

“The Public Reading of Scripture”

An Overview and History of a Phrase

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When The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, a Lutheran church body of some 1.7 million members in the United States, met in convention in July of 2026, one of the questions before the delegates was who should read the Scripture lessons in the Sunday service. The question had arrived at the convention from four different congregations and districts, in four overtures, none of them friendly to the current practice: one asked the Synod to encourage pastors to do the reading themselves; one asked it to condemn the use of women as lectors under threat of church discipline; one asked it to declare that reading is preaching and therefore closed to women; one asked it to correct the practice while conceding that laymen might read in a pinch.¹ The delegates did not adopt any of them. Instead, by a vote of 607 to 296, they adopted a resolution directing the two seminary faculties to prepare a joint theological opinion on “1 Tim. 4:13 and other related passages and how those passages relate to the public reading of Scripture in congregational worship services and who should attend to those readings” — and when a motion was made from the floor to strike that referral, the convention voted it down and kept it.²

The two sides of that debate agree on very little. But they agree completely on one thing: that the verse in question speaks of “the public reading of Scripture.” The delegates who wanted the practice restricted to pastors quoted 1 Timothy 4:13 in those

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¹ Overtures 5-26 through 5-29, *2026 Convention Workbook* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2026), 352–54. The four positions are genuinely distinct: Ov. 5-26 (St. Paul, Brookfield, Ill.) argues for pastoral reading from Augsburg Confession XIV and vocation without citing 1 Timothy 4:13 at all; Ov. 5-27 (North Dakota District) opens with the verse and asks that women lectors be condemned and defiant congregations disciplined; Ov. 5-28 (Trinity, Tryon, N.C.) argues from Acts 15:21 that reading *is* preaching, and asks the Synod to rescind its 1989 resolution; Ov. 5-29 (Mission of the Cross, Crosslake, Minn.) holds that laymen may read when circumstances require but women may not.

² 2026 Res. 5-09A, “To Address the Public Reading of Scripture in Public Worship,” *2026 Today’s Business*, 3rd ed., 325–26; floor action and vote counts in *2026 Convention Minutes*, Sessions 7 and 8 (July 22, 2026), 6. One amendment was adopted (453–436), adding a mandate to create study materials for circuit forums and district gatherings; an amendment to require “recommendations for action at the next Synod convention” failed; the motion to strike the seminary referral in its entirety failed.

words; the delegates who defended the lay reader heard it quoted in those words and answered on other grounds. The English Standard Version, which lay open on the lecterns of that convention, reads: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” The New International Version says the same. So does nearly every Bible printed in the last eighty years. Whoever is right about the lectern, surely the verse itself is common ground.

It would seem, then, a simple matter to trace this phrase back through the church’s Bibles and commentaries to the apostle. That is what I set out to do. What I found instead is the subject of this essay.

Begin with the Bibles. The King James Version of 1611 reads: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” No “public.” No “of Scripture.” The Geneva tradition before it, and Tyndale before that (“geve attendaunce to redyng”), and Wycliffe before that (“take tent” — take heed — “to redyng”), read the same way.³ Luther’s German Bible of 1545 reads “Halt an mit Lesen, mit Ermahnen, mit Lehren” — keep at reading, at exhorting, at teaching — with no *öffentlich* and no *der Schrift*.⁴ The Latin Vulgate, which carried this verse to the whole Western church for a thousand years, reads *attende lectioni, exhortationi, doctrinae* — attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching.⁵ And the Greek that Paul wrote reads: ἕως ἔρχομαι πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ. The noun ἀναγνώσις means the act of reading. Of itself it means neither public reading nor the reading of Scripture; it means reading.⁶ In later Christian Greek, it should be granted at once, the word did acquire

³ Renderings from the versions. Here and throughout this essay, *sighted* marks a citation verified against the original printing, a facsimile, or a page scan — the words read where they stand, not taken over from another writer’s citation of them. So here: Wycliffe-Purvey (c. 1382/1395, sighted): “take tent to redyng”; Tyndale (1534, folio sighted): “geve attendaunce to redyng”; Douay-Rheims (1582); KJV (1611); Young’s Literal (1862); Darby (1867/1890); RV (1881)/ASV (1901, sighted); Weymouth (1903). Every English *version* from Wycliffe to Weymouth — a span of five hundred and twenty years — renders the bare “reading.” One boundary case belongs to the scholars rather than the Bibles: Conybeare and Howson’s translation, embedded in their *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (1851–52; People’s Edition, 1870, sighted at 817), already reads “apply thyself to public reading,” with a footnote insisting this means “not... reading in the sense of study, but reading aloud to others” — on which see the scholars’ wave of the 1850s below.

⁴ Luther Bible (1545, Ausgabe letzter Hand), 1 Tim. 4:13, sighted in WA Deutsche Bibel 7; the 1545 print reads “Halt an mit lesen / mit ermanen / mit leren,” modernized in the text above.

⁵ Vulgate, 1 Tim. 4:13 (Clementine text): “Dum venio, attende lectioni, exhortationi, et doctrinæ.”

⁶ LSJ, s.v. ἀναγνώσις (9th ed., 1940): “recognition”; “reading,” from Plato onward; “reading aloud” — a sense whose first citations are the medical writers, Hippocrates (*De victu* 2.61) and Soranus (1.49), prescribing reading aloud as solitary exercise — with Acts 13:15; and, in the plural only, “public readings.” The bare singular is never glossed “public reading of Scripture,” and 1 Tim. 4:13 is not cited under any sense. Thayer, s.v. ἀναγνώσις (G320): “a knowing again; reading,” without qualifier. For the patristic centuries, G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), s.v. ἀναγι(γ)νώσκω, 98, spreads the word-family across the whole field this essay surveys: private reading counsel (Nilus, Ephrem, Isidore of Pelusium, Climacus); reading in public worship (Justin; the Apostolic Constitutions’ book-lists); “act as reader,” the office itself (Basil, *cp.* 217, can. 69); and study outright — Malalas, of the boy-emperor Theodosius II, schooled inside the palace, with young Paulinus afterward as his fellow-student: ἀνεγίνωσκεν, the verb absolute and objectless, “he did his studies.” Cyril of Jerusalem needs one sentence to run the verb both directions, each duly marked: ὅσα μὲν ἐν ἐκκλησίαις μὴ ἀναγινώσκεται, ταῦτα μὴδὲ κατὰ σαυτὸν

a technical liturgical life: by late antiquity the Euthalian apparatus, whose date is disputed, could head its divisions of Acts ἀναγνώσεις — appointed lessons — and the church's lections were household furniture. The question of this essay is not whether the word could come to mean the lection; it did. The question is what it meant in this sentence, three centuries earlier, before there were lectionaries to name.

Here is the plain fact this essay will spend its length accounting for: *the words “public” and “of Scripture” are in our Bibles, but they are not in Paul’s letter.* They entered the English Bible in the twentieth century — “public” first in 1901, “Scripture-reading” first in 1913, the full phrase first in 1923 — and they became the common possession of English-speaking Christendom only with the Revised Standard Version of 1946. Whoever quotes the verse from the Synod’s own pew Bible is quoting, as the apostle’s words, a translation decision younger than the Synod’s oldest living pastors — and whoever checks his New King James and finds bare “reading” there has just performed, in miniaure, the history this essay will now lay out.

Let it be said at once what this fact does not mean. The absence of a phrase is not the absence of a thing. The church read the Scriptures publicly from the beginning: Justin Martyr, the philosopher-convert writing to a pagan emperor, describes the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets read in the Sunday assembly of Rome about the year 155, and no one in this debate doubts it.⁷ Did Ignatius lack a doctrine of the Holy Trinity because he did not use the term Trinity? The question here is narrower and more tractable, and it is really two questions, which the reader is asked to keep apart to the end: first, whether *this verse* speaks of that public practice at all; and second — even where the public setting is granted in full — whether the verse, or anyone in the nineteen centuries of its readers, ever used it to say *who* may read. It will emerge, among other things, that the Synod’s own commission, when it faced the lectern question directly, did not rest its counsel on this verse; in that respect this essay is continuous with the church’s own paper trail, not a raid upon it. Why trouble over words? What other access is there?

THE WORDS THEMSELVES

The Greek word ἀνάγνωσις appears three times in the New Testament, and the other two occurrences are the whole modern case for reading the third as public. In Acts

ἀναγίνωσκε — “what is not read *in the churches*, do not read even *by yourself*” (*Catech.* 4.36). The lexica, in short, know every sense this controversy needs; what they cannot supply is the one that decides this verse. A note on method that this essay’s subject seems to demand: every lexical citation relied on here was read in context for this study, and the exercise proved its worth even against the lexica themselves — Bultmann’s dossier thins on inspection, and two of Lampe’s references required correction (the readers-among-the-Levites clause stands at *Const. Ap.* II.26.3, not II.25.3; his Theodoret citation, *haer.* 5.25, leads to a chapter on marriage containing no reading-word at all). The word occurs three times in the New Testament: Acts 13:15; 2 Cor. 3:14; 1 Tim. 4:13.

⁷ Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67. The passage is quoted in full below.

13:15 Paul and Barnabas sit in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia “after the reading of the law and the prophets” — μετὰ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν. In 2 Corinthians 3:14 a veil lies over Israel “at the reading of the old covenant” — ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης. Both passages are unambiguously public, and both wear their publicness on their sleeve: each carries a genitive object naming what is read, and each sits inside an explicitly institutional scene — a synagogue, a congregation, an appointed custom.

1 Timothy 4:13 has neither. The noun stands bare — τῇ ἀναγνώσει, “the reading,” with no “of the law,” no “of Scripture,” no assembly named — and it stands inside a passage (4:6–16) that is occupied from end to end with Timothy’s own person: train yourself in godliness; let no one despise your youth; set the believers an example; do not neglect the gift you have; keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. The grammar of the verse points the same way. Wherever the word appears in an institutional setting — the synagogue of Acts, the covenant-reading of 2 Corinthians, the synagogue built “for the reading of the law” — it carries a genitive naming the thing read to the assembly. In 1 Timothy the word stands as a bare dative governed by προσέχε, “devote yourself to,” and that construction — προσέχειν with the dative — is this epistle’s standard idiom for what a person habitually gives himself to. Within 1 Timothy alone, people “devote themselves” to myths and endless genealogies (μηδὲ προσέχειν μύθοις καὶ γενεαλογίαις, 1:4), to much wine (μὴ οἶνω πολλῷ προσέχοντας, 3:8), to deceitful spirits (προσέχοντες πνεύμασι πλάνοις, 4:1); Titus’s opponents devote themselves to Jewish myths (μὴ προσέχοντες Ἰουδαϊκοῖς μύθοις, Titus 1:14). The idiom describes a settled personal occupation, wholesome or ruinous — not the performance of a liturgical function.⁸ And the chapter itself supplies the control case. Three sentences before our verse, the same construction describes the apostates: they devote themselves to “teachings of demons” (διδασκαλίαις δαιμονίων, 4:1) — the noun carries a genitive precisely because the teaching attended to is *someone else’s* performance. In 4:13 the same noun stands bare: πρόσσεχε... τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ. When this author wants the reader to know that the thing attended to is performed by others, he says whose it is. The bare triad of 4:13

⁸ The observation cuts deeper than a word study: προσέχειν is one of the Pastorals’ marked terms for the *false teachers’ habits* (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:1; Titus 1:14; the older editions found it also at 6:3, where the critical text now reads προσέρχεται), and 4:13 turns the same verb around — devote yourself to reading, exhortation, and teaching *instead*. Gustav Wohlenberg’s index of the epistle’s vocabulary files προσέχειν at 4:13 among the “expressions referring to the false teachers” (*Die Pastoralbriefe*, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, ed. Theodor Zahn, vol. 13, 3rd ed. [Leipzig: Deichert, 1923], 52) — a point that will matter later in this essay. Two precisions, so that the argument is not overstated. First, in 2 Cor. 3:14 the noun ἀνάγνωσις is itself dative (ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει), just as in our verse: the diagnostic is not the case of the noun but the genitive *complement* that names what is read to the assembly — present there, absent here. Second, the New Testament does contain one cultic use of προσέχειν with the dative: Heb. 7:13, “no one from that tribe has ever attended the altar” (προσέσχηκεν τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ). But that analogy imports from its noun exactly what it would need to prove: an altar is public furniture, and only a priest can attend one; ἀνάγνωσις is an act any literate person performs at a desk, and what makes it public, everywhere in the usage, is a named text and a named assembly — which is again what 4:13 lacks.

