

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 75

CHURCH POSTIL

I

Edited by

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and sent his manuscript to the printer.⁸ In his preface to the short work, Luther reflects on his struggles against his papistic opponents and his effort to cleanse the Word of God from human filth.⁹ While in hiding at the Wartburg after the Diet of Worms, Luther's plan changed. Now he wanted to prepare a postil in German, and for that he initially intended to translate his previous Latin *Advent Postil*. But Luther had misplaced his notes, so while he awaited a printed copy of the Latin postil, he began work on the sermons for the Christmas season. However, it became obvious to him that his earlier Advent sermons would not fit into his new plan because his Latin sermons were of a completely different style than the German material for Christmas. Thus Luther abandoned his intention to translate the 1521 Latin *Advent Postil* and instead composed new Advent sermons in German.¹⁰ The Christmas sermons, known as the *Christmas Postil* (1522) in the literature, were printed separately once.¹¹ The German sermons for Advent, the so-called *Advent Postil* (1522), were printed separately twice.¹² More commonly, these two parts were published together and are now known as the *Wartburg Postil* (1522).¹³

THE 1525 *LENT POSTIL* AND *WINTER POSTIL*

No more of the postil appeared in print for the next few years, but market demand for Luther's church year sermons did not abate. Realizing the need to present shorter sermons, Luther began writing and revising sermons on

⁸ *Enarrationes Epistolarvm Et Evangeliorvm, Qvas Postillas Vocant* (Wittenberg: apud Iohannem Grunenbergium, 1521), WA 7:463–537 [VD16 L4548]. For other printings, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 538; WA 7:459–61.

⁹ See *Exposition of the Epistles and Gospels Which Are Called Postils* (1521), WA 7:463–64 (LW 76), which is Luther's preface to his Latin *Advent Postil*.

¹⁰ Gerhard Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik*, 3rd. ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), pp. 32–33; Walther Köhler, WA 10/1.2:xli–xliv; StL 11:vii–x.

¹¹ *Auszlegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien die nach brauch der kirchen gelesßen werden vom Christag biß auff den Sontag nach Epiphanie* (Wittenberg: Johann Grunenberck, 1522), WA 10/1.1:1–728 [VD16 L3936]; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 539; WA 10/1.2:xiii–xiv. The *Winter Postil* is imprecisely labeled *Kirchenpostille* in the running heads of WA 10/1.1, though it is only one part of the *Church Postil*.

¹² *Auszlegung der Epistell vnd Euangeli des Aduents* (Wittenberg: Johann Grunenberck, 1522), WA 10/1.2:1–208 [VD16 L3924]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 538; WA 10/1.2:xiv–xv.

¹³ *Avszlegung der Epistelen vnd Euangelien/ die nach brauch der kirchen gelesen werden durch den Aduent/ vnd dannenthyn vom Christag biß vff den Sontag nach Epiphanie* (Basel: Adam Petri, 1522) [VD16 L4551, L3935]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 538–39; WA 10/1.2:xv.

the Epistles and Gospels of the Sundays after Epiphany, but before he could finish the sermons for Lent, a copy of his work was stolen and printed in Regensburg, though with “Wittemberg” as the place of publication on the title page.¹⁴ Luther continued working on these sermons, known now as the *Lent Postil*, and had them published in 1525,¹⁵ along with a “Preface and Admonition to the Printers” reproving his anonymous thieves.¹⁶ Soon the *Lent Postil* was added to the *Wartburg Postil* and printed under the subtitle: “corrected for the second time [*anderweyt*] by Martin Luther,” indicating that the *Wartburg Postil* sermons were in their second revised edition. For the first time, Luther’s sermons on the entire winter half of the church year were available to the public in what is now known as the *Winter Postil* (1525).¹⁷ It was this *Winter Postil* (consisting of the *Advent*, *Christmas*, and *Lent Postils*) that Luther in 1527 called “the best book I ever wrote,” though of course he made similar statements about others of his works as well.¹⁸ This was the end of Luther’s own, independent work on the postils. After the 1525 *Winter Postil*, editors took the postils in hand, sometimes with Luther’s approval and sometimes without.¹⁹

¹⁴ *Postilla vom Sonntag nach Epiphanie biß auff den sechsten Sonntag darnach* (Wittemberg, 1525 [actually, Regensburg: Paul Kohl, 1525]) [VD16 L3969]; Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 32–33; Brecht 2:286. StL 11:x–xi, following E² 7:xiii–ix, identifies the publication city as Nürnberg, against which see WA 10/1.2:xv–xvi.

¹⁵ *Auslegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien von der heyligen Dreykoenige fest bis auff Ostern gebessert durch Mar. Luther* (Wittenberg: [Lukas Cranach & Christian Döring], 1525), WA 17/2:3–247 [VD16 L3971]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 539–40; WA 10/1.2:xv–xvii.

¹⁶ See Luther’s preface to the *Lent Postil* (1525), WA 17/2:3–4 (LW 76).

¹⁷ *Auslegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien vom Aduent an bis auff Ostern. Anderweyt corrigirt durch Martin Luther* (Wittenberg: Johannes Grunenberg [& Hans Weiß], 1525) [VD16 L3949]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 540–41, nos. 1–23; WA 10/1.2:xvii–xxi. This version of Luther’s postil, the *Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels from Advent to Easter* (1525), is anachronistically called *Kirchenpostille* and misdated at 1522 by Aland; see above, p. xiv n. 5. See also Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 35–36, 538–41; StL 11:xi.

¹⁸ *This Is My Body* (1527), LW 37:147; Brecht 2:16; Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 36 n. 72; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 29 n. 79. Luther said this while complaining of Martin Bucer’s (1491–1551) Latin translation of his postil (see *Open Letter to Johann Herwagen* and Luther’s preface to the fourth volume of Bucer’s Latin translation of the *Church Postil* [1526/1527, 1528], LW 59:163–74). The first edition of Bucer’s Latin translation (1525–27) was of Luther’s 1525 *Winter Postil* (see StL 11:xi–xii), while the second edition (1528) added Latin translations of Roth’s edition of the *Summer Postil* and *Festival Postil* Gospel sermons. Thus, in context, it is clear that Luther’s words of praise for his “postil” were directed toward his own 1525 *Winter Postil*.

