

is punished must have sinned. They have a worldly and human idea of God and His righteousness, as though He were just like men and His justice like the justice of the world.

To be sure, when Job is in danger of death, out of human weakness he talks too much against God, and in his suffering sins. Nevertheless Job insists that he has not deserved this suffering more than others have, which is, of course, true. Finally, however, God decides that Job, by speaking against God in his suffering, has spoken wrongly, but that in contending against his friends about his innocence before the suffering came, Job has spoken the truth. So the book carries this story ultimately to this conclusion: God alone is righteous, and yet one man is more righteous than another, even in the sight of God.

But this is written for our comfort, that God allows even His great saints to falter, especially in adversity. For before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of his children. But when death is in prospect and God withdraws Himself, Job's words show what kind of thoughts a man—however holy he may be—holds toward God: he thinks that God is not God, but only a judge and wrathful tyrant, who storms ahead and cares nothing about the goodness of a person's life. This is the finest part of this book. It is understood only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have His grace hidden.

The language of this book is more vigorous and splendid than that of any other book in all the scriptures. Yet if it were translated everywhere word for word—as the Jews and foolish translators would have it done—and not for the most part according to the sense, no one would understand it. So, for example, when he says something like this, "The thirsty will pant after his wealth" [Job 5:5], that means, "Robbers shall take it from him"; or when he says, "The children of pride have never trodden it" [Job 28:8], that means "the young lions that stalk proudly"; and many similar cases. Again, by "light" he means good fortune, by "darkness" misfortune [Job 18:8], and so forth.

Therefore I think that this third part will have to suffer and be accused by the know-it-alls of being an entirely different book from the Latin Bible. We just let them go. We have taken care to use language that is clear and that everybody can understand,

without perverting the sense and meaning. We can allow anyone to do it better.⁶

Preface to the Psalter

1545 (1528)

Many of the holy fathers prized and praised the psalter above all the other books of the scripture. To be sure, the work itself gives praise enough to its author; nevertheless we must give evidence of our own praise and thanks.

Over the years a great many legends of the saints,⁷ and passionals,⁸ books of examples,⁹ and histories, have been circulated; indeed, the world has been so filled with them that the psalter has been neglected. It has lain in such obscurity that not one psalm was rightly understood. Still, it gave off such a fine and precious fragrance that all pious hearts felt the devotion and power in the unknown words and for this reason loved the book.

I hold, however, that no finer book of examples or of the legends of the saints has ever come, or can come, to earth than the psalter. If one were to wish that from all the examples, legends, and histories, the best should be collected and brought together and put in the best form, the result would have to be the present psalter. For here we find not only what one or two saints have done, but what He has done who is the very head of all saints. We also find what all the saints still do, such as the attitude they take toward God, toward friends and enemies, and the way they conduct themselves amid all dangers and sufferings. Beyond that there are contained here all sorts of divine and wholesome teachings and commandments.

The psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and Resurrection

⁶Readers are encouraged to look into the Vintage Spiritual Classics edition of *The Book of Job*, with a Preface by Cynthia Ozick (1998). [Eds.]

⁷The most famous collection of such legends was probably that of Jacobus de Voragine, compiled c. 1230–98.

⁸*Passionals* were picture books, with text, describing the life as well as the sufferings of Christ or the saints.

⁹*Exempel Bücher* were books in which the lives of the saints were set forth as examples for devout Christians to follow.

so clearly—and pictures His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion, or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble Himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.

Beyond all that, the psalter has this noble virtue and quality. Other books make much ado about the works of the saints, but say very little about their words. The psalter is a gem in this respect. It gives forth so sweet a fragrance when one reads it because it relates not only the works of the saints, but also their words, how they spoke with God and prayed, and still speak and pray. Compared to the psalter, the other legends and examples present to us nothing but mere silent saints; the psalter, however, pictures for us real, living, active saints.

Compared to a speaking man, a silent one is simply to be regarded as a half-dead man; and there is no mightier or nobler work of man than speech. For it is by speech, more than by his shape or by any other work, that man is most distinguished from other animals. By the carver's art even a block of wood can have the shape of a man; and an animal can see, hear, smell, sing, walk, stand, eat, drink, fast, thirst—and suffer from hunger, frost, and a hard bed—as well as a man.

