



Luther's Critique of the Enthusiasts
An Analysis of the Invocavit Sermons from a Historical
Perspective

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and limitations

Martin Luther intrigues me, both as a historical person, and as a theologian. He is stubborn, yet open to new ideas, in some sense humble, yet in another sense full of confidence. I hope with this thesis to shed some new light on how Luther responded to the developments in Wittenberg (and elsewhere) after his return from Wartburg. Cracks were starting to appear in the once-so unified Protestant front, with inner division among the colleagues in Wittenberg becoming apparent. The situation was starting to get out of control, with the danger of a violent confrontation growing. What did Luther say and do to calm down the situation? In addition, during these volatile times, did he remain consistent with his previous teaching?

To find answers, I have to explore the historical context of Luther's absence and return. The time at Wartburg is my primary interest here. Moreover, an analysis of Luther's teaching after he returned is also expedient; the content itself requires an analysis, as well as the consistency. Based on these criteria, the *Invocavit* sermons are a natural choice for analysis, which I will further narrow down to an analysis of a specific aspect of Luther's teaching.

As a result, I have chosen the following research question: *How did Luther's faith in the work of the Word of God affect his response to the Enthusiasts in his Invocavit sermons?*

By Luther's faith, I imply essentially two related things, his understanding and trust. By the work of the Word of God, I am talking about God working through his preached Word. By response, I mean how Luther's thinking had practical implications on his perception of the historical events, and eventually the historical outcome of his preaching. By Enthusiasts, I am referring to the people advocating in favour of implementation of radical reforms, in particular Karlstadt, Zwillinger, Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets. Finally, the *Invocavit* sermons serve as a case study of Luther's thinking on the Word of God.

1.2 Purpose

This conflict had significant impact on Luther's thinking and how the Reformation further developed, with lasting consequences far beyond the Reformation itself. Some of the theological divisions are still present today. In that sense, I hope to find some inspiration on

how to deal with similar issues today. However, at the same time, there is a danger of letting my modern context colour how I understand Luther. While I will always be bound by the lens of the period of which I am a product of, my goal will be to investigate this issue in the historical context it belongs to, to as great degree as possible. Therefore, I will not go beyond Luther's return from Wartburg and its short-term consequences in this current investigation. I have chosen the *Invocavit Sermons* for a couple of reasons: These sermons had great impact in society, and are thus a good example of theology applied in daily life. In particular, these sermons reveals how faith in God and subsequent his Word, is not predominantly a matter of cognitive belief, but life lived. It is also important for me to go directly to the primary source, Luther. Overall, I hope to shed some new light on how historical factors affected Luther's thinking, and thus his critique of the Enthusiasts and its consequences.

How can Luther's faith in the work of the Word reveal itself in his criticism? I have asked the following questions in order to further concretise my research question:

- What does these sermons reveal about Luther's understanding of role God has assigned to the Christian? What does Luther say about the delimitation of the mandate of the church, and of the individual Christian?
- How, and in what way, are the Christian freedom related to the faith in the work of the Word? Furthermore, how does this affect the understanding, and regulation of order in the church? In other words, what kind of dilemmas does Luther face when trying to stop harmful teaching, while remaining consistent to his faith in the work of the Word?
- To what extent does Luther's faith in the work of the Word influence his views of revelation, in particular the Enthusiast's claims of personal, divine inspiration?
- How does the faith in the work of the Word affect the role of good works in Luther's teaching? Moreover, what kind of similarities exists between his criticism of the Enthusiasts, and his criticism of the pope?

1.3 Methodological approach

To achieve my objectives, I will need to rely on an analysis of literary sources. The primary source is the *Invocavit* sermons in Luther's Works.¹ The Luther biographies by Bornkamm, Brecht, and Lohse supplements historical perspectives.² I have also used the latter, along with Bayer for perspectives of more systematic sort.³ Moreover, Leroux provides relevant material on rhetorical aspects,⁴ although keep in mind my analysis will be predominantly historical and theological.

The analysis is structured accordingly:

I will briefly present the historical backdrop before analysing the sermons. This is a short overview of key historical factors leading up to the conflict with the Enthusiasts.

Next comes the analysis of the *Invocavit* sermons, which is my primary focus, making up the main body of my work. I will analyse the sermons one by one. To find out how Luther's faith in the Word coloured his response to the Enthusiast' threat, I will first discuss relevant historical background information and present an outline of the structure of the sermon.

Combined, these serves as a framework for the analysis of the content of the sermon, which is where the majority of my effort will be devoted. Finally, at the end of each sermon-analysis, I will draw some conclusions of how Luther's faith in the work of the Word influenced his argumentation in this particular sermon. Here is a brief overview of my analytical approach to each sermon:

Analysis of the context: Historical background consists of an exploration of important historical factors relevant to key themes of the sermon, as well as clues revealing Luther's views on the matters prior to his return. Additionally, there will be a brief outline of the

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein, et al., vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

² Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Bernhard Lohse and Roy A. Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

³ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁴ Neil R. Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

structure of the sermon. Combined, these steps makes up the contextual backdrop for the analysis of the content itself.

Analysis of the content: This leads me to the analysis of the context. What does Luther describe as problems, and how does he recommend solving them? What are his arguments, and how are they structured? Theological aspects is my primary focus. Luther's use of rhetoric is also relevant, but not my primary interest. Moreover, how does Luther's argumentation develop over the course of several sermons? Are there thematic distinctions? While all these questions are interesting, my primary focus must be on their relevance to Luther's faith in the work of the Word.

Conclusions of the analysis: At the end of the sermon-analysis, I will discuss key findings, what they reveal concerning Luther's faith in the work of the Word, and how this affects his criticism. To connect Luther's preaching with his faith in the work of the Word is the purpose of the summary at the end of each sermon-analysis. How does the current sermon fit within the bigger picture, theologically and historically?

After going through all sermons, there will be a brief summary of the main themes and topics, followed by my final conclusions.

1.4 A short historical introduction

Before analysing the sermons, I will briefly present the historical context in which they came to be.

By 1522, Luther had already been in conflict with the church establishments for several years, with canonical trials going back to 1518.⁵ In July 1520, Luther became aware that the pope had sent him an excommunication bull, which Luther burned as a response.⁶ However, it was first during the diet of Worms in spring 1521 that the emperor followed up on the excommunication. Being declared an outlaw, Luther was in serious danger. More importantly, officially protecting Luther became increasingly difficult for Elector Frederick. Thus, Luther's escape was organized, disguised as an abduction, and he was taken to Wartburg.⁷

⁵ Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 239.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 470-72.

Aside from shorter visits, Luther remained at Wartburg from May 4 1521 to March 1 1522.⁸ In these ten months, he retained correspondence with his fellow reformers. However, he was of course not able to direct the reform-process in the same manner, especially the times when his writings were temporarily held back.⁹ In this vacuum, other people took charge, and not necessarily the people Luther recommended.¹⁰ Karlstadt is of particular importance in this regard, with whom Luther had several disagreements, though kept internal during this time.¹¹

It is worth mentioning that these two did not communicate directly with each other in this period, with Luther corresponding primarily with Melanchthon.¹² Regardless, during the most of time at Wartburg, Luther was generally positive to the course of events in Wittenberg, which he expressed even as late as December, after his secret visit; though, he did call people not to cause unrest.¹³

While things looked good on the surface, trouble smouldered underneath. From the very start of Luther's absence big changes had occurred, for example priests getting married as early as May.¹⁴ However, from mid-December the situation escalated rapidly with numerous reports of unrest, and a leadership gaining increasing confidence in their ability to dictate reforms.

During ca. two and a half month, new reforms were introduced more rapidly than ever before, and controversial events abounded. Among other things, priests and monks getting married, monks were leaving the monastery, changes to the celebration of the Mass and of the Eucharist were introduced, and images was removed from churches and monasteries by force, or destroyed on the spot.¹⁵ This was in part instigated by the arrival of the Zwickau prophets, who emphasised direct prophetic inspiration.¹⁶ As a result, Luther found no other option but to return sooner than intended, arriving in Wittenberg on March 6, and three days later

⁸ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 64-67.

⁹ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 141.

¹⁰ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 25.

¹¹ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 19, 25; Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 22-23.

¹² Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 145.

¹³ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 36-37; Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 30-31.

¹⁴ *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-45.

¹⁶ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 51-62.

holding the first of eight consecutive sermons, which certainly had the intended effect. Of his old companions, only Karlstadt remained unconvinced.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-76; Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 64-65.

2 The analysis of the *Invocavit* sermons

2.1 The First sermon

2.1.1 *Context*

Before diving into the content, I will discuss relevant background information to this sermon, and present an outline of the sermon to give an overview of the main themes and sub-themes.

2.1.1.1 *Historical background*

This is the first time in a long time Luther holds a sermon to the people in Wittenberg. While I do not want to overdramatize the leadership question, there is no doubt that affirming his position as the leader is a concern reflected in this sermon, or rather to reinforce his authority.¹⁸

Beyond mentioning the mass, which certainly was reformed,¹⁹ Luther leaves the discussion of specific topics to later sermons. Instead, he is concerned with more overarching questions, building a foundation for the remainder of the series.

As I have mentioned earlier, Luther finds himself in a new position; he has to criticise his companions quite harshly. Choosing to confront his opponents could cause lasting divisions, potentially splitting the movement. A desire to avoid unnecessary conflict could be an explanation to why Luther is quite soft for his standards, and does not attack specific Wittenbergers at all in this first sermon. Regardless, Karlstadt, Zwilling, and the rest still need to take responsibility for the reforms that had happened in his absence.²⁰ It had not been impossible to contact Luther, and involve him more had they wanted to.²¹

2.1.1.2 *Outline*

1 Introduction (70)²²

2 The main body, 4 parts (70-74)

¹⁸ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 63-64.

¹⁹ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 51-52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38-39, 51.

²² This refers to the page number in LW 51.

- 2.1 Who we are and what we need (70-72)
 - 2.1.1 We are the children of wrath (70)
 - 2.1.2 We are the children of God (71)
 - 2.1.3 We need love (71)
 - 2.1.4 We need patience (71-72)
- 2.2 Care for our brother, not ourselves (72-73)
 - 2.2.1 Like a mother's care (72)
 - 2.2.2 The properties of the sun (72-73)
- 2.3 The devil is our enemy (73-74)
- 2.4 The "must" and the "free" (74)
- 3 Summary (74-75)

2.1.2 Content

In this analysis of the first sermon, I will discuss key elements of Luther's argumentation in light of his faith in the work of the Word, and how this serves as critique of the Enthusiasts.

2.1.2.1 Who we are and what we need

*The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death himself alone. We can shout into another's ears, but every one must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me.*²³

Luther goes straight to the matter at hand, wasting no time, and goes immediately to a core component of his message; we face death and judgement as individuals with full personal responsibility. Each Christian's direct connection with God, without mediators is a key premise for Luther's argumentation in this sermon, and the series as a whole.²⁴

I perceive Luther's argument as the following: This battle has to be fought alone, with the aid of none but God. By our own merit, we are the children of wrath, and we can do nothing to change this. This is our condition without God; no work holds any meaning whatsoever. Luther does not want to hear a word about our own merit in relation to the saving grace of

²³ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 70.

²⁴ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 201-02.

God. What comes next is entirely the work of God; through the saving act of Christ, God has made reconciliation possible. By faith in Christ, everyone can become a Child of God.²⁵ The conclusion of assuming these premises as true, faith in the work of the Word becomes not a choice, but rather an acceptance of how things are. Furthermore, God is given all the credit, without diminishing our responsibility. Finally, it is an acceptance of personal powerlessness, yet without resulting in apathetic determinism.

Overall, Luther paints a picture of the Christian as both a sinner and righteous in the eyes of God; he is sinner by personal merits and righteous through Christ. Moreover, this is firmly planted on Biblical ground. The reliance on Scripture also illustrates Luther's faith in the work of the Word as part of his argumentation. A key distinction, having knowledge of the Word of God is not a guarantee, there has to be faith in the Word too.

Having firmly established our condition, and complete reliance on God, Luther shifts his focus to our needs living a Christian life. We need love, and respond to God's love by showing other people love. Faith is true only with the presence of love, as Luther quotes Paul (1 Cor 13:1): "If I had the tongue of angels and could speak the highest things in faith, and have not love, I am nothing."²⁶ The Wittenbergers have the necessary knowledge; love is the thing missing. Their reforms has sound basis in faith, but in the actual execution, zeal has taken the place of love. Luther takes this issue very seriously, an issue that goes straight to the core of what faith is. A little further into the sermon, Luther describes faith without love as a "counterfeit of faith".²⁷ He is in many ways accusing the Wittenbergers being blind to the work of God, calling for repentance.

This is at the very core of Luther's theology, and critique of the pope; we are saved by faith alone. Faith is not achieved through works; rather works are the fruits of faith, the fruits of the Holy Spirit. God did not liberate us from the shackles of sin so that we continue as if nothing happened. Anyone can talk about faith and love, but love is from the Holy Spirit. Acting in love, is acting in faith, to put our trust in God's work. As a result, Luther has good reason to describe a faith without love as a counterfeit of faith, and a lack of gratefulness "to God for

²⁵ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 70-71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

his rich gifts and treasures”.²⁸ As such, there are many similarities between the legalism Luther for years had criticised the church establishment of exercising, and the legalistic innovations of the Enthusiasts. He had not fought to abolish the unbiblical laws of the pope, only to replace it with a different set of laws, equally out of line with Scripture.

Love is the first thing needed, patience the second. Living the Christian life is not easy. In fact, Luther says persecution is to be expected.²⁹ An evil foe wants to make life difficult. Facing persecution, patience as described by Paul in Rom 5:4, must be the response. As a result, Luther argues that persecution strengthens, not weaken our faith, and its fruits. This certainly fits Luther’s personal experience of persecution.

The presence and role of persecution brings up the problem of evil, which I have to leave for another time. That aside, his logic makes to a large degree sense. While the existence of evil is a mystery, God’s work is nevertheless often clearest revealed in suffering. In contrast, it can be quite the challenge to notice his work in good times. At the same time, it is necessary to make a distinction between exercising patience when experiencing persecution, and persecution as a thing itself. There is no merit in seeking persecution. Like things, also persecution can be turned into an idol, if made the object of desire. Rather, going through persecution, and hardship without resorting to personal might at the expense of faithfulness to the work of the Word, is the patience that nourishes faith. Subordination to God is the key, not seeking the things themselves.

While love expresses gratefulness for all the wonderful things God has done, patience expresses faith in all the wonderful things God will do, regardless of the current state of affairs. Regarding the state of affairs Luther returned to, he had good reason to mention patience, as the lack of it was an important factor leading up to the recent disturbances and unrest. Patience essentially becomes a matter of trusting God to act, which he does. At the same time, this kind of patience is not a valid excuse to neglect personal responsibilities, and readiness to act. It was not impatience that compelled Luther to return sooner than planned, but his sense of duty to the gospel, and love for his brothers and sisters in Wittenberg.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 71.

²⁹ Ibid., 71.

³⁰ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 43.

2.1.2.2 Luther as role model

Throughout these sermons, Luther can at times become quite personal, making rhetorical use of his own experiences, and sharing his opinion on the matters at hand. I will therefore take a closer look at the role model aspect of his preaching within this sermon. In addition to portraying the status of the Christian, the introduction also sets significant restrictions to the domain of power of leaders in the church. There is no intermediary between the individual Christian, and God.

The care for the neighbour is emphasised by Luther, referring several times to Scripture to support his arguments (which in itself is an important part of his rhetorical strategies³¹). Faith is not static and unchangeable, but it will grow when given appropriate food. Thus, the strength, or maturity of the faith, is highly individual.³² This seems to be a key point in Luther's argumentation; the loving service of the neighbour does not harm the neighbour by imposing burdens too heavy to bear, but accommodates for the strength of the neighbour's faith, in order to ensure thriving conditions in which their faith may grow. Therefore, the Christian mind-set is the mind-set of a servant. The individual fighting his own battle does so while being part of a community, namely the body of Christ. Luther turns what seems to be a matter for the individual, and makes it an issue the community must face together. The church ought to be community practising reciprocal servanthood for the good of all members.³³ This environment creates a framework for leadership that emphasise being a good role model in exercising *leadership through service*. In summary, Luther has good reason to criticise the Wittenbergers for neglecting the "weak" in their haste.

He too, will faithfully serve his neighbour, not himself.³⁴ This is faithfulness in double sense; he is faithful to his neighbour, and to the work of the Word. He made the choice to return in spite of his excommunication, and status as an outlaw. Thus, it is an example of putting love and patience into practise. Furthermore, Luther's willingness to put his own wellbeing into the hands of other people, like Elector Frederick, is an example of faith in God's work through other people. A servant-leader cannot run from his responsibilities.

³¹ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 58.

³² Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 72.

³³ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 289.

³⁴ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 73.

