

Nuechterlein Lecture by Cameron A. MacKenzie
March 20, 2012

Part 2: What Did Luther Do?

I'm not sure that actions speak *louder* than words; but they do speak. And in Luther's case regarding worship, we have sermons, liturgies, and hymns that demonstrate his practice of worship and not just its principles. So in the second part of my presentation this morning, I would like to emphasize what Luther actually *did* when it came to worship and not just what he said.

First of all preaching – and Martin Luther *was* a preacher. In fact, he came along at a time when preaching was more in demand than perhaps it had ever been. As early as the thirteenth century, the mendicant orders (Dominicans and Franciscans, for example) developed reputations for producing preachers; but that wasn't enough. Therefore, beginning early in the 15th century, many cities and towns throughout the Holy Roman Empire, not content with intermittent preaching by visiting friars, created endowed preaching posts for themselves. Since parish priests did not ordinarily preach (their job was to sacrifice the mass), city fathers made provisions for more regular and frequent preaching in the vernacular by hiring clergy for this express purpose. And one of the communities that had had such a preaching post for some time before the Reformation was Wittenberg. Significantly, when the position fell vacant in 1514, the city fathers hired a new professor from the local university as town preacher (“*Prädikant*”). His name was Martin Luther.¹

Preaching for Wittenberg obligated Luther to preach on Sundays and holidays. Later – after the Reformation began – Luther would also often preach on weekdays, especially in the absence of Wittenberg's pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen. But the city church was not the beginning

¹ Helmar Junghans, “Luther's Wittenberg,” in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20, 25.

of Luther's preaching career. Already a few years before 1514, Luther's superior in the Augustinian order, Johann Staupitz, had assigned Luther the task of preaching within the monastic community at the time of his being sent to Wittenberg as a professor of theology. Many years later, Luther recalled his initial reluctance at undertaking such a responsibility. Speaking to his friend, Anthony Lauterbach, who was concerned about becoming preacher at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Luther reminisced:

Ah, my friend, I had the same experience. I feared the pulpit perhaps as greatly as you do; yet I had to do it; I was forced to preach. At first I had to preach to the brethren in the refectory (the monastery). Ah, how I feared the pulpit!...Under this pear tree I advanced more than fifteen arguments to Dr. Staupitz [when he told me, "You are to become a teacher of Scripture and preacher to the monks in the monastery."]; with these excuses, I declined my call. But they did me no good. When I finally said: Dr. Staupitz, you are taking my life; I shall not live a quarter-year, he replied: In God's name! Our Lord God has many things to do; He is in need of wise people in heaven too.²

That was it: Luther would move to Wittenberg and there he would preach to his fellow Augustinians. We do not know very much about the circumstances of Luther's appointment to the Wittenberg pulpit just a couple of years later, but in 1522, Luther indicated that he had experienced the same kind of reluctance at undertaking responsibility for preaching at the city church as he had for preaching within his own monastery, "I know that in spite of my reluctance I was called by the [town] council to preach." In fact, in another version of this account, Luther expressed himself even more forcefully, "[I] was chosen against my will to preach here."³ Nevertheless, Luther did it. And once he began to preach, he never quit.

So Luther *was* a preacher; and he undertook this assignment when preaching was very much in vogue. What this means for the histo-

² Partially quoted and translated in Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 11. Source: WATR 3: no. 3143b.

³ LW 51:73 (WA 10^{III}:10.12-13); Brecht 1:150-51.

ry of the Reformation is that Luther embraced what would become a major technique for promulgating the new religion. Of course, everybody knows how important the printing press was for the success of the Reformation. That's true; but the Reformation message spread as much by preaching – probably even more so – as by the printing press. The sermon, the living word of the preacher, had more direct responsibility for effecting Reformation in specific places than did books and pamphlets. After all, at the beginning of the movement, general literacy was probably no more than 5% and even in the urban areas of the Empire it was probably only about 30%.⁴ Moreover, if one looks at the history of the Reformation in any number of places, the usual spark behind the movement for religious change was a preacher, not a book. One historian has described it this way, “The normal urban course of events [in the Reformation] was for a preacher – a priest, a member of a preaching order, a monk or occasionally a layman, usually someone who had himself been influenced by *reading* Luther – to expound Reformation doctrines from the pulpit and create a stir with his *preaching*. His hearers were swept away with him, and there were practical consequences as a result” [emphasis mine].⁵

So it may have been an accident (or, better, the Providence of God), that Luther began to preach; but because he did, he set into motion a movement for religious change that neither he nor anybody else could contain. Furthermore, because he preached so much, we have an enormous number of sermons still today from Martin Luther. According to one estimate, Luther preached about 4000 times during his career. And realize that if that sounds like a lot, it is not an exaggeration since 2300 of Luther's sermons have survived in one form or another; and there were many occasions upon which we know he preached but for which we

⁴ Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 38.

⁵ C. Scott Dixon, *The German Reformation: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 36-37.

have no extant records.⁶ In terms of what is available today, the Diet of Worms and the Wartburg mark a major shift, since we have only about 200 of them from the period up to 1521. However, after Luther's return from the Wartburg, his preaching activity increased greatly. Indeed, from 1522 until 1546 (the year of his death), Luther preached on the average about 70 sermons per year;⁷ and the vast majority of these were preached in the city church of Wittenberg.⁸

Clearly, Luther was putting into practice what he said about the importance of preaching! As we saw earlier, Luther had once written, Know first of all that a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly as Psalm 102 says, "When the kings and the people assemble to serve the Lord, they shall declare the name and the praise of God." And Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 says that when they come together, there should be prophesying, teaching, and admonition. Therefore, when God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together.⁹

So in order to implement the Reformation and in conformity with Luther's views regarding the centrality of preaching, all of Wittenberg's services included sermons.

What this meant in practice was that each of the 3 Sunday services had a sermon as well as each of the weekday services (2 of them a day). On Sundays, Luther usually preached on the pericopes (very often the gospel lessons and less frequently the epistles). So one interesting result is that in the sermons we have a ton of Luther's exegesis on the Gospels. Otherwise, not very much. Another interesting consequence is that in spite of Luther's fondness for Paul's epistle to the Romans, only about 30 of the extant sermons are on Romans – 1½% – and ten of these

⁶ Fred W. Meuser, "Luther as Preacher of the Word of God," in *Cambridge Companion*, 136.

