LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 69

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

Chapters 17–20

Edited by

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

SINCE the publication of the American edition of *Luther's Works* in English began in 1955 under the general editorship of Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, there has been an explosion in the translation of Luther into the languages of the globe. Scholarship on Luther continues to flourish not only in its traditional northern European seats and its newer homes in North America but also throughout the world.

Although the fifty-four volumes of the existing American edition are the most extensive collection of Luther's works in translation, they do not contain everything that has attracted the attention of historians and theologians in subsequent decades nor everything that Luther's contemporaries and successors esteemed and republished. The twenty planned new volumes of *Luther's Works*, though not attempting to translate all of Luther into English, are intended to reflect both modern and sixteenth-century interests and to expand the coverage of genres underrepresented in the existing volumes, such as Luther's sermons and disputations.

The goal of the translation is to allow Luther to speak in modern English, yet as a man of the sixteenth century. The translators have been asked to resist bowdlerizing Luther's language to conform to modern sensibilities about such matters as society, gender, or scatology. Editorial introductions and notes are offered to familiarize the reader with the particular circumstances of each text and its theological and social context.

The primary basis for the English translation is the comprehensive Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–), supplemented where possible by edited texts from more recent editions of Luther's selected works. Scholars able to work in Luther's own German and Latin will want to consult the Weimar edition and its notes, especially for textual issues. The equivalent Weimar page numbers are printed at the top of the page in each new volume of the American edition and approximate page breaks are marked with a stroke (|).

References to Luther in the notes are given from the American edition of *Luther's Works* wherever possible, and otherwise from the Weimar edition. In the case of texts scheduled for translation in future volumes, both the Weimar reference and the prospective volume in the American edition are

given. For Luther's *Church* and *House Postils*, the English translations of John Nicholas Lenker and of Eugene F. A. Klug are cited. With each substantive Luther citation, the short title of the work has been given along with its date, for the convenience of the reader. Where the dates of original composition and of first publication differ by more than a year, both are indicated, separated by a slash.

Biblical passages within Luther's works have been rendered in fidelity to Luther's own text, even when this differs from modern critical texts or conventional English translations. Necessary expansions of partial references have been rendered in brackets from the appropriate edition of Luther's German Bible, from the Vulgate (including Luther's 1529 revision thereof), or in consultation with Luther's translation of the passage in his lectures, as appropriate. This approach has made it impossible to use any single English translation throughout, though the English Standard Version (ESV) has been used as a starting point where possible or, occasionally, the Authorized (KJV) or Douay versions where these correspond more closely to Luther's own text. Biblical language has been modernized after the model of the ESV, including the use of "you" as the second person form throughout.

A comparison of the present volumes with the Weimar edition will immediately reveal the profound debt that the editors of the American edition, past and present, owe to the long succession of Weimar editors. But the publication of these texts in a new English edition affords the opportunity to draw on the accumulation of decades of scholarship since the appearance of many of the Weimar volumes, as well as on new electronic resources, and thus, on occasion, to make some new contribution in token repayment of that vast scholarly debt. Although the present edition is addressed chiefly to scholars, pastors, and theologians working in English, whether as a first language or a language of scholarship, it is hoped that the annotations and the translations of difficult texts may be of service even to those working with Luther in the original tongues.

Even now, amid the fifth century after his death, Luther remains an epochal figure in the history of the Christian Church, a prominent shaper of the religious and cultural history of the West, and a provocative voice still heard and engaged by theologians, pastors, and laity around the world as a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The editor and publisher trust that these new volumes of *Luther's Works* in English will, in harmony with the original goals of the American edition, serve their readers with much that has proved and will prove its "importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church."

C.B.B.

ABBREVIATIONS

Aland	Kurt Aland. *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium.* 4th ed. Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1996. Cited by main catalog number, postil number (Po), sermon number (Pr), or letter number (Br).
ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325.* Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Revised by A. Cleveland Coxe. 10 vols. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885–96. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
ARG	*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*.
ASD	*Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami.* Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1969–.
Baseley	Joel R. Baseley, trans. *Festival Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils.* Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2005.
BL	*Martini Buceri Opera Omnia, Series II: Opera Latina.* Edited by Robert Stupperich. Leiden: Brill, 1982–.
Brecht	Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther.* Translated by James L. Schaaf. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985–93.
CCCM	*Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaeualis.* Turnhout: Brepols, 1971–.
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
CF	*Cistercian Fathers Series.* Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970–.
Cl	Otto Clemen et al., eds. *Luthers Werke in Auswahl.* 8 vols. Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber, 1912–33; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955–56, 1966–67.
CME	Gabriel Biel. *Canonis Missae Expositio.* 4 vols. Edited by Heiko A. Oberman and William J. Courtenay. Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, [1965–67].

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 69

LUTHER'S deep affection and theological appreciation for St. John's Gospel are well-known. In the 1522 preface to his German translation of the New Testament, Luther extolled John's Gospel as "the one fine, true, and chief gospel," "the true kernel and marrow" of all the New Testament books, along with Romans and 1 Peter. Among the canonical Gospels, St. John's was preeminent because, instead of giving primary emphasis to reporting Christ's miracles, John conveyed the preaching and words of Christ that "give life" [John 6:63].[1]

While Luther retained the traditional lectionary readings for preaching on the Sundays and festivals of the Christian year, he proposed giving John's Gospel a special place in preaching over the course of the week. In the *German Mass and Order of Service* (1526), Luther urged that "the evangelist John, who so mightily teaches faith," should be the serial text for the Saturday Vesper sermons, a provision that seems to have been adopted at once, even before it was formally incorporated in the Wittenberg church order of 1533.[2]

Ordinarily, primary responsibility for preaching in the Wittenberg parish church of St. Mary fell to Johann Bugenhagen as pastor.[3] But when Bugenhagen was absent from Wittenberg—as he was from 1528 to 1529 organizing the reformation of local churches in Braunschweig and Hamburg, from 1530 to 1532 in Lübeck, from late 1534 to 1535 in Pomerania, and

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[1] LW 35:361–62. For a survey of Luther's exegesis of John's Gospel, see Eduard Ellwein, *Summus Evangelista: Die Botschaft des Johannesevangeliums in der Auslegung Luthers* (Munich: Kaiser, 1960).

[2] LW 53:68; Sehling 1:702.

[3] Johann Bugenhagen (1485–1558) of Pomerania (hence his epithet "Pommer" or "Pomeranus") had served as pastor of the Wittenberg parish since 1523. See Kurt K. Hendel, "Johannes Bugenhagen, Organizer of the Lutheran Reformation," *LQ*, n.s., 18, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 43–75; David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 58–63; Hans-Günter Leder, *Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus—vom Reformer zum Reformator: Studien zur Biographie*, Greifswalder theologische Forschungen 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002).

from 1537 to 1539 in Denmark—Luther largely took Bugenhagen's place in the Wittenberg pulpit, assuming the Sunday morning sermon as well as the serial preaching on St. Matthew (on Wednesdays) and St. John (on Saturdays).[4] As a result, between 1528 and 1540, Luther preached on most of John's Gospel, with the exception of chapters 5, 9–13, and 21.