I also find the following statement quite interesting, “I was also the one to whom God first revealed that his Word should be preached to you. I am also sure that you have the pure Word of God.”³⁵ On the one hand, he does claim that his actions are a result of God’s revealed will. Yet on the other hand, he does not make a claim of exclusivity. Luther does not base his claim of leadership on personal access to divine revelation, unavailable to others. His appeals to divine authority is thus not exempt scrutiny. Rather, I interpret his statement as acceptance of leadership responsibilities out of submission to the sovereignty of the Word of God. In fact, Luther makes a point of being held accountable for doing the devil a favour, should his actions be incompatible with Scripture.³⁶

He sums up his argumentation to reinforce his authority as the leader quite well himself, “Therefore, dear brethren, follow me; I have never been a destroyer.”³⁷ Based on my analysis this far, I would argue that there is a lot of truth to this claim.

2.1.2.3 The critique of the Enthusiasts

While he does not mention specific individuals, Luther does not shy away from criticising what he perceives as wrongdoings by the Wittenbergers.

We are to “act with fear and humility, cast ourselves at one another’s feet, join hands with each other, and help one another.”³⁸ This is quite the opposite of harassing priests, rampaging through churches, and the likes. Their zeal to reform the church has made the Enthusiasts obsessed on the wrongs done by the pope to such extent that they lost sight of an even fiercer opponent, the devil, who does a lot of harm if given the opportunity. Repeatedly throughout the sermon, Luther reminds people what is at stake, driving people to God or away from God. In addition, here, Luther leaves no doubt; “all those have erred who have helped and consented to abolish the mass; not that it was not a good thing, but that it was not done in an orderly way.”³⁹ Prayer and preaching must precede the reforms, or they risk doing the devil a favour. There is no defence for what has happened, and the situation was getting truly critical. The future of the reformation depended to significant extent on Elector Frederick resisting outside pressure to hand over these heretical reformers, and the massive unrest certainly did

³⁵ Ibid., 72-73.

³⁶ Ibid., 73, 74.

³⁷ Ibid., 72.

³⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁹ Ibid., 73.

not help in this regard. This is not to say Luther returned for political reasons, but serves as an example to illustrate the complexity of the situation. Cooperation with the worldly authorities was important to Luther, whom he trusted being under the guidance of God.⁴⁰ However, this was premised by a full rejection of any influence from worldly authorities in matters of faith, and maintaining the accountability of these authorities. This responsibility does also include respecting the distinction between what God has made “must” and what has been made “free”.⁴¹ I will come back to these terms later.

2.1.3 Conclusions

Luther starts the sermon by reminding people of their individual responsibility. However, he is quick to point out how this is done through love for our neighbour over ourselves. The emphasis of both the individual and communal dimensions of faith: Faith a gift given by God to each person. Yet, faith is relational in essence, a relationship between the individual and God, and with his neighbour. Through the Word, God works, and God only. Therefore, the human receive something free when hearing God’s Word, a Word he is obliged to share with his neighbour. At the same time, the Christian’s job is to preach, having no choice but to trust God to do the rest. In this sense, Luther’s faith in the work of the Word is a determining factor to how he perceives this relationship. Everyone has their own responsibility to bear, but cannot fight the battle against sin in isolation.

Luther’s faith in the Work of the Word is also evident in the extent he refers to the Bible in his argumentation. While this sermon is not structured around a single biblical passage, biblical references remain a common trend. The key is not solely the presence of a biblical reference, but also the mind-set with which they are used. Appealing to the Word of God comes with serious responsibilities. The affirmation of the universal priesthood elevates the relation between the individual and God, yet simultaneously ensures that all Christians always remain viable subjects to critique. As a side note, Luther’s attitude, and respect for the work of the Word is also reflected in his choice to refer to Scripture in German.

It seems common throughout this sermon that Luther first tells his audience what must be done, and then explains why this is so. He is not afraid of stating what he himself would have

⁴⁰ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 319-20.

⁴¹ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 74.

done either, typically after explaining the situation. Furthermore, he almost exclusively start using the phrase: “Let us, therefore...” This way, he himself is just as much the target of the exhortation than anybody else is. Furthermore, he leaves himself open to critique in much of his argumentation, also including his own position as the leader. The conviction of being constantly under attack by the devil, does serve as a reminder of the risk involved when deviating from the biblical path. Having faith in the work of the Word, Luther is both humble and bold at the same time. The combination of personal humbleness and bold faith in the work of the Word is what makes Luther a good role model, not claims of infallibility. Based on his argumentation in this sermon, I can conclude that there is coherence between Luther’s faith in the work of the Word, and his critique of the Enthusiasts.

To a large degree, Luther and the Wittenbergers agreed on the things that had to be changed. The disagreement, or to some extent misunderstanding, was on why, and how these changes could best be implemented in practise. Hence, Luther’s choice to focus primarily on the *why* and *how* makes sense. Regarding the *what*, like the abolishment of the mass as a sacrifice, it was sufficient to reaffirm his position, simply as a step to avoid unnecessary confusion. Beyond that, there was no need for further argumentation.

2.2 The Second sermon

2.2.1 Context

To describe what I consider the main theme of this sermon, I would use the phrase *faith as the sovereign work of God – and the implications that follows*. The “must” and the “free” can be distinguished exactly because Christians are saved by faith, not by personal merit. God acts, the Christian’s job is to preach his Word, through which he acts.

2.2.1.1 Historical background

Luther had been critical of certain elements of the mass for several years. The sacrifice was a problem, thus private masses would have to go. Likewise, enforcing unbiblical limitations on the laity in the celebration of the Eucharist could not continue. The mass was a running theme in Luther’s correspondence with the Wittenbergers while at Wartburg. However, he did not personally propose changes to the mass beyond stopping the problematic practises. Despite this, the reformers at Wittenberg felt they had support in Luther’s writings to go forward with

changes, to which he did not initially react negatively. *The Misuse of the Mass* certainly affirms this notion. An evangelical mass with no sacrificial element would be the dream, but importantly, not by any means.⁴²

His optimistic attitude to the reforms took a nose-dive during the last months prior to his return.⁴³ I suspect these events had a significant impact on his plans on how to proceed further. His convictions seems to have remained stable, but the voice of caution regarding their implementation grew in strength. Moreover, he remained opposed to the idea of using force against the Zwickau prophets who came to Wittenberg.⁴⁴

While at Wartburg, Luther also reacted fiercely when Albrecht of Mainz attempted to introduce indulgences, and had arrested priests after they married. He applied significant pressure, even giving the Cardinal an ultimatum; he stops these practises, or public exposure ensues.⁴⁵

Overall, the historical background seems to suggest that Luther's preaching in this sermon had not taken a new direction, but rather challenges the Wittenbergers' misconceptions about what he had already preached for several years. However, these misconceptions are not completely due to poor understanding by the Wittenbergers, but also to some degree a result of a lack of answers to important questions within Luther's writings, or at the very least *explicit* answers. Luther too, expressed some uncertainty on how to proceed, and was not there to steer the ship through unfamiliar waters. This sermon is thus in many ways the answer that was missing.

2.2.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction (75)

Luther starts the sermon by briefly repeating yesterday's sermon.

2 The main body of the sermon: Must and free in light of the Word (75-78)

The power of God and the Word of God as arguments against the use of force is Luther's main concern throughout this sermon.

⁴² Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530.*, 24-29.

⁴³ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

- 2.1 Must and free, related to the mass (75)
 - 2.1.1 Must and free, repeated
 - 2.1.2 The mass being evil
- 2.2 Use the Word, not force (75-78)
 - 2.2.1 Do not use force, God must do the work (75-76)
 - 2.2.1.1 Do not use force (75-76)
 - 2.2.1.2 We speak to the ears, God to the heart (76)
 - 2.2.2 Why we need the Work of the Word (76-77)
 - 2.2.2.1 People must understand (76)
 - 2.2.2.2 We must teach the Word (76)
 - 2.2.2.3 Luther stands his ground (76-77)
 - 2.2.3 The example of images and indulgences (77-78)
 - 2.2.3.1 Paul in Athens (77)
 - 2.2.3.2 Luther's reflection (77)
 - 2.2.3.3 Luther's fight against indulgences (77)
 - 2.2.3.4 The consequences of making trouble (77-78)
 - 2.2.4 Circumcision, one law turned into many (78)
 - 2.2.4.1 Paul dealing with circumcision (78)
 - 2.2.4.2 Debate between Jerome and Augustine (78)
 - 2.2.4.3 One free made law turned into many (78)

3 Summary (78)

Luther does not sum up the main points at the end of the sermon. Instead, he ends referring to 1 Cor 8:12, making an appeal to care for those of weak conscience.

2.2.2 Content

My primary goal by reading these sermons is to understand better this question: How did Luther's faith in the Word, through which God works, affect his response to the reforms introduced by the Enthusiasts? After reading this second *Invocavit* sermon, I have made some reflections in that regard.

From an overarching perspective, I would argue that throughout this sermon Luther's argumentation rests upon a core principle of this theology: God creates faith and him alone. He explained it quite thoroughly in the first sermon, and now comes the implications. This

sermon reveals how this is not simply a theoretical proposition, but practical theology, an essential truth about reality.

I consider Luther's main objective in this sermon to give the Wittenbergers what they need to realize themselves how use of force is wrong, and in conflict with faith in God and the Word of God. I will first discuss how his faith in the Word affects his approach, and then relate it to specifically the use of force.

2.2.2.1 We are saved by faith alone

As Luther has shown previously, most recently in the previous sermon, this fundamentally affects the relation between God and man; the individual is saved by faith alone. Therefore: Personal merits count for nothing, and life is utterly a response to God's work, God's love; this is what makes the "must" and "free" distinguishable, meaningful terms. Had humans relied on their own merit, life would become a "must". Fear would be the guide, not love.

Through ordaining some things as "must" and some as "free", God verifies the fundamental relational nature of faith. The sole meaning of life is not to please God through works, but to live in honest relationship with him. The "must" and "free" are not tools to guide works, but rather to maintain and strengthen the relationship. The "must" are exactly "must" because they are essential truths necessary to maintain this relationship on an honest level. The "free" things represents another dimension of an honest relationship with God. In many ways, it expresses how God recognizes each Christian as an autonomous person, contrary to what he or she deserves. He does not want blind, law-abiding followers, but a willing response to the faith he has created.⁴⁶ The response is expressed through the relationship with other people, to his other children, who are all brothers and sisters.

The mass as a sacrifice, a work of merit is wrong because it distorts the relationship with God. He is not glorified through works of merit. These works are merely the channel through which love, how God is truly glorified, can be expressed. It is for this reason, a true premise is as important as a true conclusion regarding living a Christian life. As I will elaborate in more detail later, the outward thing is simply a tool to express the inward.

⁴⁶ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 173.

2.2.2.2 *God is the one working when his Word is preached*

By acknowledging that God alone creates faith, the perception of the preached Word of God must be evaluated and adjusted accordingly. It would be inconsistent after affirming that God alone creates faith, to take any credit, experiencing people coming to faith in God by hearing his Word. Luther illustrates this excellently: “I can get no farther than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force any one to have faith.”⁴⁷ The preacher reaches only the ears, not the hearts where faith rests. This is the domain of God alone. At first sight, this might seem like a confession of powerlessness. What is preaching worth if reaching only the ears? This is true; the Christian is powerless on his own. However, this powerlessness does not give reason to pessimism, but rather optimism. The preached Word has immense value, because of the presence of the Spirit within it.⁴⁸

Luther reinforces his argument: “We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the Word, but the result must be left solely to God’s good pleasure.”⁴⁹ The attitude championed by Luther is what I can only describe as *cautious boldness*; we are to be cautious imposing our own will through our preaching, yet at the same time, bold preaching of God’s Word, and optimism of what fruits it might bear, is perfectly justifiable. God has authorized us to preach his Word, his Word through which everything is created, faith included (Luther referring to Ps 33:6).⁵⁰

Furthermore, this optimistic attitude to the potency of the Word of God, explains why Luther, with good reason, stresses the importance of becoming familiar with the Scripture, where the Word of God can be found; we are to seek teaching ourselves, and teach others. Furthermore, this is not simply a quest for knowledge, but for relationship, by learning to know God through his self-revelation. God reveals himself; Christians are nothing but passive recipients. As a result, praying and preaching the gospel must precede any attempt of reform. Luther is concerned with winning the hearts of people, and as a consequence, themselves wanting reforms.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 76.

⁴⁸ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 191.

⁴⁹ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Additionally, I find through Luther's faith in the work of the Word, a fundamental respect for the faith and life of each individual Christian. Disrespecting this autonomy, and coercing people to agree to reforms out of ignorance, not true conviction is to show faithlessness in the Word of God. Thus, Luther remains consistent stating; "this forcing and commanding results in a mere mockery, an external show, a fool's play, man-made ordinances, sham-saints, and hypocrites."⁵²

2.2.2.3 Does what I am about to do come from God?

In Luther's argumentation, particularly discussing the mass, there is the distinction between what is right, and what is right to do. This is a serious concern, and I must always ask myself, does what I am about to do come from God? Following Luther's logic, the answer is of tremendous importance. As already established, the fruits of doing God's will does not come from the person, but from God. However, when acting on the basis of personal ego, the fruits are not from God; they could even be from the devil. Therefore, it is no wonder Luther has an equally pessimistic attitude to anything not deriving from God. He repeatedly states his unwillingness to risk becoming a pawn in the devil's game:

*And if you should carry them out with such general laws, then I will recant everything that I have written and preached and I will not support you.*⁵³

*if I had seen them holding mass, I would have preached to them and admonished them... I would nevertheless not have torn them from it by the hair or employed any force, but simply allowed the Word to act and prayed for them.*⁵⁴

*I did nothing; I let the Word do its work. What do you suppose is Satan's thought when one tries to do the thing by kicking up a row? He sits back in hell and thinks: Oh, what a fine game the poor fools are up to now!*⁵⁵

In the face of this challenge, he offers this principle as guide: "Faith must not be chained and imprisoned, nor bound by any ordinance to any work. This is the principle by which you must

⁵² Ibid., 76.

⁵³ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 78.

be governed.”⁵⁶ Using Luther’s characteristics of who we are, we are not to let our sinful nature, and ego become a chain and prison for our divine sonship. This would make no sense because Christ has already secured freedom. The essence of faith is trust. Meanwhile, use of force is a result of distrust.

The way Luther supports this principle, both in terms of structure and content of his arguments, are in my view, good illustrations of how his faith in the Word affects his response to the current conflict. He uses three examples:

His reference to Paul in Athens in Acts 17:16-32 has in particular two important functions.⁵⁷ His argumentation has biblical basis, he has faith in the guidance of the Word of God, and at the same time, relating it to the current context, namely how to deal with images. He responds by following Paul’s example of trusting the work of the Word, not his own might.

To reinforce and contextualize practising faith in the Word, he uses his own struggle against indulgences as his next example. The same pattern repeats itself, applying the Word of God, found in Scripture (the parable of the seed growing in Mark 4:26-29) on his own context. Again, Luther had faith in the Word, which did all the work. There is a development though; there is a stronger emphasis on the contrast between showing faithfulness and faithlessness to the Word, and the consequences that can follow.

It looks like Luther is gradually equipping his audience to make an informed choice regarding the future path, a choice that inevitably will be necessary. Anything else would be hypocritical of Luther. He is essentially doing what he is preaching, preaching the Word to win over people by their own conviction, not by the use of force.

His last example has several interesting aspects. He illustrates how conflict is nothing new within the church by referring to Jews and Gentiles arguing whether to require circumcision or not. Luther quotes Paul making it a “free”, not a “must” (1 Cor 7:18-24; Gal 5:1). Jerome making it law, and later popes made more laws.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 76-77.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 78.

Luther has now presented three examples of disastrous laws of what should remain “free”. Moreover, this is not just due to the negative consequences of these particular cases, but the result of indifference to this as a principle itself. While images, circumcision, etc., might individually seem like minor things, the principle they represent is of utmost importance. Luther is essentially saying that by making laws like this, you risk legitimating a similar practise in the future, perhaps concerning completely different issues of far greater importance. Furthermore, there is also implicitly an accusation of hypocrisy, or at the very least inconsistency in the form of attacking the pope for making laws, while doing the same themselves.

Overall, Luther has by now made a solid case of how the distinction between the “must” and the “free” has strong biblical basis. This is indeed a matter of having faith in the Word of God, and the work that follows. While the laws might make one look pious in the outward things, the opposite is true regarding the inward.

2.2.2.4 Luther's critique of the use of force

I will first give a short explanation of how I understand Luther using the term “force”: It is an act of disobedience relying on our own judgement instead of God’s judgement. There are some nuances between his critique of the use of force concerning the “must” and the “free”. While the “must” are necessary things, and as such might give the impression of force being warranted, this is not the case at all, because they are matters of faith, thus completely the work of God.⁵⁹ Love is the guide, and force and love are mutually exclusive concepts.⁶⁰ Had salvation rested upon outward works of merit, use of force could be justified on the grounds of aiding people to do these works. However, this is not the case at all within Luther’s thinking. Meanwhile, applying force to the “free” things is essentially making them a “must”, which serves no purpose, and worse, also becomes an act of disobedience against God who commanded them to be “free”.

