

## *Highlighting in the 1534 “Luther Bible”*

by GORDON A. JENSEN

The first German translation of the Bible by Luther and his colleagues was published in 1534, twelve years after his New Testament had been published in 1522. Between these two dates, the Wittenberg circle of scholars published translations of various sections of the Bible. In many ways the 1534 Luther Bible,<sup>1</sup> along with Luther's Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession, marked the crowning literary achievements of the work of Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues. However, within the pages of the 1534 Luther Bible, one encounters an item of curiosity. There are several instances where every single letter in a word or a phrase is capitalized,<sup>2</sup> as a means of highlighting these passages for the reader.

The first examples of highlighting by means of capitalizing every letter in a word or phrase are found, surprisingly, in the Apocrypha. In the Wisdom of Solomon, at 16:12 and 18:22, “WORT” (Word) is capitalized.<sup>3</sup> The other instances are found in the New Testament: three times a key phrase is capitalized in the synoptic gospel parallels of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17:5; Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35); another example is in Paul's defence of the gospel in Romans 3:25; and the final instance occurs in 1 Corinthians 11:24, as Paul begins his recitation of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>4</sup> Given that italic and bold fonts had not yet been developed for typesetting, capitalizing every letter in a word served to emphasize or highlight the printed text.

But who capitalized every letter of these few selected words? Was it Luther himself, the printer Hans Lufft of Wittenberg, or even the publishers?<sup>5</sup> There are three indications that Luther himself authorized this highlighting. First, Luther was closely involved in determining which biblical passages would be illustrated in the 1534 Bible. Christoph Walther, a corrector in Hans Lufft's typesetting workshop which printed the Bible, reported that “Luther partly determined the illustrations in the Wittenberg Bible himself, how they should be sketched or painted, and ordered to sketch and

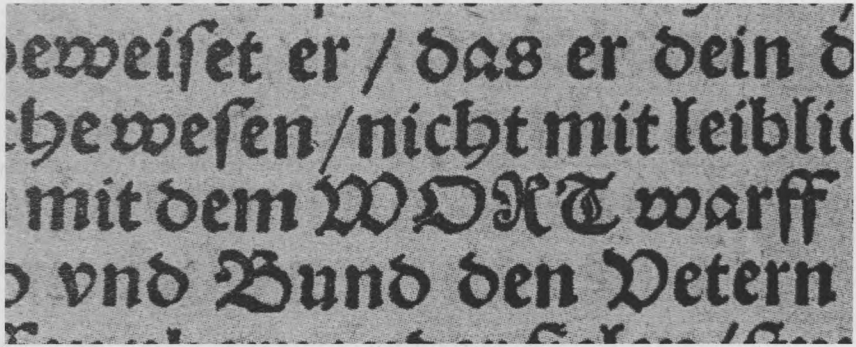
copy the text in the simplest manner, and would not tolerate that a superfluous and unnecessary thing be added that would not serve the text.”<sup>6</sup> Given this concern for selecting the textually appropriate illustrations, it would not be unexpected that the Wittenberg reformer would also oversee what are also, in effect, illustrations of the highlighted texts.

Second, as Andrew Pettegree notes, Luther was heavily involved in every aspect of the printing business, often proof texting each page of his own books to help facilitate a fast and accurate printing of his work.<sup>7</sup> Luther’s involvement is clearly shown in letters to his friends, mentioning various printing problems encountered while he was away from Wittenberg.<sup>8</sup> Another example of his personal involvement in the printing process is his insistence in using *HERR* (LORD) to indicate a translation of the Tetragrammaton, *YHWH*.<sup>9</sup> Luther’s attention to this detail, insisting upon the use of capitalization as a tool to denote differences in the names of God in the original text, makes it likely that he was also the instigator of these other capitalized highlights in the 1534 Bible.

The third and most telling argument for Luther being responsible for these capitalizations is the importance his overall corpus attaches to these particular words or phrases as they pertain to the proclamation of the gospel. The theological emphasis on these particular texts makes sense when one considers that Luther’s primary audience for this translation of the Bible was evangelical preachers, to aid them in sermon preparation.<sup>10</sup> Highlighting was thus a visibly recognizable way for Luther to draw the preacher’s attention to the gospel message in these words of scripture. Proclaiming the gospel is the preacher’s responsibility, and Luther facilitated this task by emphasizing different passages from the Bible that drove home this message.

### “WORD”

The first instance of highlighting in the 1534 Luther Bible is found in two places in the Wisdom of Solomon. Twice within the translation of this book, at 16:12 and 18:22, *WORT* (Word) is fully capitalized. [See adjacent example.] The first verse states that the Word of the Lord (*WORT HERR*) heals all people, and the latter



**Fig. 1** *Die Luther-Bibel von 1534, Two Volumes.* Stephan Füßel, ed., illustrated by Lucas Cranach d. Ä (Koln: Taschen, 2002), Vol II: Apocrypha, XXI.

reference speaks of God's wrath being conquered by the Word. Thus, with the capitalization of every letter in "Word," the Luther Bible makes clear that the Word both heals and gives life and also conquers God's wrath. This echoes Robert Kolb's observation that one of Luther's rules for translating was to determine "whether a sentence was law or gospel."<sup>11</sup> In both verses from the Wisdom of Solomon, the emphasis on "Word" proclaims this living Word as a Word of life, a Word that speaks gospel. Further, this Word is transformative. When God speaks this Word, creation happens. Life happens. Timothy Wengert states, "Understanding the Bible as the Word of God does not have to do so much with what a text is or means or with its relative position in the canon of scripture as with what it *does* to its hearers."<sup>12</sup> This living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*) blows the breath of God into people and all creation, making life a reality. At the heart of this Bible translation by the Wittenberg theologians, therefore, is the living Word.