leaves exactly two natural constructions — Timothy’s own reading, exhorting, and teaching (as the whole ancient church took it), or the congregation’s standing institutions held under Timothy’s watchful eye (as a German minority would later argue from those same definite articles, of which more below). What the grammar nowhere supplies is the specific picture the modern consensus prints: a public office, publicly performed by Timothy, over a named sacred text. Every element of that picture must be imported. This is a describable feature of the text, not an interpretive preference — and let its logic be stated exactly, so that it claims neither more nor less than it proves. Grammar alone does not decide this verse; it establishes that the sentence is undetermined, and therefore where the burden of proof lies. The deciding must come from the context and from the history of those who read it. The remainder of this essay is that history. Wherever the New Testament clearly means public reading, either a genitive object or a stated audience supplies the sense — the law and the prophets, the old covenant, “read in the church of the Laodiceans” (Col. 4:16), “read to all the brothers” (1 Thess. 5:27), “the one who reads and those who hear” (Rev. 1:3). The one verse in the whole corpus that carries neither marker is the verse now printed as though it carried both.⁹

The standard lexical authority cited for the public sense is the entry Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg — the most influential, and most radical, critical New Testament scholar of his century — wrote for Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* in 1933: ἀναγνώσις “is particularly used for reading or public reading (as in the pap.), esp. in law courts and other assemblies,” and in early Christianity “we find the same usage: Ac. 13:15; 2 C. 3:14; 1 Tm. 4:13.”¹⁰ Notice what the entry actually claims: a frequency of usage (“particularly used for”), not a semantic content; and notice that 1 Tm. 4:13 is classified as public by bare listing, without argument, two generations after that classification had become the critical consensus. Bultmann was not bending to the age; by 1933 he was the age — the Pastorals were for him, as for Holtzmann, pseudonymous church-order documents, and the dictionary entry simply deposits that exegesis as lexicography. The danger lies downstream, where a conclusion reached in the commentaries, once lodged in a lexicon, returns to the commentaries as evidence for itself. And there is a lesson in it for our own circles: a pastor who would not take Rudolf Bultmann’s word on any doctrine of the faith will cite “Kittel” on a dative without a

⁹ To state the counter-evidence fairly: the Septuagint of Nehemiah 8:8 has a bare τῇ ἀναγνώσει that plainly means the public reading — καὶ συνήκεν ὁ λαὸς ἐν τῇ ἀναγνώσει, “the people understood in the reading” (2 Esdr. 18:8, Rahlfs 1:937, no variant) — but there the surrounding narrative has spent seven verses assembling the people, naming the reader, and building him a wooden pulpit. A bare ἀναγνώσις can be public where the context supplies the scene. The point is that in 1 Tm. 4:13 the context supplies a different scene: a young pastor’s self-formation.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, “ἀναγνώσκω, ἀναγνώσις,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:343–44 (= *TWNT* I, 1933). There is a certain irony, which I leave the reader to savor, in the fact that the lexical authority most often deployed for the restrictive reading of this verse is Rudolf Bultmann.

second thought, because the judgment arrives dressed as a dictionary. I went through Bultmann's own evidence. His prize exhibit, the Theodotos synagogue inscription of Jerusalem, dedicates the building εἰς ἀνάγνωσιν νόμου — “for the reading of the law” — the genitive again. His one citation from Judaism, Philo, turns out on inspection to place ἀνάγνωσις in a catalogue of the solitary ascetic's exercises, between “inquiry” and “hearing” — a curriculum of private study.¹¹ The pattern is uniform, and it is the pattern of the verse's own New Testament company: the word is public where the sentence makes it public. In 1 Timothy 4:13 the sentence does not.

How, then, did “the public reading of Scripture” get into the Bibles? Not from the Greek, and not from the King James tradition, which held the line for five centuries. The phrase was assembled piecemeal, in the modern-speech translations of a single generation. The Twentieth Century New Testament — the work of an English committee of ministers and laypeople, complete by 1901 — was the first New Testament published as such to print “apply yourself to public reading.” The Scottish translator James Moffatt in 1913 was the first to print “attend to your Scripture-reading.” Edgar Goodspeed of Chicago, in his American Translation of 1923, was the first to put the pieces together: “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, preaching, and teaching.”¹² Goodspeed's wording is, almost letter for letter, the wording the Revised Standard Version canonized in 1946 and the ESV prints today. The phrase every delegate at the 2026 convention took for apostolic is one hundred and three years old, and its immediate author is not Paul but an American professor with a gift for a phrase.

A translation, of course, may be interpretive and still be right. The translators of 1901–1946 did not invent the public-reading interpretation; they inherited it from the commentaries, where it had recently become the confident consensus. The real question is where the commentaries got it. And that trail, faithfully followed, leads somewhere no one in the present debate — and, until last year, almost no one in the scholarly

¹¹ Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 253 (the catalogue of the ἀσκητής: ζήτησις, σκέψις, ἀνάγνωσις, ἀκρόασις, προσοχή...); Theodotos inscription (CIJ 1404): συναγωγὴν εἰς ἀνάγνωσιν νόμου καὶ εἰς διδασχὴν ἐντολῶν (the stone is damaged at the word's first letters; the restoration is epigraphically secure). Of Bultmann's five extra-biblical citations, checked in context, two support a public sense (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* I.21.146.1, a festival vigil; the inscription), one is a private-study catalogue (Philo), and two describe the individual reader at home or the individual soul (Clement, *Paed.* II.10.96.2 — the man has come home from church when “the hour of prayer and reading” arrives; *Strom.* VI.14.113.3). The pattern holds across his whole dossier: wherever the public sense appears, a genitive object or an institutional setting supplies it. The bare noun never does.

¹² *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (London: Horace Marshall, 1901), 388, and the revised edition (New York: Revell, 1904), both sighted at 1 Tim. 4:13; James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (New York: Doran, 1913), ad loc.; Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), ad loc. All three verified against the printed editions. The Revised Standard Version New Testament (1946) adopted Goodspeed's rendering nearly verbatim, and NASB (1971), NIV (1978), NRSV (1989), NET (1996–2005), and ESV (2001) followed the RSV. Two translation families declined: the NKJV (1982) keeps the King James's bare “reading,” and the Catholic NABRE reads “attend to the reading” — so a reader of those Bibles never meets the phrase at all.

literature — expected it to lead.¹³

FOURTEEN CENTURIES OF READERS

Suppose the modern consensus were right that the verse obviously commands liturgical reading. One would expect the church's ancient interpreters — native speakers of the Greek, heirs of the synagogue custom, men who presided over lectors every Sunday — to have read it so. They did not. Not one of them.

The earliest interpreter on record is Origen of Alexandria, the church's first great biblical scholar, in the first half of the third century, who cites the verse as the charge to gather Scripture "in our heart, by giving heed to reading...and by meditating in the law of the Lord day and night" — the vocabulary of Psalm 1, not of the lectern.¹⁴ The fourth-century writer who forged letters under Ignatius's name made the logic explicit, telling the deacon Hero: "Give attention to reading, that thou mayest not only thyself know the laws, but mayest also explain them to others."¹⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Antiochene school's master exegete: attend to the readings "so that, instructing yourself (*teipsum instruens*) by assiduous reading, you may be able to persevere in teaching and exhortation."¹⁶ The comment that traveled under Ambrose's name, and through Peter Lombard and the *Glossa Ordinaria* became the standard equipment of every medieval reader: "attend to reading, *that you may understand the Scriptures*, and, after the reading, attend to the exhortation of the willing and the teaching of the ignorant."¹⁷

The greatest of the Greek commentators deserves to be heard at length, because both sides of the modern debate have claimed him. Here is John Chrysostom's actual comment on the verse, from his thirteenth homily on 1 Timothy, in Field's critical text:

¹³ The trail was first mapped by Stefan Krauter, "1 Tim 4:13: Public Lecture or Private Study?" *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 12, no. 2 (2025): 215–30, an essay to which this study is indebted at many points and with which it will also, at one decisive point, disagree.

¹⁴ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* X.15 (ANF 9); likewise *Comm. in Gen.* 1:17 (GCS 29, 22) and *Comm. in Luc.* 9 (GCS 49, 54), cited in Krauter, "1 Tim 4:13," 220–21.

¹⁵ Pseudo-Ignatius, *Epistle to Hero* 1 (ANF 1). The two-step structure — read for yourself, then teach others — recurs in nearly every ancient comment on the verse.

¹⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *In epistolam I ad Timotheum*, on 4:13–14, in H. B. Swete, ed., *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in epistolas B. Pauli commentarii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880–82), 2:148–49.

¹⁷ Ambrosiaster, via Peter Lombard, *Collectanea in Epistolas D. Pauli*, PL 192:349–50; the same sentence, compressed, forms the interlinear gloss of the *Glossa Ordinaria* on the verse (Rusch ed., 1480/81, via the Gloss-e edition of the IRHT-CNRS). The attribution wanders among Ambrosiaster, Haimo of Auxerre, and the anonymous glossator — the sentence was common property — but its content never varies.

“Ἔως ἔρχομαι, πρόσσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ. Τιμοθέω κελεύει προσέχειν τῇ ἀναγνώσει. Ἀκούωμεν ἅπαντες, καὶ παιδευώμεθα μὴ ἀμελεῖν τῆς τῶν θείων μελέτης... Ἰδοὺ πάλιν, “Ἔως ἔρχομαι, φησὶν. “Ὁρα πῶς αὐτὸν παραμυθεῖται...

...Εἴτα Παῦλος μὲν προσέχει τῇ ἀναγνώσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ μικρὰν ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν ὠφέλειαν καρπώσασθαι· ἡμεῖς δὲ ῥαθυμοῦμεν;

The key word is μελέτη — study, diligent exercise, meditation — and the telling move is the extension: *let us all* be instructed not to neglect it.¹⁸ For Chrysostom the verse commands what every Christian owes the Scriptures, which is precisely why it cannot be for him a rubric assigning a liturgical function to one officer. And Chrysostom knew the liturgical function intimately. In his nineteenth homily on Acts he describes it — and in the same breath cites our verse, in a way that shows exactly where he drew the line:

Κοινὸς διάκονος, ἔστηκεν ὁ διάκονος μέγα βοῶν καὶ λέγων· Πρόσχωμεν... Μετ’ ἐκείνον ἄρχεται ὁ ἀναγνώστης τῆς προφητείας Ἡσαΐου... Τί Τιμοθέου ἴσον; Ἄλλ’ ὅμως καὶ ἐκεῖν’ ἰσὺς γράφων ὁ Παῦλος ἔλεγε· Πρόσσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει... Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν, οὐκ ἐστὶν ἔξαντληθῆναι ποτε τὸν νοὸν τῶν Γραφῶν· πηγὴ τίς ἐστὶν οὐκ ἔχουσα πέρας.

“Till I come, give attendance to the reading, to the exhortation, to the teaching.” He commands Timothy to attend to reading. Let us all hear, and be instructed not to neglect the *study* (μελέτη) of the divine [writings]... Behold again, “Till I come,” he says. See how he consoles him...

Is Paul, then, to attend to reading — for it is no small benefit that is reaped from the Scriptures — while we are indolent?

In common the deacon stands, crying aloud and saying, “Let us attend” ...After him the *reader* (ἀναγνώστης) begins the prophecy of Isaiah... What is equal to Timothy? Yet nevertheless, even to him Paul wrote, “Attend to the reading, to the exhortation” ...For it is not possible — it is not possible — ever to exhaust the sense of the Scriptures: it is a spring that has no limit.

