

# SHIFTING PARADIGMS

## MARTIN LUTHER'S ENDURING GLOBAL IMPACT



Martin  
**LUTHER**  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Federated with  
**Wilfrid Laurier**  
University



## **Session 4**

### ***Luther's Musical Dialectic: Singing Faithfully into Context***

**debbie lou ludolph**



## Luther's story from a musical lens

Martin Luther and his  
family  
*by G.A. Spangenberg  
(1866) © Musée de  
Leipzig*

Music matters: *viva vox evangelii*

“If I had children and could manage it, I would have them study not only languages and history, but also singing and music.”

- From a letter *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*, LW 45:369-370.

# A Catholic Luther's medieval musical context

- Gregorian chant, polyphony
- Music as speculative science and math
- Lay participation minimal, and separated from clergy and choir (rood screen)
- All Latin



# Luther's Theological Paradigm

- Justification
  - “grace is God reaching to us, an event”
- Theology of the Cross
  - “calls a thing what it is”; “God is found in unexpected places”
- Priesthood of all believers/vocation
  - “I am set free to bear God's grace”

## Luther on Music

See *Luther's  
Liturgical Music:  
Principles and  
Implications,*  
(Fortress Press, 2017)  
Robin A. Leaver

“I love music.”

- Music is a gift of God not man
- Music creates joyful hearts
- Music drives away the devil
- Music creates innocent delight

“I place music next to  
theology.”

- Music reigns in times of peace

“I love music”

”Note that there is a difference between singing and saying, as there is between chanting and saying a psalm and only knowing and teaching with the understanding. But by adding the voice it becomes a song, and the voice is the feeling. Therefore, as the word is the understanding, so the [singing] voice is its feeling.”

*Luther on Psalm 101:8* LW 11:294



# Music as gift of God, *donum Dei*

“I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone. . . . The gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music.”

LW 53:321-323 (*Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae iucundae*, 1538)

# Music creates joyful hearts

“I plainly judge, and do not hesitate to affirm, that except for theology there is no art that could be put on the same level with music, since except for theology [music] alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely, a calm and joyful disposition . . . .”

*Letter to composer Ludwig Senfl (1530)*

# Music drives away the devil

“...the devil, the creator of saddening cares and disquieting worries, takes flight at the sound of music almost as he takes flight at the word of theology.”

LW 49: 427-428

Music creates innocent delight

“Music creates innocent delight,  
destroying wrath, unchastity,  
and other excesses.”

# Music next to theology

“Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. . . . For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate. . . . What more effective means than music could you find?” LW 53:321-323  
(*Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae iucundae*, 1538)

Music reigns in times of peace

“It will be difficult to keep this delightful skill after us. The Dukes of Bavaria are to be praised in this, that they honour music. Among our Saxon [Dukes] weapons and cannons are praised.”

Luther on  
Music:

Concern for  
practice more  
than theory

How are the songs sung in the liturgy?

How are they being used?

