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Building on the One Foundation with Straw: Martin Luther and the Epistle of James

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For Lutherans, James, of all biblical books, is—to paraphrase George Orwell—less equal than others. If the Christian gospel centers in the Triune God, why spend time with a New Testament book that does not mention the Holy Spirit? If a Christian evangelist and apostle is, as the author of the Fourth Gospel puts it, "to testify [on Christ's behalf]," (John 15:27), then a book that scarcely mentions Christ and says nothing about his death and resurrection deserves little mention.

Having begun this harshly, it may surprise the reader to discover that Luther preached on portions of James when it came up in the common lectionary.[1] In those sermons, he did not simply criticize James (as he had in his introductions to the New Testament) but also interpreted the text for his hearers. This essay will first examine Luther's preaching on James before investigating his specific com-

[1]Luther did not believe he had the authority to change the common Sunday lectionary but instead adhered to it, since each year it outlined the basics of faith in Christ, especially from Christ's Advent through Easter and Pentecost. Other approaches to reading the Bible in the assembly may confuse knowing the Bible stories for trusting in the crucified and risen Christ.

Most know of Martin Luther's criticism of the Letter of James; fewer perhaps know that Luther preached on James several times and praised it for driving "God's law hard." Still, for Luther, James fails the ultimate test of scriptural authority by failing to "push Christ."

ments about authorship and authority from the prefaces to his translation of the Bible.

Luther Preaching James

Luther did not think he had the authority to break the visible unity of the Western church by abandoning the common lectionary, which had been established centuries earlier. Despite the fact that he thought some pericopes emphasized works over grace and faith, he refused to abandon this tradition.[2] Most early Lutherans, unlike heirs of the Reformed tradition, preached Sundays on the same Epistle and Gospel readings that their forebears had and that their Roman opponents continued to use.[3] This commitment to church unity, often obscured by modern interests in novelty, resulted in Luther preaching on James twice during the church year. These sermons reveal in what ways Luther respected James and spun that book of straw into gospel gold.

Sermon for Rogate Sunday

In Luther's lectionary, Jas 1:16–21 was appointed for Cantate Sunday (the fifth Sunday of Easter) and, in some lectionaries, Jas 1:21–27 for Rogate Sunday (the sixth Sunday of Easter). The 1544 *Postil* of Luther's sermons edited by Caspar Cruciger, Sr. (1504–1548), however, included references to alternate readings in 1 Cor 15:35–50 and 15:51–57, respectively. Nevertheless, it also included for Cantate Sunday Luther's sermon on the traditional text from James, introduced as follows:

> Because in former times the epistle from James 1 is also read on this Sunday, a reading that contains good teaching and admonition, we include the same here for those who still want to hold to it. And we want to say something about it, so that it may not be thought that we wanted to dismiss it completely—although this epistle was not written by an apostle and does not completely measure up everywhere to a correct apostolic nature and form nor to pure teaching.[4]

There follows Luther's sermon from 14 May 1536, one of three on this text that have come down to us (the other two from 1537 and 1539).[5] This sermon represents a peculiarly Luther-esque way of doing biblical interpretation. For one thing, it places exegesis within the Sunday assembly. After defining the two forms

[2]At Augsburg in 1530, the Lutherans even could boast of their adherence to this tradition as a sign of their unwillingness to break with their Roman opponents.

[3]The Revised Common Lectionary allows the same kind of visible unity, so that on any given Sunday congregations throughout the world—Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and others—read and preach on the same lessons. Other lectionaries that read through a single book exchange the central point of the Bible—Christ crucified and risen again for the life of the world—for a Reformed understanding of salvation history: individual events in unfolding covenants.

[4]See *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993) 21:351, 31–37 [henceforth: WA]. (All references to WA without an *LW* equivalent are my own translations.)