There stands the fourth-century chancel in one paragraph: a deacon bidding attention, a lector — ἀναγνώστης, the technical office-noun — reading Isaiah, a bored congregation, and a preacher scolding them. And when Chrysostom reaches for 1 Timothy 4:13, he does not reach for it to explain the lector’s office. He reaches for it *a fortiori*, over the lector’s head, at the congregation: if even Timothy was told to keep at the reading, because Scripture is a bottomless well, how much more you. The two words — ἀνάγνωσις, Timothy’s reading; ἀναγνώστης, the church’s reader — stand in the same paragraph of his Greek and are never identified.¹⁹

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, Hom. 13 (on 4:11–16), Greek text in Frederick Field, *Ioannis Chrysostomi Interpretatio Omnium Epistularum Paulinarum*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Parker; Rivington, 1861), 104–5 (= PG 62:565–66); English adapted from NPNF¹ 13. A few lines later Chrysostom glosses the noun himself: τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ τῶν θείων γραφῶν — “the reading, that is, of the divine Scriptures” — Scripture supplied as the object, the public setting never mentioned.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*, Hom. 19 (PG 60:156); English adapted from NPNF¹ 11. This passage is the closest thing to a patristic connection between 1 Tim. 4:13 and the liturgical lection, and it is a homiletical application, not an exegesis: Chrysostom’s stated exegesis of the verse (Hom. 13 on 1 Timothy,

Theodoret, the learned bishop of Cyrus in Syria, draws the same lesson with a flourish: “From this it is possible to learn that it is fitting for us too to contribute the labor (πόνος), and so to receive the grace of the Spirit. For the teacher [Paul] commanded even the thrice-blessed Timothy, spiritual though he was, to attend to reading.”²⁰ The medieval West said nothing different. Thomas Aquinas, with his usual economy: Timothy is made fit to teach by two things, “by reading, *in which he acquires knowledge (in qua acquirit scientiam)*, and by practice, in which he becomes ready. And so he says, ‘till I come, attend to reading’ — namely, of the holy books,” with 1 Maccabees 12:9 (the holy books as solace) and John 5:39 (“search the Scriptures”) as the proofs.²¹ And Erasmus, the finest philologist of his age, paraphrased the verse in 1523 with a sentence that deserves to be famous in this discussion: *Pro nostra uoce sit tibi sacra lectio* — “Let the sacred reading stand to you in place of our voice: teach according to it, if anything goes astray; exhort according to the same, if you see any growing slack.”²² Reading is what the absent apostle’s letter *gives* Timothy; teaching and exhorting are what Timothy does with it. There is no congregation in the sentence.

That is the whole surviving ancient and medieval record: Origen, Pseudo-Ignatius, Chrysostom, Theodore, Theodoret, the Byzantine catenae and commentators from the “Oecumenius” scholia to Theophylact of Ohrid, Ambrosiaster, the Glossa in all its layers, Lombard, Aquinas, Lyra, and on into Cajetan, Bullinger, Hyperius, and Calvin — every classifiable interpreter for fourteen centuries read τῇ ἀναγνώσει as Timothy’s own reading and study, ordered to his teaching of others. Much of this unanimity, to be sure, is Chrysostom’s voice carried down his tradition — breadth of transmission more than a chorus of independent judges — but the transmission itself has evidential force, and at one point it becomes an argument no silence could supply: the same catena that glosses our verse as study uses the very noun, five pages earlier, of the liturgical lection — Theodore, on 1 Timothy 3:13, describing the church’s lectors: οἱ μὲν τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν ἐκτελοῦσιν, “some perform the reading.” The tradition possessed the public sense, used it in the chapter before, and withheld it here. That is not silence;

above) is Timothy’s study, and Krauter, “1 Tim 4:13,” 221, adds *De sacerdotio* 4.8 to the same side of his ledger.

²⁰Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio epistolae I ad Timotheum*, on 4:13 (PG 82:816): Καὶ ἐντεῦθεν ἔστι μαθεῖν, ὡς καὶ ἡμᾶς προσήκει συνεισφέρειν τὸν πόνον...Καὶ γὰρ τῷ τρισμακαρίῳ Τιμοθέῳ πνευματικῶ ὄντι τῇ ἀναγνώσει προσέχειν ἐκέλευσεν ὁ διδάσκαλος. Translation mine.

²¹Thomas Aquinas, *Super primam epistolam ad Timotheum lectura*, cap. 4, lect. 3 (Marietti §87891, Corpus Thomisticum). Translation mine. Nicholas of Lyra’s *Postilla* runs the same way: the reading is “of the law, the prophets, and the gospel,” and what is acquired in study is then dispensed to the people in exhortation (*quantum ad agenda*) and teaching (*quantum ad credenda*).

²²Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in epistolam Pauli ad Timotheum priorem* (Basel: Froben, 1523), on 4:13 (Erasmus writing in Paul’s voice). His *Annotationes*, in the final 1555 recension, pass over verse 13 in total silence — the lemmata run from 4:12 directly to 4:14 — which is its own testimony: the greatest textual scholar of the sixteenth century found nothing in the verse that needed explaining. Verified against the Basel printings (BSB, Munich).

that is capacity, declined.²³²⁴ Not one connects the verse to the lector, the assembly, or the question of who may read in church — although lectors read in their churches every week, and although several of them (Chrysostom above all) wrote about those lectors elsewhere. After the catena's lector-sentence, that silence needs no psychology: the connection was available, and it was not made.

For fourteen hundred years, everyone who read this verse saw a pastor at his desk. Then, on a Monday morning in Lent of 1528, somebody saw a lectern.

A CLASSROOM IN WITTENBERG

The scholar who first traced the public-reading interpretation to its source is Stefan Krauter of Zürich, in an essay published in 2025. His chain begins in print in 1540, with Caspar Cruciger the Elder, Luther's junior colleague, whose Wittenberg lectures on 1 Timothy open their comment on our verse this way: "This passage first of all refutes the fanatic spirits (*fanaticos spiritus*), who imagine that studies of doctrine are useless and that illuminations are to be sought from the Holy Spirit alone... *Reading is both private study and the public exercising of the Church by reading out and reciting the text of Scripture.*"²⁵ That is the innovation, one clause long: for the first time in the surviving record, the public reading of the congregation enters the verse — *added to* private study, not put in its place, and deployed against the enthusiasts who despised the external Word. Cruciger spends the rest of the note on preaching; the new clause is an aside he never argues.

But Cruciger was not the origin. He was the echo. Krauter, working from the

²³Theophylact of Ohrid, *Expositio in ep. I ad Timotheum*, on 4:13 (PG 125:59–60): τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῶν θεῶν γραφῶν... ἀναγίνωσκε τὰς Γραφάς — the reading standing in for the absent teacher; the "Oecumenius" catena on 4:13 (PG 119:171–72); Cramer, *Catenae Graecorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum* (Oxford, 1844), 7:35–36, carrying Chrysostomic material and Theodore of Mopsuestia — whose lector-sentence on 3:13 stands in the same catena (7:30). All sighted in Greek for this study. One Byzantine door stays shut for want of a printed page: Euthymius Zigabenus, whose Pauline commentary (ed. Kalogeras, Athens, 1887) is not accessibly digitized.

²⁴Cajetan (1532): *ad pascendum teipsum*, "to feed yourself"; Bullinger (on the verse, with an argument from 2 Tim. 3:15: if Timothy, trained in Scripture from childhood, needed the command, how much more the clergy of today); Hyperius (1582); Calvin (1548): "Woe then to the slothfulness of those who do not peruse the oracles of the Holy Spirit by day and night, in order to learn from them how to discharge their office" (CTS ed., 114). See Krauter, "1 Tim 4:13," 222–24, whose survey of the medievals this study verified and extended. The single possible ancient exception is Pelagius, whose comment begins *fac legi* — "cause to be read" — a causative that could imply Timothy arranging a reading rather than doing his own; Krauter (222, citing Souter's edition, 492) examines and rejects the public construal. One ambiguous Pelagian jussive is the entire ancient harvest for the modern consensus.

²⁵Caspar Cruciger the Elder, *In epistolam Pauli ad Timotheum priorem Commentarius, dictatus in scola Witenbergensi* (Strasbourg: Crato Mylius, 1540), 178: "Hic locus primum refutat fanaticos spiritus... Lectio est, & priuatum studium, & publice exercere Ecclesiam, legendo & recitando textum Scripturae." Verified against the page images of both the 1540 first printing (VD16 C 5851) and the 1542 reprint (VD16 C 5852); the passage sits on p. 178 in both. Krauter, "1 Tim 4:13," 224–25, cites the 1542 printing and rightly observes that Cruciger "combines, without elaborating, both possible understandings."

printed tradition, could not have seen what lies in volume 26 of the Weimar edition, in lecture notes that no exegete between the sixteenth century and the twentieth ever read — because they were not published until 1909. On the second of March, 1528, Martin Luther lectured on this verse in Wittenberg, and the pen of Georg Rörer, Luther's tireless amanuensis, took down what he said, in the macaronic Latin-German of the lecture hall:

'Dum venio.' Da komt ein feiner text,
notandus. 'Lectio': non solum privatam
putat sed publicam, ut nos legimus; qui pro
privata, ist auch gut; sed sequencia de
publico, quia exhortatio etc. sunt publicae...
legere est nihil aliud quam pronunciare ex
libris... Ergo male dicunt Schwermeri.
Paulus instituit lectionem in ecclesia, ergo est
utilitas in ea, potest venire spiritus sanctus et
salus, alioqui non instituisset... mandat
Episcopo ipsi, qui minime indiget apud se et
tamen debet sich halten zur leßen. Non
putes dici de auditoribus, i.e. exhibe te ad
legendum, halt dich dazu, das du liesest.

"Until I come." Here comes a fine text,
worth noting. "Reading": he means not
only private but *public* reading, the way we
read [in church]; whoever takes it of private
reading, that is good too — but what follows
is about the public, because "exhortation"
and the rest are public... To read is nothing
else than to recite aloud out of books...
Therefore the fanatics (*Schwärmer*) speak
wrongly. Paul *instituted* the reading in the
church; therefore there is benefit in it; the
Holy Spirit and salvation can come through
it, or he would not have instituted it... He
gives the command to the bishop himself,
who least needs it for his own sake, and who
nevertheless must keep himself to the
reading. Do not suppose it is said of the
hearers — that is: present yourself to the
reading; keep at it, that *you* read.

There it is: the earliest public-reading interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:13 that the historical record contains, datable to a single classroom hour, and it is Luther's own. Let the claim be carried at its exact weight, no more: it concerns ἀνάγνωσις — the ancients had long taken the *exhortation* and *teaching* of the verse publicly enough; it concerns the primary sense — Luther keeps the private reading as "also good"; it concerns the commentary record — Chrysostom's homiletical juxtaposition in the Acts sermon is another kind of thing; and it concerns the record that survives, in which Zigabenus remains unexamined. Within those bounds it stands, and this study went looking for its refutation in the one place neither Krauter nor anyone else had checked.²⁶ Cruciger, lecturing on the same epistle twelve years later and opening with the same *fanatici spir-*

²⁶Martin Luther, *Vorlesung über den 1. Timotheusbrief* (1528), WA 26:81,38–82,34; the date-box "2. Martii" stands at 81,6. The text is Rörer's transcript (Jena, Cod. Bos. q. 24), first printed in 1909 — as the Weimar editors note, "Hier wird diese selbst nun zum erstenmal dargeboten" (WA 26:2). English translation mine. Krauter does not examine WA 26; the identification of Luther as the interpretation's source, twelve years before Cruciger, is offered here as a modest correction to his otherwise persuasive chain — a correction that strengthens rather than weakens his larger thesis, since lecture notes unpublished until 1909 could not have transmitted the reading to Balduin, Bengel, or Holtzmann. The transmission from Luther to Cruciger was personal and Wittenbergian, not textual.

itus, is compressing his senior colleague.

Two things about Luther's comment need to be seen clearly, because everything afterward depends on them.

First, *whom Luther is fighting*. The year is 1528. Thomas Müntzer, the revolutionary preacher of the Peasants' War, is three years dead; the enthusiasts — Luther names them in the next breath: "a wondrous spirit is in these fanatical men; Thomas began it" — had taught that the external Word is a dead letter and the Spirit teaches without means. Rörer's transcript preserves the slogan Luther threw back at them: *das testimonium in meiner ynerlickeit satis mihi* — "the testimony in my *inwardness* is enough for me" — and the Weimar editors trace the sentence home. It is Andreas Karlstadt's — Luther's senior Wittenberg colleague turned radical — from his *Dialogus* of 1524: "I will have my testimony from the spirit in my inwardness (*in meyner inwendigkeyt*), which Christ has promised." Luther had already spent a treatise on that inwardness — "the spirit, the spirit, the spirit must do it *inwardly*," he mimics, while a handful of water, and bread and wine, are despised.²⁷ Against them Luther makes this verse prove that the public reading of Scripture is *instituted by the apostle* — that God has bound himself to the external Word read aloud, "the Holy Spirit and salvation can come through it." The verse, in Luther's hands, is a weapon *for* the lectern against those who would silence it. And the one directive he draws about persons runs toward performance: the command lands on the *bishop* himself, "who least needs it" — present yourself to the reading, keep at it, that *you* read. That is a genuine handhold for those who want the pastor at the lectern, and it should be granted in full. But mark precisely what it is not. Nowhere in the lecture does Luther fence the reading off as the bishop's prerogative, exclude another reader, or so much as raise the question of who else may read; his point against the hearers is that the bishop may not hold himself *above* the reading, not that others stand below it. And Luther keeps the door open behind him: whoever takes the verse of private reading, "*ist auch gut*" — that is good too.