The capitalization of every letter in "Word" is the starting point for Luther's theological thought. From this starting point in the Wisdom of Solomon, Luther's Bible then spells out the message (*die Botschaft*) that God proclaims through the other highlighted places. However, here one encounters another surprise: in the Weimar edition of Luther's works, there are no citations of these two verses, other than in the Preface to the Wisdom of Solomon. So why not

capitalize “Word” in some other place in the Old Testament, rather than from these two largely forgotten passages from the Wisdom of Solomon? After all, there is no shortage of references to “Word,” “the Word of the Lord,” or “God’s Word” in the Old Testament, especially by the prophets who are called to transmit the “Word of the Lord” to the people. Perhaps the best explanation for this highlighting in the Wisdom of Solomon is also the simplest: the publication of the 1529 translation of the Wisdom of Solomon in Wittenberg contains the first published instances of capitalizing every letter in a word or phrase as a way to draw the reader’s eye to the importance of the Word. According to Hartmut Hövelmann, following this initial instance of highlighting, a new publication of the New Testament in 1530 then included the practice of capitalizing all the letters in the words, “Listen to Him” in the three accounts of the transfiguration, along with the word “Take” in 1 Corinthians. Highlighting the words “Forgives Sin” in Romans 3 first appears in the 1533 edition of the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> The 1534 Luther Bible simply continued the practice of highlighting these core words and phrases.

Luther’s Preface to the Wisdom of Solomon also gives an insight into why Luther highlighted “Word” in his translation of 16:12 and 18:22. He writes:

It pleases me beyond measure that the author here extols the Word of God so highly, and ascribes to the Word all the wonders God has performed, both on enemies and in his saints.

. . . Mark well that whatever praise and glory you hear ascribed herein to wisdom is said of nothing other than the Word of God. For even [the author] himself says, in chapter 16[:12], that the children of Israel were not sustained by manna, nor saved by the bronze serpent, but by the Word of God. Just as in Matthew 4[:4] Christ says, “Man shall not live by bread alone,” etc. This is why [the author] teaches that wisdom comes from nowhere else than from God, and brings many illustrations from Scripture. So he ascribes to wisdom what Scripture ascribes to the Word of God. . . . To refer to this book as the Wisdom of Solomon is as much as to call it: A Book of Solomon about the Word of God. So the spirit of wisdom is nothing other than faith, our understanding of that same Word.<sup>14</sup>

The Word, claimed Luther, incarnates and proclaims God’s activities and God’s wisdom, and is the source of life, a theme consistently highlighted in Luther’s understanding of the gospel.

Oswald Bayer, among others, has argued convincingly that Luther's theology is a "theology of the promising Word."<sup>15</sup> He claims that for Luther, theology "takes place in prayer, in the *oratio*: in praise and in lament—in the speaking of the heart with God in petition and intercession, with thanks and adoration."<sup>16</sup> This Word, then—a term that refers to the life-giving Word as found in Christ, and not only to Holy Scripture—is the foundation by which the other highlighted phrases are to be understood.

### "LISTEN TO HIM!"

The second cluster of highlighted words or phrases is found in the synoptic Gospel accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> In the midst of their spontaneous plan to build dwellings for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, who had appeared before them, the three disciples are interrupted by a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved: LISTEN TO HIM!" (*DEN SOLT IR HOREN*). As with the highlighting from the Wisdom of Solomon, the selection of these particular words appears, at first glance, quite puzzling. Of all the words that Luther could have emphasized in the four Gospels, why choose these words? Why not emphasize Jesus' mission declaration at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:18–19), or his last words—either those on the cross (Matt 27:46 or Luke 23:46), or the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20), given immediately before he ascends into heaven? Or, given Luther's preference for the Gospel of John, which he called the "chief gospel,"<sup>18</sup> why not highlight John 3:16,<sup>19</sup> rather than these passages from the synoptic Gospels? However, an examination of Luther's repeated emphasis of this phrase, reveals four reasons for drawing the reader's eyes to these particular texts.

First, highlighting the imperative "Listen to Him" draws the reader not just to the transfiguration story itself, but to what Jesus says immediately after this experience, as he tells them he will have to suffer and die. The entire pericope thus supports themes found in Luther's theology of the cross and his theology of the Word.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, by letting Luther interpret himself, we can gain some clues about the importance of these three words as the starting point of the gospel, and thus of Christian theology.<sup>21</sup> These highlighted

words from the transfiguration account reflect what Philip Watson called Luther's "Copernican Revolution" of theology: God, not humanity, is the center of the theological universe.<sup>22</sup> God, and what God says through Christ, is the subject of the theological sentence for Luther.

In the "Preface to the New Testament," Luther reinforced this starting point when he discussed the works and words of Christ in relationship to understanding the gospel: "To know [Christ's] works and the things that happened to him is not yet to know the true gospel, for you do not yet thereby know that he has overcome sin, death, and the devil."<sup>23</sup> Knowledge of the gospel thus occurs only in relationship with the Savior, and this relationship begins when God says, "Christ is your own." Humanity should thus be listening to the voice of Christ. For apart from this voice that "drives the gospel home" (*was Christum treibet*) into the hearts of people,<sup>24</sup> the actions and words of Christ impart only information. The heart remains unchanged. Thus, Luther claimed, "If I had to do without one or the other—either the works or the preaching of Christ—I would rather do without the works than without his preaching. For the works do not help me, but his words give life, as he himself says [John 6:63]."<sup>25</sup> Since the words of Christ both create and sustain life, the injunction to "Listen to Him" is crucial.