[5]WA 41:578–590 contains Cruciger's German version, based upon a printing from 1536 (*Zwo predigt vom Zorn* [Wittenberg: J. Klug, 1536]), and original notes by Georg Rörer. A somewhat error-filled translation is found in John Lenker, ed., *Luther's Epistle Sermons*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: The Luther Press, 1909) 288–300, reprinted in vol. 7 of *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nichols Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

of persecution that, in James's view, rip people away from the gospel (anger and evil desires), Luther points out that James thinks Christians overcome attacks by focusing on God's temporal and eternal blessings. Mentioning the temporal blessings in passing, Luther states: "We, however, are actually speaking now of the goods that we receive through the Resurrection of Christ. Such an account belongs especially to the Easter season."[6] Thus, *when* one reads a text (during Easter) and *where* (in the Sunday assembly) affects interpretation.[7]

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Second, and related to the first, Luther interprets James in the light of the New Testament canon. Unlike moralistic interpretations that read Paul in the light of James to smuggle works into a relation with God, Luther—in line with his criticisms of James outlined in the next section—reads James not just in the light of Paul but of the gospel itself and especially of the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, he takes the text, "all good and perfect gifts come from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17), to apply to the temporal realm (good gifts) and to the eternal (perfect gifts), which "God has begun to construct and build in us and wants to make us into his own children and heirs. This happens through the gospel (James says), which he calls the 'word of truth.'"[8]

The phrase "word of truth," which James uses in 1:18 but never defines, in combination with other suggestive phrases ("he gave us birth" and "first fruits of his creation"), allows Luther to move this text within the orbit of the rest of the New Testament and its proclamation of God's grace.[9] God gives birth, Luther stresses, through the word of truth—over against the false words about works that come from "all sectarians and rebels." In Rörer's notes on this sermon, Luther calls this "the best text in this letter" and shows that it echoes 1 Pet 1:23 ("You have been born anew…through the living and enduring word of God").[10] Luther also refers to John 1:12–13, glossing the phrase "who believe on [Christ's] name" to mean: "Those who hang on the word with their hearts," a word that forgives sins and receives them into grace.[11]

[6]WA 41:582, 18–19, 21–23.

[7]He returns to this ecclesial context in comments on the meaning of the "word of truth" (Jas 1:18), defined as: "high, glorious gifts and possessions: the Gospel, the precious baptism, the strength of the Holy Spirit and comfort in all kinds of difficulties."

[8]WA 41:582, 23–27.

[9]Luther renders the text (WA 41:585, 26–28): "'Er hat uns gezeuget williglich' oder 'nach seinem willen durch das wort der warheit'" where the second reading matches the editions of Luther's translation from 1530 on.

[10]WA 41:582, 12–13.

[11]WA 41:583, 26–29. He comes back to "the word" at the end of his sermon, noting that James returns to it (v. 21: "the implanted word that has the power to save your souls"). See WA 41:590, 16–38, where Luther uses Rom 1:16 to bolster James's argument.

Third, this canonical reading also allows Luther to concentrate on what other Lutherans (beginning with Philip Melanchthon and most clearly in the *Formula of Concord*) called *particulae exclusivae* (exclusive clauses), the most famous of which is "faith alone."[12] From this passage in James, Luther finds such a clause in the phrase "according to [God's] will." For him, this excludes all works of the human will or intellect, including his own life in the monastery. Becoming a child of God, "did not grow in our garden…but came down from the 'Father of light,'" who made us children by the Holy Spirit working through the word of the apostles and their successors.[13] "Thus, the text does not say purchased through our deeds or merit but given to us through his fatherly will and pleasure, out of pure grace and mercy."[14] Luther discovers the testimony to God's mercy otherwise lacking in this epistle. Far from *reading into* James a Pauline view, Luther *teases out of* James the very witness to the gospel that makes any biblical text—or any sermon—truly good news. We live before God out of sheer, unmerited grace.

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Fourth, when it comes to James's admonitions, Luther's resources for interpretation include human knowledge and experience. Luther realizes that James (in 1:19–20) is worried that Christians will give up the faith by complaining against God. Because James has now moved from gospel—unknowable to human beings save by God's revelation—to law, Luther calls on not only scripture but also pagan wisdom and experience to interpret the text (here: "your anger does not produce God's righteousness"). "He [James] includes the cause [of complaining]. For human anger does not do what is right in God's sight. The pagans also said this: 'Anger is a brief madness,' and experience bears this out."[15] Luther interprets James as part of the common sense of human moral wisdom.