Second, *what Luther's reading is, historically considered*. Here honesty requires a double judgment, and the reader may hold both halves at once. Read in the best way, Luther did what he always did with Scripture: he applied the living verse to the crisis in front of him. The church of 1528 was not in danger of pastors reading too little at their desks; it was in danger of prophets who despised the read Word altogether, and Luther heard in Paul's charge to Timothy the answer to them. That is application, and it was pastorally true. Read in the worst way — and here the syntax itself forbids the harshest

²⁷WA 26:82,15, page image sighted, with the marginal gloss above the line: *dat omnia; meine[t] hab[e]re Euangelium, non indeo scriptura* — "it gives everything; he thinks he has the Gospel and needs no Scripture." The Weimar editors' note refers to WA 18:136 n. 2 (sighted), where Karlstadt's sentence is quoted from the *Dialogus*, fol. c — with the editors' dry addendum that on the following leaf "the word 'Spirit' then occurs ten more times" — and the parody quoted here (*der geyst, der geyst, der geyst mus es ynnwendig thun*) stands in the text of *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525) directly above that note.

verdict — Luther did not discard the received reading at all. *Non solum privatam... sed publicam* is an expansion formula: it presupposes the private sense and builds upon it, and “whoever takes it of private reading, that is good too” is the inherited interpretation left standing in possession. What Luther supplied on his own authority was the addition, warranted by nothing weightier than the companion nouns; and the sterner judgment belongs less to his expansion than to what the tradition would do with it, for the *both* he taught would later quietly lose its first half, and no one would ever argue the loss. Both readings of Luther are correct. The tragedy of this verse’s later history is that the tradition kept the addition, lost the concession, and forgot the polemical occasion that had justified the whole — kept half of Luther’s conclusion and none of Luther’s enemy.

FROM THE LECTURE HALL TO THE BIBLES

What happened next is a study in how an aside becomes an axiom.

For a century, nothing. Calvin in 1548 read the verse of the pastor’s “diligent reading of the Scriptures” day and night, with no trace of the Wittenberg novelty.²⁸ The Lutheran dogmaticians held the old line: the annotations of Johann Gerhard, the greatest of them, commend to Timothy “assiduous reading of Holy Scripture, *so that from it he may learn what he is to teach others*” — reading is Timothy’s own; exhortation and teaching are “namely, of others.”²⁹

The first man to treat the question as a question was Friedrich Balduin of Wittenberg, Cruciger’s successor at four generations’ remove, in lectures printed after his death in 1627. Balduin knew the public-reading interpretation — “some” held it, he reports — and he was, so far as the record shows, the first to bring Acts 13:15 and 2 Corinthians 3:14 into its service, the two proof-texts on which the entire modern consensus still rests. Having stated the case better than its friends had, he rejected it:

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Timothy* (1548), on 4:13 (CTS trans., *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Edinburgh, 1856], 114, sighted).

²⁹ Johann Gerhard, *Adnotationes ad utramque D. Pauli ad Timotheum epistolam*, ed. J. E. Gerhard (Jena: Neuenhahn, 1666), 76: “commendat ei assiduam lectionem Scripturæ sacræ, ut ex ea discat, quod alios doceat.” Verified from the page image. The note printed at the verse in Abraham Calov’s *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (Frankfurt: Wust, 1676), 2:978, runs the same way — “Be assiduous in reading the Prophets, the Psalms, and the other books” — and then, remarkably, assigns the public/private line *inside* the triad in exactly the opposite place from the later consensus: exhortation is “admonishing others *privately*,” teaching is “teaching publicly.”

In tali ergo lectione Timotheum assiduum esse jubere putant Apostolum, & negari non potest, vocem Graecam de lectione publica usurpari, Act. 13, 15. & 2. Cor. 3, 14. sed ad privata potius studia Timothei eam referimus, quia *attendere* jubet *lectioni*, quae res crebram requirit repetitionem & diligentem meditationem; id quod in publica lectione, quae plerumque cursoria est, fieri non potest.

They think, then, that the Apostle is ordering Timothy to be assiduous in reading of that [public] kind — and it cannot be denied that the Greek word is used of public reading, Acts 13:15 and 2 Cor. 3:14. But we refer it rather to Timothy's private studies, because he orders him to *attend* to *reading*, a thing that requires frequent repetition and diligent meditation — which cannot happen in public reading, which is for the most part cursory.

Note the shape of the argument: Balduin *concedes the lexical point* — the word can mean public reading — and decides the verse on the verb, exactly the ground surveyed above. Public lection is *cursoria*, a passing through; what Paul commands is a dwelling. And Balduin's positive account is not private devotion in a pietist key but ministerial preparation: read privately "so that what [the Scriptures] say can be applied to use in the public office."³⁰

So stood the matter at the death of Lutheran orthodoxy's great exegete: the public-reading interpretation existed, had been examined once, and had lost. What carried it to victory was not a better argument. It was the slow abrasion of repetition. The Puritan Matthew Poole's annotations (1685) give a flat "both for thy own instruction and for the edification of others"; Matthew Henry's continuators (1721) float "it may be meant of the public reading of the scriptures"; and in 1742 the *Gnomon* of Johann Albrecht Bengel of Württemberg — the most widely used exegetical handbook of the century — disposed of the question in two words: τῇ ἀναγνώσει, *lectioni*) *Scripture sacrae, in ecclesia*. Of Holy Scripture, *in church*. No argument. No proof-text. No sign the point had ever been contested. And notice what else the two words do: they drop the other half. Luther's *non solum... sed* and Cruciger's *et... et* had carried the private reading forward inside the public one; in Bengel the both has silently become *only*, and the amputation would never afterward be noticed, let alone defended. The record thus holds a curious asymmetry: the only examined verdicts the early-modern chain contains — Balduin's — went to the study-reading; the public-only reading that every modern Bible now prints was never once argued for, by anyone, at any point.³¹

³⁰ Friedrich Balduin, *Commentarius in omnes epistolas beati apostoli Pauli* (Frankfurt a.M.: Wust, 1691), 1332, verified from the page image (Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig). Balduin documents the *existence* of public lection generously — Origen on Joshua, Bucer's observation that the whole Bible was once read through to the people in a year, Gratian's *Decretum* (D.15) with its calendar of readings — which makes his refusal to find that practice in *this verse* the more striking. He was not skeptical of public reading; he was skeptical of the proof-text.

³¹ Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Tübingen: Schramm, 1742), 860, verified from the page image of the first edition; the unpaired closing parenthesis is Bengel's own, the *Gnomon*'s way of closing a lemma — here the Greek phrase with its Vulgate equivalent — before the comment begins. Bengel's two cross-references (1 Tim. 6:2; Rom. 12:7) support his pairing of exhortation and doctrine, not the

An interpretation that enters the tradition as a polemical aside, survives its first cross-examination only as the rejected alternative, and then reappears two generations later as a self-evident gloss, has not been proven. It has been *worn in*.

The eighteenth century still knew better, in places. The English Baptist John Gill (1748) rejected the synagogue analogy by name: the verse “is to be understood, not of the reading of the Scriptures in public... but in private, for his own use and service.”³² Albert Barnes, in the most widely read American commentary of the nineteenth century, conceded the word “may refer either to public or to private reading,” citing Acts 13:15 and 2 Cor. 3:14 like Balduin before him, and judged that “the more obvious interpretation here is to refer it to private reading, or to a careful perusal of those books which would qualify him for his public work” — indeed Barnes widened Timothy’s reading list beyond Scripture to “such other books as would be useful,” on the strength of Paul’s own quotations from the Greek poets.³³ But the critical tide had turned, and the 1850s settled the matter among the scholars. The Anglican Greek scholars W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, in their immensely popular *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (1851–52), printed “apply thyself to public reading” in its own translation of the verse, with a footnote ruling the other sense out: “not... reading in the sense of study, but reading aloud to others.” In 1856 Henry Alford, whose *Greek Testament* stood on the shelf of every educated English clergyman, adopted Bengel’s *scripturae sacrae, in ecclesia* and catalogued the private view as the superseded opinion of “Chrysostom, Grotius, Calvin”; the critical commentary of C. J. Ellicott — afterward chairman of the company that produced the Revised Version — prints “(public) reading of the Scriptures” as needing no defense; and a generation later H. D. M. Spence, in the popular commentary published under Ellicott’s name, gave the English reader the formula the pulpit still repeats: “The ‘reading’ was that public reading of Scripture in

words *in ecclesia*, which stand wholly undefended. Between Balduin’s page-long argument *against* the public reading and Bengel’s two-word assumption *of* it lies the entire shift, and the interval produced no new evidence — only Schomer (1700; Krauter, “1 Tim 4:13,” 225) and, later, Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, the Göttingen church historian, whose *Erklärung* of 1755 (Hamburg: Bohn, 411–12, sighted) gives the eighteenth century its fullest performance-picture: Paul, while present, himself read, exhorted, and taught in the assemblies; departing, he handed this *Lehr- und Lesearbeit* to Timothy, who was, in the apostle’s absence, *der Vorleser und der ordentliche Lehrer der Gemeinde* — the congregation’s reader and regular teacher; and when self-appointed speakers arose at Ephesus and Timothy supposed he might fall silent among so many teachers, Paul “takes that notion from him”: keep at your reading, teaching, and exhorting until I come. Dedicated readers, Mosheim adds, were appointed only “in the following times”; at the beginning, apostles, their helpers, and the elders “filled the reader’s place themselves.” His supporting argument — “until I come” marks a time-bound deputyship, not a lifelong habit — cuts both ways in the modern debate, for a deputy’s office-bound task is a weak foundation for a standing universal mandate.

³² John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (1746–48), on 1 Tim. 4:13, sighted in a printed edition. John Wesley’s note (*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 1754; sighted in a later printing), “Give thyself to reading — Both publicly and privately,” shows the “both” reading settling into English annotation as an unremarkable default.

³³ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Thessalonians to Philemon*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–85), 169 (the epistles volumes first appeared in the 1840s). On Barnes’s exegesis the verse commands a pastor’s study habits — Greek classics included — and is not a liturgical rubric at all.

the congregation — a practice borrowed from the synagogue service.”³⁴ The capstone came in 1880, when Heinrich Julius Holtzmann of Strasbourg, the commanding figure of the era’s critical New Testament scholarship, reading the Pastorals as second-century church-order documents, found in our verse “a teaching office whose voice, apart from prayer and congregational singing, dominates the worship gatherings of Christianity.”³⁵ After Holtzmann came Bultmann’s dictionary article (1933), and after the dictionary came the translators: 1901, 1913, 1923, 1946. By the time the Revised Standard Version printed “the public reading of scripture,” the phrase was no longer a decision anyone remembered making.³⁶

No one has confirmed that verdict more authoritatively than the man best placed to deny it. William Mounce, New Testament chair of the ESV’s own translation committee, writes of this verse that the ESV “adds ‘public ... of Scripture.’ There is no Greek behind those words, not even a hint. My guess is that the ESV just kept the RSV at this point, and saying only ‘reading’ would not make sense. Reading what? Is this Timothy’s private devotional time or public ministry? All this requires interpretation.”³⁷ The chairman, guessing — his word — how his own Bible came by its

³⁴Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (People’s Edition, 1870), 817, translation and note sighted (first ed. 1851–52); Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (1856), 323, sighted — Alford at least quoted Chrysostom’s and Calvin’s own words before dismissing them, a candor his successors did not maintain; C. J. Ellicott, *The Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul* (1856), 62–63, sighted; H. D. M. Spence, in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (1878ff.), 199, sighted — the sentence commonly quoted as “Ellicott’s” belongs, by the volume’s own contributor list, to Spence.

³⁵H. J. Holtzmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1880), 250: “Ein Lehramt, dessen Stimme, von Gebet und Gemeindengesang abgesehen, die gottesdienstlichen Versammlungen der Christenheit beherrscht.” Krauter, “1 Tim 4:13,” 222, with the concluding assessment at 227–28, identifies Holtzmann as the tipping point after which the public-office reading “sets the tone,” even in confessional commentaries. There is a lesson worth pausing over: the reading now defended in confessional circles as the conservative position reached its dominance through a critical scholarship that regarded the epistle as pseudonymous and read it as an early catholic church-order manual.