¹⁹ Albrecht Beutel incorrectly states that Luther did not with his own hand write the *Lent Postil* but that Stephan Roth was responsible for this portion: “Predigt VIII. Evangelische Predigt vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert,” *TRE* 27:296–311, here at p. 297. Yet Luther’s letters from

STEPHAN ROTH'S POSTIL EDITIONS

Stephan Roth's editorial work on Luther's postil was not commissioned by Luther, though for a while Luther gave his consent. Roth (1492–1546) was not a theologian but a schoolteacher. At the age of 25 he was leading the school of his hometown, Zwickau, and later he led the Latin school in Joachimsthal (Bohemia). In 1523, however, he enrolled at Wittenberg and struck up a friendship with Luther, Johann Bugenhagen (1485–1558), and others. During this time, Roth translated writings of Luther and Bugenhagen and also took notes while Luther preached. Later, Roth added other early Luther sermons to these notes. In 1527 he returned to Zwickau to serve as the city secretary.²⁰ But Roth had already recognized the market's demand for sermons of Luther for the summer half of the church year. Although not commissioned by Luther to do so, Roth edited and published *Explanation of the Gospels from Easter to Advent*, now known as Roth's edition of the *Summer Postil* (1526),²¹ and he succeeded in obtaining a preface from Luther to include with the volume. In the preface, Luther (with the theft and publication of part of the *Lent Postil* likely still in mind) viewed the publication of the *Summer Postil* as unnecessary, but at least better than shoddy, unauthorized publications under his name.²² Unlike Luther's 1525 *Winter Postil*, which had sermons on the Epistle and Gospel texts, Roth's collection contained sermons only on the Gospel texts. Also, Roth's work was not of the highest quality. In many ways, Roth was not a theologically competent editor of the reformer's sermons—a task that required a certain amount of editorial contribution to supplement and smooth out the rough stenographic notes of his preaching. Instead, Roth was a collector and publisher of Luther's homiletical fragments. And wherever Roth could not find the sermons he needed from Luther, he proceeded to gather material from other sources and publish it among Luther's sermons.²³

Encouraged by the success of the *Summer Postil*, Roth undertook a sequel: *Explanation of the Gospels for the Chief Festivals in the Whole Year*—now

the time (to Nik. Hausmann, March 14, 1524, WA Br 3:256.14–15, no. 721; to Hausmann, February 2, 1525, WA Br 3:431.13–14, no. 823) show that he was actively working on the *Lent Postil*. See Brecht 2:286; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 35–36; StL 11:x–xi.

²⁰ Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 17–18.

²¹ *Auslegung der Euangelienn/ von Ostern biß auffß Aduent/ gepredigt durch Mart. Luther zu Wittemberg*, ed. Stephan Roth ([Augsburg: Heinrich Sterner], 1526), WA 10/1.2:211–441 [VD16 L4005]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 542–43; WA 10/1.2:xxiii–xxvi.

²² Preface to Roth's edition of the *Summer Postil* (1526), WA 10/1.2:211 (LW 79).

²³ Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 33; Emanuel Hirsch, "Zur Geschichte der Postillen," in Cl 7:39–40; WA 21:ix–x.

called the *Festival Postil* (1527)—consisting of sermons on the Gospel texts appointed for the festival and saint days of the church year.²⁴ Roth set himself a difficult task, however, since there were many saint and festival days for which there were no sermons of Luther. For these days Roth improvised by printing the text of the Gospel reading and a summary by Bugenhagen. Often Roth proceeded in a wholly arbitrary manner, for example, constructing a sermon for St. Andrew's Day from Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* and a sermon for St. Barbara's Day from a sermon Luther preached in 1524 for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity. The sermon for St. Thomas' Day was primarily Roth's own work. The sermons for SS. Philip and James and for St. Michael are translations from Philip Melancthon (1497–1560).²⁵ Again, Luther provided a preface (without having examined the volume), stating that the publication of the *Festival Postil* was undertaken completely under his supervision and direction in order to prevent people from adding to his sermons “whatever they want” and marring his preaching so that he himself could not recognize what is affixed under his name. The irony is that this is precisely what Roth's edition did.²⁶

Once he was at work, Roth was unable to stop. After the success of the *Summer Postil* and *Festival Postil*, Roth proceeded to produce an edition of the *Winter Postil* completely different from, and in competition with, the one that Luther had prepared.²⁷ Known now as Roth's edition of the *Winter Postil* (1528), this *Explanation of the Gospels from Advent to Easter*²⁸ may be considered an attempt to abridge Luther's 1525 *Winter Postil*. Roth eliminated the sermons on Epistle texts and edited down or replaced the Gospel sermons, resulting in a *Winter Postil* much more compact than Luther's own.²⁹

²⁴ *Außlegung der Euangelien, an den fürnemsten Festen jm gantzen jare, geprediget durch Mar. Luther zü Wittenberg*, ed. Stephan Roth ([Augsburg: Heinrich Steiner], 1527), WA 17/2:251–516 [VD16 L3977]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 543–44; WA 10/1.2:xxvi–xxx. For an English translation, see Joel R. Baseley, trans., *Festival Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils* (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2005).

²⁵ WA 21:xiii–xiv.

²⁶ WA 21:xiv–xv; Baseley 1:[ix] (WA 17/2:251).

²⁷ Hirsch, “Zur Geschichte der Postillen,” 39.

²⁸ *Außlegung der Euangelien vom Aduent biß auff Osteren sampt vil andern predigen*, ed. Stephan Roth ([Augsburg: Heinrich Steiner], 1528), WA 21:3–193 [VD16 L3998]; for other editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 544–45; WA 10/1.2:xxii.

²⁹ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 544. Compare the Gospel sermons in WA 10/1.2:1–208 (Luther's 1522 edition of the *Advent Postil* = Lenker 1:17–133) with the corresponding section from Roth's 1528 edition of the *Winter Postil*, WA 21:5–44. The sermons are entirely different. The editors of the St. Louis edition mistakenly thought that Luther's 1525 *Winter Postil* was Roth's 1528 edition of the *Winter Postil* (StL 11:xiii–xiv), claiming that Roth's *Winter Postil* was basically the same as the editions of the *Winter Postil* from 1522–35 (which WA 21:5–193

Roth's printers urged him to obtain a preface from Luther for the new *Winter Postil*. At Roth's request, Georg Rörer (1492–1557) showed Luther the printer's pages, and then reported to Roth on July 9, 1528:

I urged the Doctor to write a preface as soon as possible, but, being occupied with other matters, he was unable. He invited me to supper, then said, "At supper I will write it for you." However, at his first look at the postils, he became quite enraged, saying, "Why are these postils being published, when they were previously written and published more diligently and more amply by me?" Then immediately Philip and Jonas calmed him down, [saying] that the labor was in vain, but he should just acknowledge them as his own. As for me, I added that this labor of yours was not displeasing to Bugenhagen, though he likes the sermons preached by Dr. Martin more than the ones prepared and written by him. Then the Doctor was displeased that you added in the title: "Sermons of Luther When He Returned from His Patmos."³⁰ Again, he was offended accidentally while reading "the Gospel must sound bad"; Latin: *male audit*.

Rörer concluded his letter:

You will not believe how difficult—indeed, extremely difficult—it was for Luther to write the preface. The more he read in the [printer's] copy, the less he was inclined to write the preface. Surely all good men sympathize with you, which their letters will testify. Send the polished copy to the Doctor's wife and to me.³¹

One might expect the opposite, yet in his very brief preface Luther stated that he was pleased with his friend Stephan Roth's efforts to clean up his sermons and put them in order.³² Yet discontent toward Roth grew among Luther's friends, especially when it was made known that Roth was profiting financially from publishing Luther's postils and as the poor quality of Roth's work became clear. On August 5, 1528, Rörer wrote to Roth:

I asked Cruciger³³ to write to you. He promised that he would do so. But when I wanted to ask for the letter, he was not at home. He is not very pleased with your work in assembling the sermons for the summer Sundays and saints' days. He says that you were very careless in correcting them, and they were very careless in printing them, so that sometimes he

shows to be false), and that Roth's *Winter Postil* was published in Wittenberg (which Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 544–45, shows to be false). This mistaken identification of Roth's *Winter Postil* may have helped to lead the editors of the St. Louis edition to an entirely positive assessment of Roth's work.