⁷ LW 51:xii.

⁸ Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 18.

⁹ LW 53:11 (WA 12:35.19-25).

on Romans 12! Apart from the Sunday services, Luther preached thematic sermons, especially on the catechism or on practical topics like marriage, and commentaries on various books of the Bible (in other words, preaching his way through an entire book or significant parts thereof, e.g., Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Matthew 5-7, 11-15, 18-24, 27-28; Luke 15-16; John 1-4, 6-8, 16-20).¹⁰

So Luther *was* a preacher – and true to his principles. At least, most of the time. For Luther was as much sinner as he was saint, and therefore, subject to the same emotions and feelings that sometimes get us into trouble. And in one particularly bad patch, Luther actually abandoned his Wittenberg pulpit for several months. This was in 1530. From January to early April, 1530, Luther simply refused to preach in Wittenberg (except for two occasions as a favor to his protector and prince, the elector John the Constant).¹¹ Then in April, he left for Coburg, his residence during the Diet of Augsburg where his colleagues were preparing and presenting the Augsburg Confession. During his journey and after reaching his destination, he did do a little preaching but not in Wittenberg again until after his return to the city in the fall of 1530. And during these months, his friends thought that he may have given up preaching for good! This was Melanchthon’s fear according to a letter that he wrote in February; and the next month, George Rörer, who took notes on Luther’s sermons, wrote that “we are all dismayed that Dr. Martinus doesn’t intend to preach publicly any more.”

But what was the problem? Quite simply, something that many of us have to deal with – frustration, disappointment, discouragement. Already in 1529, Luther had warned the people of Wittenberg that he

¹⁰ LW 51:XI-XVIII; Meuser, *Preacher*, 18; and Meuser, “Luther as Preacher,” 19. For tables listing Luther’s sermons (texts and years), see Gerhard Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), “Anlage I,” 455-60.

¹¹ The material in this section regarding Luther’s refusing to preach comes from Meuser, *Luther*, 28-34.

would stop preaching unless they changed their ways. He called them “ungrateful beasts” and threatened, “I am sorry that I ever freed you from the tyrants and papists. You ungrateful beasts, you are not worth of the Gospel. If you don’t improve, I will stop preaching rather than cast pearls before swine.”¹² And what was it exactly that they were doing? Among other things, their misdeeds included “firing of guns under Luther’s window, hard-headedness, shameless dress, adultery, profiteering, and thievery. And the ones who didn’t do these things laughed at the ones who did.” Perhaps worst of all was their drunkenness. There was even “swilling and yelling in the taverns at the very time of the worship services.” So Luther warned them:

The time will come when you who now have an abundance of preaching...will long for a single sermon. But your impudence is so great that you have no appreciation for preaching....I am unwilling to preach [to you] any more....I would rather preach to raving dogs because there’s no use doing it with you and it is offensive to me. So – I shall leave preaching to the pastor and his assistants. I will stick to my lecturing.

And so he did until, that is, his return to Wittenberg in the fall. At that point, he simply mounted the pulpit again in St. Mary’s church and began to preach – no apologies, no explanation, just preaching.¹³

In spite of some additional tough times, Luther kept at it right until the end. In fact, just a couple of days before he died, he was still preaching; and he delivered his last sermon to a large crowd in Eisleben on February 15, 1546. Three days later, he was dead.¹⁴

But now how do we have access to this last sermon or any other that Luther preached? The answer is only with great difficulty. Obviously, of course, we have no direct access to Luther’s actual preaching. Before the invention of sound recordings in the modern era, that’s true for all preachers, not just Luther. And what we have for Luther surpasses

¹² Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950), 352.

¹³ Meuser, *Luther*, 30.

¹⁴ For that last sermon, LW 51:383-92 (WA 51:187-194).

what is available for many others, but the material presents challenges for finding the authentic Luther. To begin with, the vast majority of Luther's sermons were never printed during his lifetime; and it's difficult to say whether those that were printed were actually preached in the form that we have them.

Of course, this is not the place to go into the technical difficulties of recovering the authentic preaching, but you might find it interesting to know just how it is that we have those 2300 extant sermons today when most of them were not printed. In fact, Luther didn't even write them down in the first place. Luther prepared intensely but, like most of his contemporaries, did not preach from a full manuscript, just an outline – a *Konzept* – a series of headings (only a few of which have survived). What we have therefore – and it is really a great deal – are manuscript copies of Luther's sermons prepared by various listeners that are now available in print in the critical edition of Luther's works prepared in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sixteen huge volumes of that edition consist only of sermons, and there are many more scattered throughout the remaining volumes. Some, of course, have by this time also been translated into English.¹⁵

Obviously, the quality of the surviving transcriptions varies with the capabilities of the stenographer. Fortunately, however, one of the best of these was Luther's friend and assistant, Georg Rörer, who transcribed hundreds of Luther's sermons from 1522 on. Nonetheless, one striking feature of all the transcriptions including Rörer's – and somewhat disconcerting too – is that they predominantly employ Latin. Apparently, educated listeners found it easier to take notes of a German sermon in the more compact language of Latin, using it as a kind of shorthand, although from time to time the recorder included some of Luther's actual German as well. The result is a macaronic text that creates

¹⁵ LW 51:XII, XV-XVI; Meuser, *Luther*, 35-36.

a certain distance from what Luther actually said. Nevertheless, they are probably our best source for Luther's actual preaching.¹⁶

But what actually do they show us about Luther's preaching? For one thing, they reveal the content of Luther's personal faith. Even though Luther certainly believed in the objective truth of the Scriptures – that it was all true because God had said it, Luther's sermons reflect much more than an intellectual conviction regarding Christian doctrine. Instead, they give us his own experience of Christ and the devil, Law and Gospel, sin and forgiveness. Luther's sermons represent reality as he himself knew and lived it. This is a major reason why his rhetoric is so powerful. In his sermons, we meet an authentic Luther, not some contrivance of the orator's art. We meet a man who lived on the basis of what he preached.

Now in order to illustrate Luther's pulpit authenticity, I would like to refer to a fairly well-known set of sermons, his *Invocavit Sermons* from 1522. Unlike most of his extant sermons, these were actually printed during Luther's lifetime in a couple of versions in the year after they were delivered.¹⁷ Also different from Luther's other sermons was the context in which he preached them. For they were the very first that Luther preached upon his return from the Wartburg. By that time, the Reformation had reached a crisis. In particular, during Luther's absence, the other reformers, led by Andreas Karlstadt, had been implementing changes in the Wittenberg churches in defiance of the elector and to the

¹⁶ LW 51:XVI. For Rörer, see Walter G. Tillmanns, *The World and Men Around Luther* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 137.