To conclude, by remaining consistent with his faith in the work of the Word, Luther is left with no choice but to oppose the use of force in both the “must” and the “free” things.

⁵⁹ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 66.

⁶⁰ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 75.

2.2.2.5 Faith in the work of the Word, not in the result of the work

Strong expectations to God being present and acting in life is a natural consequence of Luther's faith in the work of the Word. This raises some challenges and potential misunderstandings. Tunnel vision on determining what is the work of the Word and what is not can become a risk. Distinguishing between ignorance and stubbornness is another, but this will have to wait.

Here is an example of Luther having strong expectations to the work of the Word:

*He who would follow me could do so, and he who refused would remain outside. In the latter case, the Word would sink into the heart and do its work. Thus he would become convinced and acknowledge his error.*⁶¹

There is an expectancy of the Word doing its work; and it does. However, if nothing happens, has the Word not done its work? If the result becomes the determining factor of whether the Word has worked or not, there is a risk of confusing success as evidence of the work of the Word.

Additionally, there is the related issue of thinking that the human perspective of life is also how God perceives reality. God has indeed revealed himself for humanity. In addition, while this should not be trivialized in any way, it does not make a person perfect, like God is.

This leads me to the conclusion that while there are good reason to expect the Word doing its work, and be encouraged by this, there are equally good reasons to be mindful of the inability to determine exactly how and when the Word is doing its work. If people could predict how the Word worked, they would be left with a work-based faith all over again. To Luther, it remains a mystery,⁶² which there are no options but to accept, hence the need for patience.

2.2.3 Conclusions

Luther was troubled by the way the Enthusiasts had implemented reforms and felt a strong obligation to intervene. Having thoroughly discussed the chief things for a Christian in the

⁶¹ Ibid., 76.

⁶² Ibid., 76.

first sermon, he is now dealing with the subject of how faith in the Word invalidates any justification of the use of force in matters concerning the “must” and “free” things. In the beginning, I used the phrase *faith as the sovereign work of God – and the implications that follows*. As of now, the implications have been discussed.

Luther opposes the use of force. He does so because the use of force is nothing but a transgression into the domain of God. One way or another, either by trying to do what only God can do, the “must”, or by acting in disobedience to what he has commanded, the “free”, use of force remains an act of disobedience. The same principle of faithfulness applies to the creation of faith in the neighbour, and their ability to make decisions in response to the faith created, not out of ignorance. Luther’s solution is to put his faith in the work of God, and the work of the Word. In some ways, calling it a solution is slightly inaccurate. Rather, this is the only choice by which God is served faithfully. In practical terms, Christians are called to preach the Word, and patiently let God work. Exactly how and when the Word works remains a mystery.

In summary, Luther’s faith in the Word affected his response to the reforms, and their implementation, by necessitating an opposition of any use of force, both speaking of the reforms and their implementation, and instead a reliance on the preaching of the Word, and emphasising importance of the individual responding to the gift of faith, not acting out of ignorance.

2.3 The Third sermon

2.3.1 Context

In the first sermon, Luther talked about the chief things for a Christian, how we are just and sinners at the same time, and the need for love and patience. He then went on to talk about the “must” and the “free”, which became the dominating theme in the second sermon, in particular related to the use of force. In this third sermon, his main concern is the “free”, but now related to specific matters; marriage, monastic vows itself, and images. At the centre of this sermon, I find God’s uncompromisable sovereignty, here related to the “free” things, marriage, vows and images. What I will try to find out is: How is this related to, or affected by, Luther’s faith in the efficacy of the Word?

2.3.1.1 Historical background

When discussing priests and monks marrying, Luther had to address two things, the justification of celibacy and the sanctity of vows. First, can the celibacy be imposed on biblical ground? This raises the debate whether or not celibacy must remain voluntary, or made compulsory. Second, are current vows of chastity, especially made voluntarily, still binding? At the same time, given the incredible hypocrisy, sexual immorality, and general frustration among priests and monks, doing nothing was an even worse alternative.

While marriage and vows had been a discussion topic for some time, attention skyrocketed when priests started to get married. One of the first was Luther's friend, Bartholomäus Bernhardi, who got married in May 1521. This caught Luther by surprise, as legal sanctions followed such act.⁶³ Because Luther in previous writings had distinguished between the compulsory nature of celibacy for priests, and the voluntary vows of chastity by monks and nuns, he was even more surprised when also they started to get married. It was especially the poor grounds upon which these choices were made, that concerned him.⁶⁴ At the same time, the misery these vows imposed on people, truly moved Luther, who had gotten a completely different view of monasticism when faith is solely the foundation for salvation. Becoming a monk was no longer a sure step towards ensuring salvation.⁶⁵ In the end, this made the case for Luther, who no longer could justify vows made with personal righteousness as motive.⁶⁶ Stopping vows from becoming works of merit rested on the premise of evangelical freedom. To guide the Wittenbergers, Luther wrote a treatise on the subject, discussing the issue more thoroughly, thus also balancing the danger of people abandoning their vows for the wrong reasons.⁶⁷

At the end of January 1522, Karlstadt announced that images were to be abolished. The intent was to reintroduce the prohibition of images from the Old Testament, to the point where even crucifixes was forbidden. This is one of the instances where Luther's and Karlstadt's disagreement on the extent of the validity of the laws in the Old Testament is most apparent. Karlstadt affirmed a much stricter view than Luther affirmed, claiming that the Holy Spirit

⁶³ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 22.

⁶⁴ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530.*, 16-17.

⁶⁵ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 130.

⁶⁶ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530.*, 18.

⁶⁷ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 140-43.

enabled Christians to keep the law.⁶⁸ This does not purely concern images, but goes far deeper, to the relation between justification and sanctification, and their approach to Christian freedom. Simply put, Karlstadt's understanding of the law enabled a far more legalistic attitude to reforms. Back to the historical consequences, this announcement, and the influence of radical preachers like Zwilling, resulted in some people taking matters into their own hands, and destroyed images by use of force.⁶⁹ While dramatic events, it did not produce much of results on the overarching level. Regardless, the consequence of this, and other imposed measures, was public disturbance on many levels. The unrest escalated to such a point it gathered attention beyond the borders of the electorate. This disturbed Luther greatly, despite his qualms about images. He agreed neither with the reasoning behind the ban, nor with how it was enforced. The ends did not justify the means, which would compromise the liberty of a Christian.⁷⁰

2.3.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction (79)

He repeats the “must”, and moves on to specific examples of the “free” as the main topic of this sermon.

2 The “free” things: Marriage, monastic vows in general and images (79-83)

2.1 The “free”, the individual responsibility, heed God's command over human (or angelic for that matter) authority (79-80)

2.1.1 The free things are a matter of choice; do what is best to retain our conscience in relation to God (79)

2.1.2 Following human authorities is no excuse; everyone has their own responsibility, and need to rely on Scripture in the battle against the devil (79-80)

2.2 Marriage and monastic vows more broadly (80-81)

2.2.1 Marriage (80)

2.2.1.1 Paul's warning against forbidding meat and marriage (1 Tim 4:1-3) (80)

2.2.1.2 Preach it before implementing reform (80)

2.2.1.3 Oppose any attempt to make law what God has made

⁶⁸ Ibid., 145-46.

⁶⁹ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 59-60.

⁷⁰ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 39-40.

free (80-81)

2.2.2 A general rule regarding monastic vows (81)

2.2.2.1 Paul strictly making chastity voluntary (81)

2.2.2.2 What God has commanded takes priority over anything decided by man (81)

2.3 Images (81-83)

2.3.1 Pope and emperor wanting to make “must” of what is “free” (81-82)

2.3.2 The laws in Scripture and how to understand them (82-83)

2.3.2.1 The command against images, arguments in favour of those wanting to forbid them (82)

2.3.2.2 That which complicates things, arguments in favour of accepting images (82)

2.3.2.3 The futility of attempting to forbid them (82-83)

2.3.3 Luther’s recommended attitude to images (83)

2.3.3.1 Paul in Athens (83)

2.3.3.2 Paul and the Twins (83)

3 The ending (83)

There is no summary at the end, as there is more to be said on this topic. He calls people to preach and teach the Word, emphasis on *ministerium*, not *executio*.

2.3.2 Content:

In my effort to figure out how Luther’s faith in the Word affected his response through this particular sermon, I have found the total sovereignty of God, and in turn, the sovereignty of the individual’s salvation by faith, to be key aspects I will discuss first. After discussing how they are related to his faith in the Word, I will move on to the impact this has on his response to the events in Wittenberg.

3.2.2.1 The sovereignty of God, and of the Word - being faithful to the ordinance of God

In the analysis of the previous sermons, I have already discussed how Luther considers maintaining the “free” things “free” an act of obedience to the ordinance of God, and the opposite an act of disobedience. In this sermon, Luther takes the same concept further by relating it to the submission to worldly authorities and vows, be that voluntarily or not.⁷¹ The

⁷¹ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 80.

worldly authorities and vows gives no comfort when troubled by the devil. Luther instead exhorts: “You must rest upon a strong and clear text of Scripture if you would stand the test.”⁷² However, while acknowledging the authoritative status the Bible has revealing God through his Word, this is not meant as blind obedience to Scripture itself.⁷³ I will elaborate this more thoroughly.

The way I see it, there are two premises upon which Luther’s view rests: The first premise: Optimism regarding our comprehension of God’s revelation in Scripture. If God is sincere in his invitation to get to know him, there is good reason to be confident in the ability to comprehend his revelation. Or rather, there is good reason to be confident in the Work of the Holy Spirit through his Word.

The second premise: Complete reliance upon seeking God’s revelation, not reading personal views into the text. A strong faith in the efficacy of the Word demands this Word, and from that Scripture, to be handled with respect and humility. In practical terms, this means reading the Bible with the whole picture in mind, not select what is convenient to confirm personal convictions. Otherwise, the efficacy of the Word is not taken seriously, and therefore, the faith in the efficacy of the Word is not strong at all.

As a result, while Luther has immense faith in Scripture as the Word of God, this does not imply all of Scripture is to be treated as the infallible Word of God down to the letter. The devil knows the Bible too. Instead, Luther suggests a broad approach in which the individual passages are illuminated in light of the Bible as a whole, with the revelation of Christ in the centre.⁷⁴ The Bible is best illuminated with itself as interpreter; the Holy Spirit interprets itself. Biblical Interpretation is not determined by an office in the church. There is neither a revelation of the Spirit in the present that trumps the revelation in the past.⁷⁵

Moreover, giving the Word of God total superiority over any worldly authority must include the Bible itself, as it is written by men. Paul’s statements are not normative because Paul said them, but because of what he said. Paul is just a man, like everybody else. The books in the

⁷² Ibid., 80.

⁷³ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 188-89.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 190.

Bible are not authoritative because they are in the Bible. They are authoritative because of their content, and therefore in the Bible. In Luther's Bible based theology, I find a balancing act between having faith in God revealing himself, therefore faith in the Scripture, and not becoming subject to worldly authorities because of their role in God revealing himself. In short, we are to treat the Bible with the reverence deserved as the Word of God, yet not so far it becomes worship of the Bible, not God. Therefore, the Bible itself is evidence of the great things God does through the preached Word.

Furthermore, Luther's approach reduces the risk of abusing the Word of God by taking a verse out of context, cherry picking passages while ignoring others, etc. While Luther like everyone else is fallible and disposed to let his own perspective colour his reading of the Bible, his attitude to Scripture seems to reflect his wish for a genuine and honest relationship with God. Judging by his use of biblical passages in this sermon, Luther does seek the overall message, not simply being content with that which would support his own views on things.⁷⁶

3.2.2.2 The sovereignty of the faith created by God in each individual Christian.

The sovereign personal faith is an inevitable consequence of God being the sole creator of faith, and the sovereignty of his Word, through which faith is created. If Luther has a strong faith in the Word, he must also have a strong faith in the sovereignty of the faith of an individual ultimately being a matter between God and man, which indeed he has made his case for in the previous sermons, and earlier writings for that matter.⁷⁷ In essence, his belief in the universal priesthood guides his response. While they are related, I find in this sermon an emphasis primarily on sanctification, not justification.

The purpose of a Christian is to respond to the faith given by God, and have faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit given to each Christian personally. The Christian is responsible for himself, and must thus ultimately be the judge of the vows he has pledged, not leave this to other people, no matter how magnificent they may be. While faith is at the core the work of God, this should not prevent using the God-given mental capacities to order and find meaning in the fruits faith brings.⁷⁸ While God does indeed transcend the comprehension of reality, he is not foreign either. If this were the case, a relationship would be impossible. However, by

⁷⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 82.

⁷⁷ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 290.

⁷⁸ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 158.

being given the Holy Spirit, humans are indeed capable of knowing and loving God, even express it through good works.⁷⁹ Therefore, everyone are obliged to respond to God's invitation as best as possible, all while humbly acknowledging his sovereignty, and the Holy Spirit as origin of all good things.

Furthermore, I find Luther quite honest regarding man's own capability, or rather, incapability. By emphasising the work of the Word, there is no point in pretending to be pious. The inward piety takes priority over the outward. This should not be misunderstood as a permission to sin, as it is premised by honesty to God, thus his commands still stands. In summary, the acknowledgement of the universal priesthood is both an acknowledgement of one's own responsibility and the total dependency on the Holy Spirit.

3.2.2.3 Luther's response dealing with marriage, vows and images

I will now look more closely at how the recognition of God, and his Word as supreme authority, and the sovereignty of the individual Christian in power of being recipients of faith by God, affected his argumentation on these issues in this sermon.

On marriage, I perceive Luther's argument as follows: God has made marriage a free thing. The same cannot be said about adultery and sexual immorality. Therefore, it is better to be married than having one's conscience tormented by attempting to keep one's vows of chastity.⁸⁰

At first glance, it might seem like Luther has low regards for celibacy. However, after a closer look, I believe this is not the general case. In fact, I find Luther quite positive to chastity. He is positive until the point it comes at the cost of one's own conscience, endangering our honest relationship to God. At this point, the outward piety is no longer an expression of the inward. Instead, it in many ways becomes a work of merit, letting one's own pride come before humbleness to God. Luther has strong Scriptural support, and is therefore justified in being as outspoken as he is, even accepting the dissolution of all monastic institutions if that is the consequence.⁸¹ In this case, I find coherence between Luther's faith in the Word, and his argumentation.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 284.

⁸⁰ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 79.

⁸¹ Ibid., 80.

Prideful attitude at the cost of humble subordination to the righteousness of God is the essence of Luther's critique regarding the vows. Like chastity, vows are not wrong in principle. Each vow must be judged individually. As soon as the vow is in opposition to the will of God, it must be abandoned.⁸² While it might hurt the pride, anger authorities here on earth; nothing comes before the authority of God. This is not just a matter of pleasing God for personal benefits, as if it was a work of merit. Rather, God's will must come first in order to give him the proper credit for his Work. It is with the vows in general as it was with marriage specifically, outward piety cannot be more than a reflection of the inward.

Furthermore, Luther brings up a very important point. Here, like when the use of force was on the agenda, empowering people to make their own choices is of utmost importance. No monk or nun should leave, nor remain in the cloister except by will of his or her own conscience. To make such determination, the Word, through which the Holy Spirit works, must be preached to them.⁸³ The Christian's conscience seems quite important to Luther, judging by his emphasis on it. This makes a lot of sense from a relational perspective. When the devil attempts to lead us astray, he hates nothing more than a lightened conscience, resting upon the Word of God.

When Luther comes to images, he has already spoken a lot about the importance of relying on "a strong and clear text of Scripture"⁸⁴ as foundation. Therefore, I find it very interesting how he takes the consequence of precisely this when dealing with images. Luther is not fond of images,⁸⁵ but he cannot abolish them without a strong and clear text of Scripture. Instead of picking one text to support his view, I find his argumentation to be quite nuanced. He would rather be proven wrong than misrepresent what is found in Scripture. On worship, the Scripture is clear (Exod 20:5). Meanwhile, on the making of images, the foundation is not sufficient to abolish them.⁸⁶ Again, following Luther's logic, there is nothing wrong in abolishing images should such agreement be found; but to make it a law, that is what is wrong.

⁸² Ibid., 81.

⁸³ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 82.

While the “free” things are a matter of choice, they are not universally good in all situations, and for all people. Rather, it is for the individual to figure out what is best. Aimlessly following the crowd is not how personal relationships are built.