³⁰ See WA 21:104.

³¹ WA 21:xvi–xvii.

³² See Luther's preface to Roth's *Winter Postil* (1528), WA 21:1 (LW 76).

³³ That is, Caspar Cruciger Sr. (1504–48). For more on Cruciger's involvement with Luther's postils, see the introduction below, pp. xxii–xxiv.

does not know what words and entire orations mean when he is supposed to correct them.³⁴ This is what I think he himself will tell you when he writes to you. Bartholomaeus the bookseller is very angry with that other man.³⁵ I wanted to calm him down recently. What does he say? "I gave that man (if you recall) 14 gulden, and Moritz [gave him] the same or a little less, and promised that he would keep the trust with us." When I heard him mentioning money, what could I say? How could I excuse you? You did not mention a word to me about this money, or if you did mention it, since it is not known to me, you certainly did not mention an amount so great.³⁶

Finally, Rörer wrote a harsh letter to Roth on October 15, 1528, reproaching Roth's entire postil edition and asking him to cease publishing Luther's sermons.

I made sure that the book you intended for Dr. M.'s wife would be bound. It would not have been at all proper to have given her the book before it was prepared. Many interpret this labor of yours in heaping up sermons in a way of which I do not now want to speak. I have not yet heard the Doctor's judgment. This is what I am advising you: Do not fool yourself and seek your own profit more than that of the readers. Enough and more than enough sermons have now been printed. I do not approve of the fact that you are having the first and oldest sermons of Dr. M. printed. If they were being printed with the consent of the author, or if he himself were having them printed, he would have found quite a few things that he would have either changed or completely erased, following the example of Augustine.³⁷ But you, without discrimination—as long as the book grows beyond bounds—are scraping together all the sermons, and you have praise; you also have your profit. Look, I say, do not deceive yourself. God has sharper eyes than you do. If you want to aid the Christian cause with your labor, why do you not ask me for the sermons preached last year and this year? Here, surely, I would have spurred you on, and would have loved one sermon more than even half of this book. I know you will not like this judgment of mine at all, but as for me, I know what I am saying. Someday in an argument those excessive commentaries will be sought, with the result that Scripture will be neglected. What do you think will happen then? "But the commentaries of former times were impure; the commentaries of our times are godly." That is true. But even before now enough of those godly commentaries have been published. You see, this is why godly men publish their explanations: not that we may cling to them forever but that they may be like pointers for us, showing the way to the fountain itself—not to mention the blasphemy of the fanatics [*Schwermologorum*], who laugh at us who spend our time even on Holy Scripture. But this blasphemy of theirs is from Satan, not the

³⁴ See WA 21:xvii n. 3.

³⁵ Moritz Goltz (ca. 1495–1548), according to WA 21:xvii n. 4.

³⁶ WA 21:xvii.

³⁷ See Augustine (354–430), *Retractions* (FC 60; CCSL 57).

good Spirit. . . . I have been asked, even almost begged by some, to tell you these things and admonish you to suppress those sermons, especially if they are from those that were preached about eight, nine, or ten years ago, which you are promising to publish with your scant attention and effort. I have not yet presented the book to the Doctor's wife, because it has not yet been prepared. If it had been prepared, I doubtlessly would have heard what judgment Dr. Martin would pass on your work. I will state this in another way: I did my part when I sent the preface. At that time Dr. M. said, among other things: "It would have been better advised for me myself to publish the rest of the Gospels and Epistles through the whole year with my annotations, and surely it would have been an easy thing to do," he said, "since there was no need for such a lengthy explanation of the Gospels and Epistles in this latter postil as there was in the first."³⁸ Much could have been understood from that former [postil].³⁹

Thus, on the basis of Rörer's testimony, Luther was displeased with Roth's edition, and the team of scholars around Luther recognized that Luther's rough sermons required revising before being released to the public and that his earlier sermons were not fit for publication without extensive editing.

Beginning in 1531, tension between Luther and Roth increased as a result of the Zwickau city council's endeavor to dismiss a pastor without just cause. Finally, Luther considered Roth, who was the secretary for the city council, as being separated from his fellowship—that is, excommunicated—and this ban was never lifted.⁴⁰ In a letter of November 27, 1535, Luther told Nicolaus Gerbel (ca. 1485–1560) of Strassburg that he wanted Roth's edition of the postil to be totally eradicated.

Concerning the postil, you have more respect for it than I do. I would like the whole book to be destroyed. And this is what I am doing: I am entrusting to Dr. Caspar Cruciger the work of re-editing the whole into a new and better form, which would be of benefit to the whole Church everywhere. He is the sort of man, unless love deceives me, who will correspond to Elisha, if I were Elijah (if one may compare small things with great), a man of peace and quiet, to whom I shall commend the church after [I depart]; Philip does this too.⁴¹

Despite the displeasure of Luther, Rörer, and Cruciger behind the scenes, Roth's edition of the *Winter Postil* continued to be published and sold alongside Luther's edition, yet then ceased to be published after Luther's own

³⁸ Luther means his own *Winter Postil* (WA 21:xviii n. 2).

³⁹ WA 21:xvii–xviii.

⁴⁰ Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 34; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 36; WA 21:xv–xix; Brecht 2:442.

⁴¹ WA Br 7:329, no. 2275; cf. StL 11:xiv. The Weimar editors identify the postil of which Luther speaks as Roth's edition (WA 22:xi n. 2).

revision of his *Winter Postil* came out in 1540. Roth's edition of the *Summer Postil*, likewise, ceased to be published after Cruciger's edition appeared in 1540. Roth's *Festival Postil*, however, was never replaced by Luther, and thus continued to be published throughout the sixteenth century.⁴²

LUTHER'S 1540 EDITION OF THE *WINTER POSTIL* AND CRUCIGER'S 1544 EDITION OF THE *SUMMER POSTIL*

In 1540 a revised edition of Luther's *Winter Postil* was published under the title *Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels from Advent to Easter, by Dr. Martin Luther, Corrected Anew*.⁴³ Luther's biggest change was an update of the biblical citations to reflect the latest version of the German Bible. Yet he also made many significant changes to his sermons. He removed sections in which he had previously tolerated Roman Catholic fasts and the cult of saints. Some omissions were made to streamline his argument.⁴⁴ More significant, some of Luther's changes demonstrate greater kindness toward Aristotle,⁴⁵ the universities, and the schools (e.g., the Epistle sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent⁴⁶). He also removed or qualified a number of reproaches of "the clergy," since by 1540 an Evangelical clergy had been established. In short, the establishment of the Church of the Augsburg Confession called for a different, less disestablishmentarian, tone. This is not to say that Luther was consistent in revising his unqualified attacks on the universities, the clergy, and Aristotle. Rather, it appears that Luther began with a thorough edit of the Advent sermons, then worked hastily, with the exception of those places where he excised lengthy sections⁴⁷ and the complete replacement of the Gospel sermon for the First Sunday after Epiphany.⁴⁸

⁴² Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 542–44, lists printings of Roth's *Summer Postil* through 1537, printings of Roth's *Winter Postil* through 1535, and printings of Roth's *Festival Postil* through 1617.