Finally, Luther reads this text eschatologically. The phrase "*perfect* gift" forces him to confess that Christians have only the first fruits. This means that there is more to come. "For we are still only the 'first fruits of his creatures' (v. 18). To be sure, he has begun in us, but he will not leave us as we are. Instead, as we remain in faith…he will bring us to the true, eternal possessions, which are called here 'perfect gifts,' where we will no long err or stray or become angry or sin."[16] This honesty regarding the Christian's imperfection is matched by Luther's commitment to the

[12]See Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration), trans. Robert Kolb, III.36, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 568.

[13]WA 41:586, 33–37 and 587, 13–17.

[14]WA 41:587, 17–19.

[15]WA 41:588, 33–35, citing Horace, *Epistolae*, 1.2.62: "Ira furor brevis est.…"

[16]WA 41:583, 34–39.

plain meaning of the text, which pushes the reader beyond this world to the edge of the next.[17] This eschatology, coupled with exclusive phrases about God's grace and with the word's power, undergird his understanding of justification by faith alone.

Notes for sermons on this text from 1537 and 1539 demonstrate this same approach with some variations. For example, the Easter season plays such an important part in his approach to this text that in 1539 Luther admits, "Although this epistle does not really fit into the celebration of Easter, where the greatest emphasis in preaching must be on the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit and [other] central articles [of the faith], but since it is appointed, let us leave it so that we do not seem peevish."[18]

Luther also admits that either the Apostle James or someone else wrote this letter amid fights over the gospel and its proclamation of the unmerited forgiveness of sins. Luther compares this to his own "papists," for whom the notion that Christ is savior "without our merits or works…makes them rabid and crazy."[19] It is against this very anger that James directs his words, Luther concludes. As Luther often does, he draws his readers into the text by sketching for them a similar situation from their own day and age. As in 1536, where he mentioned his monastic experience, here he simply rails at the foolishness of masses, monastic vows, and pilgrimages when compared to the mercy of God. In the rest of the sermon, Luther finds that every word in the text of James speaks against such works righteousness, beginning with "every good gift" (v. 16), which Luther contrasts to the righteousness of works and the law. To support James's arguments, Luther cites Isa 61:1 and 1 Pet 1:25. As in 1536, he concentrates on the "word of truth." "In sum: in the word you also remain without change or variation. The gospel does not change with the law."[20] And Luther ties being "begotten" (v. 18) to the perfect gift of new creation, brought to perfection on the final day. Jewish Christians of James's day and the "papists" of Luther's day are warned not to complain against this word.

The 1537 sermon contains even stronger criticism of James's authorship.[21] Luther writes that James wrote this to Jewish-Christians converts.

> It sounds quite strange and does not appear to hang together well, so that one can easily detect that an auditor of the apostles condensed the things found here from what they said—both in speaking with them and hearing their words, which were spoken outside of sermons, because it is credible that they did not only preach in public but also at home. That is how this sermon also seems. Thus, it appears not to have been written in an orderly fashion, and its overall point [*scopus*] is not discernible.[22]

[17]See also WA 41:584, 18–33.

[18]WA 47:742, 3–5 (the manuscript of Georg Rörer, but reading with a second manuscript "morosi" [peevish] for "mirabiles" [unusual]). The entire sermon runs from WA 47:742–748.

[19]WA 47:742, 11–12.

[20]WA 47:747, 12–13.

[21]See WA 45:77–81. For this sermon, only Rörer's notes exist.

[22]WA 45:77, 29–35.

This analysis of James's audience, style and main point (or lack thereof) demonstrates literary and historical sensitivity that marked much of Wittenberg's exegesis.[23] Luther speaks in James's own voice and states: "As if he [James] were saying, 'I have heard from the apostles (since they went before the saints) that we must remain with the heard word.'"[24]

What were James's main points? "First, he admonishes and pleads that we remain with the heard Word…and second he indicates the force and power of the word."[25] This concentration on the word, surely part of the text of James, matches Luther's conception of God as *Deus loquens*, the God who speaks, and also with the *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel. James emphasized this to his readers, Luther thinks, because of the many strange, false teachings that arose after the apostles' deaths. Luther proves this from 1 Pet 5:8 and Matt 4:2, which describe Satan's attacks.