³⁶The Synod’s own commission has since put this translation-history on record, in nearly these terms. A CTRC study document of 2025, revisiting the lay-lector question, notes of our verse that ἀναγινώσκω “can mean either ‘public reading’ or simply ‘reading,’” that “translators interpolate the phrase ‘of Scripture,’ which is not in the original Greek,” and that “prior to the RSV (1952), English translations simply had ‘to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine’ — Luther’s German, it adds, “also has only ‘reading’ (*Lesen*)” (CTRC, *Unity in Doctrine, Uniformity and Variety in Practice: A Study Document* [2025], case study 6, n. 46, printed in 2026 *Convention Workbook*, 248). Only the dating wants the correction this essay supplies: the interpolation is older than the RSV — Conybeare and Howson in 1851, the Twentieth Century New Testament in 1901, Goodspeed’s full phrase in 1923; the RSV canonized what the scholars’ wave had already assembled. And the note’s one warrant for reading Luther on the public side is AE 28:329 — the very pages whose English, as will appear below, supplies the word “public” where the transcript has none.

³⁷William D. Mounce, “The Myth of ‘Literal’ Translations (1 Tim 4:13),” *Monday with Mounce*, billmounce.com, sighted; cf. his “The Definite Article and 1 Timothy 4:13,” same series, sighted, both referencing the fuller argument of his *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46. On the articles: they are this argument’s whole weight, and they will not carry it to the lectern — Greek articles routinely mark known or habitual activities without naming any office; even taken as markers of fixed worship acts they do not identify the agent; Wohlenberg and Lenski built on the very same articles and arrived at lections without a lector; and Acts 13:15 and 2 Cor. 3:14 still carry the genitive object this verse lacks, so the parallel remains suggestive

phrase, and conceding that what it settles for the reader is an open question of interpretation. And let it be said plainly, since this essay has had occasion to complain of witnesses half-quoted: Mounce is no ally of its larger argument. He reads the verse of the public service, on the strength of the three definite articles marking fixed parts of a synagogue-shaped liturgy — Wohlenberg's argument, a century on — and the reader already knows where those same articles led in Wohlenberg's and Lenski's hands: to fixed parts of the congregation's worship, with the performer left unnamed.

The reach of the phrase can be measured by where it finally arrived. When Luther's 1528 lectures were put into English in 1973, the American Edition printed "the public reading of Scripture" into the lemma itself — where Rörer's transcript has the bare '*Lectio*': — and supplied "public" again at *institutio lectionis* and at *Primum attende lectioni*. The gloss had colonized the transcript of its own birth: Luther now argues, in English, toward a conclusion his verse already states.³⁸

Why did an interpretation that lost its only examined debate prevail without ever winning one? Krauter offers an observation worth its weight in argument: the commentators who clung to the old reading through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were, disproportionately, the pietists — Paul Anton, who gave the Pastoral Epistles their name and read our verse as the pastor's daily morning meditation; Johann Tobias Beck of Tübingen, nearly alone among the moderns in refusing the "until I come" objection. "This gives the traditional understanding," Krauter writes, "the reputation of being edifying and unscientific."³⁹ The private reading, that is, did not lose an argument; it acquired the wrong kind of friends. Tagged as the devotional man's exegesis at the very moment biblical scholarship was professionalizing, it became a reading no critical commentator could hold without sounding pious — and the public reading prevailed as the scientific alternative, "scientific" meaning, in Holtzmann's hands, pseudonymous, second-century, and concerned above all with the authority of the clergy. Neither camp in the present controversy should enjoy this history unexamined. The study-reading fell from favor in the company of pietists; the office-reading rose to favor in the company of critics who denied Paul wrote the letter. Company is an argument against neither. But whoever dismisses the old interpretation today because it sounds like pietism is repeating, at two centuries' distance, the very substitution of reputation for exegesis that manufactured the consensus he inherits.

rather than decisive.

³⁸ AE 28:328–30, cited for reference; the renderings of Luther in this essay are made directly from WA 26, whose volume is publicly scanned and may be checked by any reader. The same pages of the transcript show the lecture closing into "two kinds" of address — *duo genera praedicationis*, WA 26:82, 28–29, sighted — the seed of Cruciger's *duo genera concionum*, confirming the personal transmission argued above.

³⁹ Krauter, "1 Tim 4:13," 222 (Anton and Beck with nn. 25–26); the concluding assessment at 227–28: "While early pietistic interpreters still deviated, today, the interpretation of the reading minister has prevailed even in evangelical commentaries."

THE GERMAN MINORITY REPORT

The story told so far — study for fourteen centuries, then a Wittenberg aside worn smooth into a consensus — is Krauter's story, corrected at the headwater. But there is a second story running through the German conservative tradition, and it complicates the modern debate from a direction neither side expects. For even after the public *setting* of the verse had carried the day, the weightiest conservative commentators refused the step the restrictive argument needs most: that Timothy is the one doing the reading.

The refusal begins, quietly, inside the public-reading camp itself. J. J. van Oosterzee, the Utrecht professor writing in Lange's commentary (1861), glosses the verse as "the public reading of the holy Scriptures" on the synagogue pattern — and then frames Timothy's charge this way: "During the absence of the Apostle, no changes should take place in the wonted order of things. All must remain continuous with the old."⁴⁰ Timothy is the guardian of a standing order, not the performer of it. The verse, on this telling, assumes the congregation's reading as an existing institution and sets Timothy over its continuity.

Gustav Wohlenberg, writing in the conservative commentary series of the Erlangen New Testament scholar Theodor Zahn, made the refusal explicit. His treatment is four sentences long, and the decisive one reads:

Der Ausdruck *πρόσεχε* (vgl. *ἔπεχε* v. 16) nötigt, als Sinn anzunehmen, daß Tim. nicht sowohl ermahnt wird, sich selbst der Ausübung jener drei Tätigkeiten sorgsam zu befeßigen, als vielmehr scharf prüfend darauf acht zu geben, ob andere sie so, wie es sich gebührt, vollziehen. Tim. soll dort vor allem die *ἐτεροδιδασκαλοῦντες* oder die von ihnen Beeinflussten nicht zu Worte kommen und ihre blendenden, von der Heilswahrheit abführenden Märlein nicht vorbringen lassen.

The expression *πρόσεχε* (compare *ἔπεχε* in v. 16) compels us to take the sense to be that Timothy is *not so much* admonished to apply himself carefully to the exercise of those three activities himself, *as rather* to keep sharp, testing watch over whether others are performing them as is fitting. Timothy is above all not to let those who teach otherwise (*ἐτεροδιδασκαλοῦντες*), or those influenced by them, get a hearing there, nor let them bring forward their dazzling fables (*Märlein*) that lead away from saving truth.

Wohlenberg grants the public setting without reservation — the definite articles, he says, point to "definite functions of public worship" on the synagogue pattern, and his footnote cites the whole public-side dossier, Acts 13:15, Luke 4:16, Acts 15:21, 2 Cor. 3:14, Justin's *Apology*.⁴¹ And precisely within that public frame he reads the command

⁴⁰J. J. van Oosterzee, "The Two Epistles of Paul to Timothy," in *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. J. P. Lange, trans. E. A. Washburn and E. Harwood (1868), 53. His gloss on *πρόσεχε* is *da operam et curam* — bestow effort and care — not *lege*.

⁴¹Wohlenberg, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 3rd ed. (1923), 165 with n. 4. Translation mine. The first edition appeared in 1906; the reading is structurally embedded in the commentary (see the introduction's vocabulary list at p. 52, cited above), but page references here are to the third edition.

as *oversight*: Timothy's *πρόσεχε* is the inspector's attention, not the performer's. The "fables" are the *μῦθοι* of 1:4; the enemy is the false teacher angling for the congregation's ear; the charge is to keep him from getting it.

R. C. H. Lenski, the American Lutheran commentator, took Wohlenberg's reading — crediting him by name, complaining only that he "treats it all too briefly" — and hardened it into the boldest exegesis of the verse in the conservative literature. Timothy, traveling among the congregations as Paul's representative while Paul himself is on the road (Lenski renders *ἕως ἔρχομαι* "while I am journeying"), is directed

to pay close attention to "the reading" in the churches, i.e., to what lections are being read at the services. *Not that lections be read, still less that Timothy is to read them, but what lections are being read...* The present danger was that here and there some of the cranks and fanatics (1:4) and the foolish law teachers (1:7) might read or ask to have read as lections the Old Testament genealogies... This Timothy was not to allow.⁴²

Here is the assertion — and it deserves to be stated as the distinct thesis it is — that *Timothy is the maker and guardian of a proto-lectionary*: that what Paul commands is the doctrinal curation of the church's public reading, the setting and vetting of the propers, against enthusiasts who would fill the lection with genealogies and law. It is not a private-study reading; Lenski expressly sets that aside. It is not the modern public-performance reading; Lenski demolishes that in a subordinate clause. It is a third thing, with a shorter pedigree than the modern reader might guess — Mosheim, sometimes conscripted for it, belongs in fact to the performance camp, as his own page shows — but a real one: van Oosterzee had made Timothy curator of the "wonted order"; Wohlenberg made the oversight explicit; Lenski gave it its object, the lections themselves.⁴³ And notice what this stream does to the modern restrictive syllogism. These are the most conservative Lutheran exegetes in the modern record — Zahn's school and the Ohio Synod's great commentator, men with no brief whatever for liturgical innovation — and on their exegesis the verse cannot prove that the pastor must read the lessons, because on their exegesis *Timothy does not read the lessons*. Lenski's own

⁴²R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 642–44. Lenski's supporting arguments: the definite articles mark the churches' *existing* lections; and Paul has just said "teach" in v. 11 — "two orders to Timothy to teach personally can scarcely follow each other so closely," so v. 13 must concern others' activity. Lenski hardens Wohlenberg's comparative ("not so much... as rather") into an absolute ("still less that Timothy is to read them"), but the supervisory reading is squarely his source's.

⁴³Whether Lenski's rendering of *ἕως ἔρχομαι* as "while I am journeying" can stand is a fair question — most grammars allow the ordinary "until I come" — but his argument from the articles and from the doubled "teach" does not depend on it. And the ancient church would not have found Lenski's category strange: the Euthalian apparatus (of disputed date, fourth to seventh century) divides the very text of Scripture into numbered *ἀναγνώσεις* — for Acts, *ἀναγνώσεις εἰσὶν ἑξ*, "the lessons are sixteen" — the noun of our verse serving as the technical term for an appointed pericope (Euthalius Diaconus, prologue and apparatus to Acts, PG 85:633 (prologue), 636–37 (the list of lessons, which Zacagni notes survives in a single manuscript); his *verb*, *ἀναγνῶναι κατὰ προσώδιον*, means to read with correct phrasing — the lesson-division lives in the noun).

citation of Justin has the lector reading and “a presbyter or some other person” exhorting; his Timothy stands above the whole arrangement, watching what is read, by whomever it is read.

One more witness belongs in this section, and his presence here is the quiet joke of the whole history. In 1543, fifteen years after the Wittenberg lecture, Luther wrote a preface for Johann Spangenberg’s postil, exhorting pastors and preachers — and quoted our verse:

Darumb heisst: Wache, studire, *Attende lectioni*. Furwar, du kanst nicht zu viel jnn der Schrifft lesen, Und was du liesest, kanstu nicht zu wol lesen, Und was du wol liesest, kanstu nicht zu wol verstehen... Betet, leset, studirt, seid vleissig...

Therefore it says: Watch, study, *Attend to the reading*. Truly, you cannot read too much in Scripture, and what you read you cannot read too well, and what you read well you cannot understand too well... Pray, read, study, be diligent...

The inventor of the public-reading interpretation, addressing the clergy near the end of his life, deploys the same verse in its old sense without a backward glance: *Attende lectioni* as the pastor’s charge to unending personal study.⁴⁴ Luther, in other words, is the one interpreter in the whole record who attests *both* readings — public in 1528, when the fanatics were the enemy; study in 1543, when clerical sloth was. And on the evidence of the lecture itself this is no double life at all: the man who said *non solum privatam sed publicam* held the whole reading from the start, and the two attestations are its two halves surfacing as the need of the hour selected them. Neither camp in the present controversy gets to conscript him whole. The man is bigger than the proof-text his heirs carved from half of him.