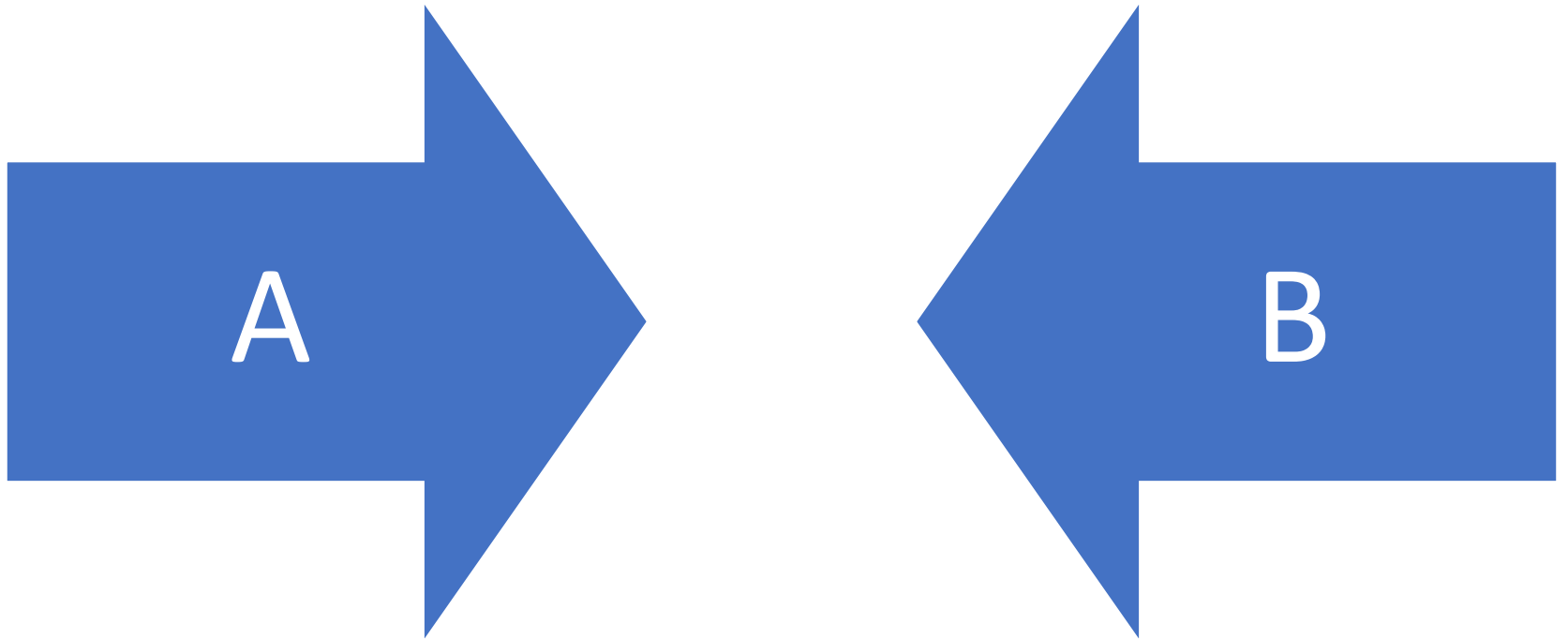
Who gets to sing the songs?

Who does not?

Are the texts and tunes accessible for our context?

Does our practice speak the Gospel?