Allowing people to figure out what is best themselves also requires accepting a no for a no. If they out of stubbornness refuse to see what is right after having heard the Word, there is nothing more man can do. It is up to God at that point.⁸⁷ While this is the case, Luther does not suggest affirming such wrongdoing ourselves. He is uncompromising in his critique of the the pope’s law oriented approach, and would take the same stance should anyone else do the same.⁸⁸ Luther is preaching individual responsibility, not religious individualism. Christians are responsible as individuals, yet called to live together as community: United and alone at the same time. I find Luther’s project very much to be an attempt to reconcile the two while retaining personal integrity to God as best as possible. Without the premise of honesty to God, the risk of abuse is still present, for example by deliberately confusing ignorance with stubbornness, thus giving the appearance of being justified in opposing the opponent’s views.

2.3.3 Conclusions

By now, I should be able to make some conclusions on how Luther’s faith in the work of the Word affected his response, attempting to solve the issues at the time. In this sermon, that would be the “free” things, explicitly marriage, vows and images.

Luther’s faith in the Word elevates Scripture to represent God’s Word, and God’s work. This is an inevitable consequence, yet creates some potential dangers, especially using Scripture for personal gains, instead of submitting to the will of God. However, Luther is not ignorant to these risks, and any authority the Scripture might have, is premised by maintaining our honest relationship with God. When used for personal gains, Scripture is no more authoritative than human words.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 82-83.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 81, 82.

Furthermore, the importance of knowledge of the Scripture is proportionally elevated. However, this is not an impossible task only possible to undertake by theologians. The creation of faith in the individual Christian, thus the establishment of the universal priesthood, is very much the essence of the work of the Word. Had only theologians been able to interpret what God has revealed in Scripture, there would be good reason to raise concerns regarding the efficacy of the Work of the Spirit, and likewise God's intention to establish a personal relationship to each person as individuals. In short, God dwarfs all other forms of authorities to the point of complete insignificance.

To use an example from the sermon: While Luther was positive to chastity, and negative to images, his faith in the Word prevented him from affirming any general laws regarding both of them. His faith in the Word takes priority over submission to earthly authorities should conflict appear. Optimism in the work of the Word must not turn into an expectation of knowing how this work is done. Humility must therefore characterize our interpretation of Scripture.

Living a pious life is an important part of living a life of glorification to God. Luther's faith in the work of the Word gives reason to optimism regarding sanctification, by being the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the Christian must therefore also accept that his good works are the merit of the Holy Spirit, not himself. As a result, piety in the inward things is a thousand times more valuable than piety in the outward things. The latter is merely supposed to be expressions of the former. Whenever this is not the case, they are hollow things, not the work of the Spirit. From this reasoning, the "free" things becomes harmless by themselves, and potential dangers they might cause originates from how they are used.

By preaching the total sovereignty of God, the empowerment of each Christian by the Spirit, and at the same time, complete insufficiency by personal merit, Luther's faith in the work of the Word seems to create a rather difficult balancing act, yet a necessary one nonetheless.

To summarize how Luther's faith in the Word affects the way he deals with marriage, vows and images, I would use the phrase *reconciliation on God's premise*. Reconciliation of the fact that Christians are children of wrath, yet also children of God, and reconciliation of the fact that the believer has received his personal faith by God alone, yet thus become part of the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers. A clear and strong text of Scripture is the best

guide here. On the specific issues of marriage, vows and images, they are harmless if subordinate to the will of God, and their proper use an individual matter. Christians as community are called to preach the Word, leaving the work entirely to God.

2.4 The Fourth sermon

Luther continues his discussion of images, before moving on to talk about meat.

2.4.1 Context

2.4.1.1 Historical background

In this sermon, Luther criticises attempts to link veneration of images and relics as good works. He had good reason to do so, as this was a big business. While in Wartburg, he had strongly attacked Albrecht of Mainz for promising indulgences to those visiting his relic collection.⁸⁹ The mixing of relics and images, good works as merit, and financial interests was the very reason Luther began his protest, and remained a recurring problem for years. This is evidence that Luther distinguished between idolatrous use of images, be that as worship or economic exploitation, and the images as a thing in themselves, and that from significantly earlier than this sermon. There were some signs of progress on this front, even prior to Luther's return. For example, when the relics were displayed in the castle church in the late 1521, it was done without a mention of indulgence.⁹⁰ However, this could also be an act to appease more the more radical tendencies, rather than theological motivations of similarity to Luther's.

Luther moves on to discuss the eating of meat at times when canon law imposes fasting. While he was certainly opposed to dietary laws on the grounds of evangelical freedom, he was neither fond of an ignorant attitude to those having a troubled conscience from eating meat instead of fasting, for example by a complete disregard for fasting prior to Karlstadt's celebration of the Eucharist in both kinds in Christmas. The opposing fronts was to a large degree locked against each other.⁹¹ Meanwhile, this troubled Luther greatly, giving several warnings against the over-aggressive approach. All this time, he emphasised the distinction between the "strong" and the "weak", and their respective duties, while neither giving in for

⁸⁹ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 12.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁹¹ Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, 51.

the pope.⁹² Jerome Schurf is a good example of someone “weak”, yet sympathetic to Luther’s cause. Schurf expressed his own views, and qualms in their correspondence prior to Luther’s return to Wittenberg, revealing a perspective highly relevant to this sermon. Schurf gives a human face to those finding it very difficult to rapidly adopt an opposite stance on a subject entrenched in tradition.⁹³

2.4.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction (84)

2 Images and meat as examples dealing with the “free” things (84-88)

2.1 Images continued (84-86)

2.1.1 The true problem with images; the belief in images being a good work (84-85)

2.1.2 The futility and absurdity in attempting to abolish all things potentially evil (85)

2.1.3 To catch the devil; identifying the real problem (85-86)

2.1.3.1 How to identify the devil (85-86)

2.1.3.2 How to avoid becoming a tool for the devil to use (86)

2.2 Concerning meats (86-88)

2.2.1 Introducing the issue; eat food, a God-given liberty, issue being the use of this liberty (86)

2.2.2 The first, abstaining should not be unhealthy; never a sin to care for our health (86)

2.2.3 The second, a call to oppose “fool’s laws”, making liberty a law (87)

2.2.4 The third, the importance of distinguishing between the “weak” and the “stubborn” (87-88)

2.2.4.1 The “weak” (87)

2.2.4.2 The “stubborn” (87-88)

3 Final exhortation, use our liberty properly (88)

⁹² Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 33-34.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

2.4.2 Content

In this sermon, deriving from Luther's faith in the work of the Word, I find an emphasis on the service of ministry, the preaching the Word, being a service in not just words, but deeds as well. Deeds are not works of merit, but preaching.

Preaching the Word is not by nature a periodical activity. Rather, I would describe it as something that encompasses the very state of being, through which God, and God alone works. Existence itself is an expression of God's good grace. As such, the service of ministry is a service of faithfulness to the revealed God, in who the Christian is, in what he say, and in what he does. It is a living ministry, a journey in the works the Holy Spirit has done.

2.4.2.1 The premise of faithfulness

In the previous sermons, Luther's argumentation is already premised by the need for a proper relationship with God. The relationship is in the centre, a relationship built and sustained by faithfulness. I will now briefly discuss what this implies in relation to Luther's argumentation in this sermon. Faithfulness is built upon honesty, in this sermon, honesty in two particular areas.

A faithful service requires honesty about the Christian identity. As Luther said in the first sermon, we are children of wrath, yet also children of God. We have a disposition to commit sin, and our work is completely insufficient. On the other hand, we can rely completely on God's work, and on his behalf, there should be no limit to our confidence. This is the essence of ministry driven by the faith in the work of the Word.

Furthermore, a faithful service cannot function properly without honesty about what this service actually is. Luther has previously used the terms *ministry* and *executio* to differentiate what Christians are called to do, and what only God can do. The Christian ministry is to bear of witness of God, as he has revealed himself, and who is sovereign par excellence. There is no room for deviation here, although it can be a hard balancing act at times, which I will come back to.

2.4.2.2 *The distinction between the thing itself and that which makes it evil*

In the first part, Luther continues his preaching on images. He repeats that worship of images is wrong without exception. Furthermore, Luther would like to see them gone. This is where it becomes interesting, as Luther's critique of images is not related to idolatrous worship directly, but to the donation of images being falsely seen as a good work.⁹⁴ The main issue is not the images themselves, neither necessarily the act of making them, but to conceive them as good works. God has not requested images being given to him, he has asked for the care of the neighbour. To God, the images means nothing. This is what Luther would want preached, not a call to abolish them, especially not by force. Therefore, it is the evil practise that must be condemned, not the thing in itself.⁹⁵

To acknowledge the risk images might represent is commendable, but does not provide sufficient justification for a universal condemnation. It would be to go beyond the rightful authority. Furthermore, while images are of no good to God, they can be useful to humans.⁹⁶ A universal condemnation would disrespect their usefulness to these people. I would go even further, and call such condemnation an act of disrespect to the sovereignty of God as the creator of faith, and the Holy Spirit sanctifying and sustaining this faith. I base this on three related reasons:

First, if an image is helpful, a good work, the merit does not belong to humans. The merit belongs to the Holy Spirit. People create outward things, God the inward faith.

Second, to neglect to take seriously the incapability to resist personal arrogance, for example by making claims of ownership on what is God's work, is a serious underestimation of the sinful nature.

And third, if the attitude is to remain in accordance with the belief in the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier of faith, no person can pass judgement and set limitations to how this work is done, beyond what God himself has revealed.

⁹⁴ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 84.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

The abolishment of images must not become a red herring; they are useful to man, but nothing to God. Thus, it is a shame should they distract from the thing that matters, namely preaching, leaving condemnation to God.⁹⁷

*If they had heard this teaching that images count for nothing, they would have ceased of their own accord, and the images would have fallen without any uproar or tumult, as they are already beginning to do.*⁹⁸

Luther is faithful to his conviction of what images are, not letting his distaste of them get the better of him. He is faithful to the service of preaching, and finally, he is faithful to his conviction of the great things achieved through the work of the Word.

*Indeed, if we want to drive away our worst enemy, the one who does us the most harm, we shall have to kill ourselves, for we have no greater enemy than our own heart, as the prophet, Jer. 17 [:9], says*⁹⁹

Luther takes things to the ridiculous to illustrate the absurdity in attempting to abolish all things causing evil. Nevertheless, as he comes back to again and again, it is not the outward things we should fear.

“If you want to fight the devil you must know the Scriptures well and, besides, use them at the right time.”¹⁰⁰ This is a serious matter to Luther. He is quite sincere in his warnings about letting zealotry get the better of people, becoming a tool in the schemes of the devil. He has an important point, exhorting people not just to know the Word of God, but also consider the proper use of it. As Luther repeats and repeats, wrong use of Scripture is a gift the devil knows how to make use of. In contrast, the preacher has no reason to fear the devil when being faithful to the Word of God.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 87.

⁹⁸ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 85.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 89-90.

To summarize, I find Luther's argumentation consistent with his faith in the work of the Word. In this sermon, he manages to challenge misconceptions surrounding images, while remaining faithful to his service of ministry, subordinated to God's sovereign authority.

2.4.2.3 The proper use of liberties while serving the sovereign God

When Luther starts talking about meats, he has already thoroughly discussed, and concluded that liberties ordained by God, is above what humans can make a law. They are inherently liberties, which no man can change. However, while liberties are unconditionally given by God, to use them properly, is highly conditional by nature. God has granted every individual the liberty to determine themselves how to use them best, yet he is not indifferent to how they are used. I mean this not in the sense of God judging the use, as if they were some form of works of merit, but in the sense of expressing his unending love, always concerned about the wellbeing of the Christian, and his neighbour's wellbeing. When using liberties properly, it is in service of the fellowship of believers, not as individual rights, or privileges.

On meats, Luther brings up three important principles regarding the proper use of this liberty. I find quite a lot of his argumentation to have relevance beyond the explicit context of food. Likewise, several aspects of how he structures his arguments can be related to his faith in the work of the Word.

His first principle is related to health, specifically to take personal health seriously if abstaining from meat becomes a problem.¹⁰² There are several interesting aspects here.

First of all, God has given this liberty out of love. What reasons exists to not accept this act of love with open arms? I can think of no valid reason, although a couple of rather dubious ones like arrogance, or submission to earthly authorities instead of God. Nobody has earned God's love, yet he loves everyone beyond comprehension nonetheless. The personal God cares for the personal wellbeing of children. It is by accepting, not rejecting the liberties given out of love, gratitude is expressed. There is no reason to let the words of men shake the faith in God's faithfulness to what he has ordained.

¹⁰² Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 86.

Second, I find it peculiar that Luther did not relate unhealthy fasting to a belief in doing a good work, because I find the relevance to his previous argumentation on images to be strong. He asked, “Do you think that Duke Frederick, the bishop of Halle, and the others would have dragged so many silver images into the churches, if they thought it counted for nothing before God?”¹⁰³ Likewise, it could be said: Do you think people would harm themselves by not eating meat if they thought it counted for nothing before God? Despite not being explicitly expressed, the relation is still implicitly there. Hence, faith in God’s liberties is an expression of faith in his work through the Word.

This becomes even more relevant looking at his second principle, which I would call, *being faithful to the sovereignty of God while under pressure by earthly authorities*. Luther is extremely critical of even giving an inch to someone treating God’s liberty as law.¹⁰⁴

This is related to Luther’s understanding of salvation, and sanctification as exclusively the work of God, not work of humans.¹⁰⁵ If someone, like an earthly authority such as the pope, wants to impose restrictions to what God has made “free”, they better have good reasons, because they have no inherent credibility except by referring to what God has revealed through his Word.

It seems to me that while Luther is adamant in his opposition to making a liberty a law, he is neither letting it govern his own choice. This does not imply always doing the opposite of the pope, but making the choice freely.¹⁰⁶ I could be misinterpreting Luther here. However, I am convinced that categorically doing the opposite of what the pope does would be to go too far. This would still in a sense make him a slave under these laws, not just the way the pope intends. As Luther said in the previous sermon, we are ultimately responsible ourselves, not excused by what other people, nor institutions say. And we embrace this responsibility making our own free choices, with the genuine intent of expressing our gratitude to the love God has shown us.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁵ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 291-92.

¹⁰⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 87.

This leads me to Luther's third principle, the importance of distinguishing between the "weak" and the "stubborn". If someone let laws govern how they use what God has made a liberty because they do not know better, Luther recommends a different attitude than he would dealing with those who know better but still refuse.¹⁰⁷

To support his argument, he does what he suggested a little earlier in the sermon: "If you want to fight the devil you must know the Scriptures well and, beside that, use them at the right time."¹⁰⁸ He refers to how Paul chose freely how to use the liberty of circumcision in accordance with what he thought best in the given situation (Acts 16:3, Gal 2:3, 11). And furthermore, by how Paul was not afraid to speak up when convinced God's ordained liberty was threatened (Gal 2:14).¹⁰⁹

People are different, and so is the strength of their faith. God has given us our faith, and our justification is resting on his shoulders, not ours. Therefore, there is an inherent optimism to a faith in the efficacy of the Word. However, it must still be acknowledged that all Christians are in a process, thus it is natural to find people at different stages of trust in their faith. While works have no saving power, the Christian has still been given the important task of preaching the Word of the revealed God. All people deserve a chance; offending them with the use of liberties is in a sense a claim of ownership on something that was given to be shared.

Love and patience are required for the Word to be preached in truth. It is not an exchange of knowledge, no strings attached, neither founded on a desire to be proven right. It is a sacrifice, and what better way to express it than adjust the use of liberties in the service of others? Although, it is not in reality a sacrifice at all. Nothing must be given up in order to use liberties properly, perhaps except a bit of pride.

When the adjustment of use of liberties to serve others are grounded in the faith in the work of the Word, it becomes an expression of patience, a necessary patience. Expecting the Word to work yet not give it time to do so, is a hollow faith. Impatiently shoving the Word, and works based on personal expectations, down people's throat is essentially an act of turning preaching

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 87.

into a work of merit. As Luther has said multiple times, love and patience must be our guide. It is a requirement for a faith in the efficacy of the Word to make sense.

While the outward things cannot cause harm by itself, neither should it serve as an excuse to dismiss the importance of the outward thing as expression of the inward. The preaching of the Word happens not just through spoken words, but equally through actions that lives up to those words preached. Luther phrased it as preaching to the ear, leaving the creation of faith in the heart to God. I think he could use not just the ears as illustration but the eyes as well. The Christian express his faith in the work of the Word in what he does, just as much as in what he says.

By differentiating between the “weak” and the “stubborn”, there is a danger which requires attention, namely to deliberately confuse the two to discredit the opponent in order to legitimate actions based on selfish motives. This is in particular a risk when experiencing setbacks, having patience put to a great test. At what point has the Word been sufficiently preached to dismiss potential opposition as stubbornness? This is a grey area where integrity to the faith in God is essential. Related to this issue lies a potential conflict between respecting the autonomy of faith belonging to the individual and common interests as a community. As far as I can tell, finding the correct balance is not impossible, yet very difficult no doubt. However, with the faith in the efficacy of the Word as foundation, this balance is necessary to pursue, otherwise inconsistencies will appear.