WHO READ IN CHURCH: A DIFFERENT QUESTION

Everything to this point has concerned the history of *exegesis* — what the church understood this verse to say. The history of *practice* — who actually stood and read in the church’s assemblies — is a different question, and the two must not be allowed to answer for each other. A church may do rightly what it proves from the wrong text; a text may fail as a proof while the practice it is conscripted for stands firm on other ground. Here, then, is the practice, told on its own terms; the reader will notice that it declines to cooperate fully with either side of the present debate.

The earliest description of Christian worship we possess already shows a division of labor. Justin Martyr, Rome, about 155:

⁴⁴Martin Luther, preface to Johann Spangenberg, *Postilla Deutsch* (1543), WA 53:218,19–28 (= St. Louis ed. XIV:397–98), sighted from the page: the print runs “Darumb heisst,” and the Weimar margin tags the passage 1 Tim. 4,16 — though Luther’s quoted *Attende lectioni* is the Vulgate wording of v. 13 verbatim. Translation mine. The passage circulated for centuries as a free-standing exhortation — Calov set it at the head of his German Bible’s dedication — and reached the Missouri Synod through P. E. Kretzmann’s *Popular Commentary* (1921), which quotes it at this verse with the words “as Luther puts it.”

καὶ τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων ἢ τὰ
συγγράμματα τῶν προφητῶν ἀναγινώσκεται,
μέχρις ἐγχωρεῖ. εἴτα παυσάμενου τοῦ
ἀναγινώσκοντος ὁ προεστὼς διὰ λόγου τὴν
νουθεσίαν καὶ πρόκλησιν τῆς τῶν καλῶν
τούτων μιμήσεως ποιεῖται.

...and the memoirs of the apostles or the
writings of the prophets are read, as long as
time permits; then, when the reader has
ceased, the president verbally instructs, and
exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

The one reading (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων) and the one presiding (ὁ προεστὼς) are two different people. That is all Justin says. He does not tell us the reader's rank, or how he was chosen, or whether he was what a later age would call a layman; the differentiation of function is primitive, and the reader's *status* is simply not stated.⁴⁵

Within two generations the function has hardened into a named rung. Tertullian of Carthage, the first great Christian voice in Latin, mocking the heretics' casual way with office about 203: "Today one man is their bishop, tomorrow another; today he is a deacon who tomorrow is a reader (*hodie diaconus qui cras lector*); today he is a presbyter who tomorrow is a layman."⁴⁶ At Carthage in 250, the bishop Cyprian makes confessors — men whose voices had confessed Christ under torture — lecturers, and sets them "on the pulpit, that is, on the tribunal of the church," to read "the precepts and Gospel of the Lord"; he marks them for future promotion to the presbyterate and, meanwhile, gives them a presbyter's share of the monthly support.⁴⁷ A year later the bishop of Rome, enumerating his clergy, counts forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes, and fifty-two exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers together.⁴⁸

Was this reader ordained? The ancient church could not agree with itself. The church-order tradition associated with Hippolytus rules that "the reader is appointed by the bishop's giving him the book, *for he is not ordained*"; the Apostolic Constitutions — reworking that very tradition in Syria about 380 — command the opposite: "Ordain a reader by laying your hands upon him," with a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit and the example of Ezra.⁴⁹ Regions differed; documents in the same family con-

⁴⁵Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 67 (ANF 1); Greek after E. J. Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914), 75, sighted. Note that Justin uses the bare participle, not the later office-title ἀναγνώστης.

⁴⁶Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41. The taunt only lands if, among the orthodox, *lector* was a recognized grade with its own dignity, below deacon and distinct from *laicus*.

⁴⁷Cyprian, *Epistles* 38–39 (Oxford numbering; ANF "Epistles 32–33"); cf. Ep. 29, where readers are examined as men "in preparation for the clerical office." Two details deserve emphasis: the lectorate is a proving-ground on a clerical track, not a volunteer rota; and at Carthage in 250 the reader reads *Gospel* content — the later reservation of the Gospel to higher orders had not yet occurred to anyone.

⁴⁸Cornelius of Rome, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VI.43.11.

⁴⁹*Apostolic Tradition* §11 (Botte) / ch. 12 (Easton), a text of disputed date and composite character whose reader-chapter, it should be said plainly, does not survive in the Latin witness at all — the famous *non enim ordinatur* is an editorial reconstruction from the Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic daughter versions; *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.22 — and the full prayer says more than the command: the reader "is to be entrusted to read Your Holy Scriptures to Your people"; he receives "Your Holy Spirit, the prophetic Spirit"; and he serves so as to "be declared worthy of a higher degree" — the lectorate as a rung, attested from inside its own

tradict each other; and the office itself drifted downward in age until it became, in the canon law of the West, conferrable on boys of seven — Pope Siricius already legislates in 385 that the child vowed to the church “from his infancy” is to be baptized before puberty and “joined to the ministry of the readers,” passing upward only at adolescence.⁵⁰ The honest summary is that the ancient lector will not serve as a mascot for either side of the modern argument: he was neither a modern lay volunteer nor an ordained pastor, his ordination was affirmed in one province and denied in another, and he was as likely to be a promising boy as a grown man. Whoever says “the early church had lay readers” and whoever says “the readers were clergy” is each holding one document and ignoring another.

Two developments in this history *are* datable, and both matter. The first is the reservation of the Gospel. The Apostolic Constitutions assign the reader everything — Law, Prophets, Acts, Epistles — “and afterwards let a deacon or a presbyter read the Gospels,” all standing in silence.⁵¹ Sozomen, the fifth-century church historian, reports the assignments as cheerful local variety: in Alexandria the archdeacon alone reads the Gospel, elsewhere deacons, “in many churches only the priests; while on noted days it is read by the bishops, as at Constantinople on the first day of Easter” — and he offers this diversity as proof that churches agreeing in essentials need not match their customs.⁵² The Gospel-reservation, in short, is real, ancient in root, and *developmental* in character — the one element of the modern intuition that the practice-history

ordination prayer. The Gallic *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua* (c. 475) continues the book-without-hands model (Mansi III:951, sighted: the bishop hands over the codex; of the subdeacon the neighboring canon says outright *manus impositionem non accipit*). The dispute over the *Apostolic Tradition*’s date and provenance — reported here, not adjudicated — runs between the composite view of Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips (*The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, 2002) and the traditional attribution defended in revised form by Alistair Stewart.

⁵⁰ Siricius, decretal to Himerius of Tarragona (385), cap. 9, §13 (PL 13:1142–43, sighted): *lectorum debet ministerio sociari*; cf. the young Julian — the future apostate emperor — serving as reader at Nicomedia in the 340s (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* III.1). The child-lectorate is no inference from one decretal: Zosimus keeps church-vowed boys among the readers to age twenty (*Ep.* 9.3); Justinian had to legislate a *floor* of eighteen (Nov. 123), which tells us how young practice ran; Ennodius’s Epiphanius read from about age eight; and Victor of Vita counts *lectores infantuli* — infant readers — among the exiled clergy of Carthage (I.9). The medieval canonists settled at age seven; the lectorate became the boy’s first step on the clerical ladder, “a stepping-stone to major orders, and a memory of early days,” as Adrian Fortescue concedes, adding of the office generally that it, “as all minor orders,” “may be supplied by a layman” (“Lector,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 [New York: Robert Appleton, 1910], sighted).

⁵¹ *Apostolic Constitutions* II.57.

⁵² Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* VII.19. Gregory the Great’s Roman synod of 5 July 595, canon 1 (PL 77:1335–36 = *Reg.* V.57a, sighted in the Latin), restricted the ministers of the altar to “only the office of the Gospel lesson within the solemnities of the Mass,” assigning *reliquas lectiones*, the remaining lessons, to subdeacons “or, if necessity require, the minor orders” — and its stated occasion is disciplinary, not hierarchical: deacons were being recruited for beautiful voices rather than for life and preaching, and the Gospel-restriction is the remedy. *Ordo Romanus I* (consulted in translation) then gives the deacon’s Gospel its incense, candles, and procession while the subdeacon reads the Epistle plainly. The trajectory from the fourth century to the eighth is a steady escalation of the Gospel’s clerical and ceremonial weight — a genuine development, not an apostolic datum, as Cyprian’s Gospel-reading lectors of 250 show.

genuinely supports, and it supports it as venerable custom, not as dominical law.

The second datable development is the one the modern debate has forgotten entirely: the “one man reads everything” service — the pattern in which the presiding minister performs all the lessons himself — is not the ancient shape of Christian worship at all. It is the shape of the medieval *private Mass*, which grew from the eighth century onward and flowered at Cluny in the eleventh: many priest-monks, each bound to celebrate daily, without enough deacons and subdeacons to staff every altar, absorbed the assisting roles into the celebrant for convenience. Out of the private Mass grew the Low Mass, and out of the Low Mass grew the assumption that a service simply *is* one robed man doing everything.⁵³ When a modern churchman feels in his bones that the pastor reading every lesson is “the traditional practice,” the tradition he is feeling is not the apostles’. It is the Low Mass — a practice the Lutheran Reformation, of all movements, has the least standing to canonize — seconded by the plain arithmetic of the village parish, where one pastor reads every word because there is no one else to read it. That necessity was real, and it asks no apology; but the Lutherans who lived under it never mistook it for a rubric. Where even the pastor was wanting, a layman led the reading service, and no one thought the lessons profaned.⁵⁴

THE LUTHERAN PATTERN: TWO SERVICES, TWO ANSWERS

What, then, did the Lutheran Reformation actually do with the lectern? The question has a precise answer, because the sixteenth-century church orders — the *Kirchenordnungen* that regulated worship territory by territory — wrote it down. And the answer has a shape nobody in the present controversy quite wants: the Reformers ran *two* readerships at once, and never confused them.

In the chief Sunday service — the Mass, the *Hauptgottesdienst* — the lessons belong to the clergy. Luther’s *Formula Missae* (1523) does not even name the reader, editing the received rite’s pericopes without touching its personnel; his German Mass (1526) has “the priest” chant the Collect and then, facing the people, the Epistle and the Gospel.⁵⁵

⁵³ Josef A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite (Missarum Sollemnia)*, trans. F. A. Brunner (New York: Benziger, 1951–55), 1:212–33 on the private Mass, 1:227 on the Cluniac lay-brother server, 1:131 on the Low Mass’s growth; the absorption of both readings into the celebrant at 1:106 — completed, on Jungmann’s dating, only in the thirteenth century, which sharpens the point. Every earlier witness — Justin, Tertullian, Cyprian, the church orders — shows differentiated ministers.

⁵⁴ The vacancy reader runs deep in Lutheran practice: the Dutch Lutheran congregations of New Netherland were holding lay-led reading services by 1657 — the model the Berkenmeyer constitution would later regularize (on which see below) — and the pattern recurs wherever Lutherans outran their clergy: the *Lehrer* who led reading services in the villages of South Prussia into the nineteenth century, and the 1806 constitution of Hopeful Church in Boone County, Kentucky, providing the same. The Prussian and Kentucky examples were supplied by Lawrence R. Rast Jr., correspondence with the author.

⁵⁵ Luther, *Formula Missae* (1523), WA 12:205–20; *Deutsche Messe* (1526), WA 19. The German Mass’s Epistle and Gospel rubrics are grammatically elliptical — “Then the Epistle, in the eighth tone... Then is read the Gospel” — with the priest of the Collect rubric as the natural continuing subject; no other minister is

The great Braunschweig order of 1528 — drafted by Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's own pastor and the Reformation's master organizer of territorial churches, and the model for a whole family of North German orders — is explicit twice over:

Dar vp leset de prester eyne dusesche
Collecta, vnde dat volk antwerdet Amen.
Denne keret sik de prester tom volke vnde
left de Epistele also: So scriffte sunte Pawel
to den Romern im teynden Capitele... Denne
keret sick de prester wedder vmme tom
volke, vnde left dat Euangelion also: So
scriffte sunte Joannes am sosten Capitele...

Thereupon *the priest* reads a German collect,
and the people answer Amen. Then *the priest*
turns to the people and reads *the Epistle* thus:
“So writes St. Paul to the Romans in the
tenth chapter”... Then *the priest* turns again
toward the people and reads *the Gospel* thus:
“So writes St. John in the sixth chapter”...