¹⁷ These are in vol. 51 of LW (pp. 70-100). The earliest versions appeared right away in 1523 in Mainz and Augsburg, but we do not know who originally transcribed them and made them available to these non-Wittenberg printers. However, it is also true that Luther himself published a pamphlet on "Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament" (LW 36:231-67) around this time (1522) that covers many of the same topics and so helps to confirm at least some of the content in the printed sermons. There are also some fragmentary texts of manuscripts related to these sermons that also provide evidence of what was originally said. For background, see the editor's introduction in LW 51:69-70 and Neil R. Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons* (St. Louis: CPH, 2002), 11-15, 41-53.

distress of many people but, of course, not all, since the Wittenberg town council was generally supportive. Furthermore, some of Karlstad's supporters had used violence against those who still favored the old ways; and, as the sermons themselves demonstrate, Luther himself was not convinced that all of Karlstadt's reforms were entirely necessary. So what Luther was attempting in these sermons was to restore peace and order to the Wittenberg community. In the long run, he was also moving Lutheranism from a more radical correction of medieval liturgical uses to what became characteristic of our church, viz., an acceptance or toleration of a lot of medieval piety, including sacred images and an artificial but reverential reception of the sacrament. In general the Reformed would reject such things, but not the Lutherans, and the *Invocavit Sermons* present a rationale for why not.¹⁸

Because Luther's purpose was different from that of an ordinary Sunday sermon, it is not simply expository. Luther's usual practice is to take the assigned text and comment on it, more or less verse by verse but always emphasizing what he considers to be the theme of the entire text. In these sermons, however, Luther addresses the Wittenberg situation in a more or less systematic form but not as the exposition of a single text. The sermons form a unit and Luther brings to bear those texts that he finds most applicable. After treating general principles, he proceeds to specific issues and considers first of all changes that he considered necessary in the practices of the church and then items about which Christians have liberty.

Although the sermons are really a unit that manifests a single theme, Luther did preach them over the course of a week, so they do exhibit starting and stopping points. These are characteristic of Luther's homiletical style¹⁹ in general and demonstrate an almost complete disre-

¹⁸ Brecht 2:57-66. See also Leroux, 41-53, 149-51

¹⁹ My comments on Luther's homiletical style on this page and several following derive largely from the insights and examples in Meuser, *Luther*, 45-59; Meuser, "Luther as

gard for any rhetorical flourishes either to win attention at the beginning or to conclude in a dramatic fashion. Instead, his typical beginnings are rather brief summaries of what he had said previously and so pick up the threads from earlier discourses in order to remind his hearers of the main points they need to know. Here, for example, is how he begins his third sermon, “We have heard the things which are ‘musts,’ which are necessary and must be done, things which must be so and not otherwise....Now follow things which are not necessary, but are left to our free choice by God and which we may keep or not.”²⁰ Nothing fancy – here’s where we left off and here’s what we are going to treat today.

Similarly, Luther’s conclusions are often quite abrupt and say no more than “time’s up,” e.g., “This is enough for today; tomorrow we shall say more.”²¹ Other times, he will include a brief benediction, “Let this be enough for this time concerning the use of this sacrament. I commend you to God.”²² This is true even at the end of the last sermon. There is not even a summary of the main points, let alone any kind of rhetorical flourish. Just, “I commend you to God. Amen.”²³

Of course, what one might consider a cliché in other preachers is anything but in Luther, so for him to commend his hearers to God was serious business and the best possible place for them to abide in the serious situation in which they found themselves. Still, in spite of its sobriety, Luther’s conclusion is anything but stirring.

That’s true obviously also for his beginnings – with but one exception: the very first of the *Invocavit* Sermons, for Luther starts it out in a way that may strike the modern reader as a bit strange but which shows how important Luther viewed the Wittenberg situation and what he was going to say, “The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die

Preacher,” 140-45; and especially Leroux, whose book is devoted entirely to Luther’s rhetoric, but see pp. 153-62 for a summary of his observations.

²⁰ LW 51:79 (WA 10^{III}:21.1, 9-11).

²¹ LW 51:91 (WA 10^{III}:47.16-17).

²² LW 51:95 (WA 10^{III}:54.12).

²³ LW 51:100 (WA 10^{III}:64.16).

for another.” All of a sudden and quite abruptly, the sermon becomes a matter of life and death! And within the first few sentences Luther has informed his hearers that whatever they thought about the issues troubling their community, Luther was going to address them from the standpoint of “the chief things that concern a Christian.”²⁴

Moreover, by stressing the isolation of death in contrast to the universal summons of death, Luther also highlights the significance of the relationship that he and they have right now. Although each must die alone, nonetheless while living, they form a community in which Luther can prepare them for the end by preaching. In other words, Luther’s introduction exhibits a rhetorical strategy not just for gaining attention but also for creating a foundation of common interest upon which the rest of the series depends: Luther is there to provide what they need at life’s end.

Establishing and maintaining community is characteristic of Luther’s style and is evident simply from the way that he employs his pronouns in the introduction and, indeed, throughout the sermons. He and his hearers are in an “I-you” relationship that sometimes becomes “we.” One imagines that this was purely instinctive on Luther’s part, but it is definitely the language of community that both reflects an existing relationship and re-establishes it in these sermons after an absence of about a year. Luther is talking to his “beloved,” his “dear friends,” about things that affect them most deeply, and he maintains this language to the end of the series.²⁵ In the last two paragraphs, he is still talking about “you,” “I,” and “we”:

“Thus *you* see that confession [and absolution] must not be despised, but that it is a comforting thing. And since *we* need many absolutions and assurances, because *we* must fight against the devil, death, hell, and sin, *we* must not allow any of *our* weapons to be taken away, but keep intact the whole armor and equipment which God has given *us* to use

²⁴ LW 51:70 (WA 10^{III}:2.2).

²⁵ LW 51:70, 71 (WA 10^{III}:2.3; 4.6).

against *our* enemies. For *you* do not know what labor it costs to fight with the devil and overcome him. But *I* know it well, for *I* have eaten a bit of salt or two with him. *I* know him well, and he knows *me* well, too. If *you* had known him, *you* would not have rejected confession in this way.