# Dialectic

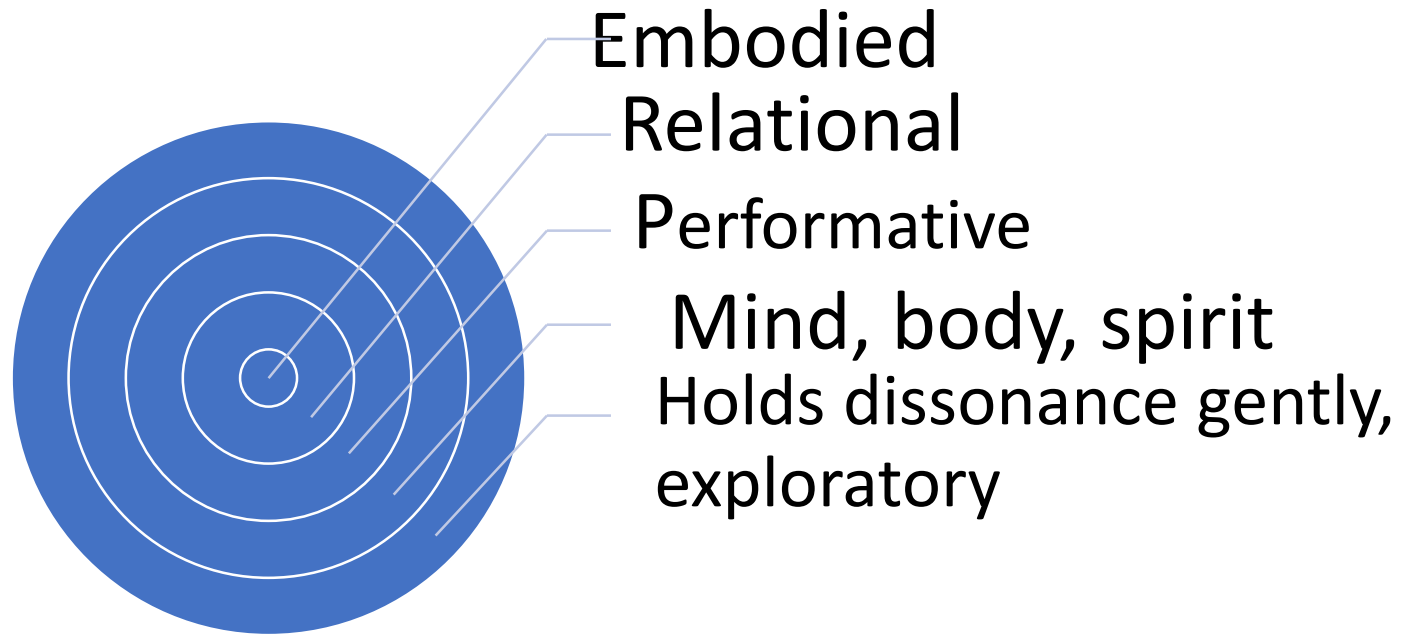




# Both/and

- Continuity/reform
- Polyphony/congregational song
  - Latin/German
  - Church/school
    - Clergy/lay
    - Text/tune
  - Intellect/emotion
- Law/Gospel, Word/Sacrament, music/theology

# Musical Dialectic: the experience of singing together



Singing together  
as constructive theology

**Justification** “grace is God reaching to us, an event”

**Theology of the Cross** “calls a thing what it is”; “God is found in unexpected places”

**Priesthood of all believers/vocation**  
“I am set free to bear God’s grace”

# Clear strong texts: theology

Songs for the liturgy (existing hymns changed to German; new texts)

Songs paired to catechism

Songs in response to current events  
(protest songs)

“I would that we had plenty of German songs which the people could sing during Mass . . . We lack German poets, or we do not yet know of them, who could make for us devout and spiritual songs.”

# Accessible Music: pedagogy

- Chorale: unison singing, mostly syllabic text setting, in strophic form, *a capella*, organ provides the pitch alternate with choir
- Choirs sing from within congregation to support
- Luther and Johann Walter (collaborators) wrote distinct melodies that move by step within a small range
  - New words, familiar music
  - New words, adapted music
  - Words adapted, music borrowed from secular source

Both/and:

“sing with spirit and mind”

- Not just German words to Latin tone or notes, but German character to “text and notes, accent, tongue and its inflection, otherwise all of it becomes an imitation, in the manner of apes.”

LW 40:141.

# Ein Feste Burg

- A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious; [firm castle, good defense and weapon]
- He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod and wins salvation glorious [helps free us from all distress]
- For old evil foe, sworn to work us woe; [the old evil enemy means it seriously]
- With dread and craft and might, he arms himself to fight, [great might and much deception]
- on earth is not his equal. [Psalm 46, 1527/28]]

# Singing together as liturgical theology: juxtapositions

- with BREAD AND WINE
- with BAPTISM
- with WORD sung (in vernacular)
- “ritually-framed intentions” as move through the liturgy
- Allows to dwell in the liturgical action
- Singing speaks belonging/unity, texts speak the warning/truth ... law/gospel



# PRACTICE:

1. Know your context
2. Radical Hospitality
3. Break down hierarchy

“You are bound to consider the edification of the common people!”

LW:53:47, writing to the Livonians (current Estonia)



# Critical theological lens on worship practice

## LATIN MASS

- Remove Canon/Offertory  
(**sacrifice to God**)
- Remove rood screen  
(break down **hierarchy**)
- freedom** of ceremony  
(vestments, candles, etc)