The same pattern — priest or preacher reads both lessons, or the rubric is silent — holds in every sixteenth-century order I have been able to verify from the critical editions: Hamburg 1529, Prussia 1525, Ernestine Saxony 1533, the Wittenberg city order of 1533, Pomerania 1535, Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel 1569. Not one of them provides for a lay reader in the chief service.⁵⁶ Prussia's order of 1525 even shows us the boundary case: as a rule “the priest” reads both lessons, but on feast days, when the crowd requires reading from the pulpit, “a helper” (*ein Mithelfer*) may do it — a concession to acoustics, not a theology of the lectern.

But walk into the same churches on a weekday, and everything changes. Luther's German Mass prescribes, for daily Matins, that “the boys, two or three in turn, should read a chapter in Latin out of the New Testament; then let another boy read the same chapter in German”; at Vespers the same relay reads the Old Testament. The parson or chaplain says the Collect — and reads nothing.⁵⁷ Bugenhagen builds the same machine with more gears: at Braunschweig's Matins three schoolboys read the Latin lesson in relay and “after the three, the fourth boy shall read in German what the others have read in Latin, plainly and clearly aloud, *as one is accustomed to read a Gospel from the pulpit*”; the four Vespers lessons “shall be from the Old Testament”; the preacher contributes the closing versicles and collect.⁵⁸ Here are non-ordained readers — children

named anywhere in the Sunday sequence.

⁵⁶ Bugenhagen, *Braunschweiger Kirchenordnung* (1528), ed. Hans Lietzmann, *Kleine Texte* 88 (Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1912), 129; Hamburg (1529), where the priest reads the Epistle at the altar and the *predikante* reads the Gospel from the pulpit and preaches on it; Prussia (1525) and Pomerania (1535) in Emil Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4; Ernestine Saxony (1533) and Wittenberg (1533) in Sehling, vol. 1; Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1569) in Sehling, vol. 6/1, 138 (“Denn wende sich der priester gegen das volk und singe oder lese die epistel deutsch”). One caution the sources themselves impose: where an order assigns a reading to a *Diakon* or *Kaplan*, those titles in sixteenth-century usage denote *ordained assistant clergy*, not laymen — the Wittenberg order of 1533 explicitly treats its three “Diakon” as preaching clergy — while Braunschweig's “Diakene” are something else again, lay almoners of the poor-chest with no liturgical function. The word “deacon” is a three-way trap for the unwary in this literature.

⁵⁷ Luther, *Deutsche Messe* (1526), the section on daily worship and the schools.

⁵⁸ Bugenhagen, *Braunschweiger Kirchenordnung* (1528), Lietzmann ed., 74–75 (“Vom singen und lesen der

— reading Old and New Testament alike, daily, publicly, in church, by the express design of the most conservative liturgical reformers in Protestantism, in the same documents that give the Sunday lessons to the priest.

So the sixteenth century answers the modern question “did Lutherans have lay readers?” with a distinction the modern question forgot to make. In the chief service: no — the lessons were the clergy’s, in unbroken continuity with the received rite. In the daily offices: yes, massively — the whole running exposure of the congregation to the two Testaments *in course* was carried by schoolboys’ voices. The boys read on Tuesday; the pastor read on Sunday; and no one in the sixteenth century seems to have felt the arrangement needed a proof-text either way. One searches the church orders in vain for 1 Timothy 4:13 deployed on the question of the reader’s person. Where Bugenhagen does sound like our verse’s neighborhood, it is on the other issue — the *content* of the reading. “Epistles and Gospels we will read as they are appointed for the whole year,” Braunschweig declares, defending the church’s appointed pericopes against the radicals who would replace them⁵⁹ — which is to say: in 1528, in Wittenberg and Braunschweig alike, the felt threat to the public reading was never *who* performed it. It was whether it would be performed, and what would be read. Hold that thought; it is the key to the last door.

THE AMERICAN RECORD

The American Lutheran record runs the same two-track pattern forward, with the emergency case now doing the work the daily office once did. The church constitution that Wilhelm Christoph Berkenmeyer, pastor of New York’s Dutch and German Lutherans, gave his congregations in 1735 — governing the Lutheran churches of New York and New Jersey a full century before the Saxon immigration — established the office of *Vorleser* — “reader” — a layman who, in the absence of a pastor, led the congregation in song and liturgy and read them a sermon a pastor had written.⁶⁰ The Missouri Synod’s own founding era knew the same instinct from the other side: the 1850 convention of C. F. W. Walther — the Synod’s first president and its founding theologian — answered a congregational dispute by ruling that even the ruling elder may not lead public prayer — yet the same answer carves out the vacancy exception,

schulkind in der kirche”). Ernestine Saxony’s 1533 visitation articles independently assign a boy (*ein Knab*) the Vespers lesson with a second boy repeating it in German (Sehling 1:192) — the pattern was not merely a Bugenhagen house style, though Prussia 1525, assigning its daily lessons to the *Caplan* or *Pfarrer*, shows it was not universal either.

⁵⁹ Bugenhagen, *Braunschweiger Kirchenordnung*, Lietzmann ed., 128–29: “Epistolen vnde Euangelien wille wy lesen also se vp dat gantze iar vorordenet sint.”

⁶⁰ Cited in the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations’ response to President Harrison’s 2022 questions on lay reading in pastoral vacancies (Report R62.11, 2026 *Convention Workbook*, 269–70). The *Vorleser* is precedent for the pastor-absent case, not for the lay lector assisting a present pastor; the distinction should be kept.

the elder reading “a prayer written by the preacher in his place.”⁶¹

How the lay reader reached the modern lectern is its own story, and it is not an exegetical one. The Church of England moved first, reviving the lapsed office of Reader on Ascension Day 1866: admission by prayer and the delivery of a New Testament, expressly without the laying on of hands, the licensed duties including “to read the lessons in Church.” The bishops’ concerns were missionary and disciplinary — too few clergy, too much unlicensed lay preaching — and, as a historian of the office has put it, “not motivated by thoughts of liturgical participation or enrichment.”⁶² Rome arrived at the same place from the opposite direction. In 1910 the *Catholic Encyclopedia* could still state the old discipline flatly — “no layman may... read any part of the Liturgy” — while conceding in the same breath that parishes, their minor clerics long extinct, were already putting cassock and surplice on schoolboys and sacristans to serve “even as lectors,” the costume there “as if to admit them temporarily to the ranks of the clergy.”⁶³ The Second Vatican Council retired the fiction in 1963 — the layman who reads exercises “a genuine liturgical function” in his own person — and in 1972 Paul VI dissolved the minor order of lector altogether and refounded it as a lay ministry, its holder reading everything except the Gospel: the old Gospel reservation surviving the revolution intact.⁶⁴

The Missouri Synod, it turns out, did not wait for any of this. In 1950 — thirteen years before the Council — a memorial titled “A Call for Greater Lay Enlistment,” brought by thirteen of the Synod’s own mission and education executives (among them Oscar E. Feucht, the Synod’s first secretary of adult education, whose *Everyone a Minister* would give the movement its slogan a generation later), planted itself on 1 Peter 2:9, declared that “there must be active participation of every Christian in the tasks by which the priesthood is carried out,” and enumerated the tasks — family devotions, personal witness, teaching — down a list that ends, under the heading “Ministering at the sanctuary before the Lord,” with “serving as deacons and lectors in the services.”

⁶¹ *Synodal-Bericht der Deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1850*, 143: the authority to pray publicly is denied “also to the ruling elders (*den regierenden Vorstehern*)... except that, in cases where the preacher is not present for the congregational assembly, the elders may read a prayer written by the preacher in his place.” The German is transcribed in the author’s “Lay Elders: A Brief Overview of Their Origin in the Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Journal* 32, no. 1 (2006): 39 n. 1.

⁶² The bishops’ resolutions of May 10, 1866, survive in the Longley Papers at Lambeth Palace Library (Longley 1866, vol. 5, fols. 32–33), transcribed in Peter Garner, “The Reader: An Exploration of the History and Present Place of Reader Ministry in the Church of England” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2010), 61–62; the judgment on their motives is Lawton’s, quoted there. The 1866 form of admission — the New Testament delivered, hands withheld — is still the Church of England’s (Canon E5).

⁶³ Auguste Boudinhon, “Laity,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910).

⁶⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), §§28–29; Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* (August 15, 1972), norms 2–5: the former minor orders “are henceforth to be called *ministries*,” may “be assigned to lay Christians,” and the reader “is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, except for the gospel.” The *motu proprio* provides even for the ordinary Sunday volunteer, “appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures” (norm 5).

The convention adopted the resolution built on that presentation.⁶⁵ The warrant is worth noting: not liturgical renewal, of which the memorial knows nothing, but the priesthood of all believers mobilized for missions — “we can never hope to reach all with the Gospel through the professionally trained clergy alone.” Then, for a generation, silence. The Proceedings do not touch lay reading again until the renewal-era service books had quietly normalized it. It is Feucht himself who closes the arc: twenty-four years after the memorial, *Everyone a Minister* lists among the era’s new participatory forms “folk services with the laity reading the Scripture lesson” — what he and his circle had proposed to the Synod in 1950 as a task of the priesthood, reported in passing in 1974 as practice, three years before the first overture on the question reached a convention.⁶⁶ And the question reached the conventions late and thin: four overtures across the six conventions from 1977 to 1989, by the Commission’s own count.⁶⁷

The first official answer came in 1985, in a document that does not say what either side says it says. Asked whether a woman may read the lessons, the Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations answered, on a single page — page 45 — in two consecutive movements:

All Christians have access to the Scriptures. They do not require the church as an institution or another person to read and interpret them on their behalf. The reading of the Scriptures belongs to the priesthood of all believers, men and women.

Moreover, there is no ceremonial law in the New Testament regarding the reading of Scripture in the context of public worship. Nor is there explicit apostolic prohibition of such reading by women. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man.⁶⁸

⁶⁵1950 *Proceedings*, 370–77 (Memorial 415, “For Such a Day as This — More Men for Christ!”), adopted on the floor committee’s recommendation at 484–87. The thirteen submitters, listed at 377, are the Synod’s program staff virtually en bloc — W. C. Birkner (missions and stewardship), Feucht (adult education), E. W. Gebauer, H. W. Gockel, J. E. Herrmann (stewardship), W. H. Hillmer, H. H. Koppelman, W. A. Kramer, Karl Kurth, H. A. Mayer, L. Meyer (publicity and missionary education — and, as the Emergency Planning Council’s executive, the organizer of the postwar Bad Boll conferences with the German churches), Arthur L. Miller (parish education), and F. C. Streufert (missions) — and the memorial carries the printed endorsement of the Board for Missions in North and South America, the Board of Foreign Missions, and the Board for Parish Education. The resolves enact a program of lay enlistment “for every phase of the Church’s work”; the lector clause stands in the presentation the adopted resolution expressly incorporates (“In view of the foregoing presentation...”). What entered the record in 1950 was an idea, not a rubric. Feucht (1895–1982) had been appointed in 1946 as the first secretary of adult education under the Synod’s Board of Parish Education; his book: *Everyone a Minister: A Guide to Churchmanship for Laity and Clergy* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974).

⁶⁶Feucht, *Everyone a Minister*, 38.

⁶⁷CTCR, *Unity in Doctrine* (2025), case study 6, n. 48 (2026 *Convention Workbook*, 248): “only four overtures related to lay readers — men or women — submitted to the six conventions from 1977 to 1989 (one in 1977, one in 1986, two in 1989).” None produced convention action before 1989.

⁶⁸Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* (St. Louis: LCMS, 1985), 45 (Part III, §D, q. 1). The section carrying the answer describes itself as “not... ‘canon law’ but... pastoral and collegial advice.”

For forty years each party has quoted its half of that page — the priesthood sentence on one side, the pastoral-office sentence on the other — and each half, alone, reverses the force of the whole. Read entire, the argument is a concession followed by a counsel: there is no divine law here, *nevertheless* we advise restraint, for the sake of what lay reading “might be *perceived* as.” And the ground of the counsel is worth pausing over: not 1 Timothy 4:13. The report quotes our verse once, in a word-study on *didaskhein* in Part II — and then, in the very place where a pastor-only proof-text would belong, declines to use it, resting instead on 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and on pastoral prudence. The Commission had the verse in front of it, quoted it in the RSV’s own wording, and did not deploy it for this question.⁶⁹

Four years later the Synod in convention took the question up, commended the 1985 report for study — and declined to enact its counsel: “*Resolved*, That the congregations of the Synod proceed with care and sensitivity in making decisions permitting the lay reading of the Scriptures, recognizing decisions in this regard lie in the area of Christian judgment.”⁷⁰ The Commission’s later reports drew the consequence — the Synod’s resolutions “permit women to... read the Scriptures in public worship services, thereby indicating that these activities are not distinctive functions of the pastoral office”⁷¹ — and there the matter rested, an advisory restriction and a permissive resolution standing in the same file drawer, until the overtures of 2026 pulled the drawer open and the convention, offered three different ways to decide, chose instead, for the first time in its history, to name 1 Timothy 4:13 in a resolve and hand it to its theologians.

