been placed

¹⁵³ "...solchen exempeln nach das begrebnis hinaus fur die stad machen (*WA* 23:375.24f.).

on the south side of the church, the original purpose that of being near the saints (*ad sanctos*).¹⁵⁴ Instead, Luther focuses entirely upon the cemetery's function as a reminder of the ineluctability of death, and of the certainty of what comes after death. Further, since he offers no evidence, Luther makes no real argument here. Rather, he may have assumed that the previous biblical examples—and perhaps especially that Rom. 14:7—imply piety and decency in cemeteries. This may be a large presumption, given what he says next.

The status quo in Wittenberg, according to Luther, is anything but pious and decent,¹⁵⁵ and for Susan Karant-Nunn, Luther's description is quite plausible for many cities at that time.¹⁵⁶ However, his characterization of the Wittenberg cemetery is mostly done in the third person. Later there are signs that the speaker is not unwilling to be associated with the place and what goes on there. He begins with rhetorical question, inviting readers to ponder and see if they do not agree with him:

But our cemetery, what is it like? Four or five alleys and two or three marketplaces, with the result that no place in the whole town is busier or noisier [*gemeiner odder unstillter*] than the cemetery. Both people and cattle roam over it at any time—yes, day and night.¹⁵⁷ Everyone has a door and pathway to it from his house, and all sorts of things take place there, probably even some that are not fit to be mentioned (*WA* 23:377.1–6).

¹⁵⁴ For a discussion of traditional medieval burial see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 170–178.

¹⁵⁵ Beginning both a new sentence and a new paragraph with *Aber*, he describes both place and behavior as anything but ideal, in his judgment. We should note that in the following description of 'our cemetery [*unser Kirchhoff*]' Luther is, for only the second time in the document, speaking negatively about his own city. The overwhelming majority of the document is the opposite—a model for how other German cities and towns should take example from Wittenberg.

¹⁵⁶ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 176. Her description is strikingly similar to Luther's, and she supplies the many vested interests people, including clergy, had in wanting to keep burial intramural. When Luther says things happen in the cemetery that should not be mentioned, perhaps he had in mind such problems as people using it for a latrine. Karant-Nunn says, "It is likely that the people themselves ducked into the cemetery when they needed to relieve themselves, so frequent in the Protestant visitation registers are the pastors' and civic leaders' complaints about the noisome smells emerging from the cemeteries, and their enjoinders to the sextons to remove filth. Decaying corpses laid too close to the surface were not the only source of the stench, and they did not produce new filth" (176). The first Lutheran visitation was in the summer of 1527.

¹⁵⁷ *LW* 43:137 omits 'both' and reverses the doublet *Tag und Nacht*.

The proposition that current cemetery conditions are cause for shame and not satisfaction is what Luther must then pursue. So he follows his brief description with an explanation invoking an appeal to honor and shame. He interweaves statements of status quo and ideal, showing how the former undermines the latter. He asserts that what he has described violates the purpose of the cemetery.¹⁵⁸ The cemetery totally destroys ‘respect and reverence [*Andacht und Ehre*]’ for the graves, and people tramp around as if it contained executed criminals. Not even the Turk would dishonor the place ‘as we do.’ Yet a cemetery should inspire such devout thoughts and the contemplation of ‘death and resurrection’ and respect for saints lying there.

Now it is more clear to us how Luther’s policy is consistent with Reformation teaching and distinct from traditional Catholicism: piety is to be directed toward God, death, and resurrection. Decency is one’s proper attitude toward the memory of those buried there. As Luther attempts to reconcile status quo and ideal, he employs anthyphora—rhetorical question with answer. The question is not an easy one, for solving a vexing problem—where real and ideal are far apart—never is. Question: how can the ideal (quiet contemplation) be reached in a public place that has such unregulated access?¹⁵⁹ Answer: I would rather be put to rest ‘in the Elbe or in the forest,’ if a cemetery is to have some dignity.¹⁶⁰ While that retort seems not to have much interest in a practical, political solution for the *Gemeinde*, Luther may be simply using hyperbole to make his point—that the lack of privacy and quiet has prevailed for too long. Furthermore, he has earlier suggested that a wall with limited access would help.¹⁶¹ He ends with concise, forthright

¹⁵⁸ We should note that all descriptions were general assertions in plural, and no specific incidents were offered.