Moreover the psalter does more than this. It presents to us not the simple, ordinary speech of the saints, but the best of their language, that which they used when they talked with God Himself in great earnestness and on the most important matters. Thus the psalter lays before us not only their words instead of their deeds, but their very hearts and the inmost treasure of their souls, so we can look down to the foundation and source of their words and deeds. We can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need. The legends and examples, which speak only of the deeds and miracles of the saints, do not and cannot do this, for I cannot know how a man's heart is, even though I see or hear of many great deeds that he does. And

just as I would rather hear what a saint says than see the deeds he does, so I would far rather see his heart, and the treasure in his soul, than hear his words. And this the psalter gives us most abundantly concerning the saints, so that we can be certain of how their hearts were toward God and of the words they spoke to God and every man.

A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four corners of the world. Here it is stuck with fear and worry about impending disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil. Here breathes a breeze of hope and of anticipated happiness; there blows security and joy in present blessings. These storm winds teach us to speak with earnestness, to open the heart and pour out what lies at the bottom of it. He who is stuck in fear and need speaks of misfortune quite differently than he who floats on joy; and he who floats on joy speaks and sings of joy quite differently than he who is stuck in fear. When a sad man laughs or a glad man weeps, they say, he does not do so from the heart; that is, the depths of the heart are not open, and what is in them does not come out.

What is the greatest thing in the psalter but this earnest speaking amid these storm winds of every kind? Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens; yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God, because of His blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints as into death; yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God! So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for you fear or hope, and no Cicero¹⁰ or other orator so portray them.

And that they speak these words to God and with God, this, I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnest-

¹⁰Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.) was a Roman statesman distinguished as an orator and man of letters.

ness and life. For when men speak with men about these matters, what they say does not come so powerfully from the heart; it does not burn and live, is not so urgent. Hence it is that the psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better.

This also serves well another purpose. When these words please a man and fit his case, he becomes sure that he is in the communion of saints, and that it has gone with all the saints as it goes with him, since they all sing with him one little song. It is especially so if he can speak these words to God, as they have done; this can only be done in faith, for the words [of the saints] have no flavor to a godless man.

Finally there is in the psalter security and a well-trying guide, so that in it one can follow all the saints without peril. The other examples and legends of the silent saints present works that one is unable to imitate; they present even more works which it is dangerous to imitate, works which usually start sects and divisions, and lead and tear men away from the communion of saints. But the psalter holds you to the communion of saints and away from the sects. For it teaches you in joy, fear, hope, and sorrow to think and speak as all the saints have thought and spoken.

In a word, if you would see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the psalter. There you have a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what Christendom is. Indeed you will find in it also yourself and the true *Gnothi seauton*,¹¹ as well as God Himself and all creatures.

So, then, let us see to it also that we thank God for all these unspeakable blessings. Let us receive them and use them diligently and carefully, exercising ourselves in them to the praise and honor of God, lest with our ingratitude we earn something worse. Heretofore, in the time of darkness, how one would have treasured a right understanding of a psalm, and a reading or hearing of it in intelligible German; but we did not have it. Now, however,

¹¹"Know thyself," a well-known maxim from Greek philosophy, was the inscription on the temple of Apollo in ancient Delphi.

blessed are the eyes which see what we see, and the ears which hear what we hear.¹² And still I fear—no, sad to say, we see it!—that things are going with us as with the Jews in the wilderness, when they said of the bread from heaven, "We loathe this worthless food" [Num. 21:5]. We should remember, however, that at the same spot there stands also the story of how they were plagued and died [Num. 21:6], lest this same thing happen to us.

To this may God the Father of all grace and mercy help us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be praise and thanks, honor and glory, for this German psalter and for all His innumerable and unspeakable blessings to all eternity. Amen, amen.

Psalm 23

1. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
2. He feeds me in a green pasture and leads me to the fresh water.
3. He restores my soul, He leads me in the right path for His name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me against my enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil, Thou pourest my cup full.
6. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

EXPOUNDED ONE EVENING AFTER GRACE AT THE DINNER
TABLE BY DR. MARTIN LUTHER

1536

In this psalm, David, together with every other Christian heart, praises and thanks God for His greatest blessing: namely, for the preaching of His dear Holy Word. Through it we are called,

¹²Cf. Matt. 13:16-17; Luke 10:23-24.