Luther preached on John 1–4 between 1537 and 1540, during and after Bugenhagen's sojourn in Denmark.[5] These sermons were not published, however, until Johann Aurifaber (1519–75) prepared them for publication in the Eisleben edition of Luther's works in 1565, though only chapters 1 and 2 emerged from the press at the time until the remainder of Aurifaber's edited manuscript was published in 1847. These sermons are translated in LW 22.

Luther preached on John 6–8 between 1530 and 1532, during Bugenhagen's stay in Lübeck, sermons that were likewise first published by Aurifaber in 1565. They are translated in LW 23.

Luther preached on John 14–16 in 1533 and 1534. These sermons were something of an exception: they were preached while Bugenhagen was resident in Wittenberg and were delivered not on Saturdays but on Sunday afternoons. The dating of the sermons between the beginning of May 1533 and October 1534 has been established by the discovery of a notebook of Wittenberg preaching kept from 1533 to 1535 and in 1544 by Georg Helt (ca. 1485–1545), the advisor to Prince George of Anhalt (1507–53).[6] The more extensive notes of Georg Rörer (1492–1557) on these sermons (now lost) were edited for publication by Caspar Cruciger Sr. (1504–48) in 1538 (John 14–15) and 1539 (John 16). Cruciger's edition is translated in LW 24, though the dating there of the sermons to Eastertide 1537 must now be corrected.

Luther preached on John 16–20:18 during his first substitution for Bugenhagen, in 1528–29. The sermons on John 17, the great prayer of Christ, were edited for publication by Cruciger in 1530; the last portion, on Christ's Passion and resurrection from John 18–20, was edited by Andreas Poach (1515–85) and published in 1557.[7] These sermons, from John 17 to

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[4] See Gerhard Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik* (Munich: Lempp, 1942; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962; and with a new afterword, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), pp. 15–16. During Bugenhagen's absence in Pomerania in 1534–35, Luther assumed only the Sunday preaching responsibilities (cf. Brecht 3:12).

[5] The sermons on John 1–2 were delivered from June 1537 to March 1538; those on John 3–4 between March 1538 and September 1540.

[6] Ms. Dessau Georg 104. See the discussion by Johann Schilling in WA 59:242–310.

[7] The John 16 sermons were not published until their appearance (as Rörer's raw notes) in WA 28:43–69.

20:18, are translated in the present volume, thus completing Luther's continuous exposition of John's Gospel in the American edition.

The final section of the volume presents a complete survey of Luther's preaching on John 20:19–31, spanning the years from 1522 to 1540. Although this text was never included in Luther's continuous exposition of John's Gospel, it was assigned in the Sunday lectionary as the Gospel for the Sunday after Easter (Quasimodogeniti), and Luther preached on it at least eight times, in addition to a sermon sketch written for a friend and the later revision of some of the sermons for the *Church Postil* and *House Postil*. With its central text announcing the forgiveness of sins—"Those whose sins you remit, their sins are remitted. Those whose sins you retain, their sins are retained" (John 20:23)—this pericope gave Luther opportunity to articulate the central proclamation of Christian faith as he understood it, both in distinction from the medieval church's understanding of sacerdotal absolution and in opposition to alternate Protestant interpretations that, in Luther's judgment, failed to take seriously the divine power of the Word of forgiveness.

Indeed, a central theme of Luther's preaching on John in this volume is his emphasis on the "external," "oral," "physical" Word [*äusserliches/mündliches/leibliches Wort*]—in preaching, in the spoken Absolution, in the Sacraments, and in Scripture—as the source of Christian faith and assurance. Unlike Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1467–1536) and many other reformers of the sixteenth century, for whom anything external could be at best merely secondary and at worst a seductive distraction from truly spiritual, inner religion, Luther came to embrace the "external" Word and Sacraments as the anchor preserving the Christian from going adrift into the unfathomable depths of introspection. Not inner religious experience nor the secret, immediate working of the Holy Spirit but the external Word, as written, read, and preached, was the true locus of spiritual power and the basis of Christian certainty.[8]

Luther was not, of course, the first Christian preacher or exegete to undertake the interpretation of John's Gospel. Although Luther's exposition of John from the pulpit explicitly engages other interpreters only occasionally, as compared with his university lectures, he clearly had a range of ancient, medieval, and contemporary commentaries at hand. The editorial notes prepared for this volume indicate key points of Luther's dependence on or divergence from this tradition. They should be consulted as an extension

[8] See the sermon on John 20:19–31 of April 12, 1523 (below, pp. 334–39), for the emergence of this emphasis within the material translated here, as well as the definitive statement in the *Smalcald Articles* (1537/1538) III VIII 3–13 (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 322–23; *Concordia*, pp. 280–81).

and specification—and in some cases a modification of—Gerhard Ebeling's helpful survey of Luther's exegetical sources.[9]

As a theologian trained in the late medieval universities, Luther was thoroughly familiar with the medieval exegetical tradition, especially the *Glossa ordinaria* (the standard set of annotations to the Bible, largely gathered from patristic exegesis).[10] He also drew on the biblical annotations of Nicholas of Lyra's (ca. 1270–1349) *Postilla literalis*[11] and, though less extensively, on the *Postillae* of Hugh of St. Cher (ca. 1190–1263).[12]

All these sources incorporated material from patristic commentaries, but Luther also seems to have used the *Catena Aurea* of Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), a verse-by-verse collection of longer excerpts from patristic preaching on the four Gospels.[13] Of the authors surveyed by Aquinas,

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[9] Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, esp. pp. 141–58. On the use of the exegetical tradition by Reformation exegetes, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon's 'Annotationes in Johannem' of 1523 in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1987), and Craig S. Farmer, *The Gospel of John in the Sixteenth Century: The Johannine Exegesis of Wolfgang Musculus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[10] The *Glossa ordinaria* (and *glossa interlinearis*) are cited from the *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81*, ed. Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992). The *Patrologia Latina* (PL 113:67–1316 and 114:9–752) reproduces an earlier state of the marginal glosses. On the history of the *Glossa*, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952; repr., South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), pp. 46–66. See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 143–44.