“*I* commend *you* to God. Amen.”²⁶

Establishing a sense community is probably important in any sermon, but especially if the preacher needs to convey bad news. No one likes being scolded, but it’s easier to take if the scolder has a right to do so and if he has otherwise demonstrated real concern for his hearers. Therefore, in this first sermon, Luther reminds his congregation that he has already been their teacher, that he was returning from exile (and by implication an action that meant some risk to himself), and that he was called to be their preacher by the town council in spite of his initial reluctance. By these means, Luther recreates a personal bond between himself and those whose conduct he must rebuke. He has longstanding connections with them.²⁷

In spite of his closeness to them, Luther is clear and specific about their sin. He says, for example, “And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among you, and I observe very well that you have not been grateful to God for his rich gifts and treasures.” However, Luther does not exempt himself from sin but affirms, “We are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all.”²⁸ And when it comes to addressing the situation and correcting matters, he immediately joins himself to his hearers and commits himself to them: the “I – you” becomes a we: “Let us, therefore, let us act with fear and humility, cast ourselves at one another’s feet, join hands with each other, and help one another. I will do my

²⁶ LW 51:99-100 (WA 10^{III}:64.8-16).

²⁷ LW 51:70, 75, 73.

²⁸ LW 51:71, 70 (WA 10^{III}:3.9-4.2, 2.4-5).

part, which is no more than my duty, for I love you even as I love my own soul. For here we battle not against pope or bishop, but against the devil.”²⁹

Clearly, therefore, one of the things to observe about Luther’s sermons is that he uses the language of intimacy, the language of community that draws listeners into the concerns of the speaker and the speaker into the concerns of his listeners.

Of course, as soon as one mentions “sin” in the context of preaching, a Lutheran wants to know about the gospel. Has the preacher presented Christ the Savior? Does the good news predominate? Obviously, these are questions about more than style but they do involve rhetorical strategies as well.

With respect to these sermons, we can comfortably answer the first the question “yes”: the gospel is definitely there. But we may have a little more trouble with the latter. To a certain extent, of course, the answer to the question of which prevails – law or gospel – is a matter of judgment. Opinions can differ, and it’s never just a question of how many words. But if we were to use that criterion, it is clear that Luther devotes significantly more words to the faults of the people than to the gracious work of Christ. In fact, there are whole “sermons” that really have no gospel at all, e.g., the third sermon, the fourth sermon, and fifth sermon.

However, rhetorically speaking, emphasis is more than just the number of words devoted to a subject. Among other things, it is also a matter of placement since both the beginning and the end of a speech are the two best spots for saying what you want people to remember; and from this perspective the gospel does pretty well in the *Invocavit* Sermons. When Luther begins the series, he says that in preparation for death one must know the “chief things” of the Christian religion; and as

²⁹ LW 51: 73 (WA 10^{III}:8.11-9.2).

he lays things out, these consist of three items: law, gospel, and love. Though presented in rather succinct form, the message of sin and grace enjoys a prominent place at the beginning of the first sermon.³⁰

Nonetheless, it is also true that Luther quickly moves to his topic of greatest concern and that is love – or, rather, the lack of it in his Wittenberg congregation. Indeed, for someone whose theology is sometimes presented as almost antinomian, these sermons are remarkable for how strongly they present the obligations of Christian love. Luther is very concrete in discussing these obligations through the rest of the series by addressing the actual issues that were dividing the Wittenberg community. Significantly, the way he arranges his discussion brings him back to the gospel at the end of the series. Even though there is no real gospel in those sermons that discuss marriage and vows and images, at the end of the series he comes back to the gospel by treating the means of grace, the sacrament of the altar and confession and absolution.

For example, in the sixth sermon (LW 51:92-95) which continues Luther's discussion of a proper reception of the sacrament, he comes back to the gospel. What matters, says Luther, is not whether you take the sacrament into your hands but whether you take it in faith. Outward reception, Luther says, "without faith and love....does not make a man a Christian, for if it did, even a mouse would be a Christian." This position then leads Luther to a definition of faith as "a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon his shoulders and that he is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father." And with that we are back to the gospel!³¹

Now, it's true that Luther then returns to love as "the fruit of this sacrament" in the very brief seventh sermon that he concludes with a

³⁰ LW 51:71 (WA 10^{III}:2.10-12). "Secondly, that God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in him and that whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and a child of God."

³¹ LW 51:92 (WA 10^{III}:48.11-13; 49.9-12).

solemn warning against the failure to demonstrate brotherly love.³² Nevertheless, in the eighth and final sermon Luther discusses confession and absolution and stresses that the principal value of retaining this rite is the forgiveness of sins that it conveys. In fact, Luther's concluding paragraphs are all about the variety of ways that God forgives our sins for, as Luther says, "we must have many absolutions, so that we may strengthen our timid consciences and despairing hearts." But that is exactly what God has provided, "For our God, the God we have, is not so niggardly that he has left us with only one comfort for strengthening for our conscience, or only one absolution, but we have many absolutions in the gospel and we are richly showered with many absolutions."³³

Thus, it's fair to say that by the end of the *Invocavit* Sermons, Luther clearly permits the gospel to predominate even if the last sentence or two are yet another warning against the wiles of the devil and if, as a whole, the theme is Christian love. Whether this would pass muster with a homiletics professor at the Seminary today is an open question, but my point is simply that when the situation demands that Luther preach on Christian conduct as here, even then the gospel of God's forgiveness for the sake of Christ has a central and significant role. Luther would not be Luther if it did not.

Now, we observed in Part One that for Luther preaching involved conflict with the devil. Although this is not the main concern of *Invocavit* Sermons, Luther's belief in a real, personal devil is a constant theme in all his work so it no surprise to find several references to the Reformer's battles with Satan. The last few sentences of the entire set are an interesting example of this. Speaking out his own experience (and that too is

³² "And if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you; let this be a warning to you, for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain." LW 51:95, 96 (WA 10^{III}:56.4).