2.4.3 Conclusions

While Luther appears to talk primarily about images and meat in this sermon, his principles are relevant to liberties in general.

Christians are not in a static state of being, but in a process reflecting the dynamic relationship with God. To use Luther’s terminology, we are sinners, children of Wrath, yet by the mercy of God, righteous, his children through Christ. When receiving our faith from God we were made just by grace. While having been made just, we are not at the point where we on our own can do what God wants. That would make the Holy Spirit superfluous, and our sinful nature belong to the past, neither being the case. However, while we still suffer by our own hand, we can still rejoice, and expect fruits from our faith, as the Holy Spirit is the one responsible for our sanctification.

Being confident in the personal capacity to use liberties properly, to the best both personally and for the neighbour, is therefore coherent with, or even a result of, Luther's strong faith in the work of the Word. However, this is premised by a genuine reliance on a strong and clear biblical text, and willingness to admit mistakes.

Christians have a responsibility to oppose any attempts to make what God declared a liberty, a law. Yet, while doing so, the Christian cannot forget his call, namely to preach the Word, not try to do what only God can. As I now have an overview over the "free" things Luther has discussed this far, I feel confident concluding that his suspicion of donation of images being motivated by pleasing God, as if it was a good work, has a general relevance to attempts to make a liberty a law. There is the common theme of forgetfulness regarding personal insufficiency whenever the belief in knowing what God wants has become sufficiently strong. Yet such thoughts find a humble faith in the work of the Word to be an undefeatable opponent. By remaining true to the calling of *ministry*, leaving the *executio* to God, Christians rejoice in optimism regarding the maintenance of the supreme sovereignty God deserves.

Having faith in the work of the Word, and subsequently attributing the gradual sanctification to the Holy Spirit, having patience with those of weaker faith becomes a matter of trusting, and respecting the work of the Spirit. In contrast, impatience in these matters can quickly turn into a transgression into the domain of the Spirit. Therefore, on the ground of the affirmation of the efficacy of the Word, patience is a necessary part of the rightful subordination to the sovereignty of God. The responsibility rests on the individual alone, but at the same time, the faith of the individual can only flourish in a community, a community placing the subordination to the example of Christ at the centre. To preach is to pass on what was given to be shared. And to preach truthfully necessitates the affirmation of what God has made liberties, and a genuine wish to use them properly, not for selfish purposes, but in service to God.

All in all, I therefore feel confident in concluding that Luther's faith in the work of the Word affected his response dealing with the proper use of images and meats (and liberties more broadly) in several ways, in particular by emphasising the importance of preaching solving real issues. And by preaching, I mean bearing witness to the Word of God, in words and deeds.

2.5 The Fifth sermon

Having finished his preaching on the “free things” like vows, marriage, and images, Luther moves on to discuss the Lord’s Supper over the three next sermons.

2.5.1 Context

2.5.1.1 Historical background

Because these sermons are one long discussion of the Lord’s Supper, I will discuss their historical background as a whole rather than split it up for each sermon. I will concentrate on important developments of Luther’s sacramental thinking prior to these sermons, as well the immediate historical context leading up to Luther’s return.

Already a few years earlier, in his sermons on the sacraments, Luther defined sacraments in an unprecedented way by distinguishing between the sign, the meaning, and the faith which receives it. It was particularly the latter which was criticised by his opponents. They feared for the objectivity of the gift, while for Luther, it was an emphasis of the relational aspects of the Eucharist. The Word of Christ, and our faith, which is the work of Christ, guarantees the efficacy of the sacrament, completely independently, and unaffected by human influence, be that priest or pope.¹¹⁰ The universal priesthood was incompatible with division between laity and clergy, thus served as a solid foundation for Luther’s critique of the “foolish law of the pope”.¹¹¹ The critique of the idea that humans has a say is key, thus the same principle likewise applies to any elevation of human authority by the Enthusiasts regardless of how it is done. Luther does not want to *change the rules*, but rather *change how to think about the rules*.

Concerning the Lord’s Supper, Luther greatly emphasised fellowship as the central aspect through which everything else work from, or towards. “On this basis Luther described forgiveness of sins as the special gift of the Supper”.¹¹² Participating in the Eucharist is not a good work for God’s sake, but an explicit promise by God to forgive the sinner, thus relieve his conscience. And this is done as a fellowship of all Christians and Christ.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 128-29.

¹¹¹ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 88.

¹¹² Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 131.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 131.

There were major developments concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper while Luther was absent. A major discussion started in July 1521, headed by Karlstadt. While Luther's writings certainly influenced the discussion, they also had their own views, which affected the direction the discussion was heading. Like Luther, Karlstadt also expressed his support to celebrate communion in both kinds also for the laity, and likewise the intent to abolish private masses. However, their reasoning differed starkly. Karlstadt stated that participation in the Eucharist as a sacrifice was to commit a sin. This was strongly criticised by Luther, who viewed the participants as the victims, not the perpetrators responsible. For the next months, there was a verbal tug of war between the reformers and the Augustinians who strongly opposed the changes. Broadly speaking, the Elector rejected the reform requests, and supported the Augustinians instead. This was not a purely theological issue, but also had financial implications. Thus, little headway was made through official channels. However, over time, there was introduced changes, in spite of the official prohibition. For example, the distribution of both kinds in the sacrament.¹¹⁴

With no solution to the conflict in sight, there was inevitably radicalisation among the citizens, in part inspired by Zwilling's critical preaching against the clergy. The willingness to find compromise was no longer there, and the polarisation culminated with Karlstadt celebrating the Eucharist on Christmas Day, taking matters completely into his own hands.¹¹⁵

The rejection of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament directly affects the conditions as to when participation is useful. The value of the Eucharist as a good work in itself is replaced by the value of coming together as community in the presence of Christ. The forgiveness of sins is what comforts the troubled conscience, not the delusion of having done a good work. Likewise, good works remain the fruits of the sacrament, but not in the sense of the sacrament itself being a good work, but through doing good to the neighbour as response to the saving work of Christ in the sacrament. Hence, it was not sufficient for Luther to reorient the practise of the sacrament in Church, who had to address it more thoroughly.

¹¹⁴ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 26-28.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

2.5.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction/Repetition (88)

2 The main body: The Eucharist (88-91)

2.1 Concerning the Eucharist, making foolish laws of what God made free (88-90)

2.1.1 The foolish laws of the pope, and of the Enthusiasts (88-89)

2.1.1.1 The foolish laws of the pope (88-89)

2.1.1.2 The Enthusiast' laws are equally foolish (89)

2.1.2 Luther's Biblical argumentation (89-91)

2.1.2.1 To take the sacrament with our hands is no sin (89)

2.1.2.2 To make it compulsory is not Biblical (89-90)

2.1.3 Luther's conclusion and recommendation (90)

2.1.3.1 Luther's theological conclusion, taking the sacrament with our hands is our liberty, yet a liberty ought to be used properly (90)

2.1.3.2 The practical consequence of Luther's theological conclusion; no new practises before the Gospel has been thoroughly preached and is understood (90)

2.2 Both Kinds in the Sacrament (90-91)

2.2.1 Luther's recommendation (90)

This time, Luther starts by giving his conclusion, and then explains why he holds this view.

2.2.2 Luther's reasoning in more detail (91)

3 End of today's sermon, same topic tomorrow (91)

2.5.2 Content

Luther discusses two main themes related to the Eucharist in this sermon. First, who is eligible to touch the body of Christ, and the cup? Second, who is eligible to receive both the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist? I want to investigate these questions further, especially their relation to Luther's faith in the work of the Word, and his critique of the Enthusiasts.

2.5.2.1 *The ordinance of God, according to Scripture*

As Luther repeatedly states, reliance on a strong and clear text is key to understand and interpret the Gospel accurately. Otherwise, we become easy prey for the devil.¹¹⁶ In the particular case of touching the sacrament, Luther can safely permit it, following the example of the Apostles, yet he finds the arguments making it compulsory lacking.¹¹⁷ Therefore, it must remain optional, not a matter of sin, but using the liberty properly. In essence, this is the same point he brought up in the first sermon, referring to Paul's distinction between *lawful* and *helpful* in 1 Cor 6:12. Luther uses the same argumentation to conclude that receiving both kinds in the sacrament is permissible, even preferable, yet must remain voluntary.¹¹⁸

Living according to Scripture implies finding the right balance, avoiding prohibiting what God made "free", nor making it compulsory if the scriptural support is lacking. Even in things that are "musts", the use of force is impotent, and cannot create lasting change. Despite personally being in favour of the new practises, Luther is primarily faithful to his conviction that God creates faith. Therefore, he has no option but subordination to the work of the Word, serving his neighbour, not his own preferences. This is yet another example of the need for love and patience as the guide, in service to the neighbour, in order to live out a strong faith in the efficacy of the Word.

What the reforms achieve is of no real value, yet it comes at the cost of compromising the sovereignty of God, by making a "must" of what is inherently "free". The Enthusiasts have set aside the freedom God has given, and made their own rules instead. Regardless of intent, this is completely unacceptable for Luther, who would rather quit and undo everything he has done, than support it, or anyone who does.¹¹⁹ By doing the exact opposite of the pope, the Enthusiasts are falling into the same trap. I would even argue that ironically, the Enthusiasts are giving up their God-given freedom out of contempt for papal legalism. By using the Christian freedom to impose a different set of moral laws, the Enthusiasts illustrates the dangers of validating human authority on matters of faith. It is equally problematic, whether it is done by detaching optimism concerning human capabilities from being a result of God's work, or by elevating the human capability to serve as a messenger directly from God, on

¹¹⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 90.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89, 90, 91.

grounds that cannot be criticised. This is not to say that God cannot, and did not speak through humans. The problem lies in making interpretations in a vacuum, isolated from God's revelation elsewhere. The same principle applies to the interpretation of the Bible, for example by reading one verse as a direct command, without looking at the context of the verse. To summarize, when the Christian freedom goes beyond the limitations of the ministerial framework, human over-confidence becomes a new jail.

Back to Luther's argumentation, his faith in the work of the Word is evident in his Scriptural use as part of his argumentation in three explicit ways: First, this practise occurs quite frequently. Second, he looks for a clear and strong text to support his argument; the devil reads the Bible too. Third, using the Bible is not just a matter of obtaining the right knowledge; it must also be used faithfully, in service of the neighbour, not for personal gains.

2.5.2.2 The role of the priest

Luther's understanding of the role of the priest has strong relevance to what he considers the proper use of the sacrament. Luther's faith in the work of the Word forms an important basis for the theology of the universal priesthood, which again affects how the role of the priest is understood. Furthermore, the efficacy of the sacrament comes from the words of institution, and is not in any way related to the priest as a person. It is the work of the Word, not the work of the priest.

Luther criticises the Enthusiasts of going too far, "But now you go ahead and become as foolish as the pope, in that you think that a person must touch the sacrament with his hands."¹²⁰ Furthermore,

I was glad to know when some one wrote to me, that some people here had begun to receive the sacrament in both kinds. You should have allowed it to remain thus and not forced it into a law.¹²¹

Just as the priest according to Luther does not have an inherent mandate to enforce Eucharistic laws, like prohibiting someone from touching the sacrament, or receive the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 89.

¹²¹ Ibid., 91.

sacrament in both kinds, neither does a priest have an inherent mandate to force someone to touch the cup, or receive the sacrament in both kinds. The priest is always acting with the purpose of serving the universal fellowship of priests. The office is necessary to ensure order in the church, and the office holder is held accountable of his execution of the duty he is entrusted.¹²²

Furthermore, all Christians are both children of wrath and children of God in Christ. Becoming a priest does not take away the former; the incapability to earn anything from God fully remains. No matter what anyone thinks, be that pope or reformer, it is God who decides what is sinful and what is not. As Luther makes clear, going against this serves only to fuel hypocrisy.¹²³ And hypocrisy will always remain incoherent with faithfulness in the work of the Word, serving to weaken, not strengthen faith.

Luther states plainly the way faith in the work of the Word is applied on the practical level: “We must rather promote and practise and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in this matter.”¹²⁴ As Luther said in a previous sermon, we preach only to the ear; only the work of God touches the heart. This is the service of ministry the priest is called to, and which he can do boldly, confident in the work of God.

In summary, Luther’s faith in the work of the Word is reflected in both the understanding of the priestly ministry and the role as priest itself. The priest can only preach the Word of God, and can only wait lovingly and patiently while God creates faith in the individual Christian, thus in other words only express outwardly what God does inwardly, and the moment conflict arises, what the priest does, is worth nothing. This brings me to the next topic, the inward and outward things.

2.5.2.3 The inward and outward things

In his discussion of the outward and the inward things, Luther first refers to biblical statements about the nature of the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:20; Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20), summing it up the following way; “the kingdom of God does not consist in outward things,

¹²² Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 292-95.

¹²³ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 88-89.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

which can be touched or perceived, but in faith.”¹²⁵ He is basing his argument on what he perceives to be the clear and strong message in the Scripture. This is a good example of Luther practising what he is preaching, even more so considering the impact these sermons had on reforms that followed.

Second, Luther attacks the idea that we become better Christians by outward reception of the sacrament, be that taking it with our hands, or receiving both kinds:

*If you want to show that you are good Christians by handling the sacrament and boast of it before the world, then Herod and Pilate are the chief and best Christians, since it seems to me that they really handled the body of Christ when they had him nailed to the cross and put him to death.*¹²⁶

*For if you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others just because you take the sacrament into your hands and also receive it in both kinds, you are bad Christians as far as I am concerned. In this way even a sow could be a Christian, for she has a big enough snout to receive the sacrament outwardly.*¹²⁷

While his argumentation is on the polemical side, his rhetoric does serve its purpose, highlighting the problem of one-sided emphasis on the outward practise. There are two particularly problematic consequences of this way of thinking, work-oriented thinking, and selfish thinking.

Doing good works or being a good Christian does not improve the standing in the eyes of God. Nobody are good Christians thinking they can save themselves. Rather, being a good Christian is reflected in the service of the neighbour, expressing love and gratitude for the love God has shown. The Eucharist is not a special exception; outward piety is nothing but a reflection of inward piety. In other words, Luther warns against a different kind of legalism, thus falling into the same trap as the Enthusiasts criticise the pope for having fallen into. Furthermore, an emphasis of being a good Christian by the outward reception of the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 91.

sacrament might serve as a red herring, taking away attention from what truly matters, namely the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ.

In the first sermon, Luther spoke of the necessity of love, which, if absent, turns faith into a “counterfeit of faith.”¹²⁸ Neglecting the neighbour for selfish purposes is a textbook example of what the absence of love does. Moreover, acting selfish sets a bad example for the neighbour, who might adapt the same attitude himself. This had in many ways been institutionalized in the church, something the Wittenbergers themselves had felt when their attempt to reform the mass was trumped by financial considerations.¹²⁹ However, many of the same arguments could levelled against the Enthusiasts and their lack of understanding of the fact that people needed time and knowledge to adjust, with good conscience, from practising canon law for decades.

As Luther said in the second sermon, we have the *jus verbi*, but the *executio* is the domain of God alone.¹³⁰ Thus, we are restricted in terms of both *what* we can do, but also *how* we do things. Luther has the following suggestion to how reforms can be introduced while reducing the risk of crossing into the domain of God: “Therefore no new practises should be introduced, unless the gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood, as it has been among you.”¹³¹

Native to Luther’s soteriological thinking is an immense confidence in the work of the Word, and proportional lack of confidence in the work of man, which his argumentation in this sermon is yet another example of. Use of force is utterly impotent, even counter-productive. Preaching the Word and trusting God to do the work is the only valid option, maintaining both the necessary subordination to the authority of God, and the service of love for the benefit of the neighbour, and in turn, for his neighbours.

2.5.3 Conclusions

To sum up Luther’s critique in this sermon, I would describe it as taking an uncompromising stance against what he perceived as legalism and use of force in the administration of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹²⁹ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 27.

¹³⁰ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 76.

¹³¹ Ibid., 90.

Eucharist. Being ordained into priesthood does not give a special authority grounded in the role alone, and use of force is completely inappropriate beyond maintaining order in church. Some level of order is necessary to maintain a steady course, and keep the people entrusted power in check. The church must point to God, who is the supreme creator of faith, and saviour. Attempts to go further inevitably turn into a work oriented, selfish, and unbiblical faith, thus the opposite of a Word oriented faith. Touching the sacrament and receiving it in both kinds are liberties that must be used properly, and should not be made law, one way or the other. Moreover, while it might be necessary to agree on some guiding principles to maintain order, these must be coherent with the needs of the church, in particular the “weak”.