Skipping over "gift and perfect gift," Luther concentrates again on "the word of truth." He contrasts the unreliable, changing practices of the papacy, under which many of his hearers had grown up (singling out the Carthusians, St. Christopher, St. George, and pilgrimages), and asks them to compare such things to the word of truth. He again refers to 1 Pet 1:25 ("his word endures forever") and the sacraments, through which one receives God's true and perfect gifts, blending the ecclesial and canonical sides of interpretation. He emphasizes the reliability of God's word: "With God it is not, 'Today darkness; tomorrow daylight,' but eternal daytime. Therefore do not be moved by their [pseudo-apostles'] words [devoid of] God's Spirit or truth but look to the word from which you were begotten."[26]

On verse 18 ("he has begotten us"), Luther poses a question: "Why therefore would we deny so glorious a birth from the Holy Spirit through the church and in the Devil's name let ourselves instead be tonsured in a gray cowl according to human works?"[27] This again indicates how Luther's canonical and churchly interpretation brings James back to the center of Christian faith. On the basis of this summary thought ("let us not be moved from the saving word that remains forever"), Luther puts James's admonitions (in vv. 19–20) into perspective. Luther brings James into the common gospel of the church and its scripture.

Sermon for Rogate Sunday

On 2 May 1535, Luther preached on James 1:21–27, the epistle for the sixth Sunday of Easter (Rogate Sunday).[28] This sermon demonstrates Luther's canonical

[23]See Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melanchthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism," now in: idem, *Philip Melanchthon, Speaker of the Reformation: Wittenberg's Other Reformer* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) 118–140, and idem, "Georg Major (1502–1574): Defender of the Wittenberg's Faith and Melanchthonian Exegete," in *Melanchthon in seinen Schülern*, ed. Heinz Scheible (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997) 129–156.

[24]WA 45:78, 2–3, reading S[ancti] for S[anctos].

[25]WA 45:77, 36–78, 1.

[26]WA 45:80, 2–4.

[27]WA 45:80, 21–23.

[28]WA 41:69–73. The debate over James or 1 Cor may also be found Georg Major's *Postil*, which includes ex-

exegesis, in that he compares James's admonition with Jesus' parable of the sower from Matt 13. James's admonition against sordidness and wickedness in verse 21 matches the seed that falls on the path. Besides warning about temptations, Luther's admonition focuses on God's grace in the "implanted word that has power to save your souls" (v. 21): "But you have the word, which is our Lord God's little plant—not human but heavenly—which has the power to save souls."[29] On this basis one can be meek. Luther also refers to Rom 1:16 and John 4:14 to describe the word's power against sin, which he then contrasts to the books of laws and philosophers, which have no eternal power.

He concludes by talking about Christians who hear the word but do not do it. For them, preaching goes in one ear and out the other.

Luther does not so much contrast papal practices with this word but rather describes the work of the devil in his hearers. "The devil can, without your realizing it, lull you to sleep, so that he makes you lazy and you stay home from church, and the sermon and sacrament taste like nothing."[30] Luther places his interpretation within the broader life of the church by recounting at length a story from the *Lives of the Fathers* about a desert father so holy that an angel came and fed him only beautiful, white bread. "What happened? He began to regard himself as so holy that an angel was his cook and butler."[31] Only returning to the word saved him. Luther also applies the text to his own experience. "I know what happens to me when I do not pray from the heart. Immediately I find how cold and lazy I am, so that I spit in my own face."[32] He encourages the children to follow the Catechism by praying morning and evenings. The Lord's Prayer is God's word and needs to be learned and understood.

He concludes by talking about Christians who hear the word but do not do it (Jas 1:22–24). For them, preaching goes in one ear and out the other. Luther sees this kind of hearing as self-deception and opposes it to those who "let themselves be commended to the word and consider that they can never hear it enough."[33] Here Luther manages to overcome the moralistic tone of the passage by centering it not in the admonition to do something ("Be doers…") but in its *conditio sine qua non* for such doing: first hearing the word. The problem is with a lack not of deeds but of proper hearing.

positions for both Sundays on James and on 1 Corinthians. *Secundus Tomus Operum…Georgii Maioris: Homeliae in Epistolas dierum Dominicorum & Festorum* (Wittenberg: Luft, 1569) 186r.

[29]WA 41:70, 28–29.

[30]WA 41:71, 17–19.

[31]WA 41:71, 19–34. Luther may be referring to Abba Or in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 63–64.

[32]WA 41:71, 40–41.

[33]WA 41: 73, 23–24.