³³ LW 51:99 (WA 10^{III}:63.5-8). Luther enumerates 5 methods: (1) forgiving one another; (2) the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer; (3) baptism; (4) private confession and absolution; and (5) the Lord's Supper. To a certain extent, this seems to anticipate the Schmalkald Articles 3.4.

also characteristic of his preaching), Luther refers to combat with the devil and what it costs. It is unclear exactly what he was referring to when he claimed that his first-hand experience was greater than his congregation's. Did he mean his recent challenges like the Diet of Worms and the Wartburg? Or earlier struggles of conscience prior to his evangelical breakthrough? Or all of the above? We don't know; but what we do know from his sermons is that for Luther the devil was intensely personal and not simply someone he read about in the Bible.³⁴

There are other references to the devil in these sermons and at least two of them are significant in understanding the earnestness of Luther's preaching. In the very first sermon, as Luther is working to establish a community of interest between himself and his hearers, he emphasizes the seriousness of their mutual endeavors on account of the enemy they face, "not against pope or bishop, but against the devil." Note also how Luther personalizes Satan by describing him as a soldier ("here we battle...against the devil, and do you imagine that he is asleep? He sleeps not, but sees the true light rising, and to keep it from shining into his eyes he would like to make a flank attack"), and referring to his own experience with him, "I know him well...."³⁵

Significantly for the theme of the sermon, Luther does not rebuke his congregation for their decision – in this sermon, to abolish the mass – but for their manner, their lack of love that showed itself in "offense to your neighbor" and a failure to act in accordance with those in authority (Luther is here thinking of the elector). Moreover, true to the first line of

³⁴ "Thus you see that confession [and absolution] must not be despised, but that it is a comforting thing. And since we need many absolutions and assurances, because we must fight against the devil, death, hell, and sin, we must not allow any of our weapons to be taken away, but keep intact the whole armor and equipment which God has given us to use against our enemies. For you do not know what labor it costs to fight with the devil and overcome him. But I know it well, for I have eaten a bit of salt or two with him. I know him well, and he knows me well, too. If you had known him, you would not have rejected confession in this way. I commend you to God. Amen." LW 51:99-100 (WA 10^{III}:64.8-16).

³⁵ LW 51:73 (WA 10^{III}:9.5).

these sermons about dying, Luther describes a battle with Satan as an assault upon conscience at the very end of life: “For if on their death-beds the devil reminds those who began this affair of texts like these...how will they be able to withstand? He will cast them into hell.”³⁶ A personal devil strikes at the very moment when man is weakest in order to create a crisis of conscience, doubt and fear, that lands a person in hell. Now, that’s serious business.

But there is a remedy – a theological principle that also helps to explain a rhetorical technique that is common in Luther’s sermons. Luther teaches the people, “You must rely upon a strong and clear text of Scripture if you would stand the test. If you cannot do that, you will never withstand – the devil will pluck you like a parched leaf.” Unfortunately, we do not have time to describe in detail Luther’s approach to the Scriptures which was always more than just citing texts as he suggests, “If you want to fight the devil you must know the Scriptures well and, besides, use them at the right time” – to which he might have added, “and in the right way.”³⁷

But for our purposes, it is important to note that Luther does cite Bible passages when he preaches. He regularly punctuates his message with what today are disparagingly called “proof texts.” One can see this frequently in the *Invocavit Sermons*. Right off the bat, for example, when he enumerates the “chief things which concern a Christian,” viz., law, gospel, love, he proves each point by a Bible passage. Luther refers to the human writers, Paul and John, but he cites the passages as evidence of God’s will.³⁸ Sometimes, Luther says this quite explicitly (“God has

³⁶ LW 51:73 (WA 10^{III}:10.6-10).

³⁷ LW 51:80, 86 (WA 10^{III}:22.11-23.3, 36.6-7).

³⁸ For example, “The priests who have taken wives...in order to save their consciences must stand squarely upon a clear text of Scripture, such as this one by St. Paul...[1 Tim. 4:1-3]. This text the devil will not overthrow or devour, it will rather overthrow and devour him.” LW 51:80 (WA 10^{III}:23.3-11).

said through Moses”) but always that is the clear assumption behind the citation. You can absolutely rely upon it because it is God’s Word.³⁹

Besides direct citations, Luther’s work is filled with unattributed references and allusions. Fortunately, the editor of *Luther’s Works* has noted these in the text with bracketed references but one should realize that this is just Luther speaking scripturally. These are not direct quotations, and Luther did not include the references:

Here let us beware lest Wittenberg become Capernaum [cf. Matt. 11:23]....Dear friends, the kingdom of God, – and we are that kingdom – does not consist in talk or words [1 Cor. 4:20], but in activity, in deeds, in works and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words [James 1:22], but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love. For a faith without love is not enough – rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit off faith, just as a face seen in a mirror is not a real face, but merely the reflection of a face [1 Cor. 13:12].⁴⁰

By using passages as proof for the assertions that he makes, Luther could have easily developed a pedantic style in his preaching – principle and proof; principle and proof – that would have been both clear and persuasive; but probably also boring. And Luther is anything but boring. So how does he maintain interest?

One obvious way is by means of the rhetorical question. His sermons are filled with such questions and though I suppose that it’s possible to overuse any technique, rhetorical questions are a good way for a speaker to maintain a connection with his hearers. A question can wake up an audience and provoke them into a more active mode of thinking rather than just listening passively. In Luther’s case, they help to reinforce the sense of I and you when “I” ask “you” what you think about so

³⁹ Eph. 2:3 for law; John 1:12 for gospel; 1 Cor. 13:1 for love. LW 51:70-71, 72.

Other examples (85) – “God has commanded us.” (85) – “as the prophet...says’ (87) – Paul read him an apostolic lecture, saying, (94) – as the prophet Isaiah says (96) – St. Paul says (97) – “this confession is commanded by God in Matt. 18” (98) – this is what David means... (99) – “we have this in the gospel” “another comfort we have in the Lord’s Prayer.”