Second, highlighting the command to listen to Christ reveals Luther's Christological Trinitarianism. When Jesus speaks, the triune God speaks. In his 1532 comments on Psalm 2:12, Luther noted: "God by His command sends us back to the Son and wants us to worship and adore the Son. Therefore the thought agrees with these expressions of the gospel: 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him'" (Matt 17:5).<sup>26</sup> Further, when one "listens to him," the will of God is revealed. While God's will had been revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai through the law, now God's will is revealed on Mt. Tabor as gospel.<sup>27</sup> Although God speaks clearly in Christ, it is often difficult to believe that Christ's voice is the voice of God. To address this problem, Luther put these words into God's mouth: "'Behold, this is My Son; listen to Him' (Matt 17:5). . . . For 'He who sees Me,' says Christ, 'also sees the Father Himself'" (John 14:9).<sup>28</sup> Luther's repeated use of the phrase "Listen to Him" is telling. Not only does

it lead to a knowledge of God and of God's will, but it also proclaims soteriological benefits, namely, life and salvation.

Third, the injunction of Matthew 17:5 to listen to Christ also provides a useful pastoral and ethical principle. "You must judge everything solely in the light of the words of Christ the Lord; for it is written: 'Listen to Him' (Matt 17:5)." <sup>29</sup> On this basis, he criticizes the common practice of withholding the cup from the laity, arguing that this was "contrary to the words of God which say, 'Listen to Him!'" <sup>30</sup> If a person listens to any other voice, they will go astray, and they will not find God. <sup>31</sup> For this reason, the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* is incarnated in the *sola vox*. That authoritative voice (and Word) alone speaks life into human hearts. As Kolb notes, in scripture "Luther found God's words and voice, and from God's presence in the page, Scripture gains its authority." <sup>32</sup> Therefore, the voice to which one should listen, whether on the mountain-top or in the sanctuary, is the living, authoritative, life-giving voice of God. Luther thus noted: "it has been determined by God that Christ wants to speak in His church and does not want to tolerate any other teacher, as the voice of the Father resounds from heaven: 'Listen to Him' (Matt 17:5)." <sup>33</sup> To listen to Christ is nothing less than listening to the voice of the triune God.

Fourth, this injunction to listen to Christ points to a defining marker of the church: the church is to be a "mouth-house," <sup>34</sup> passing on what the living voice proclaims. This authoritative voice speaks words of grace, or as Luther states it in the *Small Catechism*, the "forgiveness of sins, life and salvation." <sup>35</sup> False teachers can be easily recognized because their message reveals that they have not heard the voice that speaks life. "Anyone who confuses [grace and merit] causes the people to go astray and misleads both himself and those who listen to him." <sup>36</sup> Luther's advice, then, is to flush erroneous papal decrees down the toilet so no one can hear them, <sup>37</sup> and listen instead to the voice of the true shepherd, who breathes words of life. One listens either to Christ, and hears God's voice speaking and creating faith, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, <sup>38</sup> or one listens to a false "apple god" (*Apfelgott*) or a worldly "apple-king" (*Apfelkönig*). <sup>39</sup> The voice a person listens to is the voice they follow. Thus, one must "Listen to Him;" otherwise, everything is lost, and

nothing else said by Christ in the four Gospels matters. Only in listening to Christ does a person hear, encounter, and experience the gospel. The *sola vox viva*, the living voice alone, comes from the mouth of God in Christ.

### “FORGIVES SIN”

The command, “Listen to Him,” spoken on the Mount of Transfiguration by God, identifies the voice that is to be listened to above all others. But what is this gospel to which we should listen? Luther gave his answer in Romans 3:25 by capitalizing every letter in the two words, “FORGIVES SIN” (*SUNDE VERGIBT*). His reason is simple: “the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track, and taught what he is to look for in this book, so that he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, these two words were important for a multitude of reasons.

First, Luther highlighted these two words, “Forgives Sin” because they clarified the gospel. This clarity was a priority for him in his translation work, as is evident on this page in the 1534 Bible. In the marginal gloss beside the highlighted words “Forgives Sin,” Luther commented,

Note this: when he says that (they are all sinners, etc.), it is the centerpiece and heart of this epistle and of the entire scriptures, namely that everything is sin which has not been redeemed through the blood of Christ and justified by faith. Therefore understand this text well, because here it undercuts the merit and fame of all works, as he himself says here, and the only thing that remains is God’s grace and honor.<sup>41</sup>

This marginal gloss reveals Luther’s theological hermeneutic. The only way sinners can obtain forgiveness is by “listening to Him,” for Christ alone declares, and makes, the person righteous.<sup>42</sup> This forgiveness is justification writ large. Any human attempts to cooperate with God to earn this forgiveness end in failure. If Jesus the Christ is not heard, forgiveness is impossible.

Second, Luther’s emphasis on the two words, “Forgives Sin,” defines the gospel in its essence. In a 1524 sermon on Matthew



9:1–8, he stated that “forgiveness of sins is not more than two words, yet the entire realm of Christ is based upon them.”<sup>43</sup> Even earlier, in December of 1516, he preached, “The proper office of the gospel is to proclaim the proper work of God, i.e. grace, . . . [And] this happens whenever the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed.”<sup>44</sup> In a 1520 treatise he stated, “For what is the whole gospel but the good tidings of the forgiveness of sins?”<sup>45</sup> In his Galatians lectures, written around the same time as the 1534 Bible was translated, he declared, “But here comes the gospel, which preaches the forgiveness of sins to you through Christ.”<sup>46</sup> This simple definition of the gospel is precisely what is emphasized in the decision to capitalize every letter in the two words, “Forgives Sin,” in Romans 3:25.