James and Straw[34]

Saying "Luther" and "James" in the same sentence, makes Lutherans groan or smile knowingly, but few know Luther's actual comments. In a study of English Puritan interpretations of James, Derek Cooper discovered that, even if these divines of the mid-seventeenth century knew nothing else about Luther, they at least knew this: he did not like James and had tried to remove it from the canon.[35] They all knew that he called it an epistle of straw.

Here are the facts. In his 1522 translation of the New Testament, Luther talked about James in two places: in the general preface to the New Testament and in his specific preface to James and Jude. Although he never changed the preface to James and Jude, he deleted comments in the general preface about James from every edition of the complete Bible and, after 1539, from separate printings of the New Testament.

In 1522, at the end of his introduction to the New Testament, Luther included a section entitled, "Which Are the Correct and Purest Books of the New Testament." On the basis of criteria introduced earlier in the preface, Luther concluded that the best books were the Gospel of John, Paul's letters (chief among them Romans), and 1 Peter. He suggested to his readers that they read these most often. "For in these you will not find much description of Christ's works and miracles but instead you will find depicted in a masterly way how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell and gives life, righteousness, and salvation, which is the proper meaning of gospel, as you have heard."[36] He added this:

> In sum, St. John's gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's letters, especially the ones to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are all books that show you Christ, and they all teach what is necessary and salutary for you to know, even if you do not see or hear any other book or teaching. It is for this reason that James' epistle is in comparison a real strawy epistle, for it has no evangelical character about it.[37]

First, Luther placed James alongside the other New Testament authors, whom (unlike James) he calls saints. Second, his main point of contrast was that these books "show you Christ." This was really Luther's only criterion for judging scripture, so that in contrast he said about James that it "has no evangelical character about it." By that he meant that it preached law. Third, his use of the word "straw" did not reflect a

[34]The following is a synopsis of what I have written in chapter one of my book *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 1–7, used by permission.

[35]See Derek Cooper, "The Ecumenical Exegete: Thomas Manton's Commentary on James in Relation to Its Protestant Predecessors, Contemporaries and Successors" (PhD diss., The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 2008). The following paragraphs are based upon Cooper's work. His work is now published as *Thomas Manton: A Guided Tour of the Life and Thought of a Puritan Pastor* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, 2011).

[36]See *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Bibel*, 12 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–1961) 6:10, 15–19 [henceforth WA DB]. For the standard translation, see *Luther's Works* [American edition], 55+ vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–) 35:362 [henceforth *LW*]. All translations are the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

[37]WA DB 6:10, 29–35 (=*LW* 35:362).

German insult but Paul's picture in 1 Cor 3:12 about building upon the foundation of Christ with either straw or gold and precious stones. James uses straw in contrast to the gold of John, Paul, and Peter.

In the preface to James itself, which remained unaltered in later editions of Luther's translation, Luther provided a bit more detail for his arguments. First, Luther revealed in the very first sentence something that many people today have forgotten: the ancient church was also very skeptical about James.[38] Luther did not mention that others in the sixteenth century questioned the authorship of James, including Erasmus of Rotterdam and Tommaso de Vio (better known as Cardinal Cajetan, who interviewed Luther in Augsburg in 1518). Luther was one humanist scholar among several who raised questions about James.[39] Luther was not so much going out on a limb as revisiting some old debates in the church with a new critical eye.

> ***"I praise James and hold it to be a good writing because it does not propose human teachings but drives God's law hard"***

If discovering that others also questioned James's authority comes as a surprise, what Luther said next is downright shocking: "I praise James and hold it to be a good writing because it does not propose human teachings but drives God's law hard."[40] James preaches *God's* law not silly *human* teachings so beloved by the papacy. Luther praised James! Despite this good review, Luther then entered the actual debate about the apostolicity of James, stating that this was simply his own opinion and that others could differ with him on this matter. He gave two reasons for his misgivings, the first of which was new to the debate and the second of which arose tangentially from traditional objections. He then gave a theory about the book's composition. Luther rejected James because "it is completely contrary to St. Paul and all other Scripture in that it attributes justification to works and saying that Abraham was justified by his works because he offered his son, despite the fact that St. Paul teaches the opposite in Romans 4, citing Genesis 15 that he is justified by faith alone, a text that comes before the sacrifice of Isaac."[41]

Luther was talking about the literal texts of Paul and James, which indeed contradict one another. Knowing that some—probably some in his inner circle—tried to explain the contradiction away, he added, "Although this epistle may perchance be helped and an explanatory gloss for justification by works may be found, yet one cannot protect it from the fact that it connects the saying of Moses

[38]WA DB 7:384, 3–4 (=*LW* 35:395).