Luther’s critique is directly related to his faith in the work of the Word, essentially accusing the Enthusiasts of trying to do what only God can do. Their approach to the issue is fundamentally flawed, and bound to fail; No good can come from it, while risking potential exploitation by the devil. That it has come to this regarding also the Eucharist is in many ways extra depressing, given that the Eucharist is supposed to be an expression of repentance, and gratitude for the gift from Christ. The Eucharist is the outward expression of faith in the work of the Word, thus hollow without the presence of this faith.

Luther goes quite far in his critique, even telling them this is no better than what their fierce opponent, the pope does. However, it is not a sermon without hope. Having immense faith in the work of the Word, the solution is clear: A complete subordination to the authority and work of God through his Word. They must do two things; first, follow and preach the Gospel, and second, serve the community. This is what the church and every Christian is called to do, according to the Gospel.

2.6 The Sixth sermon

2.6.1 Context

Having discussed the right use of the sacrament in terms of taking the cup with their hands, and the reception of the sacrament in both kinds, Luther moves on to talk about the importance of being in the right condition when receiving the sacrament. After an initial look, much of his reasoning seems related to why he has previously emphasised patience in

suffering as potentially strengthening faith. I will come back to this in a more thorough analysis later.

2.6.1.1 Historical background

See 2.5.1.1

2.6.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction (92)

The introduction is very short, and serves primarily as a bridge between the last sermon and this sermon, both dealing with the Eucharist.

2 The sacrament (92-95)

2.1 The inward and outward reception (92)

2.1.1 The insufficiency of outward reception when the inward is lacking (92)

2.1.2 Christianity consists in faith (92)

2.2 What faith is, and how it relates to the right use of the sacrament (92-93)

2.2.1 The essence of faith (92-93)

2.2.2 The foolish laws of the pope (93)

2.3 The sacrament as food for the hungry (93-95)

2.3.1 The sacrament is food for the suffering heart (93-94)

2.3.2 Abstain from the sacrament if you are not fit (94)

2.3.3 The institution of Christ (94-95)

3 End (95)

2.6.2 Content

I find quite a lot of Luther's argumentation in one way or another coloured by his faith in the work of the Word. His argumentation is to a large extent familiar by now, but in this sermon related to the specific topic of reception of the Eucharist. In the following analysis, I have looked closer at how his faith in the work of the Word affects his argumentation dealing with the outward and inward aspects of the Eucharist, determination of worthiness to properly receive the sacrament, additionally, who is suited to determine this, and finally, the Eucharist as food for the needy, the suffering, and the persecuted.

2.6.2.1 *Outward and inward*

In the first part of the sermon, Luther continues his attack on outwardly oriented piety.

“It is very necessary here that your hearts and consciences be well instructed here and that you make a big distinction between outward reception and inner and spiritual reception.”¹³²

This is essentially repetition of his argumentation in the previous sermon, and although related to different topics, sermons prior to that too. However, while Luther is very critical of outward piety, he still strongly affirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Thus, his critique is not primarily against the practise, outwardly speaking, but rather against misguided attitudes concerning the sacrament. In other words, his critique is not a devaluation of the Eucharist as a sacrament, but a warning against taking the work of Christ lightly.

Luther has faith in the work of the Word, not the work of man, and the sacraments are no exceptions. “There is no external sign by which we Christians may be distinguished from others except this sacrament and baptism, but without faith outward reception is nothing.”¹³³ Christ is present in the sacrament solely due to the words of institution. However, the essence of the sacrament is not a magic formula, but the communion, being united as the one body of Christ, with him present. The believer become part of this fellowship through faith. The sacraments are efficacious because of the words of institution, nothing else, including faith. The lack of faith is not a question of the efficacy of the sacrament, but of inward reception.

To conclude, while Luther strongly affirms the Eucharist as an external act of grace, it is completely premised by God doing the work, not man. His faith in the work of the Word thus affects the point where he draws the line of the sacrament no longer being used properly. When faith is lacking, the sacrament is an empty show, and a mockery of the mercy given in Christ.

2.6.2.2 *The importance of being fit to receive the sacrament*

As already said, in Luther’s eyes, faith is a necessity for proper reception of the sacrament. He goes on to give a detailed description of what *faith* implies:

¹³² Ibid., 92.

¹³³ Ibid., 92.

*But faith (which we all must have, if we wish to go to the sacrament worthily) is 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.*¹³⁴

In short, faith, as Luther here describes it, is to trust Christ, not ourselves, giving God the credit for liberating us from sin. However, insufficiencies, soteriologically speaking, does not serve as an excuse from personal responsibility. Humans are responsible, but the glory goes to God alone. God heals what humans fail to heal.

There is a fundamental difference between (A) the sacrament no longer being efficacious because faith was lacking, and (B) lacking faith in the efficacious sacrament. In the former case, the efficacy of God's work in the sacrament becomes subordinate to the trust in Christ. Outward reception without faith is not an accusation of distrusting in God's work, but rather prevents God from working. Meanwhile, in the latter case, God's work in the sacrament is sovereign the participants trust in him, and lack of faith is a distrust in God's efficacious work. Thus, distrust in God's work is completely unreasonable, and fully the responsibility of the participating human, while God's sovereign work is uncompromisable. As a result, taking the body and blood of Christ without gratitude, or even recognition of the work he has done for the sake of the sinner, becomes a very serious offense. With this in mind, it makes a lot of sense that Luther strongly criticise those who teaches otherwise.

In Luther's teaching, I find both a constant and a dynamic side of faith. On the one hand, faith is constant as a gift from God. Nothing can be done to acquire faith except receive it as a gift from God. As a result, justification is completely reliant on the work of God. Justification by faith as God's gift to the sinner, is not process that must be repeated frequently to be efficacious, but was achieved once and for all by Christ on the cross. On the other hand, the very gift the sinner is given in faith is the invitation to a fellowship with God. This fellowship, while in a constant state in one sense, is in a dynamic state in another sense. Sanctification is a process that develops over time, nourished by the power and work of Christ in the preached Word. The forgiveness of sins in fellowship with Christ is the key message of the Lord's Supper. The work of Christ is what gives the sacrament meaning, and to doubt this, is to doubt the very purpose of participating, and it makes more sense to abstain. Honesty is the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 92.

key here. Luther stresses that there is no shame abstaining from the sacrament.¹³⁵ In fact, it expresses a serious attitude to the gift Christ has given. Meanwhile, doing the opposite is not only meaningless, but directly harmful.¹³⁶

Overall, this makes a strong argument against giving the priest, pope, or anyone else, the power of decision of who shall receive the sacrament and who shall not. This is directly related to the faith in the efficacy of the Word: “Because we are not all alike; we do not all have equal faith; the faith of one is stronger than that of another. It is therefore impossible that the sacrament can be made a law”.¹³⁷ Reception in faith must be voluntary; force cannot create faith. Thus, attempting to make this law can end only one way, on the path to sin. Only God knows the heart, and can touch the heart.¹³⁸ Having faith in the work of the Word, thus implies leaving the decision whether to receive the sacrament or not, ultimately as a matter between the individual and God.

Furthermore, having faith in the work of the Word also necessitates a faith in the preaching of the Word. Therefore, the minister, or other Christians for that matter, are not expected to remain indifferent to these matters either. Empowering the individual to make decisions founded on Scriptural ground requires thorough teaching of the Gospel. Furthermore, leaving the ultimate decision to the individual does not contradict upholding necessary principles for proper use of the sacrament, such as the sacrament being efficacious due to the words of institution, affirmation of the divinity of Christ, the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, and so on. There is a line between blind legalism, and useful principles to maintain order in church, to prevent members from inadvertently doing something considered harmful. The problem arise when the latter turns into the former by being elevated as divinely commanded. When attempting to understand Luther’s discussion of liberty, I find it very important to remind myself what kind of society Luther was living in, as there is a natural impulse to interpret his writing on liberty through a democratic lens due to my own background. This is of even greater importance regarding individualism.

¹³⁵ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 117.

¹³⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 94.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

To conclude matters, Luther's faith in the work of the Word invalidates approaching the question of eligibility concerning sacramental reception with a black and white view. He instead recommends finding the difficult, but necessary balance between the minister's call to preach the Gospel, with eyes remained open to misguided attitudes in the congregation, and at the same time, leaving the ultimate decision of eligibility to the individual member, whose heart none but God knows.

2.6.2.3 The Eucharist is food for the needy, the suffering, and the persecuted

Luther argues strongly in favour of the gifts of the Eucharist being food for the needy, those who suffer, who have weak hearts, are discouraged, or filled with fear.¹³⁹ Luther traces this all the way back to the institution of the Eucharist by Christ (Matt 26:21).¹⁴⁰

Luther stressed the importance of patience facing hardship already in the first sermon.

For whoever has faith, trusts in God, and shows love to his neighbour, practicing it day by day, must needs suffer persecution. For the devil never sleeps, but constantly gives him plenty of trouble.¹⁴¹

Patience in hardship produce hope, and hope produce faith.¹⁴² While Luther praises the fruits of patience in face of persecution and suffering, he never praises the suffering itself, which on numerous occasions, he attributes as the work of the devil.¹⁴³ Sin and the devil deserves no praise, but endurance in the battle against them does; it is no glory to humans, but to God. The Eucharist is food for the sufferer, giving him strength to endure patiently the challenges ahead.¹⁴⁴ Enduring hardship does itself not make a good Christian; faith in God through hardship does.

In hardship, the human state of helplessness is revealed, and likewise the complete dependence on God's good grace. As Paul says, the law reveals the need for the Gospel. Luther does not try to hide the difficulties enduring hardship. On the contrary, the refusal to

¹³⁹ Ibid., 93-94.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴² Ibid., 71-72.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 93-94.

¹⁴⁴ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 313.

face the harsh realities of life, and the diligence of the devil, is a sure path to the misuse of the sacrament. The hidden God sends a Christian fleeing into the loving arms of the revealed God. When receiving the body and blood of Christ in faith, the focus is turned away from personal works, which can only serve to aid the devil, and instead the Word who became flesh, to Christ who has given himself to console and comfort the sinner in this battle, and who turns the devils weapons against himself.

Furthermore, while the existence of persecution and suffering remains a mystery not yet revealed, God has revealed through his Word that he is not indifferent to it. On the contrary, he actively engages it, even undergoes suffering himself, not out of necessity, but purely out of love, a completely undeserved love.¹⁴⁵ Whatever hardship a Christian is going through, he goes through it knowing Christ has suffered for his sake too. No place is the work of the Word, and the communion with Christ more clearly expressed than in the Eucharist.

“For who desires a protector, defender, and shield to stand before him if he feels no conflict within himself, so that he is distressed because of his sins and daily tormented by them?”¹⁴⁶ Ironically, it is often when the Christian is most blessed by God that he thinks he can manage without him. The devil is sometimes the most dangerous when he does nothing, or rather, appears to do nothing. However, this is not a call to actively seek out tribulation and hardship, thus turn it into a false idol; suffering and hardship in itself is not praiseworthy, and even damaging when drawing the attention away from God, sowing distrust in the work of the Word. If the law does not point to the Gospel it serves no purpose, and the same could be said here. When going through hard times, it is not uncommon to experience a feeling of loneliness, also regarding Christ, who feels so far away. And here is Luther’s point; there is no place Christ is closer than in the Eucharist.

2.6.3 Conclusions

I have now discussed significant implications Luther’s faith in the work of the Word had on several aspects of his argumentation in this sermon. The first thing I want to comment is how he finds a balance emphasising both the real presence, and the efficacy through faith alone. The external dimension of the Eucharist is very important, but exclusively when faith is

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 215-17.

¹⁴⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 94.

present. This is not because faith is required for Christ to work, but because without faith, the reception of the very body and blood of Christ is empty.

To elaborate, Luther strongly disapproves of any practise where the Eucharist is turned into an expression of indifferent religiosity, or even worse, when it is used for the sole purpose of self-promoting man himself. This is hypocrisy at its worst, and the opposite of faith in the work of the Word. It goes against everything Luther has said about the call to *ministerium*, leaving *executio* where it belongs, to God.

Using the Eucharist wrong is a great offense to God. However, when used appropriately, leaving the work in the hands of God, even the strongest attacks of the devil will fail, and instead of driving people away from God, they are drawn to him.

In summary, because Luther has full faith in the work of the Word, and zero faith in the work of man, the Eucharist as sacrament only makes sense if God is the acting person. This shines through Luther's argumentation on all levels. First, the outward sacrament is worthless without the inward faith, without Christ acting. Second, only God knows the heart, thus legalism by any other person can do nothing but harm. Of course, there must be order and preaching of the Word in church, but making the sacrament compulsory is a severe transgression into the domain of God. Third, the sacrament is food for those who need Jesus as their saviour, not those who do not need saving, either by having no such need, or thinking they can save themselves. While suffering and persecution can become a false idol like everything else, it is not without meaning if it points to Christ. Christ instituted the Eucharist precisely to strengthen those who suffer under the weight of sin, and to be near those who feel he is far away. He did not hide from the disciples the difficult things ahead, but instead gave his promise to be right beside them whatever they might face. Overall, this sermon is to large extent a call to trust the work of the Word, not own works.

2.7 The Seventh sermon

This is a relatively short sermon where Luther discusses one topic, the fruit of the sacrament, which is love. It marks the end of his discussion of the sacrament that he started in sermon 5.

2.7.1 Context

2.7.1.1 Historical background

See 2.5.1.1

2.7.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction/repetition (95)

Luther starts quite neutral, going over what was said in the previous sermon. The sacrament is food for those of weak faith and troubled conscience. Meanwhile, those who feel no need for this food should abstain.

2 The fruit of the sacrament (95-96)

This is a discussion of the necessity for the sacrament to bear the right fruit, love. Luther's argumentation can be divided into three parts; first, he emphasises God's love, and the sacrament as expression of this love, all in a neutral way. However, in the next part, he directly criticises the Wittenbergers for lacking love, relating it to Paul's teaching of love, while pointing out inconsistencies among the Wittenbergers. Finally, he warns against consequences of continued disobedience.

2.1 Introduction to the "fruits of the sacrament" (95)

2.2 Critique of the Enthusiasts (95-96)

2.2.1 The Biblical foundation of his critique (95-96)

Luther refers to Paul, stressing the necessity for love.

2.2.2 Attacking the problematic practise, and attitude (96)

2.3 A call to change their ways, and a warning against the consequences should they not (96)

3 Ending (96)

Luther is brief, somewhat abrupt in the way he ends the sermon; "I commend you to God."¹⁴⁷ This is starting to become a pattern.

2.7.2 Content:

What is love, and how is it a fruit of the sacrament? In addition, how is this related to Luther's faith in the work of the Word? The way I understand Luther, love is far more than an emotion. It is an act as much as a feeling, a decision as much as an impulse. It is commitment, not for

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 96.

selfish gains, but maintaining a relationship built on honesty and respect, even if sacrifice is required. And the sacrifice of Christ is the ultimate expression of love that God has revealed to us. Moreover, the sacrifice of Christ frees human works from the shackles of merit, turning them into expressions of love instead. While the sinner freed from the impossible task of saving himself, he is not left with a vacuum, but rather with the task of sharing the good news, expressing gratitude in service of the neighbour, even involving sacrifice.

2.7.2.1 *The role of love*

Luther is bringing back the topic of love from the first sermon, but now in relation to the sacrament. Between the sermons, there is an overlap in Biblical references, primarily the use of Paul. Luther strongly emphasise doing good works as an important expression of love, based on the right motives, of course. Good works in service of the neighbour in response to, and as fruit of the love and work of Christ, is what gives faith meaning. I have made some reflections that I will now discuss more thoroughly.

Luther expresses strong criticism of the Wittenbergers in this sermon too. These are not his enemies, but his friends, his brothers in arms, so to speak. This sermon is a confirmation of a change of pace regarding implementation of new reforms. Furthermore, from a rhetorical perspective, the position of the most intense critique does not look coincidental (nor the ending itself), as it marks the end of the discussion of the sacrament, setting the tone for what comes next, namely confession.¹⁴⁸

Second, in his initial discussion of love, he also emphasised the outward aspects of Christian life as crucial to express the sanctification following justification. If the inward faith does not result in gradual transformation of the outward, faith is empty. Here, I perceive an emphasis of the exclusivity of the work of God in faith related things, yet in a way that does not contradict the necessity of doing good works. God's love should start a chain reaction, producing good works for the neighbour. The absence is the deviation from the norm.¹⁴⁹ After having thoroughly imprinted the crucial distinction between *ministerium* and *executio* over the course of several sermons, this is a good moment to repeat how love is expressed through good works, and essential to a faith with real substance. This reinforces my impression of

¹⁴⁸ Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 128.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-22, 24.

Luther as a “messenger of balance”, balance between giving God all the glory, yet still remembering the responsibility of humanity, both as individuals and fellowship.