Third, the two words, “Forgives Sin,” not only capture the essence of the proclaimed gospel, but also carry with this proclamation many profound doctrinal implications. In his academic writings, therefore, Luther carefully nuanced what he meant by the gospel as the forgiveness of sin, especially in relationship to the law or to the person and work of Christ:

The Gospel is a light that illumines hearts and makes them alive. It discloses what grace and the mercy of God are; what the forgiveness of sins, blessing, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation are; and how we are to attain to these. When we distinguish the Law from the Gospel this way, we attribute to each its proper use and function . . . But when this distinction is recognized, the true meaning of justification is recognized.<sup>47</sup>

The real heart of the gospel and of scripture is not merely the bare forgiveness of sin, but rather, the forgiveness of sin through “Christ alone” as accomplished through his death and resurrection, thereby making the sinner righteous.<sup>48</sup> The forgiveness of sins is derived from Christ’s defeat of sin, death, and the devil, with the law no longer controlling or determining the ground rules of human relationships with the giver of life.

Fourth, defining the gospel by the phrase, “Forgives Sin” makes sense when one considers Luther’s audience. While nuanced implications of Christology and soteriology, in relation to the gospel of forgiveness, were important academic issues, when Luther wanted to define the gospel for preaching to the common people, he called

it the “forgiveness of sins.” Distinguishing between law and gospel thus serves to further heighten the powerful impact of the words, “Forgives Sin.” The gospel is not toleration of sin, but decisive action against sin and for life. To speak “you are forgiven” transfigures a person from death into life because that person has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Fifth, the gospel proclamation that Christ forgives sin has a strong pastoral aspect to it. The bold announcement that God forgives sin can comfort troubled consciences afraid of the law, death, and condemnation *coram Deo* (in the presence of God).<sup>49</sup> Luther stated, “To put on Christ according to the Gospel, therefore, is to put on, not the Law or works but an inestimable gift, namely, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Spirit, salvation, life and Christ himself.”<sup>50</sup> The gospel does not only stop condemnation or break the restricting power of the law, it also comforts the afflicted soul with the forgiveness of sins, and thus, life and salvation.<sup>51</sup> God proclaims good news, and life is created, nurtured, redeemed, and sanctified by God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, all because God forgives sin.

Sixth, Luther recognized that the forgiveness of sin is the basis for community. Being joined to Christ through his death and resurrection is to be joined to the community, the body of Christ. As Luther stated, “Here there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.”<sup>52</sup> The gospel of the forgiveness of sins, proclaimed to heal and unite the community in Christ, is thus also at the heart of Word and sacrament. In the sacrament of the altar, for example, the gathered community encounters the new covenant [promise], which is “the bestowal of grace and the forgiveness of sins, i.e. the true gospel.”<sup>53</sup> It is in the community where the sacraments are present, “along with the gospel, in which the Holy Spirit richly offers, bestows and accomplishes the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>54</sup> “In this Christian Church, wherever it exists, is to be found the forgiveness of sins, i.e. a kingdom of grace and of true pardon. For in it are found the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, in which the forgiveness of sins is offered, obtained, and received.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the highlighting of the two words, “Forgives Sin,” captures the very heart of Luther’s

community-grounded reformation theology, and it is emphasized so that the preachers will preach this gospel and the hearers will hear God's voice and listen, making it possible for all to experience life in the community God has envisioned for everyone.

"TAKE!"

Luther recognized that it was not enough to simply hear the gospel of the forgiveness of sins audibly proclaimed. The gospel seeks multiple access points to a person. The ears are not the only sensory organs through which a human being can "hear." Hearing also occurs through tasting and touching this gospel made flesh. This led Luther to the final instance of highlighting in the 1534 Luther Bible: "TAKE" (*NEMET*), in 1 Corinthians 11:24–25. This word emphasizes the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh (John 1:1). In the sacrament of the altar, humanity hears, sees, tastes, and experiences the gospel in multiple ways. For those captured by a medieval piety that made people reluctant to receive Christ in the sacrament because of their sense of unworthiness, Luther the pastor enjoined people instead to experience the gospel.<sup>56</sup> In the preface to First Corinthians, Luther observed that many in Corinth were trusting their own wisdom, rather than listening to Christ: "everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the gospel, the sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile they let the main thing drop—namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption—as if they had long since outgrown it."<sup>57</sup> Failing to listen to Christ (*DEN SOLT IR HOREN*) or changing the gospel message from its basic meaning of forgiveness of sins (*SUNDE VERGIBT*) leads to problems. This was the case in Corinth, and Luther also felt it was a problem in his time. Everyone was listening to their own voice, hearing only what they wanted to hear. To shatter this "curved inward" attitude in the community and drive them to the gospel, then, Luther turned his focus on the injunction to "Take," for some very important reasons.

First, the imperative, "Take," forces attention onto words spoken by Christ. Rather than an "imitation of Christ" (*imitatio Christi*) advocated by Thomas à Kempis or Johannes Tauler,<sup>58</sup> or trying to

become sanctified like Jesus, Christ's command to "Take!" conforms people into Christ (*conformitas Christi*). Conformity is God's work, similar to a potter shaping the clay (Jer 18:1-6; Isa 29:16). Christ's command to "Take" his body and blood declares that the important action in the sacrament is God working through Christ's body and blood to give people life. God acts and the recipients are conformed in Christ. "Take," therefore, echoes the earlier highlighted words, "Listen to Him," thus reinforcing Luther's theocentric approach.