⁴³ *Auslegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien vom Aduent an bis auff Ostern. Durch Doctorem Martinum Luther. Auff's new corrigirt* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1540), E² 7:25–369; 8:1–172; 10:3–482; 11:1–187 [VD16 L3965]; for other editions, see WA 10/1.2:xxi, and Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 541, nos. 24–47.

⁴⁴ E.g., see below, sermon for Advent 4 on John 1:19–28, p. 175, paragraph 15; and sermon for Christmas Day on Titus 2:11–15, p. 187, paragraph 1 (which is found in n. 2).

⁴⁵ For Luther's attitude toward Aristotelianism in theology, see, e.g., Luther's preface to Klingebiel, *On Clerical Marriage* (1528), LW 59:224; commentary on Rab, *Specimen of Papist Theology* (1531), LW 59:299; and afterword to *Letter Censuring Cajetan* (1534), LW 60:52.

⁴⁶ See below, sermon for Advent 2 on Rom. 15:4–13, p. 74, paragraph 32.

⁴⁷ Such as paragraphs 253–312 of the sermon for Epiphany on Matt. 2:1–12, E² 10:440–65; WA 10/1.1:681–709 (LW 76).

⁴⁸ Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 35; StL 11:xv; WA 17/2:15–32.

As mentioned above, as early as 1535 Luther planned to entrust the revision of the *Summer Postil* to Caspar Cruciger. Like Roth and Rörer, Cruciger came to Wittenberg from the University of Leipzig and was, among the three, the preeminent intellect. After participating in the organization of the Magdeburg school system, he was called back to Wittenberg to fill in for absent professors. Cruciger had earned Luther's full trust by editing and publishing sermons of Luther on the basis of stenographic notes.⁴⁹ Cruciger took up the work on the *Summer Postil*, but from the middle of 1539 did not make progress. In July 1541, Luther himself began to work on the *Summer Postil* but soon gave the work back to Cruciger. The *Summer Postil* was published shortly after Christmas 1543 under the title *Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels from Easter to Advent, by Dr. Martin Luther, Prepared Anew*. It bore the date 1544 on the title page, since the new year was reckoned as beginning on Christmas Day.⁵⁰

Luther provided an ample preface to the work, addressing preachers of the Gospel. He writes that God has blessed Germans by providing His Word in the German language, the preaching of the catechism, the Sacraments, the Keys, and instruction in godly vocations and estates—all of which stands in stark contrast to the blindness they experienced under the papacy. Luther continues:

Beyond that, we have the postils, and especially this one, which my lord and good friend Dr. Caspar Cruciger has improved and expanded. In it the Epistles and Gospels through the year have been clearly and pleasantly prepared and, as I may say, “pre-chewed,” as a mother chews the porridge before giving it to her baby.

Luther continues by reviewing other literary blessings of God: the purified legends of the saints, Christian hymns, the Psalter, the German Bible. Luther also admonishes his readers to repent and emphasizes the necessity for pastors and preachers to rebuke sin and to excommunicate unrepentant sinners. Although Germany and the world in general are apparently becoming worse and worse, Luther states his confidence that Christ will ultimately triumph over the world and the devil.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 35; G. Bebermeyer, WA 22:xiv.

⁵⁰ *Auslegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien/ von Ostern bis auff das Aduent. D. Mar. Lut. Auff's new zugericht*, ed. Caspar Cruciger (Wittenberg [Leipzig]: durch Nicolaum Wolrab, 1544) [VD16 L5606]; for more editions, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 545–46; WA 10/1.2:xxi–xxii, xxxvi. Otto Clemen, WA Br 7:329 n. 5; Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und seine Schriften*, 5th ed., ed. Gustav Kawerau (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1903), 2:586. Concerning Luther's association of the new year with Christmas Day, see stanza 15 of “From Heaven on High I Come to You” (“*Vom Himmel hoch*”), LW 53:291 (LSB 358:15).

⁵¹ Preface to Cruciger's edition of the *Summer Postil* (1544), WA 21:200–203 (LW 77).

Cruciger replaced many of the Gospel sermons that Roth had selected, and he provided Epistle sermons for the summer half of the church year for the first time. His editorial approach does not correspond to modern historical principles of editing; he was quite free with his sources. Whereas Roth's edition presented the contents of his stenographic notes from Luther's preached sermons with little emendation, Cruciger's edition shaped his sources into a uniform whole, which Luther was able to claim as his own intellectual property. Luther's desire and intention was not at all to present to the reading public a literal transcript of his pulpit utterances. Therefore, while Luther disapproved of Roth's slavishly exact publication of his sermons, he was fully satisfied with Cruciger's revisions and acknowledged the latter's work as his own. Luther saw in Cruciger someone who understood how to communicate his thoughts faithfully without being bound to his extemporaneous homiletical word choice.⁵² That is to say, Roth catches better what Luther said; Cruciger catches better what Luther meant to say. Of course, in most cases one can now read the stenographic notes themselves as edited in the Weimar edition, obviating the necessity for Roth's edition except where the notes have not survived.

THE PURPOSE OF THE *CHURCH POSTIL*

With the publication of Veit Dietrich's edition of the *House Postil* in 1544, Luther's *Winter Postil* and Cruciger's edition of the *Summer Postil*, printed together, began to be called the *Church Postil*⁵³ and became established as the definitive form of this work. Roth's edition, except for the *Festival Postil*, went out of print. When the Formula of Concord (1577/1580) cited the *Church Postil*, the references in both cases are to Cruciger's *Summer Postil*.⁵⁴

From the beginning of his work on the postils, Luther had stated that they were supposed to serve "common pastors and people," and thus were to be the great devotional book of the Reformation.⁵⁵ In 1526 Luther suggested that less-capable preachers could occasionally recite one of his postils

⁵² Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 35; Brecht 3:251; Köstlin, *Martin Luther*, 2:586; G. Bebermeyer, WA 22:xvii.

⁵³ See above, p. xiii n. 4.

⁵⁴ FC SD V 11–12 refers to the sermon for Trinity 5, and FC SD VI 9 refers to the sermon for Trinity 19 (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 583–84, 589; *Concordia*, pp. 554–55, 559). The sermons are found in E² 13:153–54 (LW 78) and E² 9:298–311 (LW 79); Lenker 4:158–59; 8:304–16. Roth's edition of the *Summer Postil* (1526) did not include Epistle sermons.