[11] Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, 4 vols. (Strassburg, 1492; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1971). For Luther's critical evaluation of Lyra, especially as a commentator on the Old Testament, see *On the Last Words of David* (1543), LW 15:269; *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), LW 3:26 and passim (cf. LW 1:xi); *First Lectures on the Psalms* (1513–16/1743–1876), LW 10–11 passim. See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 152–55. On Lyra, see Deeana Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[12] Hugh of St. Cher [Hugo de Sancto Caro or Hugo Cardinalis], *Postillae in vetus et novum testamentum*, cited from the Basel edition of 1504. For Luther's use and evaluation of Hugh, see *First Lectures on the Psalms* (1513–16/1743–1876), LW 11:180; *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), LW 3:26; cf. WA 55/1:xxv. Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, mentions Hugh only in passing, p. 169.

[13] Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, ed. Angelico Guarienti (Turin: Marietti, 1953); the text is reproduced in and cited here from Roberto Busa, ed., *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), 5:367–441. English translation edited by John Henry Newman, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers* (Oxford: Parker, 1841–45; repr., Southampton, England: St. Austin Press, 1997). Although Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 152, could find "no direct trace" of Luther's use of the *Catena*, the close parallels between Luther's use especially of Greek patristic material and Thomas' excerpts strongly suggest that he used it. Also cited in the notes (though perhaps not used directly by Luther) is Aquinas' own commentary,

Luther made his own independent use of Augustine's (354–430) *Tractates on John*,[14] though he seems here to have drawn on Chrysostom (ca. 347–407)[15] and Theophylact (ca. 1050–ca. 1108)[16] only at second hand. Luther also used linguistic and historical information from Jerome's (ca. 345–420) work, but whether directly or mediated by medieval compilations is difficult to determine with certainty.[17] In his sermons on John 18–20, Luther also stood self-consciously both in opposition to and within the rich tradition of medieval Passion preaching, discussed below in the introduction to those sermons.[18]

Luther was aware of new resources as well, including Johann Reuchlin's (1455–1522) *De rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506)[19] and Cyril of Alexandria's (d. 444) commentary on John, unknown to the Western medieval tradition and to Theophylact but translated into Latin by George Trebizond (d. 1489) and first printed in 1508.[20] In all, Luther's patterns of use reflect fairly closely his evaluation in the *Table Talk* of spring 1532, in which he rejected Chrysostom

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Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura, ed. Raphaelis Cai, 5th ed. (Rome: Marietti, 1951), also reproduced in and cited here from Busa, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, 6:227–360. The English translation of J. A. Weisheipl and F. R. Larcher, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 2 vols., Aquinas Scripture Series 4–5 (Albany: Magi Books, 1980, 1998), is available but not cited here. Cited as Aquinas, *Lectura super Ioannem*.

[14] Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus*, ed. Willems Radbodus, CCSL 36 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1954; 2nd ed., 1990); PL 35:132–1976. Translated by John Rettig, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 2 vols., FC 90, 92:3–94; also NPNF[1] 7:7–452. Cited as Augustine, *Tractates on John*. See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 150–51.

[15] Chrysostom, *In Iohannem Homiliae*, PG 59:23–482. Translated by Thomas Aquinas Goggin, *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, 2 vols., FC 33, 41; also NPNF[1] 14:1–334. Cited as Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*. See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 147–48.

[16] Theophylact of Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium S. Joannis*, PG 123:1127–348, 124:9–318. Translated by Christopher Stade, *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John* (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 2007). Cited as Theophylact, *Explanation of John*. Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 151–52.

[17] See, e.g., pp. 42–43, 98–99, 147–48, 176–77, 244–45, 246, 257–58, 274–75, 278–79; Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 148–49. Luther's notes on Jerome's commentaries, but not his encyclopedic works, are edited in Martin Brecht and Christian Peters, eds., *Annotierungen zu den Werken des Hieronymus*, WA Ar 8 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000). None of the passages cited below is marked there.

[18] See below, pp. 123–40.

[19] See below, pp. 42–43. Luther may have known the encyclopedic *Historia Scholastica* of Peter Comestor (d. ca. 1180) (PL 198:1049–722) as well; see below, p. 274 n. 174, and Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 152.

[20] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Joannem*, PG 63:9–1044, 64:9–756. Translated by E. B. Pusey and Thomas Randell, LFC 43, 48. Cited as Cyril, *Commentary on John*. See Lois Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007). Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, does not

as a "mere gossip," allowed Jerome's witness to matters of history but not of faith, and praised Augustine and Theophylact—even while setting Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) above them all.[21]

Cyril's influence on Luther was indeed mediated in part by the exegetical work of Luther's Wittenberg colleagues, especially Melanchthon and Bugenhagen. Melanchthon's *Annotations on John*, based on his university lectures of 1522–23, were ushered into print almost immediately by Luther with his own laudatory preface, but without Melanchthon's foreknowledge or consent.[22] Bugenhagen, for his part, had labored on an annotated harmony of the accounts of Christ's Passion and resurrection drawn from the canonical Gospels.[23] The Latin version of the harmony was published in 1524.[24] A German version, first published in 1526, was included with Stephan Roth's (d. 1546) 1528 edition of Luther's *Winter Postil* and was reprinted frequently thereafter, both separately and in combination with other works, becoming a much-read text in the public worship and private devotion of German Lutherans.[25] Although Melanchthon made occasional use of Cyril in his Johannine commentary, it was Bugenhagen who had drawn on Cyril most extensively in preparing his work.[26] But though many of Luther's parallels with Cyril correspond with Bugenhagen's use, a few passages suggest

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mention Cyril, identifying Chrysostom as the "only Greek exegete of the ancient church whose exposition of the Gospels was known to Luther" (p. 148).

[21] *Table Talk* no. 252 (1532), LW 54:33–34.

[22] Philipp Melanchthon, *Annotationes in Iohannem, castigatiores quam quae antea invulgatae sunt. Utpote in quibus multa, quae desunt in alijs, habentur, una cum Epistola commendatitia M. Lutheri* (Hagenau: Setzer, 1523); CR 14:1043–220. See Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon's 'Annotationes in Johannem'*; for Luther's preface, see LW 59.

[23] Anneliese Bieber, *Johannes Bugenhagen zwischen Reform und Reformation: Die Entwicklung seiner frühen Theologie anhand des Matthäuskommentars und der Passions- und Auferstehungsharmonie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

[24] Johann Bugenhagen, *Annotationes in Deuteronomium. In Samuelem prophetam, id est duos libros Regum. Ab eodem praeterea conciliata ex Evangelistis historia passi Christi et glorificati* (Basel: Petri 1524). Cited as Bugenhagen, *Historia*, from pp. 362–463.