Third, while the directness and strength of Luther’s critique initially catches my attention, there are some interesting aspects in the details too. In particular, I find one thing quite striking; there is little ridicule in his critique. He goes straight to the point, no animal comparisons, surprisingly. I have some ideas why. First, this is not the topic, nor the time to lighten the mood, quite the opposite; those who have a troubled conscience are worthy receiving the sacrament, and his next topic is confession. Additionally, Luther is in many ways speaking to the “weak”, not the “stubborn”. By this, I mean that he is speaking to his friends, not his enemies – at this stage at the very least. The purpose of his critique is to expose their wrongdoings, not to harm them, but to enable them to realize their mistakes, and change their ways. Intended or not, it is in some regards an illustration of the brotherly admonition he recommends in the next sermon, although applied on a group of people in public, not an individual in privacy.

2.7.2.2 Luther’s critique of the current situation

The problems are not a result of lack of preaching, nor lack of knowledge. There has been plenty of preaching.¹⁵⁰ While knowledge of the Scripture is necessary, and worth pursuing, it is worthless without proper use.¹⁵¹ Rhetorically, this serves to remind the Wittenbergers that they are accountable for their use of the Word.¹⁵² However, it also serves an even more important purpose, namely to exemplify that the Word is efficacious because God works, not because Christians preach it. The conclusion that preaching goes only as far as the ears, is not a valid argument against the importance and usefulness of preaching. Rather, it is the complete opposite; while human preaching reaches no further than the ears, God, the Almighty has given his promise to work through the preached Word, a work that goes all the way to the heart.

However, this is not without issues, especially for a modern reader: In Wittenberg, there had been plenty of preaching of the Word, and celebration of the sacrament. And as previously said, God has promised to work through the preached Word. In spite of this, the

¹⁵⁰ Luther, *Luther’s Works: Sermons I*, 51, 96.

¹⁵¹ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 203-05.

¹⁵² Leroux, *Luther’s Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 126.

Wittenbergers still went down the wrong path. For many people today, this would raise questions about the nature of God's work, even his existence. In contrast, Luther does not question God, but the Wittenbergers. This does not come as a surprise to me, in particular due to Luther's faith in the work of the Word: "We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure."¹⁵³ God has revealed that he works - not how he works. Thus, no human is in a position to criticise his methods, because no human have any knowledge about the ways of God's works, beyond what can be inferred through his revealed work. What humans primarily can criticise, or analyse is whether a phenomenon, prophetic inspiration, etc, has the necessary characteristics to be in accordance with the teaching of Christ found in Scripture. Assuming I have understood Luther correctly, I think he has a good point; acknowledging some things being the mystery of God is not acceptance of intellectual defeat, but acceptance of what it means to be a human, and the limitations that follows.

That being said, I find some challenges with parts of his argumentation in this sermon. Luther first says; "we should treat our neighbour as God has treated us. Now we have received from God nothing but love and favor,"¹⁵⁴ but later says, "if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you... for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain."¹⁵⁵ On the one hand, Luther is doing the right thing warning against disrespectful attitude to God, and the work of God. On the other hand, leaving the work to God's good pleasure sets significant restrictions to the level of detail such warning can contain before turning into speculation – and in turn, potentially justify misguided emulation of divine righteousness in the form of overconfidence concerning what humans are given the authority to do on behalf of God. By being saved by faith, the Christian is freed from the pressure to do good works for selfish purposes, and likewise the pressure of avoidance of evil works solely out of fear of punishment. Personal pursuit of salvation is no longer a valid motive to do good works, nor to avoid evil works. Love, in response to the love Christ has shown has instead taken that place. This is not to say punishment is undeserved, but if fear of punishment is what stops people from doing evil things, the consequence would be the reintroduction of a merit-based system, back to legalism. Again, deficiencies are fully, and exclusively the personal responsibility of the sinner. Yet there is only one way to respond to the gift of grace in Christ,

¹⁵³ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 76.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

love, to do good in love, and avoid evil in love. Neither legalism, nor antinomianism is reconcilable with a response motivated by love.

2.7.3 Conclusions

Christ has freed humanity from their failure to live up to God's standard, to save themselves by works. But he has not freed humanity from the act of doing good works. Love in Christ has taken the place of sin, thus becoming the new master.

From the perspective of having faith in the Word, not own works, love is not the fruit of the sacrament because it reminds the Christian of his obligation to repay the gift given by Christ. On the contrary, it is the fruit of the sacrament through the communion of Christ, not by augmenting the human's own strength, but by receiving Christ, because he gives himself to the human. Yet works are not without merit. By distinguishing how good works relate to justification and sanctification, it is possible to emphasise good works as expression of love as fruit of the sacrament while at the same time maintaining an unconditional faith in the work of the Word. It is this distinction the Enthusiasts missed, just like the pope. Good works have no worth regarding justification, yet can serve as valuable expressions of the fruits of sanctification.

Luther speaks of both love and fear of God in this sermon. The proper understanding of both of them are necessary in order to maintain a relationship with God, founded on faith in the work of the Word. Both of these things are related to justification and sanctification.

However, there is a very important difference in their relation to justification on the one hand and sanctification on the other. Concerning justification, the fear of the wrath of God reveals the need for his love, and own incapability. Nobody are saved because they fear, nor because they love God, but purely because God loves them. The conduct of the sinner is irrelevant to his justification. However, speaking of sanctification, the fear and love of God is indeed relevant to personal conduct. This is not to say that the believer can sanctify himself, but that the response to the gift of grace is best expressed when guided by fear of acting against God's command, and by love, as God has loved his creation. Overall, proper balance is the key, avoiding one from overshadowing the other. One way or another, legalism is a result of misplaced fear, and antinomianism a result of love being distorted in such a way that the accusations by the law are trivialized and ignored. Speaking of Luther's rhetorical use of the wrath of God, I would argue he is going very far in this sermon. Detached from its context, I would say Luther goes too far. However, as I said previously, balance is the key, thus my

conclusion is that the broader context, in particular the previous sermon, permits, or perhaps even necessitates a critique this strong.

2.8 The Eighth sermon

In the title, this sermon is described as “a short summary of the sermon”,¹⁵⁶ thus I have to assume Luther discussed the subject in greater detail than what my text initially suggests. I can only imagine the full content of the sermon, but if I were to speculate, I would assume in particular the second kind of confession was discussed to greater length, as I find that section quite brief in the text available to me. If I were to speculate further, given that this sermon marks the end of the series, it would not surprise me if Luther allocated more time in the introduction, and/or the end of the sermon to summarize main aspects of the series as a whole, placing this sermon within the greater context. Speculations aside, it must have been a significantly longer sermon than the previous sermons, given that the summary matches the other sermons in length. It would seem Luther has chosen to cover the entirety of confession in one sermon, instead of spreading it over two or more.

2.8.1 Context

This is the last, of eight sermons. The theme is new, though relevant to previous topics of discussion. Overall, these sermons contain a mix of criticism, lectures, and encouragement. This sermon is light on the critique, emphasises encouragement, with lecture kept to the minimum required to understand Luther’s argumentation. I suppose this has been the tendency in general; it is the preacher and reformer predominantly speaking, not the teacher. The critical situation that urged Luther to come back sooner than planned, reflected in these sermons.

2.8.1.1 Historical background

While at Wartburg, Luther wrote “On Confession, Whether the Pope Has the Power to Require It”, dedicating it to Francis von Sickingen on June 1. The basis of confession is Luther’s main concern in this work. This remained a topic of debate throughout the autumn, with Luther responding to requests. Throughout his career, confession was a very important topic for Luther, both on a theological, and a personal level. He strongly attacked the practise

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 97.

of compulsory confession to a priest, yet at the same time held confession itself in very high regards.¹⁵⁷ His views on confession and on the Lord's Supper shared many similarities, both expressions of his broader sacramental understanding.¹⁵⁸ It was a question of whether the pope, or the church had sufficient authority to legitimise the current practise. Investigating the use of the biblical support was a key priority for Luther (Matt 8:4), and ended up concluding that there was not sufficient biblical support. The clergy had not special power to forgive sins; this belonged to all Christians. They neither had the power to dictate when and how the individual Christian were to confess his sins to God.¹⁵⁹

This was not a purely theoretical problem, but had direct implications on Christian lives, be that laity or clergy. Unrightful spiritual disempowerment was only one aspect, financial exploitation was another. While forcing people to confess their sins is a significant offense, charging coin for the words of absolution is on another level. The promise of God's mercy was not to be held to ransom. While condemning the papal compulsions on confession, Luther realized these could not be abolished over-night, and emphasised the confession to a Christian brother, or sister as a fully valid alternative to confession to a priest. While facing opposition, it did not take long for the Wittenbergers to put Luther's recommendations into practise.¹⁶⁰ However, it remains a question whether they understood his underlying argumentation, or simply rejected it in favour of their own convictions. By relying on direct inspiration, enforcing the abolishment of confession, and still using outward morality to determine sacramental eligibility, one form of legalism was replaced by another.¹⁶¹

In summary, prior to the *Invocavit* sermons, Luther had attacked specific elements of the practise of confession, namely the weak biblical foundation, the authority of the church, and the subsequent financial exploitation, all while maintaining the incredible value of the practise of confession itself. The events in Wittenberg bear witness of a strong adherence to his critique, but his concern for the "weak", and following recommendation to err on the side of caution. Karlstadt did not share Luther's positive views of confession itself, quite the opposite.¹⁶² Furthermore, Karlstadt's views on the law disposed him towards greater legalistic

¹⁵⁷ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 18-20.

¹⁵⁸ Lohse and Harrisville, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, 18-19.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

¹⁶² Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons*, 129.

tendencies (see 2.3.1.1). These are certainly relevant factors to why people stopped going to confession.

2.8.1.2 Outline

1 Introduction (97)

2 Luther's discussion of confession (97-99)

2.1 The first kind of confession, brotherly admonition (97-98)

2.1.1 The Biblical origin (97)

2.1.2 Luther's thoughts on how this practise is best implemented in his congregation (97-98)

2.2 The second kind of confession, confession directly to God (98)

2.3 The third kind of confession, private confession (98-99)

2.3.1 Luther discusses the importance of private confession, and how the pope's approach is faulty (98-99)

2.3.2 The authority to give absolution as if God himself was speaking (99)

2.3.3 Private confession must remain "free" (99)

3 Concluding thoughts on confession (99-100)

2.8.2 Content

Since this is the last sermon, I want to briefly go through main tendencies in Luther's argumentation in the previous sermons that can be related to his faith in the efficacy of the Word. From this follows a short analysis of Luther's argumentation in his response to the Enthusiasts in this sermon. Finally, I will connect his argumentation to his faith in the efficacy of the Word, also in the context of the series as a whole.

2.8.2.1 A short repetition of common consequences of Luther's faith in the work of the Word

Luther preaches reliance on the work of the Word, not human might. Thus, use of force is off the table, beyond the necessity of maintaining order in church. Additionally, Luther tends to refer to Scripture within his own preaching, thus remaining coherent with his emphasis of Scripture. To avoid unnecessary legalism, which potentially threatens the sovereignty of God, he distinguishes between the "must" and the "free". Outward piety has no worth beyond reflecting inward piety. Works are worth nothing, except as expression of love in response to the love Christ has shown. Finally, Luther is convinced that the preached Word will create

faith, thus he has a positive view on the reception of his preaching among the Wittenbergers, and stressing the importance of distinguishing between the “weak” and the “stubborn”, patiently awaiting the work of the Word within each individual, and the church as community.

2.8.2.2 *Identifying problems and solutions based on Luther’s argumentation*

I outlined a sermon where Luther discusses three specific forms of confession, confession and absolution in more general terms, and their internal relation.

Regarding the first form of confession, the main problem is its lack of use; Luther recommends the congregation to reinstate this practise as his solution.¹⁶³ He supports his arguments by referring to Scripture, the tradition, or practise by early Christians, and appeals to emotion, primarily compassion, to his authority, making obvious his own stance, in a persuasive manner, not coercive. Finally, Luther appeals to reason, by giving a detailed explanation, for the Wittenbergers to judge themselves.¹⁶⁴

Next up is confession directly to God. This is a “must”, a practise commanded by God.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, there is no direct critique of the Enthusiasts here; he is exclusively concerned with the solution, the right practise, using indicative form through the entire section. Like previously, he refers to Scripture, relating it to the Biblical concepts of judgement and righteousness – judgement of self, righteousness of God. There is appeal to authority in the sense of being a command, though it could be argued this is equally an appeal to reason.

The last form of confession Luther discusses in depth is private confession. He has problems with the pope’s practise of this confession, at a fundamental level, as compulsion is unacceptable to Luther, with the same kind of thinking applied to attempts to prohibit confession as well.¹⁶⁶ His solution is simple, no compulsion, nor prohibition – and confession to a common brother is no less worth than to a priest. In fact, Luther, with the Bible as reference, gives immense authority to the words of comfort from a brother, or sister. I feel forced to repeat myself, as Luther relies heavily on Scripture in this case too. Luther is not interested in a compromise at all. While, strictly speaking, he does not directly criticise the

¹⁶³ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 97.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

Wittenbergers, his complete rejection of alternative views speaks for itself. What I find most interesting in his argumentation, is his use of personal experience, his struggle with the devil. Luther appeals to authority, both his own, and more importantly, the Word of God. He appeals to emotion, especially fear, compassion, and a longing for comfort. And he appeals to reason, for example in how he takes time to explain his claims, and support his conclusions, like his rejection of forbidding confession.¹⁶⁷

2.8.2.3 *The relation between Luther's argumentation and his faith in the work of the Word*

Given Luther's frequent reference to the Bible, I can conclude that confession must be founded on Biblical ground,¹⁶⁸ which itself expresses faithfulness to the Word. I will start by quoting Luther's comment to judgement and righteousness, after referring to Ps 106:3:

*Judgment is nothing else than a man's knowing and judging and condemning himself, and this is true humility and self-abasement. Righteousness is nothing else than a man's knowing himself and praying to God for the mercy and help through which God raises him up again.*¹⁶⁹

Honest relation with God is the fruit of confession, of judgement of the self, and glorification of God. It completely exposes personal incapability, and instead total dependence on the mercy of God. While total dependence rarely inspires optimism, dependence on God's undending faithfulness does. It is upon this faithfulness the trustworthiness of the Word is grounded, which in turn enables complete faith in the work of the Word. Thus, Luther's faith in the efficacy of absolution, as described in the Bible, and from the mouth of a brother, relies on his faith in the work of the Word. There is pessimism and optimism at the same time, pessimism in regards to the human isolated, but optimism regarding the human in communion with God.

In essence, as long as humans remain unable to resist the temptation to sin,¹⁷⁰ confession to God is a necessary part of maintaining a relationship founded on honesty. Meanwhile, confessing to another person is not necessarily required in the same way. It is a gift to the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 97, 98, 99.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁷⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 195.

needy, not a compulsion. As such, it expresses God's love, not God's laws. While not a compulsion, trusting humans with the authority to give absolution in his name, an authority given, not earned, God reveals his sincere intent to reveal himself and establish a personal relationship to his creation, a relationship founded on faith, not merit. Furthermore, this authority reinforces not only optimism in the work of the Word, but also specifically in the work of the Word when preached by Christians. At the same time, with increased authority comes increased responsibility, thus increasing the importance of distinction between acts on human might, and acts on behalf of God, as the consequences of confusion on this matter becomes greater.

Therefore, confession remains important not because of the outward actions themselves, but due to its relational foundation. Detached from the work of the Word, confession and absolution are empty things. Thus, the very purpose of confession is undermined when it is made compulsory, resting on human might instead. It is the latter Luther criticises the pope of doing, not the practise of confession itself.¹⁷¹ The same critique applies to anyone, should they choose to forbid confession from taking place. Despite being completely opposite to each other in outward things, the pope and the Enthusiasts are not so different at all in the inward; both neglect the work of the Word in favour of dependence on human authority, each in their own ways.

The pope has no power to judge, this power belongs to God alone.¹⁷² While Luther mentions the pope specifically, the same goes for all people. However, Luther also recommends brotherly admonition among the Wittenbergers.¹⁷³ I am therefore inclined to think that Luther's critique of the pope also must be considered regarding brotherly admonition. In essence, this practise cannot primarily serve to provide grounds to judge and exclude. Rather, speaking up when experiencing wrongdoings must serve the purpose of revealing people's mistakes to give them opportunity to repent, letting God be the judge. Social injustice is not to be tolerated within the Christian fellowship. Yet at the same time, judgement ultimately belongs to God, and exclusion is only valid to the extent of avoiding a greater evil of other people getting harmed, on a temporary basis, not permanent. Additionally, by giving several opportunities to admit fault, in relatively safe surroundings, this practise should give the

¹⁷¹ Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, 51, 98.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 97.

“weak” better opportunity to acknowledge their ignorance, instead of immediately being misjudged as “stubborn”, and ridiculed accordingly.