⁵⁵ *Exposition of the Epistles and Gospels Which Are Called Postils* (1521), WA 7:463.12–18 (LW 76).

as their sermon, though in 1543 he did not want preachers to use postils as a crutch for their own laziness.⁵⁶

Although it was popular, Luther's *Church Postil* found some critique. The sermons of the *Summer Postil* were actually preached by Luther, recorded by a stenographer, and revised by an editor to a lesser (Roth) or greater extent (Cruciger). The sermons of the *Winter Postil* were written by Luther as "explanations" and were not really sermons, so most were far too long to be preached, even by sixteenth-century standards. Roth's solution to Luther's lengthy *Winter Postil* sermons has been mentioned above.⁵⁷ In addition to the length, criticism was leveled at the *Winter Postil*'s decidedly one-sided attacks against Luther's Papist opponents, though the sects and Sacramentarians also needed to be opposed. Also, many of Luther's digressions in the *Winter Postil* did not remain as relevant, such as the long excursus against monasticism in the Gospel sermon for Epiphany (which Luther excluded in his 1540 revision).⁵⁸ Finally, Luther did not stick to the main points but drifted far afield. Antonius Corvinus (1501–53), another of Luther's contemporaries, recognized various deficiencies in Luther's *Winter Postil* and sought a remedy by providing a postil of his own. Whether or not Luther agreed with these perceived problems, he did acknowledge the need for more practical postils and so supported Corvinus' postils with prefaces.⁵⁹ Writing in 1613, Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) described Luther's preaching style as both "catechetical," which he advised his readers to imitate, and "heroic." This "heroic" style was found especially in Luther's *Church Postil* and *House Postil* and involved wandering far from the biblical text that served as the focus of the sermon, but then in a pleasant way returning to the same. Gerhard advised his readers not to attempt to imitate this.⁶⁰

After the late 1560s, the popularity of Luther's *Church Postil* waned. While the two *House Postils* were printed at least ten times from 1569 to 1584, the *Church Postil* was reprinted only once, in 1575. It was printed again in 1584, and then not again until 1598 and 1617. In contrast, between

⁵⁶ *German Mass and Order of Service* (1526), LW 53:78; preface to Spangenberg, *German Postil* (1543), LW 60:285; Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ See the introduction above, p. xviii.

⁵⁸ E² 10:395–427; WA 10/1.1:634–67 (LW 76).

⁵⁹ See Luther's prefaces to the *Postils* of Corvinus (1535, 1537), LW 60:103–10; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 76–77.

⁶⁰ Johann Gerhard, *Postille: Das ist, Auslegung und Erklärung der sonntäglichen und vornehmsten Fest-Euangelien über das ganze Jahr . . . Erster Theil* (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1870), pp. viii, x. Gerhard's introduction does not appear in the recent English translation: Johann Gerhard, *Postilla: An Explanation of the Sunday and Most Important Festival Gospels of the Whole Year*, vol. 1, trans. Elmer Hohle (Malone, TX: Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2003). See also Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, p. 183.

1555 and 1568, a complete set of the *House Postil* was published every eighteen months. Indeed, from the moment Dietrich's edition of the *House Postil* was published, it became more popular than the *Church Postil*.⁶¹ The latter was not included in the first "complete" editions of Luther's works (the Wittenberg and Jena editions), probably because of its widespread circulation in former years.⁶² In the same period of time, a significant number of Luther's students published their own postils, among which the postils of Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550) and Corvinus were especially popular. Indeed, from Luther's death until the end of the sixteenth century, one or more new Lutheran postils were published nearly every year.⁶³

PHILIPP JACOB SPENER'S EDITION OF THE *CHURCH POSTIL* AND TRADITION

The first attempt at a critical edition of Luther's *Church Postil* was made in 1700 by Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705). Spener stated that he wanted to set forth an edition that was as complete as possible,⁶⁴ and to do this, he used three editions: from 1528 (Hans Lufft [1495–1584] in Wittenberg), 1532 (Melchior Lotter [ca. 1490–after 1544] in Magdeburg), and from 1543. The title page of Spener's edition claims that these were the three main editions of Luther's lifetime, yet actually these editions were the only ones Spener happened to have on hand.⁶⁵ The first of his foundational texts presents Luther's 1525 *Winter Postil*, and the second text presents the same, with the addition of Roth's 1526 edition of the *Summer Postil* and 1527 edition of the *Festival Postil*.⁶⁶ Spener's third text is Luther's 1540 *Winter Postil* and Cruciger's 1544

⁶¹ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 181, 558.

⁶² Walther Köhler, WA 10/1.2:lxiv–lxxv. Köhler (WA 10/1.2:lxxv) and the editors of the St. Louis edition (StL 11:xvi) claim that after Luther's death the text of the *Church Postil* continued to be changed as doctrinal controversies arose, but unfortunately they do not give any examples or proof.

⁶³ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 454–65. On the postils of Spangenberg and Corvinus, see above, p. xxv nn. 56 and 59.

⁶⁴ *Kirchen-Postille/ Das ist Auslegung Der Episteln und Evangelien Auf alle Sonntage und Feste Durchs gantze Jahr. D. Martini Lutheri. Aus den dreyen zu des sel. Autoris Lebzeiten vorgekommenen vornehmsten Editionibus 1528. 1532. 1543. nach langwihrigem Verlangen vieler Christlicher Leute/ also eingerichtet/ daß/ was alle solche in sich fassen/ zugleich vor Augen geleyet wird. Mit einer Vorrede D. Philipp Jacob Speners/ Von der Gnade Gottes durch Lutherum der Kirchen erzeiget/ absonderlich von der Kirchen-Postill und dieser Edition* (Berlin: Johann Michael Rüdiger, 1700), fol. [d2]v.

⁶⁵ “. . . bekenne/ sonderlich/ weil itzo keine mehrere editionen beyhanden sind/ als die drey 1528. 1532. 1543. daß von der gantzen sache nicht so gründlich nachricht ertheilen kan/ als ich selbs wünschete/ und auch andere verlangen möchten” (Spener, *Kirchen-Postille*, fol. Dv).

⁶⁶ VD16 L3956, L 3960, L4019, L3987 [?].

(i.e., 1543) edition of the *Summer Postil*.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, there were barely any variations between Spener's first two texts, aside from the Bible quotations that had been updated to the latest version of the German Bible in the second of his basis texts.⁶⁸

Yet Spener noticed significant differences between his first two texts and his third text. He recognized that the "1543 [1544] edition" was the last published during Luther's lifetime and was approved by him, even the major changes undertaken by Cruciger in the *Summer Postil*. Nevertheless, Spener may not have known of Luther's disappointment with Roth's edition, and so Spener did not approve of Cruciger's *Summer Postil* and also noted the changes that had been made to the *Winter Postil*. Spener's argument against Cruciger's edition is that, though he was loyal, trustworthy, and approved by Luther, his editing changed too much and was not Luther's very words; Luther himself probably had no time to review Cruciger's work. Spener wanted only the words from Luther's own hand and mind. And since Spener mistakenly thought Cruciger was responsible for both halves of the 1543 [1544] edition, including Luther's 1540 *Winter Postil*, this half of the *Church Postil* was suspect to him as well.⁶⁹

As a result, for the first time since Luther's death, the *earlier* 1525 Luther edition of the *Winter Postil* together with the 1526 Roth edition of the *Summer Postil* with the 1527 Roth *Festival Postil* served as the basis of Spener's edition.⁷⁰ This meant that in the winter half of the year, Luther's unqualified, anti-institutional rhetoric returned as the primary reading, though Spener, as an honest editor, used brackets and asterisks to show what had been changed or omitted in the later edition. In the summer half of the postil, the sermons edited by Roth were given pride of place as the first sermon for each Sunday, while the sermons edited by Cruciger were listed in second or third place.