[25] *Die historia des leydens und der Aufferstehung unsers Herrn Jhesu Christi aus den vier Evangelisten durch Johannem Bugenhagen Pomer vleyssig zusammen bracht* (Wittenberg: H. Weiss, 1526); WA 21:165–88. Georg Geisenhof, *Bibliotheca Bugenhagiana: Bibliographie der Druckschriften des D. Joh. Bugenhagen*, Quellen und Darstellungen aus der Geschichte des Reformationsjahrhunderts 6 (Leipzig: M. Heinsius, 1908; repr., Nieuwkoop: de Graaf, 1963), pp. 105–80, lists nine Latin, thirty-three High German, and twenty-one Low German editions, as well as seven in other languages.

[26] See Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon's 'Annotationes in Johannem,'* pp. 65, 68–69; Bieber, *Johannes Bugenhagen*, pp. 52–54.

Luther's own independent reading.[27] In particular, Luther is apparently the first Western exegete to adopt Cyril's description of Jesus' prayer in John 17 as an exercise of His high priestly office,[28] though here he may have reached beyond the Wittenberg circle to make use of the Swabian Lutheran reformer Johann Brenz's (1499–1570) 1527–28 commentary on John.[29]

Even as Luther draws on the patristic and medieval tradition or borrows from his contemporaries for historical and textual information or an occasional striking image or elucidation of the biblical text, he places this material within a new theological framework that makes his exposition as a whole a striking departure from what had come before, thus shaping a distinctly Lutheran exegetical tradition. Although Luther, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, and Brenz do not agree with one another on every point in their exegesis of John, the Lutheran authors share a substantial body of interpretations and applications of Johannine texts that are shaped not only by a common polemical context and direct textual interdependence but also above all by the basic structures of Luther's theology: the distinction between Law and Gospel, the dialectic of the two kingdoms or governments, and the role of the external Word.

In contrast, Luther had little use for the Strassburg reformer Martin Bucer's (1491–1551) 1528 commentary on John, which had become a vehicle for airing his theological differences with Brenz and the Wittenberg theologians.[30] Similarly, though his work on the translation of the Bible had made Luther aware of Erasmus' textual commentary on John in the *Annotations*, there is no evidence here that he used Erasmus' *Paraphrase on John* beyond Bugenhagen's prior incorporation of some of its interpretations.[31] Luther's choice of exegetical resources was determined not only by philological erudition but also by theological compatibility.

Finally, the sermons on John illustrate the maturation of Luther's exegetical approach by the late 1520s. By this time, Luther had set aside the moralizing "spiritual" exegesis favored in much of the medieval tradition—though

[27] See below, pp. 105–6, 263–64. Later, Luther explicitly praised Cyril's commentary on John: *On the Last Words of David* (1543), LW 15:300.

[28] See below, p. 15. Bugenhagen, *Historia*, p. 395, only alludes to John 17 in passing and does not transmit this interpretation.

[29] Johann Brenz, *In D. Iohannis Evangelion, Iohannis Brentii Exegesis* (Hagenau: Setzer, 1528). The 1528 edition is a revision of the 1527 first edition. Cited as Brenz, *Exegesis in Iohannem*. On Brenz, see Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, pp. 9–14.

[30] Martin Bucer, *Enarratio in Evangelion Iohannis*, in *Martini Buceri Opera Latina* 2, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Cited as Bucer, *Ennarratio in Iohannem*.

[31] Erasmus, *Annotationes in Ioannem*, in ASD 6/6:29–176; Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Ioannem*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Clericus (Leiden, 1703–6; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), 7:498–650. Translated by Jane E. Phillips, *Paraphrase on John*, CWE 46. See below, e.g., p. 185.

he continued to find biblical allegory used as a rhetorical ornament or where he believed the literary character of a particular text called for allegorical interpretation. Luther concentrated instead on the "history," the narrative of the biblical text. In Luther's understanding, however, this historical interpretation was nonetheless genuinely spiritual because it focused on the "use" or "fruit" of the history of Christ's Passion and resurrection as it was appropriated by faith.[32] The sermons on John 17–20 thus stand as an important and substantial example of Luther's Gospel exegesis.

The translations in this volume are based upon texts edited in the Weimar edition (WA) of Luther's works; the corresponding Weimar pages are indicated in the top margin throughout. The Clemen edition (Cl) has also been consulted and cited as appropriate, especially for John 17.

The General Editor is indebted to the translators, revisers, and the Managing Editor for their work on the texts in this volume. Mrs. Marjorie Koehlinger kindly gave the editors permission to revise translations drafted by her husband, the late Erwin W. Koehlinger. Dean Ray Hart and Academic Dean John Berthrong of the Boston University School of Theology have given cordial support to the project. The librarians of the Boston University School of Theology and of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, have lent their aid in procuring materials. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert reviewed portions of the editorial material and made helpful recommendations; Jennifer Knust, Paul Raabe, and Bruce Schuchard assisted with questions on the biblical text. Many thanks in particular are owed to Margaret Arnold, who served indefatigably as research assistant throughout the labor. For this volume, the first to be published in the extension to *Luther's Works* in English, the General Editor bears responsibility both for the final state of the translation and for the editorial material.

C.B.B.

[32] See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 68–89, where 1529 is identified as a "turning point" (pp. 72, 87) in Luther's exegetical development.

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

CHAPTER 17

1528/1530

Translated by

Erwin W. Koehlinger †

Revised by

Benjamin T. G. Mayes

Introduction

FROM May 1528 to June 1529, the Wittenberg pastor Johann Bugenhagen was called away from Saxony to advise on the reorganization and reformation of the churches in Braunschweig and Hamburg.[1] In his absence, Luther took responsibility for the pulpit in the Wittenberg parish church of St. Mary. In addition to Sunday morning preaching on the Gospels, Luther continued his Sunday afternoon sermons on the Pentateuch[2] and preached three times through the catechism (in May, September, and November–December 1528).[3] On Wednesday mornings, Luther preached on St. Matthew's Gospel, and at Saturday Vespers, he preached on the Gospel according to St. John.[4]

Luther began his serial preaching on John's Gospel on June 6, 1528, with John 16:1, where Bugenhagen had left off.[5] Luther then preached on John 17 from August 8 to October 31, interrupted only on September 19 amid the second series on the catechism.[6] These sermons survive thanks to the notes of Georg Rörer, who had become Luther's secretary, editor, and amanuensis, tirelessly recording Luther's preaching, lecturing, and table conversation in his notebooks over the following decades, supported by a stipend from the Wittenberg town council.[7] Rörer had arrived in Wittenberg as a student in 1522 and was made a deacon on May 14, 1525, in the first Evangelical

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[1] Brecht 2:284. See above, pp. xv–xvi.

[2] Luther had begun preaching on Genesis in 1523 (WA 14:97–488; cf. WA 24:24–710) and continued with Exodus in 1524 (WA 16:1–646; LW 62) and Leviticus in 1527 (WA 25:411–36; LW 63). In 1528, Luther was engaged in preaching on Numbers (WA 25:436–517; LW 63). The following year he completed the series with sermons on Deuteronomy (WA 28:509–763).