While I believe the terms have appeared more recently, long after Luther’s time, distinguishing between “restorative” justice and “retributive” justice is relevant to the discussion of the type of justice Luther, presumably on biblical grounds, promoted in this sermon. For the purpose of this text, I will define restorative justice as a greater emphasis on healing the relationship between the involved parties, preventing new offences from occurring, with less emphasis on the proportionality of the punishment as ensurance of justice being served. Meanwhile, I define retributive justice as the opposite emphasis.

“When you see a usurer, adulterer, thief, or drunkard, you should go to him in secret, and admonish him to give up his sin.”¹⁷⁴ Acknowledgement of the offense is prioritized over shaming the person. Additionally, in a society strictly divided by class, it might enable confrontation across classes otherwise divided. From a retributive view, a public apology to a public offense might be expected, though this is still an option. “If he will not listen, you should take two others with you and admonish him once more, in a brotherly way, to give up his sin.”¹⁷⁵ I interpret their primary task being to guide him on a better course, not punish his sins – yet they are not ignored either. Mending the relationship is emphasised over condemning the action. The repentant sinner still has opportunity to change his course, ask for help, without being embarrassed publicly. “But if he scorns that, you should tell the pastor before the whole congregation, have your witnesses with you, and accuse him before the pastor in presence of the people,”¹⁷⁶ Telling the pastor before the whole congregation, not in private, could be interpreted as an emphasis of the universal priesthood, with the pastor not being above those he is chosen to serve. Confessing the sin, and requesting forgiveness is the priority, not punishment, with excommunication being only a temporary solution to protect the congregation. Overall, I would describe Luther’s approach as primarily restorative, not retributive, which corresponds with justice as described in the New Testament, not by being free of punishment, but because restoration of the sinner is the central message. The concept of justice I find in Luther’s discussion of confession and absolution is not one trivializing the wrongdoings of the sinner. There is judgement and righteousness, but for the sole purpose of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 97.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 97.

glorifying the mercy of God, as it must when the work of the Word has the power to save, not human works. This is not to say there was an emphasis on restorative justice in society in general in Luther's time, quite the opposite, I would argue. The restorative nature of confession and absolution is tied to the dependence on the work of the Word, to the act of faithfulness to the work of the Word.

With the efficacy of the Word as foundation for the efficacy of confession and absolution, their internal relation is similar to that between law and gospel. They cannot be separated without incurring major consequences. On the one hand, confession with no absolution is essentially preaching the accusations by the law with no gospel to bring the good news. Without the mercy of God, there are but two outcomes facing his judgement, complete hopelessness, or self-deception regarding own power. On the other hand, absolution with no confession is preaching the good news of the gospel, but no law to expose the need. The forgiveness of sins is no comfort for a conscience oblivious of its faults. Thus, confession is an expression of faith in the Word, and absolution an expression of faith in the efficacy of the work of the Word.

2.8.3 Conclusions

Confession and absolution are bound to each other when efficacious due to the work of the Word. Confession is a "must" to some extent, but "free" beyond that. It is a necessity to keep an honest dialogue with God to maintain a truthful relationship. Use of force, be that to make it compulsory or prohibited, is not compatible with faith in the Word, as it relies on human might. In general, use of force is off the table beyond the bare minimum necessary to maintain order. Thus, a complete rejection of confession is no better than making it mandatory. While completely different outwardly, the Enthusiasts fall into the same trap as the pope, namely by relying on human works instead of the Word.

While it is not a necessity, confession, and absolution are given to comfort the troubled conscience. Therefore, these practises reveal the great mercy of God, and must be viewed in a relational framework, not a legalistic framework. Essentially, judgement of oneself and revelation of God's righteousness are the key aspects of confession. While it might involve the act of self-humiliation, it is not the point to shame for the sake of shaming, but to expose what is broken with the sole aim of restoring the relationship, both to the neighbour who has been offended, and to God. In fact, Luther expresses repeatedly the importance of doing

things quietly to prevent unnecessary offence, as the outward acts are of lesser importance, in comparison to the inward will to put away the old sinful nature, one step at the time (while neither condoning social injustice). Like the law, confession exposes sinfulness and need of God's mercy, expressed through absolution, which every Christian is given authority to proclaim on behalf of God. This authority rests on the efficacy of the Word, not on human merits. It provides ground for a very positive view of humanity, but on the premise of complete reliance on the work of the Word, not own works, which when used forcefully, undermines faith in the work of the Word, the sovereignty of the Word.

To use force, when patiently waiting while the Word works would be appropriate, is to express disobedience to the sovereignty of God. This is not necessarily the main issue, as everyone can make mistakes and act disobediently, but repent when realizing their error. However, taking matters into their own hands, while at the same time giving the impression of carrying out the will of God takes the issue to a completely different level, by creating an environment where personal merit is emphasised over obedience to the work of the Word. This in turn increases the risk of misuse of Christian authority, as its key premise, faithfulness to the work of the Word, is exchanged by the impulsiveness of human nature. Paradoxically, human autonomy, grounded by reception of faith directly from God, is best preserved through obedience to the work of the Word.

As long as Christians rely on the work of the Word, not personal merit, confession and absolution is needed frequently, and in many forms. Being incapable of solving a problem by own means, and instead having to rely on someone else is often a cause for hopelessness and despair. However, God stops personal incapability from turning a state of hopelessness. There is no reason to fear personal insufficiency when God, who is utterly faithful and loving, is the one working. Thus, God turns human failure into his own success.

2.9 Summary

Before moving on to my conclusions, I will briefly summarize the main themes of the *Invocavit* sermons.

In the first sermon, Luther discusses the human condition, and objectives as followers of Christ. The chief things for the Christian: We are children of wrath, but also of God. We are to love and show patience to our neighbour, in response to Christ's love for us. Luther does

not discuss a specific problem, but concentrates on guiding principles, relevant for the specific issues discussed throughout this series. Moving on to the second sermon, the Christian freedom is a key topic. Luther preaches on the abolishment of the mass, and elaborates what he means by the “must” and the “free”. The impotency of force in the creation of faith is a key theme here; we have *jus verbi*, but only God has *executio*.

In the third and fourth sermon, Luther looks at marriage for priest, monks, and nuns, vows more broadly, images, and fasting. He considers these things as “free”. Any regulation rests upon human authority. Thus, each individual must determine what is best for their conscience, without doing harm to their neighbour. Sometimes it is the right thing to abstain from using a liberty in order to avoid offending the “weak”. Furthermore, Luther stresses the importance of reading Scripture in light of Scripture, rather than justify actions by selecting passages in isolation of their context. Use of images might be prohibited in certain passages, but the broader voice of Scripture reveals that it is idolatrous worship that is problematic, not the thing in itself.

Luther moves on to speak about The Lord’s Supper in the fifth sermon, a theme that continues in the sixth, and seventh sermon too. Key topics are the proper administration, the reception, and the fruits of the sacrament. In principle, the laity are not restricted from touching the host, or receive the sacrament in both kinds. However, neither of these things are compulsory. Additionally, a loving attitude to the neighbour necessitates a concern for the “weak”. If faith in the presence of Christ, and the saving work he has done is absent, participation in the sacrament becomes without purpose. In fact, it would be better to abstain. Participation in the Eucharist also becomes empty, even harmful, if loving service of the neighbour does not follow from taking part in the sacrament.

The eighth sermon contain a broad approach to confession; Luther talks about brotherly admonition as described in the Bible, personal confession directly to God, and private confession to another person. It is of great importance to Luther that confession does not become a tool to control the morality of people, but rather give the sinner opportunity to hear God forgiving his sins.

3 Conclusion

3.1 How did Luther's faith in the work of the Word of God affect his response to the Enthusiasts in his *Invocavit* sermons?

I will go through my findings by answering the sub-questions from the introduction.

3.1.1 What does these sermons reveal about Luther's understanding of role God has assigned to the Christian? What does Luther say about the delimitation of the mandate of the church, and of the individual Christian?

The core foundation of Luther's faith in the work of the Word is his faith in God who seeks a genuine and personal relationship with the individual human. This relationship is only possible thanks to the work of Christ. It is founded on the mercy and initiative of God, not as a result of, but in spite of human works. Only God can create faith, and this is a key premise of Luther's faith in the work of the Word. However, Luther does not affirm determinism; giving God all the glory does not take away the accountability of the human.

Because God does all the work, the human can do nothing but express gratitude, by loving the neighbour. In Luther's soteriology, there is a constant tension between the individual and social aspects. There is no middle man in the relationship between God and each Christian. At the same time, God did not create humanity to be alone, but to live in fellowship with each other. The Christian has an individual relationship with God, but always as a member of the one body of Christ.

In Luther's faith in the work of the Word, this is expressed through the subordination to the supreme authority of God. The Christian is entrusted the task of ministerium, yet executio belongs to God alone. Humans preach to the ears, while God's work goes all the way to the heart. As a result, transgression into the domain of the sovereign God has nothing but negative consequences. It undermines the premise of honesty upon which a healthy relationship with God rests.

3.1.2 How, and in what way, are the Christian freedom related to the faith in the work of the Word? Furthermore, how does this affect the understanding, and regulation of order in the church? In other words, what kind of dilemmas does Luther face when trying to stop harmful teaching, while remaining consistent to his faith in the work of the Word?

The efficacy of the Word originates from God, not the person preaching. As the priesthood of all believers, every Christian has immense value. There is no end to what the Almighty God can do working through his preached Word, and the optimism this warrants. Meanwhile, words from humans is at the diametrically opposite end of the spectrum, warranting proportional pessimism. Therefore, complete faithfulness to the work of the Word is not a choice, but the only way forward. Even the slightest deviation becomes problematic. Additionally, the faith in the work of the Word must not turn into faith in the results of the work. While the fruits can be seen, the process remains a mystery. And God does not always do things the way expected.

This excludes all use of force in matters of faith. Any form of legalism made by humans becomes pointless, even dangerous. Every member of the Christian fellowship must take their service of the neighbour seriously. The “strong” cannot impose faith in the “weak”, especially not through laws they are to blindly follow. But by preaching and teaching Scripture, the Word works and nourishes the faith of the “weak”, and also gives them the knowledge to use their liberties properly.

Neither the “must” nor the “free” can be enforced by laws. There can certainly be laws, and some level of order is necessary in the church. Yet this can never create faith. Human authority must remain subordinate to the authority of God, never replace it, be that by trying to do God’s work through enforcing the “must” by laws, or making a “must” of what God has ordained “free”. The distinction between the “must” and the “free only exists because we are saved by faith, not merit. Without faith in the work of the Word, everything becomes a “must”, and fear takes the place of love as guide. This distinction reveals the relational nature of faith; we exist not solely to please God through works of merit, but to live honestly, exercising our liberties in fellowship for the good of our neighbour. Compromising the Christian freedom would be inconsistent with the faith in the work of the Word. In essence, the Christian enjoys the greatest freedom when obedient to the sovereign work of God.

3.1.3 To what extent does Luther's faith in the work of the Word influence his views of revelation, in particular the Enthusiast's claims of personal, divine inspiration?

The faith in the work of the Word directly affects the perception of the Bible as the Word of God. First, the emphasis of relationship with God implies an optimistic attitude to God's intention of revealing himself in the Bible. God wants the Christian to get to know him. At the same time, the Christian does not get to know God by using Scripture to confirm his own views. Thus, the authority of the Bible as the Word of God is premised by seeking the will of God. The Bible reveals the Word of God when read on its own premises, hence Luther's emphasis of not only reading the Bible, but also the exegetical methodology used. His refusal to prohibit images is a good example of how this affected his criticism of the Enthusiasts. Luther does not exhort blind adherence to the Bible, quite the opposite. The content is not authoritative because it is in the Bible. Rather, the Bible is authoritative because of the content it contains. Like Luther repeatedly points out, the devil reads the Bible too. This does not provide an infallible method to read the Bible, but it ensures that no interpretation is exempt from criticism.

In a similar fashion, agreement on *what* to do is not enough when there is strong disagreement on *how* to do it. Luther and Karlstadt both wanted to abolish the mass as sacrifice. They wanted the laity to receive the Eucharist in both kinds. At the same time, Luther believed that the Christian was justified and a sinner at the same time, thus remaining incapable of good works on their own. In contrast, Karlstadt held that reception of the Holy Spirit enabled Christians to live according to the law. As a result, Karlstadt could justify far greater legalism, for the purpose of aiding Christians to keep the law. This is one important factor to why the reformation process took such a radical turn in Luther's absence. Placing all faith on the work of God leaves no room for compromise. Furthermore, to get Wittenbergers on the right track by their own conscience, the only option was to teach them, and let the Word work. It was not primarily teaching of Scripture that was needed, but how to use this knowledge properly, hence why Luther emphasised the guidance of love and patience throughout these sermons.

In my view, Luther's use of the wrath of God sometimes borders coercion (or perceived as such). It is a difficult exercise to bring up the punishment of God without overshadow the gospel with the law. However, Luther does appeal to God's wrath to silence potential critics. Rather, the wrath of God illustrates God's incredible willingness to forgive sins. The Eucharist is the food that strengthens the terrified conscience, and confession sets people free

from their sins rather than imprison them to a life of shame. Therefore, when understood in this context, the use of God's wrath in his argumentation remains consistent with the subordination to the work of the Word. Overall, I would describe his argumentation as persuasive, but not coercive. Additionally, Luther repeatedly makes use of his own struggles in his argumentation.

3.1.4 How does the faith in the work of the Word affect the role of good works in Luther's teaching? Moreover, what kind of similarities exists between his criticism of the Enthusiasts, and his criticism of the pope?

While the Christian is not justified by their good works, good works still remain important as expression of love for the neighbour. God has not given humans gifts not to be used. However, "Outward piety" retains value only insofar as it reflects "inward piety". The "outward" thing is not the problem in itself, nor is it important. It is empty. The Enthusiasts certainly did not appreciate the rules of the pope, yet had been blind to the pitfalls of their own rules. With the knowledge they possessed, they should have known better than to over-emphasise the "outward" things. The faith in the work of the Word does not make the "outward" pointless, despite being empty in itself. There is immense power in preaching the Word, and "outward" things are necessary to express it. In both words and deeds, the Word must be communicated to the neighbour, not kept as if it was a personal possession. What is love, if never expressed? Sanctification does not yield fruits if treated as a purely cognitive process. Outward expression of inward love is how the Christian serve his neighbour. I see this as a strength of Luther's faith in the work of the Word. It allows him to give God the glory he deserves, without surrendering the importance of doing good in the process.

Confession does not attain value from the outward act, but because of the inward, relational aspect. From being an expression of God's law, confession becomes an expression of God's love. Premised by the faith in the work of the Word, the sinner's judgement of himself, and God's righteousness forms the core of confession and absolution. It is not the "outward" act itself that comforts the conscience of the sinner, but his faith in efficacy of the Word. The same applies to the Eucharist, hence why both must remain a voluntary for the individual. To impose rules upon the individual is a great injustice to their autonomous relationship with God.

In conclusion, his faith in the work of the Word had significant impact on his critique of the Enthusiasts, while being consistent with his earlier teaching. Or rather, it is his earlier teaching, applied in a new context. Moreover, the critique of the Enthusiasts in the *Invocavit* sermons suggests that Luther's faith in the work of the Word compelled him to emphasise relationships over rules. Rules have no purpose in themselves, and are useful only to the extent they support a fundament upon which the relationship will flourish.

3.2 What can Luther's faith in the work of the Word teach us today?

Luther's faith in the work of the Word has a lot to teach us, too much for me to mention here. I would emphasise the importance of having faith in the work of the Word particularly when meeting people who do not count themselves as Christians. We are called to preach the Word, not just with words but also with actions. Good works are guided by love and patience, not the conviction of being right. The faith in the work of the Word greatly affects our relationship with God, and must again be reflected in our relationship with our neighbour. Remaining within the boundaries of ministry is not a reason to take lightly on what we do, nor reason to keep expectations low. Quite the opposite, we have all reason to be very optimistic and raise our expectations (though without shifting our focus from ministry to *executio*). Moreover, we have an immense value, and a lot to look forward to, experiencing God's work along the path we walk.

At the same time, patience is not an easy exercise, especially at times when God's work eludes our attention. It is easy to become impatient instead of waiting while the Word works. At the same time remaining patient is not an exercise in upholding status quo. Sometimes status quo is a result of impatience, for example by rejecting good suggestions without giving time and space for reflection.

There is also a lot to learn from Luther's rejection of using force in matters of faith. While there is plenty of conflict in the church today, it fades in comparison to what Luther faced. Theological disputes in the 16th century was certainly not for the faint hearted. Regardless, Luther still sought solutions that respected the conscience of the individual believer, even if that meant going against his personal views. The ends did not justify the means back then, nor should it today. God works through people regardless of how pious they may outwardly appear. Thus, to have faith in the work of the Word necessitate having faith in the potential this leaves within all people, whether we like them or not.

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