⁴⁰ LW 51:71 (WA 10^{III}:4.3-12).

and so. Such questions can be used very simply to advance the argument.⁴¹ But they can also be used to draw a conclusion that Luther wants his hearers to think about.⁴²

But, of course, almost every good speaker uses rhetorical questions at some point or another, so Luther is hardly unique. Another of his favorite techniques which is much less common is his dramatization of his message – his turning the argument into an imaginary conversation. He does this all the time and it can be very effective once again in engaging his hearers – this time by appealing to their imagination. For example, Luther describes a conversation with the devil over how to receive the sacrament:

And my reason is that the devil, when he really pushes us to the wall, will argue: Where have you read in the Scriptures that “take” means “grasping with the hands”? How, then, am I going to prove or defend it? Indeed, how will I answer him when he cites from the Scriptures the very opposite, and proves that “take” does not mean to receive with the hands only, but also to convey to ourselves in other ways? “Listen to this, my good fellow,” he will say, “is not the word ‘take’ used by three evangelists when they described the Lord’s taking of gall and vinegar? You must admit that the Lord did not touch or handle it with his hands, for his hands were nailed to the cross...” Again, he cites the passage: “Fear seized [took] them all” [Luke 7:16], where again we must admit that fear has no hands. Thus I am driven into a corner and must concede, even against my will, that “take” means not only to receive with the hands, but to convey to myself in any other way in which it can be done.⁴³

Sometimes there is a humorous quality to Luther’s minidramas – for example, when Luther talks about “poking a spear into the devil’s face, so that even the world will become too small for him.” Or again, when he talks about blackening the devil with charcoal, instead of chalk.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See Luther’s “why?” a couple of times on LW 51:92-93.

⁴² “What harm can it do you? You still have your faith in God, pure and strong so that this thing cannot hurt you.” LW 51:77 (WA 10^{III}:17.9-10). Cf. also LW 51:82, 90.

⁴³ LW 51:89-90 (WA 10^{III}:43.12-44.11). Cf. also LW 51:85-86 (drama: “I” and the devil), similarly LW 51:89, 93 (God speaking), and 97 (church discipline).

⁴⁴ LW 51:73, 85-86 (WA 10^{III}:10.10-11, 34.6, 36.5-6).

The humor in these passages is part of a broader pattern, for Luther lightens his message without harming its seriousness by using what I call “homey illustrations,” examples from daily experience that might cause a chuckle even while reinforcing Luther’s point. Again, these are all over the place in Luther’s sermons. Perhaps the best example in these sermons – and one that is quite famous – is his illustration of how the Word works (from the second sermon):

Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.⁴⁵

As this illustration indicates, Luther likes to use examples, sometimes drawn from his own life but also from nature, history, his contemporaries, and, of course, the Bible.⁴⁶

It’s also worth noting that Luther’s humor frequently employs sarcasm, for instance already in the second paragraph in the first sermon: “Indeed, I am well aware and I dare say that you are more learned than I, and that there are not only one, two, three, or four, but perhaps ten or more, who have this knowledge and enlightenment.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Luther likes to employ *reductio ad absurdum*, “If we want to drive away our worst enemy, the one who does the most harm, we shall have to kill ourselves, for we have no greater enemy than our own heart, as the prophet says, Jer. 17....”⁴⁸ Also frequent and involving humor are his references to animals, e.g., “In this way even a sow could be a Christian, for she has a big enough snout to receive the sacrament outwardly.”⁴⁹ Finally, Lu-

⁴⁵ LW 51:77 (WA 10^{III}:18.12-19.3).

⁴⁶ Here are some examples: himself (LW 51:87), nature (LW 51:72), history (LW 51:78, 81-82), contemporaries (LW 51:84), and, of course, the Bible (LW 51:77, 78, 82-83, 87-88, 94-95).

⁴⁷ LW 51:71 (WA 10^{III}:3.2-4). Cf. also LW 51:89, 91.

⁴⁸ LW 51:85 (WA 10^{III}:33.15-34.3). Cf. also LW 51:89.

⁴⁹ LW 51:91 (WA 10^{III}:46.12-14). Cf. also LW 51:92 about the mouse.

ther also employs colorful statements – proverbial statements – and we have at least one of them in these sermons, “Then I cannot press them any further, but must put my flute back in my pocket.”⁵⁰ It’s not always clear whether Luther is quoting or making up such statements; but in either case they make the point in a memorable way.

The result, then, of all these various rhetorical strategies is very engaging and powerful preaching. Not only the message but also the method makes them very effective. Even though Luther exhibits both intelligence and imagination in his sermons, he does not come off as aloof, intellectual, or even clever. Instead, Luther comes off as authentic – engaged, sincere, committed. He establishes community with his hearers, and within that community he does not hesitate to scold and instruct while at the same time comforting and reassuring his hearers. Luther’s style undoubtedly reflects his personality and his intellect, but he uses his talents and experience to advance the cause of Christ by preaching the Word of God to people who need to hear it. Thus, Luther does what the best pastors still do today – apply Scripture to real life.

Clearly, preaching was the center of Luther’s ministry. Along with teaching it accounts for almost all of his ministry. This is how he spent his time. However, in terms of our topic – worship – it is important also to note that Luther also rewrote the liturgy and composed hymns that are still sung today. When Luther returned from the Wartburg and restored calm to Wittenberg, he rejected the *radical* reforms of Carlstadt but that didn’t mean that he was content just to keep all the medieval forms of worship. No, there were too many things in the old ways that obscured and even perverted the gospel. So for a period of time in the 1520’s, Luther devoted himself to liturgical reform. The result was two communion services and 37 hymns (most of them written in 1523-24).⁵¹

⁵⁰ LW 51:83 (WA 10^{III}:28.13-16). Cf. Ernst Thiele, *Luthers Sprichwörterammlung*, Weimar, 1900.

⁵¹ “Table of Contents,” LW 53:VII-IX

The two services that Luther wrote are sometimes used as evidence of Luther's conservatism or traditionalism. In one respect, at least, this is true, *because* Luther did not throw everything out from the Middle Ages and just start over. Instead, he kept a great deal. Even when he made the transition into German, he retained the basic form of the medieval mass and many of its elements. However, Luther's main reason for keeping something was not just that it was old or customary but rather because it served the Gospel.⁵²

A good example of this is the "elevation of the host." In the traditional service, when the priest spoke the words, "This is my body," He lifted the bread high over his head as a sign that it was now the body of Christ, ready for offering for the sins of the living and the dead. Most Protestant reformers eliminated this ceremony, and Carlstadt insisted on abolishing it. Luther's Wittenberg, however, retained the elevation until 1542, when Luther and his colleagues finally did away with it. Nonetheless, for many years, they had kept it.⁵³ But why?