[3] WA 30/1:2–27, 27–56, 57–122. The last set of catechism sermons, an important source for the *Large Catechism* (1529) (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 377–480; *Concordia*, pp. 351–440), is translated in LW 51:135–93.

[4] See Luther's division of preaching throughout the week in *German Mass and Order of Service* (1526), LW 53:68. Only fragments of notes on the Matthew 11–15 sermons survive (WA 28:4–30), apart from one sermon that was adapted for Rörer's edition of the *House Postil* (Klug 1:264–77).

[5] Rörer's notes on the John 16 sermons were published for the first time in WA 28:43–69.

[6] Sermon on the 8th–10th Commandments, September 19, 1528, WA 30/1:39–43. During the third series in November and December, Luther arranged his catechism preaching around the regular Saturday sermons rather than displacing them.

[7] See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 18–20.

ordination. He was part of the circle of scholars and friends who helped Luther with the ongoing revision of the German Bible. With the Wittenberg theologian Caspar Cruciger Sr., Rörer served as the editor of the Wittenberg edition of Luther's collected works from 1537 until this labor was disrupted by the Smalcaldic War of 1546–47 and its aftermath. After a brief stay in Denmark, Rörer then accepted the deposed elector's invitation to come to Jena in 1553, where he took up the oversight of the new, competing edition of Luther's works being produced there.[8]

Rörer prepared some of his own notes on Luther's lectures and sermons for publication, notably the *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535) and *Commentary on Psalm 90* (1534–35/1541).[9] The editing of the sermons on John 17, however, was entrusted to Cruciger. (The remaining 1528–29 sermons on John 18–20 were not published until Andreas Poach's edition of 1557.)[10] Cruciger had already helped in editing Luther's sermons on 1 and 2 Peter and Jude (1523–24) and in preparing the Genesis sermons of 1523–24 for their 1527 publication in Latin.[11] Although Cruciger had been present in Wittenberg to hear the sermons preached, the chief basis for his editions was Rörer's notebooks. The John 17 sermons, worked by Cruciger into a continuous commentary, appeared in 1530 from the Wittenberg press of Hans Weiss, bearing Luther's preface commending Cruciger's labors.[12]

Cruciger's work with Rörer's notes was conscientious and careful, but not slavish. He consolidated related material from different sermons, reducing the repetitions natural to oral delivery and clarifying the organization of the printed commentary. In a few places he made substantial changes, condensing Luther's discussion of predestination in the exposition of John 17:6 and removing references to contemporary Antitrinitarianism (see below). Luther may well have suggested these changes; in any event, he gave the finished project his approval. Cruciger's skill in preparing the material won him Luther's favor and trust as a preferred editor of his work. Thus Cruciger

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[8] On the Wittenberg and Jena editions, see Eike Wolgast, "Geschichte der Luther-Ausgaben vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert," WA 60:464–543; Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 137–50.

[9] LW 26–27; LW 13:73–141.

[10] See below, pp. 143–310.

[11] Cruciger had studied at Wittenberg from 1521 to 1525, and then, after a period as rector of the Latin school in Magdeburg, he was called back to the Wittenberg faculty in April 1528. See Timothy J. Wengert, "Caspar Cruciger, 1504–1548: The Case of the Disappearing Reformer," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 417–41. On Cruciger's early editorial work for Luther, see WA 12:249 and 14:2 (sermons on 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, LW 30:1–215); WA 24:xvi and 28:34 (sermons on Genesis, WA 24:1–710).

[12] *Das Siebenzehend Capital Johannis, von dem gebete Christi, Gepredigt und ausgelegt durch D. Mar. Luther* (Wittenberg: Hans Weiß, 1530). Luther's preface is translated below, p. 13.

The Seventeenth Chapter of St. John

On the Prayer of Christ

Preached and Explained by Dr. Martin Luther

1528/1530

Martin Luther's Preface[1] (1530)

I am pleased to see these sermons of mine on the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, John 17, appear in print; indeed, I myself asked my dear friend Master Caspar Cruciger, who is very well suited for such a task, to collect them and put them in a fine, clear form—since I neither have had the time to do it nor am so well suited for it—so that others may share it. For I know that these fragments and this drink of cold water [cf. John 6:12; Matt. 10:42] will be welcome and useful to true, upright Christians, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and it is they alone whom we are serving with this book. The satiated, mad saints have more than enough without our help and service, and we do not want to serve them with this book, except to furnish them with something new to criticize and blaspheme. With that, I commend these sermons to all the dear, faithful members of Christ and commend myself likewise to their prayers. The grace of God be with us. Amen.

[Luther's Preface to the Latin Edition][2] (1536/1538)

Martin Luther to the orthodox brethren in the Lord:

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus our Redeemer. These two [series of] sermons of mine on St. John and on [St.] Paul, which were delivered before our Wittenberg congregation, I have readily allowed to be taken and published by others. It is not that I would boast so much of great and marvelous things concerning myself nor that I would scorn or desire to surpass others who are better than myself. But since in this most dissolute age there are so many pestilential and blasphemous books, highly attractive and even more lucrative but above all highly injurious to both governments,[3] and since I am confident that in these sermons I have treated things, if not always exactly as the matter and the reader demand, nevertheless faithfully and purely in accordance with my ability, therefore I am glad to see this work of mine also

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[1] Translated from WA 28:70.

[2] Translated from WA Br 12:215, no. 4262. The Latin preface was not part of Cruciger's 1530 German edition.

[3] *utriusque Reipublicae*, that is, both temporal and spiritual authority. See *Temporal Authority* (1523), LW 45:91.

published and exposed among those wolves and serpents, that, perchance, some may be able to avoid the pestilential spirits and so be retained in the sheepfold of Christ. Accordingly, I am exceedingly pleased with the effort and diligence of my friend Vincent,[4] who, I see, also burns with zeal to make these things known in other tongues and nations as well, as a testimony to them of how foully they have lied in accusing us among themselves of so many crimes—namely, of false faith[5]—because they talk among themselves without any understanding of our theology[6] or our language. But God, who has begun a good work in us, will perfect it [Phil. 1:6] to the praise of His name and the confusion of Satan and all his agents. Farewell in the Lord, dearest brother. And whatever service may be rendered by this work and service, take it in good part.

Wittenberg, June 7, [15]36. |

Chapter Seventeen

AMONG[7] all the works of our Lord Christ, we should especially desire to know how He conducted Himself when He prayed and spoke with His dear Father. Much has been written elsewhere about how He preached and worked miracles, but little about how He prayed. Here His prayer is written down in full before our eyes, just as He spoke it in the presence of His disciples as a valediction.[8] And yet no one heeds it. If the prayer had not been written down, we would have run seeking after it to the end of the earth.