Despite its flaws, Spener's edition represented a revolution in the publication of the *Church Postil* and soon established itself as the predominant tradition for publishing this postil. Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) republished Spener's edition in 1710 with additional sermons of Luther.⁷¹ Johann Georg Walch (1693–1775) accepted Spener's approach to the *Church Postil* and incorporated this preference for Roth's *Summer Postil* and Luther's 1525 *Winter Postil* into his own edition of Luther's collected works, though

⁶⁷ VD16 L5607 [?], L5608 [?]. On the dating of Cruciger's *Summer Postil*, see the introduction above, p. xxiii and n. 50.

⁶⁸ Spener, *Kirchen-Postille*, fol. [d2]r; WA 22:xxx–xxxi.

⁶⁹ WA 22:xxx; Spener, *Kirchen-Postille*, fol. [d2]r.

⁷⁰ Spener, *Kirchen-Postille*, fol. dv, [d2]r.

⁷¹ WA 22:xxx–xxxi.

EPISTLE FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

*Romans 13:11–14*¹

1. This Epistle reading does not teach about faith, but about the works and fruits of faith. It shows how a Christian life should be conducted outwardly and bodily on earth among people. Faith teaches how we are to live in the spirit before God; [Paul] writes and teaches abundantly and apostolically about that previous to this Epistle [cf. Romans 12]. When we look at this Epistle carefully, then, it does not so much teach as incite, exhort, urge, and arouse those who already know what they should do. St. Paul divides the preaching office into two parts: teaching and exhortation (Romans 12 [:7–8]). Teaching means that one preaches what is unknown so that people know and understand; exhortation means that one incites and urges what everyone already knows. Both parts are necessary for a preacher, and for that reason St. Paul uses both of them.

2. Therefore, so that the exhortation would be all the stronger and more pleasing, he employs many charming, figurative words, which yield a very colorful speech; he speaks of “sleep,” “darkness,” “light,” “waking up,” “weapons,” “works,” “day,” and “night.” These are purely figurative words, by which something else is understood than their manner and nature expresses. He does not at all speak about natural night, day, darkness, light, waking up, sleep, weapons, and works, but he presents to us a metaphor by which he would incite and lead us in our spiritual lives. It is as if he would say: You see that for the sake of temporal possessions people rise from sleep, cast off the works of darkness, and apply themselves to the day’s work when night has passed and the day has come. How much more ought we to wake up from our sleep, to throw away the works of darkness, and to take up the work of our light, since our night has passed and our day has dawned.

3. “Sleep” signifies the works of wickedness and unbelief. Sleeping is a work which properly happens at night, and he himself explains this when he says, “Let us cast off the works of darkness” [Rom. 13:12]. Similarly, “waking up” and “rising” signify the works of faith and godliness. Rising is properly

¹ This sermon is found in E² 7:25–46 (Aland Po 9). Cf. WA 10/1.2:1–21 (Luther’s 1522 *Advent Postil*); StL 12:1–19 (Luther’s 1525 edition of the *Winter Postil*), from which: Lenker 6:9–27.

a work of the morning and of the day, of which he also says: “Dear brothers, you are not in darkness. You are all children of light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So, then, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But we who belong to the day should be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet that is the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation² through Jesus Christ our Lord, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5 [:4–10]).

4. Here it is obvious that he is not forbidding natural sleep, and nevertheless he applies the metaphors of natural sleep and waking to spiritual sleep and waking, that is, to living a good and an evil life. In short, rising from sleep means the same as when he says: “The grace of God has appeared, teaching us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live chaste, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2 [:11–13]). “Renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions” is here called “rising from sleep,” and “living chaste, upright, and godly lives” is here called “waking and putting on the weapons of light” [cf. Rom. 13:11–12]. The “appearing of grace” is the day and the light, as we will hear.

5. Now, note how natural and spiritual sleeping are like each other. The sleeper neither sees nor perceives any of the things or stuff of the world around him. In the midst of them he lies as a dead, useless person who has no use or regard for anything. Although he has life in himself, it is as if he were dead to all things. Moreover, his mind is occupied not with realities, but with dreams of mere images and useless forms of the realities; he is so foolish that he thinks they are true. But when he wakes up, these illusions fall away and come to nothing. Then he begins to occupy himself with realities, without any images.

6. So also with spiritual [sleeping]. The person who lives an ungodly life sleeps and is as though dead before God; he neither sees nor perceives the true spiritual goods which are offered and promised him in the Gospel—he lets them all be in vain for him. Such goods can only be seen by faith in the heart; otherwise they are still hidden. Meanwhile, he is occupied with temporal, transitory stuff, pleasure, and honor, which are, compared to eternal life, joy, and salvation, like illusions compared to flesh-and-blood creatures.

When he wakes up and receives faith, then all such transitory things fall away, and he recognizes that they are nothing at all, of which the

² 1522, 1528, 1532 have: “but for the possession of salvation”

psalmist says,³ “Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, You make their image nothing” (Psalm 73 [:20]). And the prophet: “As when a hungry man dreams he is eating and awakes with his hunger unsatisfied, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking and awakes faint, with his thirst unquenched, so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion” (Isaiah 29 [:8]).

See, is that not speaking in an insulting way about the world’s highest power, wealth, pleasure, when they are all compared to a dream and an illusion? Who dares to say that the wealth, possessions, pleasure, and power of kings and princes are imaginary, when they rage and bluster about them in this world? It is as if they sleep and do not arise; they still do not see this light in faith.

For our salvation⁴ is nearer now than when we first believed. [Rom. 13:11]

7. What is that saying? Did we believe before and now do not believe? Here we should know that Paul says that God through His prophets promised in the Holy Scriptures the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, that through Him all the world was to be saved (cf. Romans 1 [:2-3]), as the words to Abraham read: “In your Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22 [:18]). The blessing, here promised to Abraham in his Seed, is nothing other than grace and salvation in Christ proclaimed to all the world through the Gospel, as St. Paul emphasizes (cf. Romans 4; Galatians 4). For Christ is the Seed of Abraham, his natural flesh and blood, in whom all who believe in Him and call on Him will be saved [cf. Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9, 13].

8. This promise of God was afterward promoted and spread further by the prophets. All of them wrote about the coming of Christ, His grace, and the Gospel, as St. Peter says (Acts 3 [:17-26]). All saints before Christ’s birth believed this divine promise, and thus were preserved and saved by this faith in and through the coming Christ. Christ calls this promise “Abraham’s side” (Luke 16 [:22]), in which all saints after Abraham until Christ were gathered.