For one thing, Luther resented Carlstadt's making a law about something not required in the Scriptures. Luther remained adamant on this point as he wrote on more than one occasion, "We do not condemn the practice of conducting the sacrament with chasubles and other ceremonies; but we do condemn the idea that they are necessary and indispensable and are made a matter of conscience, whereas all things which Christ did not institute are optional, voluntary, and unnecessary, and therefore also harmless."⁵⁴

This, of course, included also the elevation which, Luther believed, one could understand in an evangelical way as an encouragement to

⁵² Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 72-74, 76-82.

⁵³ LW 53:82, footnote.

⁵⁴ LW 36:168 (WA 8:511.18-22).

faith in promise of the sacrament – the body of Christ *given for you*.⁵⁵ So the elevation stayed in for while, as did many other traditional elements of the service, including vestments, candles, and altars, so much so that the Lutherans maintained in the Augsburg Confession that “the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns are interspersed here and there among the parts sung in Latin.”⁵⁶

Given this claim by the Lutherans in 1530, it is not surprising to find that Luther’s two communion services retain much of the medieval mass.

⁵⁵ LW 38:314 (“Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament). Cf. also LW 53:82 (“The German Mass”).

⁵⁶ AC 24.2 (Latin).

Luther's Communion Services

Formula Missae (1523)	Deutsche Messe (1525-26)
Introit	A Hymn or German Psalm
Kyrie	Kyrie
Gloria in Excelsis	
Collect	Collect
Epistle	Epistle
Gradual or Alleluia	German Hymn, e.g., "To God the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray"
Gospel	Gospel
Nicene Creed	Creed Hymn, "We All Believe in One True God"
Sermon	Sermon
Preface	Paraphrase of Lord's Prayer and Admonition for Those Intending to Commune
Words of Institution	Words of Institution
Sanctus	Distribution of the Host (German Sanctus or "Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior" or "O Lord, We Praise Thee")
Lord's Prayer	
Pax	
Distribution (during Agnus Dei)	Distribution of the Cup (German Agnus Dei)
Collect	Thanksgiving Collect
Benedicamus	
Benediction	Benediction

All of the elements in the *Formula Missae* come right out of the medieval mass; and the *Deutsche Messe* just takes them over into German (both language and music). In this respect, Luther really was a reformer, not a revolutionary. But the fact that Luther kept so much of what was customary does not mean that he kept everything. This is especially evident in connection with the Lord's Supper.

As we have already observed, for Luther, the Sacrament of the Altar was a means by which God comforted consciences and strengthened faith. Therefore, it had an essential role in Christian worship. However, unlike the medieval Church, Luther never made a rule regarding how often one should receive the sacrament – “rules and regulations” were too much like the religion out of which he had come. Nevertheless 16th century Lutherans offered communion regularly in their services on Sundays and festivals of the church year although it is not evident as to how frequently people actually communed.⁵⁷

But even if the Lord's Supper remained an essential part of Lutheran worship, Luther's new theology had important implications for how the sacrament would actually be celebrated in Lutheran churches. So, for example, in his *Small Catechism*, Luther defined the Lord's Supper this way, “Instituted by Christ himself, it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.”⁵⁸ What was essential therefore in communion services was that *both* bread and wine be set apart for communicants; but, if there were no communicants, there should be no Lord's Supper. In this way, Lutherans corrected a couple of medieval corruptions, viz., private masses celebrated by the priest himself without the people and the practice of communing lay people with the bread only while reserving the cup to the priests. Neither policy fit the description of the Lord's

⁵⁷ AC 24.34. Tappert, 60. BKS, 94-95. Theodore G. Tappert, “History and Frequency of Communion,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11(1959):292, cites Luther suggesting at least four times a year.

⁵⁸ “Small Catechism” (1529), Tappert, 351. BKS, 519-20.

Supper in the Words of Institution and so neither would survive very long in Lutheran worship.

In fact, Luther was quite concerned that the Words of Institution themselves receive a prominent place in the celebration of the sacrament because these were the words by which Jesus Himself authorized the celebration and explained its purpose. For Luther, these words were at the heart of the sacrament. This meant that Luther substituted for the canon of the mass, the long prayer in which Christ's instituting word was imbedded, a simple recitation, indeed, proclamation of the words of institution, by themselves. In fact, he entirely eliminated the canon, which he described as "that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool," because it presented the mass as a sacrifice, performed by the priest in order to merit divine favor for anything and everything from the well-being of the dead to temporal prosperity.⁵⁹

So Luther retained and gave directions for reciting aloud the words of institution.⁶⁰ Previously, the priests had whispered them over the elements in Latin, almost as if these words were a kind of magic formula to transform the bread and wine into body and blood.⁶¹ But for the Luther the words were the gospel at the heart of the sacrament. As he wrote in *Small Catechism*,

The bodily eating and drinking do not in themselves produce [such great effects], but the words 'for you' and 'for the forgiveness of sins' [from the *verba*]. These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins.⁶²

⁵⁹ "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg" (1523), LW 53:21-22 (WA 12:207.14-21). See also his "German Mass," LW 53:80-81 (WA 19:97.12-100.3).

⁶⁰ LW 53:28, 31, 80-81.

⁶¹ This practice was confirmed by the Council of Trent. See Fortescue, Adrian. "Canon of the Mass." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 6 Apr. 2015 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03255c.htm>>.

⁶² "Small Catechism," Tappert, 352. BKS, 520.

In short, on account of the Word, the Lord's Supper brought the salvation of Christ to sinners, and so it became an integral part of Lutheran worship.⁶³

On account of Luther's stature in our Church as well as his plain good sense, Luther's services had and continue to have an impact on the Church that bears his name. This is in spite of the fact that in both services, Luther was explicit in insisting that Christians are free to follow these services or not. It's a question of Christian liberty. Nevertheless, the *Formula Missae* is the basis for the service that a lot of us grew up with, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 15 (*Lutheran Service Book* Divine Service 3) and the *Deutsche Messe* provides the basis for LSB Divine Service 5. Apparently, most Lutherans have exercised their liturgical liberty once again by following Martin Luther!

Lutherans have also followed Luther in singing hymns. In fact, the Lutheran Church is famous for its hymnody and rightly so – we are a singing Church. And the man who began it was, once again, Martin Luther.

As we noted in Part One, Luther believed that music was most appropriate for Christian worship. In fact, he believed that it was inevitable, for Christian song is a consequence of faith. Luther wrote:

For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it. And whoever does not want to sing and speak of it shows that he does not believe.⁶⁴

Strong language for sure, but I suspect that most of us know exactly what Luther meant, for music is a basic way in which human beings ex-

⁶³ Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 41-63.