¹⁵⁹ “Everyone thinks he must walk there and everyone has direct access” (*da yderman mus uberlauffen und fur ydermans thür auffstehet*).

¹⁶⁰ A similar sentiment had been expressed at the Homberg synod of 1526 in Hesse, by the theologians who said it made no difference if one was buried in a churchyard or in an open field: “Es ist ungehörig, zu glauben, das Begräbnis (nämlich an geweihter Stätte) trage etwas zum Heile bei. Denn es ist ganz einerlei, ob jemand auf freiem Felde oder auf einem Kirchhof bestattet wird.” Herbert Derwein, *Geschichte des Christlichen Friedhofs in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1931), 80. I thank Craig Koslofsky for steering me to this source.

¹⁶¹ Using *Aber* to begin, Luther makes a final, sincere appeal for a change of course—at least, of attitude among cemetery goers, if no change in cemetery design and administration takes place. His suggestion reverts to the oft-repeated phrase from the biblical examples: to locate the cemetery in a ‘remote, quiet spot [*abgesondert stillen Spot*]’ (*LW* 43:137 reverses the doublet) that would preclude ready access from townspeople

comments that indicate that these are not instructions (*Unterricht*), as the previous two parts of the document are.¹⁶² Using anaphora, he indicates that the preceding is his advice (*mein Rat*); whoever wishes may follow. If anyone can improve on it, he should do so (*WA* 377:1–16).

III. Conclusion

In broadening the issue, Luther transforms a medical plague into spiritual pestilence, while still clinging to the rational aspects of health care, when necessary (*WA* 23.377.20–379.6). In a document responding to ethical questions about plague, he takes this occasion to place into context the entire Reformation effort at the time. Luther uses plague terminology to describe the satanic forces at work to oppose him, particularly with regard to controversy over the Sacrament. In addition to metaphor, the tactics Luther uses are doublets and an inclusive first person plural, which is communal for sympathetic readers and divisive for any readers from the opposition. The more one talks about others (in third person), the more effective can be one's use of first person plural to talk to friends.

Luther urges: we (*wir*) 'admonish and plead [*vermanen und bitten*]' with you (*euch*, plural) in Christ's name, that you help us (*uns*) with your prayers to God, so we may battle with teaching against 'the real, spiritual'¹⁶³ pestilence' of Satan in his wickedness now used as he 'poisons and defiles' the world. Luther directs prayers to support the teaching against those blasphemers of the sacrament, though there are other sectarians.¹⁶⁴ Satan is 'infuriated and feels' that the day of Christ is

would make a 'spiritual, proper and holy sight [*geistlich, ehrlich und heilig anzusehen*]' and could be administered so as to inspire devotion (*Andacht*) among visitors.

¹⁶² More of Luther's 'forthrightness' with Hess.

¹⁶³ *LW* 43:137 inserts a conjunction in this doublet.

¹⁶⁴ One of the 'sacrament blasphemers' Luther has in mind is Zwingli, whom he mentions as 'raging, foaming and threatening' and having a 'haughty spirit' in his letter to Luther that accompanied his "Friendly Exegesis of Christ's Words" to Luther (1 April 1527); cf. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*, Vol. 2: 1521–1530 (Philadelphia, 1918), 398 (Letter 757, "Luther to Wenzel Link at Nuremberg," ca. 4 May 1527). Another was Karlstadt, and a third was Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531); cf. Luther's, "That These Words of Christ, 'This is my body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics" (1527 [*LW* 37:13–150, esp. 13–25; *WA* 23:64–283]). On the fanatical view of the sacrament that "rages like a plague and grows stronger and stronger" (*LW* 37:5), see *WABr* 4:123.6f. ("in hanc pestilentem et sacrilegam haeresina") and *WABr* 4:125.7f. ("Pestis sacramentaria sevit").

close, so he raves fiercely to take away ‘the Savior, Jesus Christ’ from us, through his enthusiasm (*geisterey*, final position) (*WA* 23:377.20–26).