Second, throughout his writings the imperative verb "Take" conveys Luther's understanding of the words of institution. In his 1523 Treatise on the Lord's Supper, he stated, "we have often said that the chief and foremost thing in the sacrament is the word of Christ, when he says: 'Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you.'"<sup>59</sup> Here, his "theology of the word"<sup>60</sup> is so strong that he later states in the same treatise that the whole gospel is found in the words, "Take and eat, this is my body."<sup>61</sup> "Everything depends on the Word,"<sup>62</sup> for it proclaims the forgiveness of sin and makes that forgiveness a reality. Thus, it is the "Word" added to the elements that make something a sacrament. The elements alone do not constitute the sacrament.<sup>63</sup> In a 1527 letter, which Luther wrote after the murder of two supporters of the Reformation, he pointed people to the sacrament, where they would encounter Christ and his gospel: "Here stand the lean and bare words of the gospel, 'Take, eat; this is my body, given for you.'"<sup>64</sup>

Third, Luther recognized that "Take" was an imperative verb, meaning that what is being given is essential, for it is something that the human does not possess. God alone can bestow the life-giving, community-creating forgiveness of sin through Word and sacrament. Humanity can only receive what is given. Thus, in a 1526 treatise on the Lord's Supper, Luther bluntly stated, "There you hear it, expressed in clear German: he commands you to take his body and blood. Why? For what reason? Because the body is given for you and the blood is poured out for you."<sup>65</sup> The only human response possible to Christ's command is to take what is offered. Echoing his stubborn arguments at the Marburg Colloquy, Luther believed the imperative verb, "Take," gives no room to do anything else.<sup>66</sup> As early as 1520, Luther commented, "This word of God [Take, eat . . .]

is the beginning, the foundation, the rock, upon which afterward all works, words, and thoughts of man must build. This word man must gratefully accept."<sup>67</sup> The highlighted word "Take" does not focus on the receiving action of the person, but on the commanding action of Christ. As with creation, God's Word creates and brings life and community into being.

Fourth, Luther stressed the word "Take" for pastoral reasons. Contrary to Martin Bucer and others who argued that only the godly or those believers who feel unworthy would receive Christ's true presence in the bread and wine, while the ungodly ate only bread and wine, Luther claimed that the validity of the sacrament was not dependent on the piety of the recipient or the presider.<sup>68</sup> He stated, "Imperatives are of two kinds: one kind where faith is presupposed, such as Matthew 21[:21] on the moving of mountains. . . . The other kind comprises the passages where faith is not presupposed, such as these words in the Supper, 'Take, eat,' for here even the unworthy and unbelieving eat Christ's body, as Judas and many of the Corinthians did."<sup>69</sup> Luther interpreted the "Take" as a reality-creating imperative, a command of God that does not require a corresponding human response to make the command valid. Rather, it is all about God acting to create a new reality and a new community.

Finally, Luther emphasized the command "Take" to address the specific pastoral problem of his parishioners' fears about receiving the sacrament without proper preparation. He addressed this in a very pastoral way in his *Small Catechism*, where he advised that "Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,' is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words 'for you' require truly believing hearts."<sup>70</sup> What was important was what God declares, what Christ offers, because what Christ does, what Christ gives, is what is transformative. Luther recognized that to "Take" what is thrust into one's hands is the only proper preparation for the sacrament. To "Take" the bread and cup is to taste the gospel and encounter Christ.

### *Conclusion*

These highlighted texts, marked by capitalizing every letter in a word or phrase in the 1534 Luther Bible, are not random or coincidental. Rather, they reveal Luther's single-minded determination to draw the eyes of evangelical preachers to the foundational theology of the Word. Luther was instructing preachers to begin their theological investigations by hearing God's Living Word, rather than looking for human wisdom. He enjoined them not to deviate from the simple and clear definition of the gospel. These highlights provided key words to shape the sacramental piety of their congregations upon the externally proclaimed word of Christ, this living word of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*).

Furthermore, Luther used these emphasized texts to provide a concise summary of the whole biblical message of salvation. Beginning with an emphasis on the Word as a voice that speaks and makes life possible by destroying wrath and bringing healing, he moves on to the imperative, "Listen to Christ," thus establishing a theocentric starting place for all theology. This allows the church to discover and hear the gospel message—namely, that God forgives sins. This gospel is obtained, not by works or cooperative efforts, but solely because God has determined to place this gospel in the ears, hearts, and hands of people, even as Christ commands people to "Take" it.

The decision to highlight these words and phrases indicate that this was the fundamental message that Luther wanted to impart to preachers of the Word. For him, this gospel message of the living "Word" was simple: "Listen to Christ," who declares "your sins are forgiven you" through preaching, in the waters of baptism, and in the sacrament, even as you "Take" the means of grace offered, regardless of your personal sense of piety, for life and salvation. Experiencing the gospel in scripture is encapsulated for Luther in these highlighted words of the 1534 Bible. Gathering the highlighted phrases together, a clear message emerges: the living "WORD" (*WORT*) speaks, so "LISTEN TO HIM" (*DEN SOLT IR HOREN*) declare that he FORGIVES SIN (*SUNDE VERGIBT*), while telling us to TAKE (*NEMET*) and eat his very body and drink from his cup of salvation. Thus, Luther's highlighting begins with Word and

concludes with sacrament. Even scripture itself is to be heard and experienced, and not simply read. A person does not just hear the gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation, but tastes and experiences it. This is the gospel one encounters in scripture, highlighted for all to hear, taste, and see.

## NOTES

1. This Luther Bible is available in a facsimile edition: *Die Luther-Bibel von 1534*, Stephan Füssel, ed., illustrated by Lucas Cranach d. Ä (Koln: Taschen, 2002).