And, truly, it is an extraordinarily fervent and heartfelt prayer, in which He opens and pours forth all the depths of His heart to us and to His Father. But if these words are heard without the Spirit, they sound like childish prattle in our ears, without force or flavor, indeed, not worthy to be spoken. For reason and human wisdom place no value on whatever is not couched and set forth in splendid, grandiloquent words that compel everyone to open their eyes and ears. |

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[4] Vincent Obsopoeus (see p. 5).

[5] *fiducia scilicet vulpina*, literally, "foxlike faith," with implications not only of cunning deceit but also of heresy. Cf. Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, Psalm 81 (80 Vg), PL 37:1040, translated by Maria Boulding, *Expositions of the Psalms*, Works of St. Augustine 3/18 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), pp. 162–64; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 64–65 (PL 183:1086ff.; CF 31:175–89). *Fiducia*, "faith" in the sense of "trust," became a byword for Lutheran teaching; cf. the Council of Trent's condemnation of the "vain confidence [*fiducia*] of the heretics," sixth session, ch. 9 and can. 12: Denzinger, no. 802.

[6] *res*

[7] The section that follows is based on Luther's sermon of August 8, 1528.

[8] Cf. Augustine, *Tractates on John* 104.2 (PL 35:1902–3; FC 90:253–54; NPNF[1] 7:394).

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

CHAPTERS 18–20:18

1528–29/1557

Translated by

Erwin W. Koehlinger †

Revised by

Nicholas D. Proksch and Benjamin T. G. Mayes

Introduction

HAVING concluded his Saturday Vespers sermons on John 17 on October 31, 1528, Luther continued immediately the following week, on November 7, with preaching on the Passion according to St. John, beginning with John 18 and continuing until he reached John 20:18 on June 19, 1529. Bugenhagen returned to Wittenberg on June 24 and resumed the Saturday preaching responsibilities thereafter.

These sermons were part of the ongoing efforts of the Wittenberg reformers to transpose the medieval tradition of Passion preaching into an Evangelical mode. In his previous Good Friday sermon of April 10, 1528, Luther had expressed the wish "that during the year the Passion might be treated over an extended time," a votum fulfilled with these sermons on John 18–20 over the course of seven months.[1] It was an opportunity that, as it happened, came only once amid Bugenhagen's frequent absences. After 1533, the Wittenberg church order specified that the last chapters of John should be omitted from the regular Saturday afternoon preaching and reserved for Passiontide.[2]

Luther had long criticized both the form and the content of medieval Passion preaching. His practical concerns—that a six-hour sermon on Good Friday was more conducive to slumber than to devotion—were shared by some of his predecessors as well.[3] The influential Strassburg pre-Reformation preacher Johann Geiler von Keysersberg (1445–1510) had also ridiculed the soporific length of Good Friday sermons, preferring to preach for only an hour in the morning and again in the afternoon on Good Friday and to devote extended attention to preaching on the Passion throughout the season of Lent.[4]

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[1] WA 27:103–4.

[2] That is, the last two weeks of Lent. See Sehling 1:701.

[3] For Luther's complaints about the length of medieval Passion preaching, see *Meditation on Christ's Passion* (1519), LW 42:8, and his sermons for Good Friday, March 25, 1524 (WA 15:509), and April 10, 1528 (WA 27:103–4).

[4] Johannes Geiler von Kaysersberg, *Das Evangelibuch, das Büoch der Ewangelien durch das gantz Iar, mitt Predig und Ußlegungen* (Strassburg: Johann Grieninger, 1515), f. 77r, compared preachers to cuckoos trying to outdo each other in length of preaching: "What is this lengthy preaching? What purpose does it serve? The women [must] relieve themselves where they sit, and the men fall asleep; the preacher exercises no one but himself." On Geiler von Keysersberg [Kaysersberg], see Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, pp. 9–14; E. Jane Dempsey Douglass,

The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Chapters and a Portion of the Twentieth Chapter of St. John

On the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Preached and Explained by Dr. Martin Luther

1528–29/1557

Nicolaus von Amsdorf's Preface (1557)

Translated by Kenneth E. F. Howes

To all pious Christians, I, Nicolaus von Amsdorf, wish God's grace, understanding, Spirit, and wisdom, that they remain and persevere steadfast in the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel until their end. Amen.

Many beautiful and splendid sermons of the holy, dear man, Doctor Martin Luther, of blessed memory, on chapters of the two evangelists John and Matthew,[1] were collected from his own lips by the worthy and well-learned Herr Georg Rörer and have been set down on paper and prepared for printing by another,[2] faithfully, diligently, and to the best of his ability—sermons that had never before come into print nor been published. Although they are not equal to the other writings that [Luther] himself prepared and had printed, they are nonetheless very necessary, useful, and comforting in this last, dangerous time, when a mass of all kinds of errors and heresies is again arising and emerging anew, that we may guard ourselves against and resist the same.

Therefore, the illustrious, high-born princes and lords, Lord John Frederick [1529–95], Lord John William [1530–73], and Lord John Frederick the Younger [1538–65], brothers, dukes of Saxony, landgraves in Thuringia, and margraves at Meissen, my gracious princes and lords (having a special love for Holy Scripture and a desire that it be set forth according to its pure, natural, and true understanding), have ordered and commanded that these sermons be printed separately.[3] In them, many articles of our holy Christian faith are treated and explained in accordance with the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel.

Likewise, their Princely Graces desired, for urgent and considerable reasons, to have the individual confessions of the illustrious, high-born former elector of

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[1] The sermons on Matthew mentioned here did not appear in the published volume. Amsdorf may be referring to a series of 1528–29 sermons on Matthew originally contained in the same manuscript with the sermons on John 18–20 (WA 28:1–3, 4–30), one of which Poach included in his 1559 edition of the *House Postil* (Klug 1:264–77), though this portion of the manuscript is now lost. The reference may be, however, to Luther's 1537–40 sermons on Matthew 18–24, WA 47:232–627 (LW 68), which Poach helped Johann Aurifaber transcribe from Rörer's manuscript for the never-published third volume of the Eisleben edition of Luther's works (WA 47:ix).

[2] Andreas Poach.

[3] That is, apart from the edition of Luther's collected works being published under ducal patronage at Jena, the first volume of which appeared in 1555.

Chapter Nineteen[1]

PILATE[2] delays the proceedings for quite a long time. He does not rush and hurry Jesus to judgment, though the Jews press him hard. Because it is obvious to him that the Jews are mad with rage and nevertheless cannot bring any charge against Him, he acts as any reasonable man would and does not rush the proceedings. To be sure, he also had to respect the custom of the Romans, who had a strict law and did not play games when someone had committed a crime.