Having now moved from blaming Satan to identifying the enthusiasts as the agents, Luther explains the nature of the problem. According to him, orthodoxy has swung from one extreme to the other in its mistaken view of Satan’s power and how it works: under the papacy people were so confused that they feared Satan no more than mere flesh, compared to their misguided perceptions as to what is sacred—they took a monk’s cap as holy. Now many of these same people have swung so far the other way as to find the devil sheer spirit, and Christ’s ‘flesh and word’ no longer mean anything. In other words, the view of sacrament has for some people completely shifted—from overly mystical to devalued completely, from transubstantiated body and blood of Christ to merely symbolic bread and wine. As Luther continues to discuss his opponents—in third person plural—he contrasts them and their responses to himself and his writings—in first person singular:

They made me an answer to my treatise long ago, but I am surprised it has not yet reached Wittenberg. I shall, God willing, only once more answer them and then let the matter drop. I can see that they will only become worse. They are like a bedbug which itself has a foul smell, but the harder one rubs the more it stinks. I hope to have written enough in my pamphlet for those who can be saved so that, praise God, many may thereby be snatched from their jaws and many more may be in the truth strengthened and confirmed. May our Lord and Savior preserve you all in pure faith and fervent love [*reinem Glauben und brünstiger Liebe*] unspotted and pure [*unbefleckt und unstrefflich*] until his day. Amen. Pray for me, a poor sinner (*WA* 23:377.28–379.6).¹⁶⁵

The Wittenberg cemetery was not relocated any time soon. In 1539 Luther would write to Hieronymous Krapp, the Burgermeister, complaining that the churchyard’s condition was no better—in fact, was worse. He called for an end to the abuse of the churchyard, referring

¹⁶⁵ “Sie haben mir auff mein büchlin longest geantwortet, Mich wundert aber, das bis auff diesen tag nicht her gen Wittenberg komen ist. Jch wil, so Got verleyhet, noch ein mal drauff antworten und darnach sie lassen faren. Jch sehe doch, das sie nur erger davon werden, und sind wie eine wantzke, wilche von yhr selbs ubel stinckt, Aber yhe mehr man sie zu reibet, yhe erger sie stinckt. Und hoffe, wer zuerhalten ist, dem sey furch mein buchlin gnug geschrieben, wie Denn Gottlob viel dadurch aus yhrem rachen geriffen und noch viel mehr ynn der warheit gesterckt und bestetiget sind. Christus unser Herr und Heiland behalte euch alle ynn reinem glauben und brünstiger liebe unbefleckt und unstrefflich auff seinen tag sampt uns allen. AMEN. Bittet fur mich armen sunder.”

specifically to a carpenter working there. The appeal was, again, for respect. Luther argued that if the dead, who “await the resurrection in the churchyard...are not given a bit more respect and peace...it will seem that we think nothing of the dead or the resurrection of the dead” (*WABr* 8:364.2–16).¹⁶⁶ If Koslofsky is correct in arguing that population growth in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was more responsible than health concerns for increasing the acceptance of extramural burial, perhaps Luther’s arguments fell mostly on deaf ears, until Wittenberg’s cemetery at the *Stadtkirche* grew sufficiently overcrowded.¹⁶⁷ As it happens, despite some cities adopting it early in the century, there was strong resistance against extramural burial. Koslofsky presents a thorough analysis of the 1536 controversy surrounding burial in Leipzig, particularly the arguments of Georg Witzel (1501–1573), who answered Luther’s arguments with his own lengthy tract, “On the Dead and their Burial [*Von den Todten und yhrem Begrebnus*].”¹⁶⁸ Koslofsky calls Luther’s 1527 tract “the only known Protestant defence of extramural burial published prior to Witzel’s work.”¹⁶⁹ Eventually, Duke George of Saxony ordered extramural burial for Leipzig in 1536.

¹⁶⁶ “. . . und auff dem kirchhofe der ausserstehung gewarten. . . . ein wenig grosser eher vnd ruge vergonnet werde. . . . als halten wir nichts von den Todten noch ausserstehung der Todten,” translation by Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 178, note 38.

¹⁶⁷ Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 44–46. On cemetery relocation see Fritz Schnellbögl, “Friedhofverlegungen im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Jahrbuch für frankische Landesforschung* 34/35 (1974–1975): 109–120; Katharina Peiter, *Der evangelische Friedhof von der Reformation bis zur Romantik* (Ph.D. Diss., Berlin, 1969), reviewed in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 95 (1970): 951–952.

¹⁶⁸ *Ware trostung, grund und ursach auß Göllichem wort...* (2nd. ed., Freiburg/Breslau, 1536); cf. Georg Richter, *Die Schriften Georg Witzels* (Niewkoop, 1963); Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 44–77.

¹⁶⁹ Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, 51.

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