2. This does not include all instances where the translators regularly capitalized every letter in the Word *HERR* (Lord) when it refers to the Hebrew translation of the Tetragrammaton *YHWH*, Luther states, "Whoever reads this Bible should also know that I have been careful to write the name of God which the Jews call "Tetragrammaton" [YHWH] in capital letters thus, LORD [HERR], and the other name which they call Adonai only half in capital letters thus, LOrd [HErr]." Martin Luther, "Preface to the Old Testament (1545/1523)," in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 79 vols., eds. Pelikan, Lehmann, and Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 35:248 (Hereafter cited as LW); Martin Luther, *Dye fünff Bücher Mose/|| des alten testaments || Teutsch. Mit aym Register . . .* (Augsburg: Sigmund Grimm, 1523), BbV (v).

3. In Wis. 16:12, WORT (Word) is paired with HERR (Lord). The practice by Luther and his colleagues of highlighting a text by capitalizing every letter in a word or phrase begins in 1529 and continues in the other editions of the Luther Bible, according to Harmut Hövelmann, *Kernstellen der Lutherbibel: Eine Anleitung zum Schriftverständnis*. Texte und Arbeiten zur Bibel, Deutschen Bibelgesellschaft, eds., Bd. 5 (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1989), 49–74. Hövelmann calls these highlighted words or phrases "Kernstellen (seminal, or core, places)." The current version of *Die Bibel: Nach Martin Luthers Übersetzung. Lutherbibel Revidiert 2017* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017) continues a variation of this long tradition by emphasizing certain key verses (rather than short phrases or individual words) by placing them in bold font.

4. Verse numbering was not used by Luther. This practice is first introduced five years after Luther's death by Robert Estienne (Stephanus), in his Greek New Testament, published in Geneva; see John Brown, *The History of the English Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 75. Verses are given in this essay only to assist in identifying where in the chapter the highlighting is found. Note also that the *New Revised Standard Version* contains neither the words, "forgives sin" in Rom. 3:25, nor the injunction, "Take, eat," in 1 Cor 11:24. Further, while these two phrases remain in the 1912 *Lutherbibel*, the 2017 edition includes "forgives sin" in Romans 3:25, while "Take, eat" is omitted from 1 Cor 11:24. The 1984 *Lutherbibel* explained that this deletion was because this phrase was an interpolation of Matthew 26:26.

5. The 1534 Luther Bible was "published by the Wittenberg booksellers Moritz Goltze, Bartholomäus Vogel and Christoph Schramm. It had 117 woodcuts signed with the monograph MS, had a Saxon privilege of unlimited duration dated 6 August 1534, and cost 2 gulden 8 groschen—about the price of 5 calves." Hans Volz et al., "Continental Versions

to c. 1600," *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, S.L. Greenslade ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 98.

6. *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, *Briefwechsel*, 18 vols., eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 6:lxvii. The English translation is from Stephan Füssel, *The Bible in Pictures: From the Workshop of Lucas Cranach (1534)* (Cologne: Taschen, 2009), 31.

7. Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town Into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 110, 269.

8. See, for example, Luther's letters to George Spalatin and Philip Melanchthon, LW 48:18–19, 75–77, 150, 255, 288.

9. LW 35:248. See note 2, above. Although his explanation for capitalizing every letter in *HERR* does not appear in the 1534 Preface to the Old Testament, the practice is still followed.

10. "Luther's exegetical lectures aimed at preparing students for preaching and teaching the texts." Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 135. This was equally true of the 1534 Luther Bible. The focus on aiding preachers in preparing sermons is also reflected in the glosses and marginal notes of the Luther Bible.

Further, the cost of bound Bibles, along with various church ordinances in Germany requiring congregations and pastors to have access to a Bible, both point toward the preaching function. According to Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, "Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present*, no. 104 (August 1984), 40, "Bibles printed in Germany in the sixteenth century were bought by governments, by parish churches with revenues set aside for this purpose, and by ministerial candidates who were required by seminary regulations to own them." Their claim that seminaries required the purchase of a Bible is questionable, however, given that no seminaries existed at the time—only Faculties of Theology. Further research is needed to determine if the Faculty regulations in Wittenberg required the purchase of a Bible. Gawthrop and Strauss further note (40, n. 43), "This assertion rests on a reading of two kinds of sources: firstly, church constitutions (*Kirchenordnungen*) which mandated Bibles in churches and in the private libraries of pastors, published in *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Emil Sehling, 5 Volumes (Leipzig, 1902–11)"; and "secondly, the protocols of Lutheran visitations throughout the sixteenth century, which, among other concerns, investigated the contents of pastors' libraries." Thus, these translations, with prefaces and glosses, were primarily for use by the pastors in the pulpits, and not by the laity.

11. Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 214.

12. Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther: An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 30–31.

13. Hövelmann, *Kernstellen der Lutherbibel*, 49.

14. Martin Luther, "Vorrhede auff die spruche Salamo," in *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, *Die Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols., eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 10.II:3 (Hereafter cited as WA DB); LW 35:343, 344, "Preface to the Wisdom of Solomon (1529)."

15. Johannes von Lüpke, "Luther's Use of Language," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 147. See also Oswald Bayer, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie*, 2d ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989) and



*Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, Thomas H. Trapp, tr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), esp. 15–28, and Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 46, 74.

16. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 16.

17. Matthew 17; Mark 9 and Luke 9.

18. LW 35:362; WA DB 6:10.26; "Prefaces to the New Testament (1546/1522);"

19. In reference to John 3:16, Luther once preached, "This is one of the best and most glorious Gospel readings, characteristic of St. John's writing, so that it would be worthy of being written in golden letters, not on paper but on the heart, if it could be." LW 77:365, "Sermon for Pentecost Sunday (1544)"; "Crucigers Sommerpostille. Evangelium Am Pfingst Montag. Johan. III.[:16–21]," in *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 73 vols., eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 21:479.19–22. [Hereafter cited as WA.]