That is what St. Paul means when he says, “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.” He means to say that the promise of God given to Abraham is now no longer to be waited for but has been fulfilled. Christ has come, the Gospel has gone out, and the blessing has been distributed throughout the world. All that we waited for and believed is now here in the promise. Thus the apostle has described the spiritual day of which he

³ 1522, 1528, 1532 add: “The men of wealth have slept their sleep and found nothing in their hands’ (cf. Psalm 76 [:5]), and”

⁴ Herz in E² 7:28, but this is a misprint for *Heil*, the reading of WA 10/1.2:4.15 and the 1544 Leipzig Wolrab printing [VD16 L5605], fol. Iv.

afterward speaks, which is properly the rising and the light of the Gospel, as we will hear.

9. However, faith was not abolished on account of this, but rather established. Just as they previously believed the promise of God, so we believe in the same promise, which has now been fulfilled; the one faith is just like the other, except that it follows the other, just as the promise and the fulfillment follow each other. They both depend on the Seed of Abraham (that is, on Christ)—one before, the other after His coming. Whoever would now believe, as the Jews do, that Christ has not yet come, as if the promise were still unfulfilled, would be condemned because he calls God a liar and asserts that He has not fulfilled His promise, which He has fulfilled. Then salvation would still be far away from us, and we would have to wait for it.

10. These two kinds of faith may be what St. Paul had in mind when he said,⁵ “In the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1 [:17]). “From faith to faith” is nothing other than saying there is one kind of faith, the faith of the fathers and our faith, one which believes in the coming Christ, and the other, in the Christ who has appeared; yet the Gospel leads from the one faith to the other. It is now necessary to believe not only the promise but also its fulfillment, which Abraham and the ancients did not yet have to believe, though they had the same Christ as we do. There is one faith, one spirit, one Christ [cf. Eph. 4:4–6], one communion of all saints, except that they were before Christ and we are after Him.

11. Thus we (that is, the fathers and us) have believed with the same common faith in the one Christ, and still do believe in Him, but in different ways. Just as we, because of this common faith in Christ, say, “We have believed,” even though we were not alive at that time but “the fathers believed,” so in turn they say, “They will hear, see, and believe Christ,” even though they are not alive at our time but we do that. David says, “I look at Your heavens, the work of Your hands” (cf. Psalm 8 [:3]),⁶ even though he did not witness it.⁷ There are many similar passages in which one person applies another person’s [actions] to himself because of the common faith; in that way they have Christ in the middle and are one Body.

12. Now, when he says, “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” [Rom. 13:11], that cannot be understood of the nearness of having or possessing, for the fathers had the same faith and the same Christ. He was just as near to them as to us, as Scripture says, “Christ yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13 [:8]); that is, Christ has been from the beginning

⁵ 1522, 1528, 1532 have: “Concerning these two kinds of faith, Paul says,”

⁶ 1522, 1528, 1532 add: “that is, the apostles”

⁷ 1522, 1528, 1532 add: “Likewise: ‘I will praise the Lord and proclaim all His wonders’ (cf. Psalm 9 [:1]).”

of the world to the end, and all are preserved through Him and in Him. Whoever believes the most, to him He is nearest, and whoever believes the least, from him salvation is the farthest, when we speak of possessing and having. But St. Paul is speaking here of the nearness of revelation, that at the time of Christ the promise was fulfilled and the Gospel went out into all the world; through that, Christ came to all people and was preached publicly. So here he says, “Our salvation is nearer to us now than when it was hidden in the promise and had not gone out” [Rom. 13:11]. Thus he says, “The saving grace of God has appeared” (Titus 2 [:11]); that is, it has gone out and been publicly preached, though it had previously been in all saints.

13. Thus Scripture teaches that Christ comes,⁸ though He was previously in all the fathers; but He did not come to everyone through public preaching until after His resurrection from the dead. Scripture speaks most of this coming, for the sake of which He also came bodily in the human nature. His incarnation would have been useful to no one if the Gospel had not come from it, through which He came into all the world and made known why He became man, so that the promised blessing would be distributed to all who believed on Christ through the Gospel. Paul certainly says that the Gospel was promised by God (cf. Romans 1 [:2]), as if he would say that God paid more attention to the Gospel and the public coming through the Word than to the bodily birth or His coming in human form. For Him, it had to do with the Gospel and our faith, and for that reason He had His Son become man, so that the Gospel would be preached by Him, and thus His salvation would come to all the world through the public [preaching of the] Word.

14. Some have supposed a fourfold coming of Christ according to the four Sundays in Advent.⁹ But they have not perceived what is most necessary, on which all power depends, of which St. Paul is speaking here. For they do not know what the Gospel is or why it was given. They babble much about Christ’s coming and drive Him farther away from us than heaven is from earth. What use is Christ if we do not possess Him by faith? But how can He be possessed by faith where the Gospel is not preached [cf. Rom. 10:14–17]?

The night has passed away; the day has come. [Rom. 13:12]

15. But that is as much as to say, “Our salvation is near.” With the word “day” Paul means the Gospel, which is a day in which hearts and souls are enlightened. Therefore, because day has broken, our salvation is near to us.

⁸ 1522 adds: “and has come”

⁹ E.g., William Durandus (ca. 1230–ca. 1296), *Gvillelmi Dvranti Rationale divinorum officiorum* 6, ep. 2, de tempore adventus, CCCM 140A, cited in WA 10/1.2:7 n. 5.

GOSPEL FOR THE THIRD DAY OF CHRISTMAS

*John 1:1–14*¹

1. This is the highest of all the Gospel readings, and yet it is not, as some think, obscure or difficult. For here the high article of the deity of Christ is established most clearly, which all Christians should know and which they can certainly understand. Nothing is too high for faith. Therefore, we want, as much as we can, to treat it most plainly, and not as the scholastics, who have hidden it from the common man with their invented subtleties and frightened them away from it. There is no need of much pointed and sharp consideration, but only of plain, simple attention to the words.

2. First, we should know that all that the apostles taught and wrote they took out of the Old Testament, where all the things are proclaimed that were to be fulfilled later in Christ and were to be preached, as St. Paul says when he talks about “the Gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scripture” (Romans 1 [1–2]). Therefore, all their preaching is based on the Old Testament, and there is not a word in the New Testament that does not look back into the Old, where it had been foretold.

Thus we have seen in the Epistle² how the deity of Christ is confirmed by the apostle from passages in the Old Testament. For the New Testament is nothing more than a revelation of the Old. Just as if someone had a sealed letter at first, and then broke it open, so the Old Testament is the testamentary letter of Christ, which He has opened after His death and caused to be read and proclaimed everywhere through the Gospel. This is shown by the Lamb of God who alone opens the book with the seven seals, which no one else could open, neither in heaven nor on earth nor under the earth [Rev. 5:1–5].

3. Now, so that this Gospel may be clearer and more easily understood, we must go back to the Old Testament, to the place on which this Gospel is founded—and that is when Moses writes at the beginning of his Book of Genesis: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and it was dark over the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering on the water. Then God said, ‘Let there be light;’

¹ 1522, 1528, 1532 have: “The Gospel for the Christmas High Mass”

This sermon is from E² 10:171–229 (Aland Po 23). Cf. WA 10/1.1:180–247 (Luther’s 1522 *Christmas Postil*), from which: LW 52:41–88; StL 11:154–205 (Luther’s 1525 edition of the *Winter Postil*), from which: Lenker 1:171–223.