[39]For Luther's humanism (concern for "Good Letters" and returning to the sources), see Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Weimar: Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1984). Ancient questions about this epistle are found in Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (reprint: Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) 103 [II, xxiii, 25] and 134 [III, xxv, 3].

[40]WA DB 7:384, 4–6 (=*LW* 35:395).

[41]WA DB 7:384, 9–14 (=*LW* 35:396).

in Genesis 15 to works."[42] This weakness shows that it was not apostolic. The issue for Luther was not James's teaching about works, which could be made to agree with Paul, but its misuse of scripture.

Luther's second suspicion about James could be summarized in a single phrase: apostolicity has to do with "*was Christum treibet*" (whatever emphasizes, drives, or pushes Christ). Luther rejected the apostolicity of this letter:

> Second, because it tries to teach Christians and yet does not mention even once with any teaching of any length the suffering, the resurrection or the Spirit of Christ. He mentions Christ a few times but does not teach anything about him but instead talks about general faith in God. Indeed, the office of a true apostle is that he preaches about Christ's suffering, resurrection and office, and lays the foundation of this very faith, as Christ himself says in John 15, "You will bear witness to me." And in this all the correctly written holy books agree, so that they all preach and emphasize Christ. This is also the proper touchstone by which to measure all books, when a person observes whether or not they emphasize Christ. Since all Scripture reveals Christ (Romans 3) and since Paul wants to know nothing but Christ (1 Cor 2), whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if Peter or Paul taught it. Or again, what preaches Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod did it.[43]

This devastating criticism is undeniable. If only one book of the New Testament had somehow survived to the present, it would be virtually impossible to know anything about Christ or the Holy Spirit if this book was James. Frankly, on the basis of its Christology, calling James an epistle of straw was a compliment! There is no witness to Jesus Christ, no mention of his saving death and resurrection, and no mention of the Holy Spirit. Luther's rejection of James rested on the biblical question of the apostolic office.

Luther provides a way to judge not only scripture but other Christian writings. The debate from the ancient church over whether an apostle named James wrote James is moot. If Judas wrote a book *and it pushed Christ*, it is apostolic. The same criterion Luther used to criticize his Roman opponents and the Roman papacy had now become the measuring stick and touchstone for scripture itself (and for many of today's sermons).[44] Preachers in megachurches or minichurches who use every sermon to turn Jesus simply into an example to follow are no better![45]

As in the above sermons, Luther examined James's style and content. "He emphasizes the law and its works"[46] and did it in a very disorderly fashion. Luther suggested that either some pious Christian wrote James by stringing together some

[42]WA DB 7:384, 14–18 (=*LW* 35:396).

[43]WA DB 7:384, 19–32 (=*LW* 35:396).

[44]For Luther's criticism of the papacy, see Scott Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[45]Thus, in an earlier section of his preface to the New Testament, Luther warned his readers (WA DB 6:8, 3–4 [=*LW* 35:360]), "Therefore watch out that you do not make a Moses [i.e., lawgiver] out of Christ, nor out of the Gospel a book of laws or doctrines, as has happened up until now."

[46]WA DB 7:386, 1–2 (=*LW* 35:396f.).

words handed down by disciples of the apostles or that James consisted of a pious Christian's sermon recorded by someone else. The fact that the author had taken lines from the letters of Peter and Paul (for which Luther provided examples) proved that the author could hardly be the apostle and early martyr James but that the book was written long after the apostles. Most modern exegetes agree.[47]

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Luther concluded that the author wanted to protect against those who trusted in faith without giving any attention to works, but the author just could not pull it off. He wanted to accomplish with the law what the apostles achieved by stressing love. Luther could not put this among the chief books but instead stuck it in an appendix of less important ones. He refused to criticize those who wanted to rehabilitate the book, since it did contain some really good sayings. We would do well to use the same critical eye to approach James today: admitting what it lacks and what little it has to offer.

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[47]Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (Louisville: Knox, 1995) 83–85, 93–95.