20. The connection between a theology of the Word and the *theologia crucis* is important in Luther's thought. "Although Luther's theology can be summarized in any number of single phrases—theology of the cross, theology of justification, theology of Christ—his concept of God's Word permeates his thinking." Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 74.

21. Paul Hinlicky notes, "Luther takes his theological point of departure *von oben*, as in the heavenly command in the Transfiguration story, the Father's *Hunc audite*." He then adds, "Christian theology begins with the Father's *Hunc audite*," Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 37, 130.

22. Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), 33–38.

23. LW 35:361; WA DB 6:9.14–16; "Preface to the New Testament (1546/1522)"; "Das Neue Testament. Vorrede. Aus der Bibel 1546." This preface first appeared in the 1533 edition of Luther's New Testament and was retained, essentially unchanged, in editions of the New Testament and of the entire Bible from 1534 onward. Compare LW 35:363, note 13.

24. Luther used this phrase in LW 35:396; WA DB 7:384.27; "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude (1546/1522)"; "Das Neue Testament. 1522. Vorrede auf die Epistlen S. Jakobi und Judä." See also Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther*, 5. Wengert later notes: "Only when Scripture is approached as the inexhaustible resource that it truly is—as God's Word that kills and makes alive (2 Cor. 3:6) and thus as something that will not succumb to our categories, principles, or proof texting—will it *drive us away from itself and toward faith in Christ* under the cross." Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther*, 21. Italics added.

25. LW 35:362; WA DB 6:10.20–23; "Prefaces to the New Testament (1546/1522)"; "Das Neue Testament Deutsch. 1522. Vorrede."

26. LW 12:84; WA 40.II:300.25–28; "Commentary on the Psalms (1532)." "Ennaratio Psalmi II. 1532. [1546.]" Luther gave "proof-texts" to bolster this argument: "If anyone believes in Me, he will never see death" (John 8:51); "You believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1); "My teaching is not Mine" (John 7:16); "What I speak, the Father speaks" (John 12:49); "My Father is working still, and I am working" (John 5:17); "The Father has given all things to Me. The Father has given judgment to the Son, the Son judges no one. Just as the Father brings to life, so also the Son" (John 5:19–27)." He later added, "In these expressions they refer to each other, the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, so that no one can doubt that this King is true, proper, and natural God. And if you do not

worship and embrace this King, you cannot worship God, for the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30)." LW 12:84, "Commentary on the Psalms (1532)"; WA 40.II:300.33–36.

27. LW 23:229; WA 33:362; "Commentary on John (1530)"; "Wochenpredigten über Joh. 6–8." Luther makes the same point in his commentary on John 14:10, in LW 24:65–66; WA 45:520; "Commentary on John (1537)"; "Das XIV. Und XV. Kapitel S. Johannes."

28. LW 5:45; WA 43:459.29–31; "Commentary on Genesis (1542)." "Vorlesung über 1. Mose Kap 26,9."

29. LW 22:260; WA 46:774.10–11; "Commentary on John (1537)"; "Auslegung des ersten und zweiten Kapitels Johannis."

30. LW 22:257; WA 46:771.6; "Commentary on John (1537)."

31. LW 23:103; WA 33:157; "Commentary on John 6:51 (1530)." Luther further stated, "Christ says: '... You will never get anywhere with your own ideas. You are pursuing the wrong way when you wrangle about it. The only right method is to hear My Word, to listen to Me, to let yourself be persuaded that My Words are also My Father's Word. For the Father has His Word proclaimed from My lips, and He enlightens your heart that you may realize that it is His Word. Thus the Father draws him whom He wishes to bring to Me.' We must let the Son proclaim the Word, and we must listen to Him. Thus He gives faith." LW 23:96; WA 33:147; "Commentary on John (1530)."

32. Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 80. *Sola scriptura* can be understood as the *sola vox* when the authoritative Word is spoken by Christ. Braaten suggests that scripture's authority is located in its "gospel content," which is driven into human hearts by Christ. Carl E. Braaten, "The Holy Scriptures," in *Christian Dogmatics*, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 1:66. Nafzger et al, however, insist that such an approach fails to distinguish between scripture's causative and normative authority, between its content and divine inspiration. Samuel H. Nafzger with John F. Johnson, David A. Lumppp, and Howard W. Tepker, eds., "Holy Scripture," in *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, 2 Vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 2:713.

33. LW 8:271; WA 44:778.23–25; "Commentary on Genesis (1542)." "Vorlesung über 1. Mose von 1535–1545."

34. LW 75:51, note 72; WA 10.I/2:48.5; "Sermon on the Gospel [Matthew 21:1–9] on the first Sunday of Advent (1522)," "Adventspostille 1522."

35. *Small Catechism*, Sacrament of the Altar, 5–6; in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 362 (Hereafter cited BC); *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, Vollständige Neuedition, ed. Irene Dingel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 888, 890 (Hereafter cited BSELK).

36. LW 21:285; WA 32:536.13–14; "Sermon on the Mount, Postscript (1522)," "Wochenpredigten über Matth. 5–7. 1530/2."

37. "But we shall relegate the decretals of the pope to the privy." LW 8:271; WA 44:778.26; "Lectures on Genesis (1542)." "Vorlesung über 1. Moses von 1535–1545."

38. "Indeed, lest you tempt God, you should rather listen to Him when He promises. Cling to him in firm faith." LW 7:308; WA 44:538.10; "Lectures on Genesis (1542)." "Vorlesung über 1. Mose von 1535–1545."