That is why the present essay exists. The seminaries have been asked what the verse means. The least a historian can do is lay out what it has meant.

⁶⁹The verse’s absence from the 1985 answer is matched across the earlier record: H. G. Brueggemann quotes it — in RSV wording, so labeled by Brueggemann himself — for the general doctrine of the ministry, not against lay readers (“The Public Ministry in the Apostolic Age,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22, no. 2 [Feb. 1951]: 81–109, at 101, sighted); a 1982 opinion of the Fort Wayne seminary’s exegetical department is reported in the literature of the debate but has not been located by this study; and the verse entered the sister-synod debate through a 2002 Lutheran Church—Canada overture. The earliest located use of the verse *against* lay readers is a South Wisconsin District memorial of the mid-1990s, reported — and judged an overreach — by a writer himself opposed to the practice (Rolf Preus, “Historical Use of Laymen within the Worship Service,” conference paper, October 5, 1996). As a proof-text in this controversy, 1 Timothy 4:13 is younger than the controversy itself.

⁷⁰1989 Res. 3-14, “To Address Appropriate Roles for Women and Men in Worship,” 1989 *Proceedings*, 118. The resolution’s own preamble attests, as a matter of record, that “the use of lay assisting ministers, both female and male, is permitted within the rubrics of *Lutheran Worship* for the reading of the lessons, *except the Gospel*” — the Synod’s 1982 hymnal had already embodied the old Gospel-reservation instinct, allowing lay readers the other lessons while keeping the Gospel to the ordained. The 2026 convention’s summary of 1989 is exact: it “cited these statements by the CTCR approvingly, yet did not endorse” the reading-restriction opinion.

⁷¹CTCR, *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices* (1994), 20; reaffirmed by 2004 Res. 3-08A. The Synod’s public FAQ states its position in one sentence: “there is no Scriptural ‘thus says the Lord’ regarding who may or may not read the lessons in worship.”

WHAT THE VERSE CAN BEAR

Let the findings be gathered in one place, and let each side take its medicine first and its comfort second.

To those who would restrict the reading to the pastor on the strength of this verse: the phrase you are quoting is a twentieth-century translation of a sixteenth-century polemical aside. For fourteen centuries every known interpreter — Greek fathers who presided over lectors, medieval doctors, Erasmus, Calvin, the Lutheran orthodox — read τῇ ἀναγνώσει as Timothy’s study. The public-reading interpretation begins, orally, with Luther in 1528, aimed at enthusiasts who despised the external Word, not at lay readers, whom it never mentions; it enters print as one unargued clause in Cruciger; it is examined once in the age of orthodoxy, by Balduin, and rejected; it becomes consensus through Bengel’s two words and the nineteenth-century critical commentators — riding, in Holtzmann, on a view of the epistle as a pseudonymous church-order manual — and it reaches your Bible’s text in 1923. And even if the public setting be granted in full, the German conservative tradition — Wohlenberg in Zahn’s commentary, Lenski after him — read the verse, within that public setting, as commanding Timothy’s *oversight of what is read*, expressly not his performance of the reading: “still less that Timothy is to read them.” For the verse to forbid the lay reader, in fact, five things must all be true, and it is worth setting them out as the ladder they are: (1) τῇ ἀναγνώσει here must mean the assembly’s lection — not Timothy’s study, and not his oversight of the lection; (2) Timothy must be the *performer* of that reading, not its guardian; (3) the charge must be standing church law, not a deputy’s assignment “until I come”; (4) what Timothy performs must thereby be reserved to the pastoral office in every later congregation; and (5) reserved *exclusively*, others thereby forbidden. The first rung is disputed at the tradition’s highest levels; the second is where the best conservative exegesis breaks the other way; the third was Mosheim’s own reading of the temporal clause; and the last two are attested nowhere in nineteen centuries — no interpreter, in any camp, ever took them. A seminary opinion that establishes only the first rung, the public setting, will not have answered the question the convention asked: the overture language claims a *mandate*, and a mandate needs the whole ladder. The strongest conservative exegesis available makes it a verse about the lectionary, not the lector. And it may be worth asking — I offer this as diagnosis, not accusation — whether the old reading’s difficulty among confessional Lutherans today is still, in part, the difficulty of its friends. To ears trained by long and often just polemic against pietism, “Timothy’s private reading” sounds like *Innerlichkeit* — the quiet time, the closet, the religion of the heart. And the word deserves its history: it is Luther’s own battlefield term. *Das testimonium in meiner ynerlichkeit satis mihi* was the fanatics’ slogan in the very lecture where the public reading was born — Karlstadt’s inward testimony raised *against* the external Word. But the tradition’s private reading was never that inwardness; it was the opposite of it. Balduin’s Timothy reads privately “so that

what the Scriptures say can be applied to use in the public office”; Gerhard’s, “that from it he may learn what he is to teach others”; Erasmus’s Timothy holds the *sacra lectio* in place of the absent apostle’s own voice. This is not the pietist’s closet; it is the pastor’s study, ordered wholly to the pulpit and the font — and it was the possession of Chrysostom, Aquinas, and the Lutheran orthodox long before pietism existed to be accused of it. None of this leaves the restrictive instinct homeless. The case for the pastor at the lectern may still be argued — as venerable custom, as pastoral prudence, as an analogical application of Augsburg Confession XIV’s *rite vocatus* — and it is no accident that the one overture before the 2026 convention which never cited our verse argued on exactly that ground. What may not be argued is “Paul requires it in 1 Timothy 4:13.” Those are two different kinds of argument, and the convention’s referral asks about the second.

To those who would find in this history a charter for the volunteer rota: the practice-history gives you less than you hope. In the chief service of Lutheran worship, from Luther’s German Mass through the whole run of verifiable church orders, the lessons were read by the ordained — not because 1 Timothy 4:13 was thought to require it (no one cited it), but as unbroken, unargued custom, continuous with the Western rite. The ancient lector, for his part, was no modern volunteer: he was an enrolled, often clergy-tracked, often ordained, frequently seven-year-old rung of a cursus the Reformation dismantled. The genuinely old distinction the practice-history yields is a different one: the Gospel-reservation — reader reads the lessons, deacon or presbyter reads the Gospel — which runs from the Apostolic Constitutions through Gregory the Great to the rubrics of *Lutheran Worship* in 1982, and which the Synod’s own resolutions, note well, have never adopted as law. And the pattern that *feels* most traditional — one pastor performing every word — descends not from the apostles but from the medieval Low Mass and the necessities of the one-pastor parish, by way of institutional forgetting of the daily offices in which Lutheran schoolboys once read both Testaments to the parish in course.

And to both sides together, the finding I commend most: *attend to what the verse was actually used for, by the men who first read it publicly*. Luther in 1528: the fanatics are wrong; Paul instituted the reading in the church; the Spirit comes through the external Word. Bugenhagen in the same year: we will read the Epistles and Gospels as appointed for the whole year — against those who would read something else. Wohlenberg in 1906: Timothy must not let the false teachers and their glittering fables get a hearing. Lenski in 1937: Timothy must watch what lections are read, lest the cranks fill the lectern with genealogies. Across four centuries, every Lutheran who brought this verse to the lectern brought it to defend the same two things — that the Scriptures *be* read publicly, and that what is read be the pure lectionary of the church and not the fables of the hour. Not one of them used it to police the reader’s résumé. Read with the tradition, then, the verse leaves the church a threefold charge: that the Scrip-

tures be read; that what is read be the church's appointed Scripture and not the hour's fables; and that the pastor answer for both — for the reading's existence and for its purity. The verse, in the Lutheran tradition's own hands, is a charge about the *that* and the *what* of the public reading. The *who* is a question it was never asked to settle until living memory.

CONCLUSION

When research for this essay began, I expected to write the history of an ancient consensus and its modern critics. What I found instead was a phrase with a birth certificate. "The public reading of Scripture" was born in a Wittenberg lecture hall on the second of March, 1528 — born an expansion of the old reading, not a replacement for it — lived for three centuries as a minority aside, was worn into consensus by repetition rather than argument, was narrowed to "public only" by no argument at all, entered the English Bible between 1901 and 1946, and has now been sent, by six hundred and seven delegates, to the seminaries of the church body I have served all my life, under the impression that it is the plain wording of the apostle. The practice it names is apostolic. The phrase is not. The church read Scripture publicly before this verse was thought to command it, and she will go on reading it publicly whatever the faculties conclude — because the reading rests, as Luther said against the fanatics, on the fact that God has bound his Spirit to the external Word, and not on the exegesis of a single dative.

If this history hands the present debate anything, it is not a verdict on the lectern but an ordering of loves. What the verse has actually defended, in every Lutheran hand that ever wielded it publicly, is the reading itself and the purity of what is read — the lessons appointed for the whole year, kept against every generation's glittering substitutes. A church that fights over who may read while caring little what is read and whether it is heard has inherited the proof-text and mislaid the treasure. And the man who started it all left both camps their instruction. To those who prize the public reading: it was Luther who taught the church to find it here, and to find it *instituted* — the Spirit and salvation coming through a text read aloud to sinners. To those who prize the pastor's study: it was the same Luther, fifteen years later, who read the same verse the old way and told every preacher, "Truly, you cannot read too much in Scripture, and what you read you cannot read too well... Pray, read, study, be diligent." The verse has led a double life since 1528. Perhaps that is the most Lutheran resolution available: the reading in the church, defended as God's own means; the reading at the desk, commanded as the pastor's daily bread; and the sixteen-hundred-year-old question of whose voice carries the lesson left where Sozomen, and Bugenhagen, and the Synod's own conventions have always left it — among the customs in which churches agreeing in the essentials of worship need not be alike.

MORPHOLOGY OF “THE PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE”

The study stream (A): reading as Timothy’s own

c. 240	Origen	gather Scripture “in our heart... day and night”
c. 390	Chrysostom	μὴ ἀμελεῖν τῆς τῶν θεῶν μελέτης
c. 440	Theodoret	even “spiritual” Timothy owes the πόνος
c. 1270	Aquinas	<i>lectio, in qua acquirit scientiam</i>
1523	Erasmus	<i>pro nostra uoce sit tibi sacra lectio</i>
1548	Calvin	the pastor’s day-and-night perusal
†1627	Balduin	concedes the lexicon, rejects the verse: <i>lectio publica... cursoria est</i>
1666–1748	Gerhard, Gill	“that from it he may learn what he is to teach”
1840s	Barnes	private reading, Greek classics included
1921	Kretzmann	“probably at least includes Timothy’s personal study”

The public stream (B): reading as the church’s lection

1528	Luther (oral; printed 1909)	<i>non solum privatam... sed publicam</i> — against the <i>Schwärmer</i>
1540	Cruciger	<i>ἔῃ publice exercere Ecclesiam</i> — one clause
1685–1754	Poole, Henry, Wesley	“both,” floated and unargued
1742	Bengel	<i>in ecclesia</i> — two words
1755	Mosheim	Timothy, Paul’s deputy, <i>der Vorleser der Gemeinde</i>
1850s	Conybeare–Howson	“apply thyself to public reading”
1856	Alford, Ellicott	settled fact; the old view a relic
1880	Holtzmann	the teaching office “dominates” the assembly
1933	Bultmann (TDNT)	classification by bare listing

Into the Bibles

1901	Twentieth Century NT	“public reading” (first)
1913	Moffatt	“Scripture-reading” (first)
1923	Goodspeed	“the public reading of Scripture” (first full phrase)
1946	RSV	the phrase canonized; NASB, NIV, NRSV, ESV follow

The supervisory stream (D): reading as the lectionary Timothy guards

1861	van Oosterzee	“no changes... in the wonted order”
1906/1923	Wohlenberg	<i>nicht sowohl... als vielmehr</i> : oversight against the <i>Irrlehrer</i>
1937	Lenski	“what lections are being read” — the proto-lectionary