⁶⁴ LW 53:333 (WA 35:477.6-11).

press their emotions; and God's Word moves those emotions. So Christians sing, and Luther has provided for us some great hymns to sing.

As we have already seen, Luther employed the German language so that the German people would actually get something – the Gospel – out of worship. But Luther realized that in addition to language, music was also culture specific. Indian music is not the same as Chinese or European music. So the music of the German people in Luther's day was different from the medieval chant tunes that accompanied the Latin liturgy. Therefore, even as he began contemplating putting worship into the language of the people, he observed that Lutheran worship would also have to employ the music of the people. He wrote:

I would like to have [a German mass] to have a true German character. For to translate the Latin text and retain the Latin tone or notes has my sanction, though it doesn't sound polished or well done. Both the text and notes, accent, melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflection, otherwise all of it becomes an imitation in the manner of apes.⁶⁵

But who was going to do this? In his text accompanying the *Formula Missae*, Luther complained about the dearth of good German poets who “could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, worthy to be used in the church of God.” So, while encouraging others to take up the task, he tried his own hand at it and with considerable success. Thus, for a few years in the mid 1520's, Luther produced the bulk of his hymns, many of which continue to be used to this very day.⁶⁶

As Luther had hoped, one reason that his hymns work even to this day is that they combine a powerful gospel message and with an equally effective melody. On the one hand, Luther's texts do not aim directly at the emotions but instead express the great biblical truths that evoke the emotions that are also being conveyed by the music. This makes for a

⁶⁵ LW 40:141 (WA 18:123.19-24). Cited also in LW 53:54.

⁶⁶ According to the Table of Contents in LW 53:ix, 24 of the 37 “hymns” listed were composed in 1523-24; 3 more in 1525-30; 5 in 1531-40; and 5 in 1541- 43. Cf. also the “introduction” to the hymns in LW 53:191-205.

very powerful combination. Luther's hymns have tremendous content – many of them expressing the entire story of sin and salvation (nothing vacuous here). However, the melodies can be challenging – at first – but once mastered get right down to the core of one's being in a way that is unforgettable, indeed, unshakeable, e.g., A Mighty Fortress; Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice; and We All Believe in One True God.

But did Luther write all the texts and tunes of the hymns attributed to him? As far as texts were concerned, he often began with what was already out there – an old Latin hymn or a German one. These he would translate or otherwise modify and then add extra stanzas. With respect to music – although it was customary for authors also to write their own tunes – here too Luther did not hesitate to use what was already available while also composing some of his own melodies, especially when he was starting afresh rather than building on an already existing hymn. Luther himself was musical – he sang and played the lute – and was more than capable of producing a tune that could work for his hymns. The *Lutheran Service Book* attributes at least four different tunes to him: 607 – From Depths of Woe; 656-57 – A Mighty Fortress; 766 – Our Father Who from Heaven Above; and 960 – Isaiah Mighty Seer.⁶⁷

But what about the oft-repeated assertion that Luther used “tavern tunes” for his hymns? I'm not sure that that's the best way to express it; but on some occasions, the early Lutherans did employ tunes originally used with a secular text. An example of this is the tune for the Elisabeth Cruciger's hymn, “The Only Son from Heaven” (LSB 402). Interestingly, on one occasion Luther reversed himself and discarded a secular melody, the original tune for “From heaven above to earth I come,” because it retained its popularity in the taverns and dance places. As Luther is sup-

⁶⁷ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: CPH, 2006), 1005. For Luther's hymns generally, see 53:191-205.

posed to have said, he was “compelled to let the devil have it back again.”⁶⁸

Luther’s very first hymn (“A New Song Shall Here Be Begun” – 1523) was actually in the form of a folk ballad – a form that was commonly used in Luther’s today to recount important happenings (kind of like a musical newspaper). And Luther used it to tell the story of the first Lutheran martyrs, Heinrich Voes and Johann Esch, two Augustinian monks burned at stake in Brussels in the Netherlands (July 1, 1523). Interesting from a historical perspective, this is one of Luther’s hymns that has *not* made it into our modern hymnals except for a couple of stanzas (out of 12) that were used for TLH 259 (Flung to the Heedless Winds).⁶⁹

Many of Luther’s other hymns do remain in use today. LSB, for example, includes the text of 23 different hymns now ascribed to Luther.⁷⁰ These can be organized in different ways – I’ve suggested one way on your outlines. This combines considerations of the sources Luther used (psalm paraphrase or an original Latin or German hymn) as well as the purpose (liturgical hymns or catechism). Again, Luther saw music as an effective teaching device.

Although Luther himself did not publish criteria for what makes a good hymn, it’s not too difficult to develop a few from what he himself did. Luther’s hymns were based on the Scriptures and centered in the work of Christ for sinners. He saw no need to reject what had been done by predecessors, but also felt free to assimilate it to the needs of the peo-

⁶⁸ As quoted in Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories* (Nashville: Thomson Nelson, Inc, 2003), 15. Google Books, http://books.google.com/books?id=4fJLL2VXuSUC&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Luther+and+%22compelled+to+let+the+devil+have+it+back%22&source=bl&ots=BTlMbT13E5&sig=ali2MrferkJWQB90SQ6vfo7bpzw&hl=en&ei=v2CaS86QCojyM7nwwZ8C&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CAoQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Luther%20and%20%22compelled%20to%20let%20the%20devil%20have%20it%20back%22&f=false accessed 3/12/10.

⁶⁹ See LW 53:211-13.

⁷⁰ LSB, 1000.

ple without, of course, compromising the message of law and gospel. To suggest standards for the music is a little more difficult. Although Luther used the musical idiom of his day, he also relied on the work of predecessors and of contemporaries who were professional musicians. Neither his music nor his texts were easy in the sense of immediately singable but, as we have seen, Luther did intend them to feel “natural” for the people who used them.

All this is entirely in line with what we observed in Part One – Christian liberty employed for the sake of the gospel. As we have now seen, therefore, Luther both said it and did it. He preached sermons, arranged liturgies, and composed hymns so that people would hear and proclaim the Good News. But what was necessary in the 16th century is still important in the 21st. That’s why we are Christians. Therefore, I think we can all agree that those who are responsible today for Lutheran worship – preaching, singing, and praising – would be wise to follow Martin Luther.