39. Luther uses this term in the LC, Commandments, 23; BC 389. See also BC 389, note 40; BSELK 938.5 and BSELK 938 note 126.

40. LW 35:357; WA DB 6:3.8–11; "Prefaces to the New Testament (1546/1522)." "Das Newe Testament Deutsch, 1522. Vorrede."

41. WA DB 7:38. "*Merck diß, da er sagt, Sie sind alle sunder &c.. ist das hewbtstück vnd der mittel platz dißer Epistel vnd der gantzen schrift. Nemlich, das alles sund ist, was nicht durch das blut Christi erloset, ym glauben gerechtfertiget wirt, Drumb fasse disen text wol. Denn hie ligt darnyder aller werck verdienst vnd rhum, wie er selb hie sagt, vnd bleybt alleyn lautter gottis gnad vnd ehre.*" These words were also found in the 1522 *Septembertestament*.

42. See, for example, AC IV; BC 38–40; BSELK 98.

43. "*Vergebung der sunden sind nicht mehr denn zwey wort, daryn das gantz reich Christi steth.*" WA 15:703.24–25. Obviously, *vergebung der sunden* is three words here, not two. However, Luther was referring to the Latin Vulgate, in which "forgiveness of sins" is only two words: *remissio peccatorum*, as noted in WA 15:703.24. See also Martin Schloemann, "Die Zwei Wörter: Luthers Notabene zu 'Mitte der Schrift,'" *Luther* 65 (1994), 117, n. 12.

44. LW 51:20, "Sermon on St. Thomas' Day (1516);" WA 1:113.6–11 See also LW 51: 126; WA 17:I:41.32–33; "Sermon on St. Mathias' Day (1525);" and LW 51:326; WA 49:132.32–35; "Sermon on Matt. 3:13–17 at the Baptism of Bernhard von Anhalt, Preached in Dessau (1540);"

45. LW 36:56; WA 6:525.36–7; "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520)."

46. LW 26:152; WA 40.I/II:262.20–23; "Galatians Commentary (1535)."

47. LW 26:313; WA 40.I/II:486.17–487.13; "Galatians Commentary (1535)."

48. In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther is careful to note that the "chief and first article" is not just God forgiving sin, but that this is of the very nature and work of Christ. SA II.1.1–5; BC 301; BSELK 727, 729.

49. Thus, in a lecture on Psalm 2:4 Luther declared, "... the Gospel does nothing else than liberate consciences from the fear of death so that we believe in the forgiveness of sins and hold fast the hope of eternal life." LW 12:19; WA 40.II/II:214.14–17; "Psalms Lectures (1532)."

50. LW 26:353; "Galatians Commentary (1535);" WA 40.I/II:541.17–20.

51. SC Sacrament of the Altar, 5–6. BC 362; BSELK 888, 890.

52. LC Creed, 55; BC 438; BSELK 1064.

53. LW 37:325; WA 26:468:32–34; "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528)."

54. LW 37:370; WA 26:508.28–29; "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528)."

55. LW 37:368; WA 26:507.7–13; "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528)."

56. At the time of the publication of the *Luther Bible* in 1534, Luther, Melancthon and Martin Bucer were engaged in debate over whether the piety of the recipient determined the Sacrament's efficacy. Bucer insisted that one's piety played a role, while the Wittenberg theologians insisted that God's actions were decisive. While the matter was "resolved" in the Wittenberg Concord two years later, by making a distinction between the pious and the unworthy (those recognizing their unworthiness as they stand before God) and the ungodly. Yet this "solution" was not ultimately satisfactory to either party. See here, Gordon A. Jensen, *The Wittenberg Concord: Creating Space for Dialogue*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), esp. 99–102, and "Luther and Bucer on the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no 2 (Summer 2013), 167–87.

57. LW 35:381; WA DB 7:85.5–9; "Preface to 1 Corinthians, (1522 / 1546)."

58. Rather than following Thomas a Kempis' *imitatio Christi*, Luther proposed *conformatas Christi*. See here LW 1:253; LW 38:76; LW 51:199, 208; LW 59:297, 311 for examples.

For a brief analysis of Luther's use of *conformatas Christi*, see Dietmar Lage, *Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics*. Texts and Studies in Religion, Vol 45 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 75–92.

59. LW 36:277; WA 11:432.10–12; “The Adoration of the Sacrament (1523).”

60. See Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 35–74, for an excellent discussion on Luther's understanding of this “Word of God.”

61. LW 36:288; WA 11:442.12–13; “The Adoration of the Sacrament, (1523).”

62. LW 40:214; WA 18:204.21; “Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments (1525).”

63. SC, Baptism, 9–10; BC 359; SC, Sacrament of the Altar, 7–8; BC 363; BSELK 884.

64. LW 43:151; WA 23:413.22–24; “Letter of Consolation to All Christians at Halle (1527).”

65. LW 36:348; WA 19:503.19–21; “The Sacrament of the Body of Christ (1526).”

66. In debating with Zwingli, Luther insisted, “since it is written, ‘Take, eat,’ etc., it is to be done and to be believed altogether. One must do it.” LW 38:54; WA 30.III: 116.25; “The Marburg Colloquy and Marburg Articles (1529).”

67. LW 35:82; WA 6:356.7–10; “Treatise on the New Testament, That is, the Holy Mass (1520).”

68. For a brief overview of this debate, see Jensen, *The Wittenberg Concord*, 99–102.

69. LW 37:188; WA 26:288.12–14; “Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528).”

70. SC Sacrament of the Altar, 9–10; BC 363; BSELK 890.

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