But the Roman law and custom was that no one could be put to death unless he had previously been brought to trial, arraigned, confronted with the charge, and had also given his defense. Thus we read in Acts 25 [:16] that Porcius Festus |would not put Paul to death, even though the Jews demanded it of him. On the contrary, he says, "It is not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone to be put to death before the accused confronts his accusers face-to-face and has opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him."

And that is in accordance with natural law and the Law of Moses. Nature and the law of all nations[3] insists that the other side be heard as well, as it is said: *Audiatur altera pars*.[4] And Moses teaches: "No person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness" (Numbers 35 [:30]). This was the Roman custom and law, and they held to it strictly. Because Pilate, as a subject of the Roman Empire, had to be afraid of doing anything opposing Caesar, he thus prolongs his dealings with Christ as long as he can, particularly because the Jews were unable to bring anything against Him, but everything they brought forward became like water slipping through their fingers.

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[1] Poach gives the full text of John 19 in Luther's translation, followed by the heading "The Exposition."

[2] The exposition of John 19 begins in the midst of Luther's sermon of February 27, 1529, which began above, p. 216.

[3] Roman jurisprudence defined the *ius gentium* as differing from natural law in that natural law applied to all animals, the law of nations only to human beings: Justinian, *Digest* 1.1.1.4 (Watson 1:1).

[4] Cf. Seneca (ca. 4 BC–AD 65), *Medea* 2.2, lines 199–200 (Loeb 62 [2002], p. 362); Augustine, *De duabus animabus* 14.22 (PL 42:110; NPNF[1] 4:107); Wander 3:406, "Mann" nos. 701, 997. For the history of the maxim, implied but not found explicitly in Roman law, see John M. Kelly, "Audi alteram Partem," *Natural Law Forum* 9 (1964): 103–10.

1. *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him.*

Here again Pilate acts like a reasonable man, and a wise Gentile and Roman: since the Jews would by no means be satisfied, he tries this approach and has Jesus flogged. Scourging or flogging was a common punishment among the Romans, like the interrogation under torture among us.[5] This is also seen in Acts 22 [:24], where the tribune has the captive Paul scourged and examined to find out the reason why the Jews were crying out against him. In like manner, Pilate also had Jesus flogged and examined to see whether he might appease the Jews by doing so. It is as though he were saying, "I will attempt to satisfy their maniacal hatred; I will have Him punished and impose sentence to see whether this will appease them."[6] But the Jews are also not pacified by the flogging but cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him" [John 19:6].

That is an even larger piece of the portrait of the beautiful, dear world than the one we had before. In the previous chapter we heard how the Jews would rather set the murderer Barabbas free than the innocent Jesus. Such is the world! First, it will not tolerate the just and the innocent. Second, it prefers the rebel and murderer, Barabbas, to Christ, the preacher of truth. These are hard and coarse knots.[7] But the third is much more coarse: the darling, beloved world is not satisfied or satiated even when the truth is punished in moderation. The Jews are not content, do not cease pressing Pilate, and continue to clamor against Jesus, even though Jesus, the preacher of truth, is being interrogated and flogged.

People ask why God would be angry and send flooding, fire, pestilence, war, and other punishments upon the world. [But] it would be nothing to marvel at if God were to let the world collapse and perish altogether in the blink of an eye. For is it not a great and unheard-of wickedness, deserving divine wrath and punishment, that the world will not tolerate the truth—indeed, what is more, that it can by no means be satisfied and does not cease

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[5] Judicial torture, a feature of Roman law (see Justinian, *Digest* 47.10.15.41–43; 48.18 [Watson 4:779, 840–45]), had been reintroduced in canon law by the 1252 bull *Ad exstirpanda* of Innocent IV (d. 1254), and then by the end of the thirteenth century in German codes as well, the latter finally codified in the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* of 1532: see John H. Langbein, *Prosecuting Crime in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 148–209. For Luther's criticism of the effects of torture on the testimony of the weak, see *Wider den Bischof zu Magdeburg, Albrecht Cardinal* (1539), WA 50:411ff.

[6] The idea that Pilate intends the flogging of Jesus to satisfy the Jews so that they will cease calling for Jesus' execution is apparently universal in the preceding exegetical tradition: see CWE 46:337 n. 7 and (not listed there) Gerson, *Ad deum vadit*, p. 92; cf. Brenz, *Exegesis in Iohannem*, f. 317v.

[7] I.e., "sins." Cf. above, p. 202 n. 208.

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

CHAPTER 20:19–31

1522–40

Introduction

MARTIN Luther emerged into public view out of the obscurity of the Wittenberg cloister and university lecture hall as a counselor to the laity on the sacrament of penance—a concern of which the *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power of Indulgences* were only, at least in retrospect, the most notable expression.[1] Although the theology and practice of private confession had developed first within the monasteries of the early Middle Ages, since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, every lay Christian in the Western Church had also been obligated to make confession to his or her parish priest at least once each year.[2] The "pervasiveness of penitence" in the late medieval church linked Luther's experience as a monk and theologian with the experience of ordinary lay Christians in 1517, a connection reinforced by Luther's enormously popular publications addressing lay concerns about penance.[3]

If the theology and practice of penance were ubiquitous in the late medieval church, they were also bound up with central questions of theology and ecclesiology: the doctrine of justification and the definition of the role and authority of the clergy.[4] The sacrament of penance was, concretely, the place at which the sinner came to grace, under the judgment or by the mediation of the clergy. The key biblical texts underlying the medieval discussion were Jesus' granting of the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" to Peter in Matt. 16:13–20, His subsequent conferral of the power of binding and loosing on

[1] *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), LW 31:25–33; *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* (1517/1518), WA 1:243–46 (LW 70); *Sermon on Penance* (1518), WA 1:319–24 (LW 70); *A Brief Instruction on How One Should Confess* (1519), WA 2:59–65 (cf. the revised edition, trans. in LW 39:27–47); *Sacrament of Penance* (1519), LW 35:9–22.

[2] The decree *Omnis utriusque sexus*, Denzinger, no. 437. On the historical development, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 3–27.

[3] See Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), ch. 3, pp. 46–91. On the frequent publication of these works in the early years of the Reformation, see Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), pp. 43–51; cf. Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 49–56.

[4] Cf. Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," *Kerygma und Dogma* 14 (1968): 207: "Private confession is the point at which numerous theological and ecclesiastical problems crystalize . . . [the point at which] a great many central theological questions meet."

Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter, John 20:21–29

Preached at Borna April 27, 1522, in the afternoon

Translated by Kenneth E. F. Howes

At the beginning of March 1522, Luther left his enforced seclusion in the Wartburg Castle, against the elector's wishes, and returned to Wittenberg, where in the Invocavit *sermons of March 9–16 he rejected the precipitous course of reform to which the Wittenberg professor Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt had turned.*[1] *When he passed through the Saxon town of Borna on March 5 on his way to Wittenberg, Luther had promised (most likely to Michael von der Strassen, the administrator of tolls there) that he would return to preach, a promise fulfilled at the end of April when Luther traveled to Borna on a circuit that then took him through Altenburg, Zwickau, and Torgau, and back through Borna again on May 4.*[2]

The sermons preached on the trip were intended to set the proper direction for reform in the other towns of Electoral Saxony and to serve as exemplary presentations of Evangelical teaching in contrast both to medieval religion and to the alternatives offered by Karlstadt and the Zwickau prophets.[3] *Luther thus dealt systematically with such central topics as the role of faith, true good works and service to the neighbor, and the relation between evangelical freedom and good order.*

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[1] LW 51:67–100.

[2] Letter to Spalatin, April 24, 1522, WA Br 2:511–12, no. 481. See also Luther's letter to Elector Frederick, written from Borna on March 5, 1522, LW 48:388–93, and the note on Michael von der Strassen there, LW 48:393 n. 17.

[3] Brecht 2:67.

Dr. Martin Luther's Sermon
Twelve O'Clock in the Afternoon

YOU have heard today the first part of the Gospel, in which we are shown how we should conduct ourselves toward God.[8] What now follows is how we should conduct ourselves toward our neighbor. When He appeared to them for the second time, He said: "Have peace! Just as the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you" [John 20:21]. Of this we wish to speak. It is said that when we preach of faith we are forbidding good works. We have never preached that. Christ, in His life, never did a good work in order to become righteous, and yet He did good works all the time. From the time He was born of the Virgin Mary He was always righteous, from the very beginning of His birth. Everything that Christ did on earth He did to serve us. He did all His works for us and for our sake.

Now we come to the same place. "Just as My Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." [Jesus says:] "How has He sent Me? He has sent |Me in such a way that I take upon Myself the Law, death, hell, sin, etc., even though I have not deserved it, but I have done it for your sake. Now you also, do as I have done today." If I come to acknowledge and to love the Law, I fulfill the Law entirely, and that happens out of or through faith. Faith brings everything along with it, [faith] that says, "I have a gracious God." [Jesus says,] "As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." There is no command there. "As I have done, do likewise; if you do not do it, that is a sign that no faith is yet present."

St. Peter also admonishes us in this respect when he says, *Satagite fratres*, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure through good works" [2 Pet. 1:10]. It is the things that we should do for our neighbor that are good works and are called good works by St. Peter. Just as Christ did not seek His own benefit and advantage, so we should seek our neighbor's benefit and advantage. The works done for our neighbor show that we have faith in God and love for our neighbor.[9] However, we become neither righteous nor saved by them. Faith takes away all works, as St. Paul says in Romans 13 [:8]: *Nemini quicquam*, "Owe no

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[8] The sermon notes begin: "This morning I spoke of the Law and the Gospel, how the Law makes us sinners and the Gospel again makes alive those who believe in Christ, which justification comes from faith and not from works. Now follows the purpose served by works." Luther's morning sermon on John 20:19–20 stands behind the first part of the *Church Postil* sermon, translated in Lenker 2:364–74 (WA 10/3:86–93).

[9] The notes add: "Just as many coats do not make a tailor but show that the one who has made them is a tailor, so, too, works make no one righteous but show that someone is righteous."

Sermon for Easter Tuesday Morning, John 20:19–23

Preached in Wittenberg March 30, 1529 (1566)

Translated by Benjamin T. G. Mayes

Luther preached on this text on Easter Tuesday in 1529 (rather than in its usual place on Quasimodogeniti, the following Sunday) because he was following Bugenhagen's Gospel harmony, which conflates the usual Easter Tuesday text, Luke 24:36–48, with John 20:19–23.[1] *Luther was concerned at the time with the spread of clandestine Anabaptist preaching in Saxony and here urges his hearers to refuse the preaching of those without a regular, public call to the preaching office—and to hold those who did have legitimate calls strictly to the proclamation of the Word.*[2] *Returning to problems raised by his earlier exegesis of John 20:22–23,*[3] *Luther develops an important distinction between the gift of the Holy Spirit to the person for salvation and the gift of the Spirit to the office of preaching (below, pp. 355ff.).*

The sermon is preserved in Georg Rörer's notes (R) as well as in an independent version in the Nürnberg Codex Solger 13 (N), prepared (presumably on the basis of another scribe's original notes) by Friedrich Myconius.[4] *A modern conflation of these notes has been*

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[1] Bugenhagen, *Historia*, pp. 446ff.; WA 21:184–85.

[2] On Luther's struggle against Anabaptism in these years, see *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528), LW 40:229–62; *Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers* (1532), LW 40:383–94; and his preface to Justus Menius, *The Doctrine and Stealth of the Anabaptists, Refuted from Scripture* (1530), WA 30/2:211–14 (LW 59).

[3] See above, pp. 330–31.

[4] Rörer's notes (R) and the notes from the Nürnberg codex (N) are edited in WA 29:302–10; R alone in Cl 7:146–51. The sermon notes are cataloged as Aland Pr 1035.

House Postil Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter

On the Sunday Quasimodogeniti
The Gospel: John 20 [:19–31]
1531/1544

Translated by Kenneth E. F. Howes

YOU have heard, dear friends, in the preceding sermon, that this history took place on Easter Day, after the disciples had come from Emmaus back to Jerusalem and announced to the others how they had seen the Lord [Luke 24:36–49].* Now, it is characteristic of John more than the other evangelists that he does not only recount the history but also adds the preaching and word of Christ, which are the things into which we should chiefly and principally inquire. So, here, he reports the words of which nothing is found in the other Gospels, namely, how the Lord, after He had wished peace to His disciples and showed them His hands and feet, said to them, "Just as My Father has sent Me, so I am sending you" [John 20:21].

Those are weighty words, with which He transfers† the office of preaching to them and brings the Passion and the resurrection of Christ into its true use and application.‡ For if it had remained a mere history or event§ apart from the preaching office, the event would have been of no use to us, as we see in the papacy, where they have the histories well and fine, just as we have them. But because they don't make use of it in the office of preaching, as Christ here commands, it remains without any fruit, just as if it were a story of Dietrich of Bern that is heard and taught, but one gains nothing more from it than knowledge [of the story]. Therefore, it is essential that the history of the Passion and resurrection of Christ be brought into its proper use.

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* In Dietrich's *House Postil*, the preceding sermon is based on Luther's 1533 household sermon for Easter Tuesday. See Loy, *Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*, 2:33–46, and the equivalent in Poach's version, translated in Klug 2:32–40.

† *uber gibt*

‡ *brauch und ubung*

§ *geschicht*; "story" or "event."

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