² See above, sermon for 3rd Day of Christmas on Heb. 1:1–12, pp. 256–76.

and there was light” (Genesis 1 [:1-3]), etc. Then Moses relates how all the creatures were created in the same way as the light, namely, by the speaking or the Word of God. For example, God said, “Let there be an expanse”; or, again, God said, “Let there be sun, moon, and stars,” etc.

4. From these words of Moses it clearly follows and is concluded that God has a Word, through which He spoke, before any creatures were created; and this Word may not and cannot be a creature, since all creatures were created through this divine speaking, as Moses’ words clearly and forcibly state, since he writes: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” The Word must therefore have preceded the light, since light came by the Word; consequently, it was also before all other creatures, which also came by the Word, as Moses writes.

5. But let us go farther. If the Word preceded all creatures, and all creatures came into being and were created by the Word, then [the Word] must be of a different nature than a creature and was not made or created like a creature. It must therefore be eternal and without beginning. For when all things began it was already there, and [it] cannot be contained in time nor in creation, but is above time and creation; indeed, time and creation are made and have their beginning through [the Word]. Thus it is undeniable that whatever is not temporal must be eternal, and that which has no beginning cannot be temporal, and that which is not created must be God. For outside of God and His creation there is nothing—or no being. Thus we learn from these words of Moses that the Word of God, which was in the beginning and through which all creatures were made and spoken, must be the eternal God and not a creature.

6. Further, the Word and He who speaks [the Word] are not one person, for it is impossible that the speaker is Himself the Word. What sort of speaker would He be who is Himself the Word? He would have to be a mute, or the Word would have to sound of itself without the speaker and speak itself. Scripture here speaks in strong and clear words: “God said,” and thus God and His Word must be two.

If Moses had written “there was a saying” or “there had been a saying,” it would not be as clear that there were two, the Word and the speaker. But when he says, “God said,” and names the speaker and His Word, he forcibly states that there are two, that the speaker is not the Word and that the Word is not the speaker, but that the Word comes from the speaker and has its being not of itself but from the speaker. But the speaker does not come from the Word nor does He have His being from the Word, but from Himself. Thus Moses concludes that there are two persons in the Godhead from eternity before all creatures, that one has His being from the other, and the first has His being from no one but from Himself.

7. Again, Scripture confirms and establishes that there is only one God, since Moses begins by saying, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” [Gen. 1:1]. And later: “Hear, O Israel: Your God is only one God” (Deuteronomy 6 [:4]). See, Scripture proceeds with simple, comprehensible words, and teaches such high things so clearly, that everyone may well understand them, and so forcefully that no one can oppose them. Who is there that cannot here understand from these words of Moses that there must be two persons in the deity, and yet only one deity, unless he would deny the clear Scripture?

8. Again, whose thinking is so acute as to speak against this? He has to allow the Word to be something different from God, the speaker; and he must confess that [the Word] was before all creatures and that the creatures were made by [the Word]. Consequently, he must surely have [the Word] be God, for outside of creatures there is nothing but God. He must also confess that there is only one God. Thus Scripture forces the conclusion that these two persons are one complete God and that each one is the only, true, complete, and natural God, who has created all things; that the speaker has His being not from the Word, but that the Word has His being from the speaker; and yet all of this is eternal and from eternity, outside of all creatures.

9. The Arian heretics³ wanted to draw a cloud over this clear passage and to bore a hole through heaven, since they could not overcome it. They said that this Word of God was indeed a god, not naturally, but by creation. They said that all things were created by [this Word], but it had also been created previously, and after that all things were created by it. They said this from their own dreams without any basis in Scripture, because they abandoned the simple words of Scripture and followed their own thoughts.

10. Therefore, I have said that he who desires to proceed safely on firm ground must have no regard for the many subtle and sharp words and fancies, but must cling to the simple, powerful, and clear words of Scripture, and he will be secure. We shall also see how St. John anticipated these same heretics and refuted them in their subterfuges and fabrications.

11. Therefore, we have here in Moses the real gold mine, from which everything that is written in the New Testament about the deity of Christ has been taken. Here you may see the source from which the Gospel of St. John flows and on which it is founded; and from [Moses] it is easy to understand.

See, it flows from the words “by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made” (Psalm 33 [:6]). And Solomon, when he describes in many beautiful

³ Followers of Arius (ca. 280–336), an Alexandrian presbyter, who taught that Christ, as the Word (John 1:1), was the highest creature but not true God. He was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325, but his numerous supporters regained the ascendancy under Emperor Constantine’s sons.

words the Wisdom of God which was with God before all things, takes all of that from this chapter of Moses (cf. Proverbs 8 [:22]). All the prophets have worked in this mine and have dug their treasures from it.

12. But there are other words in this same Moses about the Holy Spirit, namely, when he says, “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” [Gen. 1:2]. Thus the Spirit of God must also be something different from the one who breathes Him, and yet He must be before all creatures.

Likewise, when [Moses] says [that] “God blessed” the creatures [Gen. 1:28]—considered them and was pleased with them—this benediction and kind consideration point to the Holy Spirit, since Scripture attributes life and kindness to Him. But these passages are not so well developed as those which refer to the Son; consequently, they do not glitter so brightly. The ore is still halfway in the mines, so that it is easy to believe—if reason is taken captive in such a way that it believes in two persons. If anyone has the time to compare the passages of the New Testament about the Holy Spirit with this text of Moses, he will find much light, pleasure, and joy.

13. Now we must open wide our hearts and understanding to look upon these words not as the insignificant, perishable words of man, but to think of them as being as great as He is who speaks them. It is a Word which He speaks in Himself, which remains in Him and is never separated from Him.

Therefore, we must think according to the apostle’s thoughts of how God speaks with Himself and to Himself, and has a Word from Himself in Himself. However, this Word is not an empty wind or sound, but brings with it the whole essence of the divine nature. Reference has been made above in the Epistle⁴ to the radiance and image [Heb. 1:3]; the divine nature is imaged in such a way that it goes along into the image wholly and becomes the image itself, and the brightness gives off the radiance also in such a way that it goes into the radiance in essence. In the same way also God speaks His Word from Himself in such a way that the whole deity follows the Word and remains in the Word by nature and is [the Word] in essence.

14. See, here we see where the apostle’s words come from when he calls Christ an “image of the divine essence” and “the radiance of the glory of God” [Heb. 1:3], namely, from these words of Moses, when he teaches that God spoke the Word of Himself. This can be nothing else than an image that represents Him, since every word is a sign which signifies something. But here the thing signified is by its very nature in the sign or in the Word, which is not in any other sign. Therefore, he very properly calls it a real image or sign of His nature.

⁴ See above, sermon for 3rd Day of Christmas on Heb. 1:1-12, pp. 262-64, paragraphs 19-25.