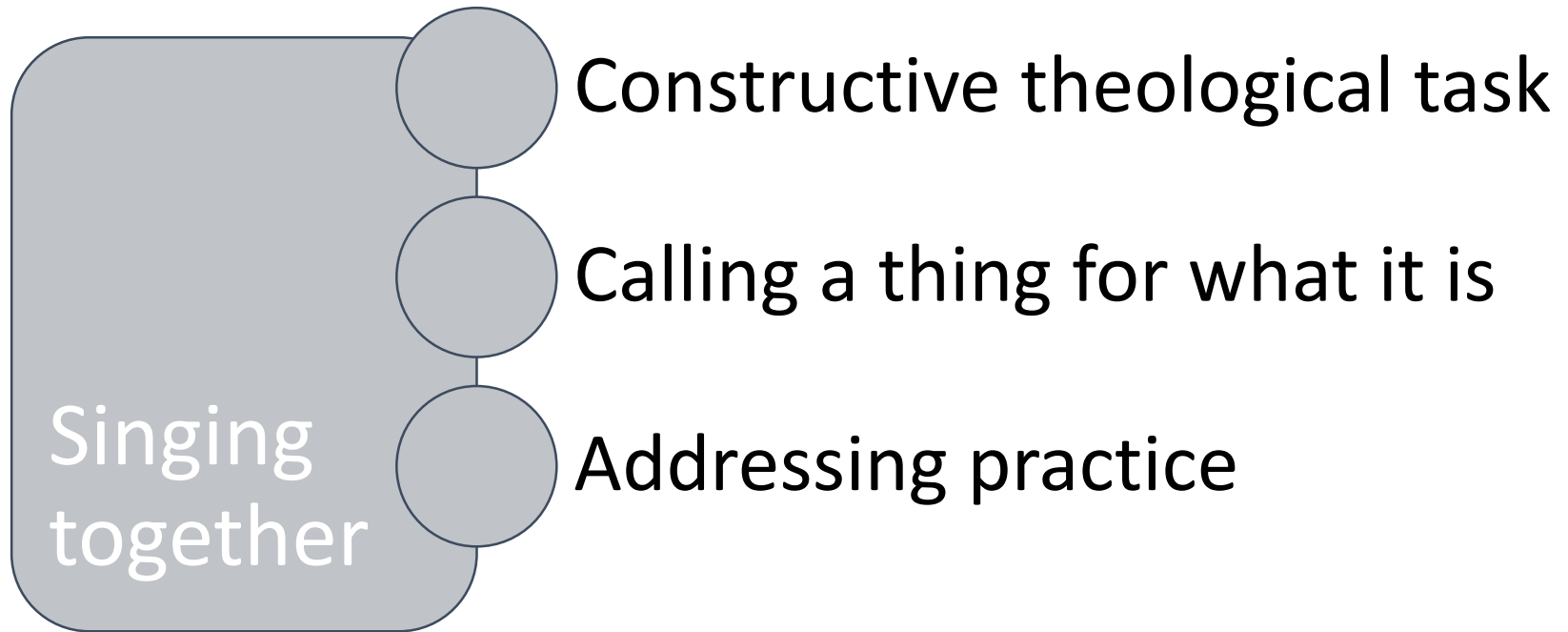
## GERMAN MASS

- sing in the vernacular  
with German tunes
- all participate and  
sing
- all receive wine and  
bread

# *Deutsche Messe* (1524)

- Alternative to the Catholic Mass
- Based on Gregorian liturgy and music, simplified with German options
- Each church could use as much Latin or German as was right for their context

# Luther's musical dialectic



# The Inshallah Project



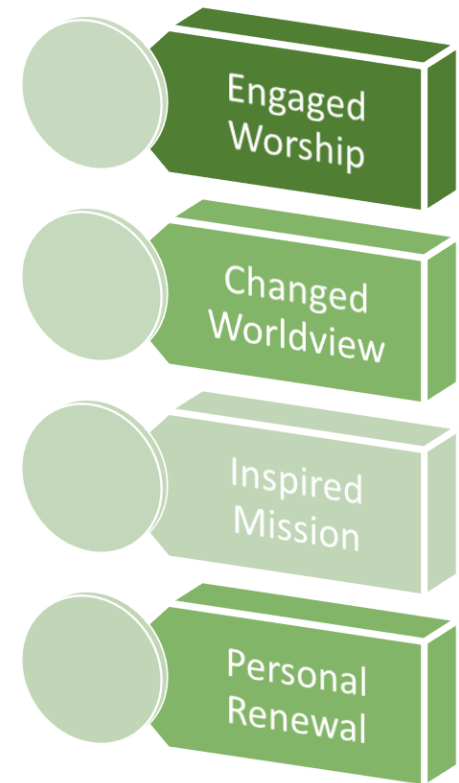
# Both/and

- Continuity/reform
  - Global/local
  - English/other
- Indigenous/settler
  - Lutheran/other
    - Text/tune
- Intellect/emotion
  - Joy/lament

Ethnographic  
Study

Ludolph, 2009

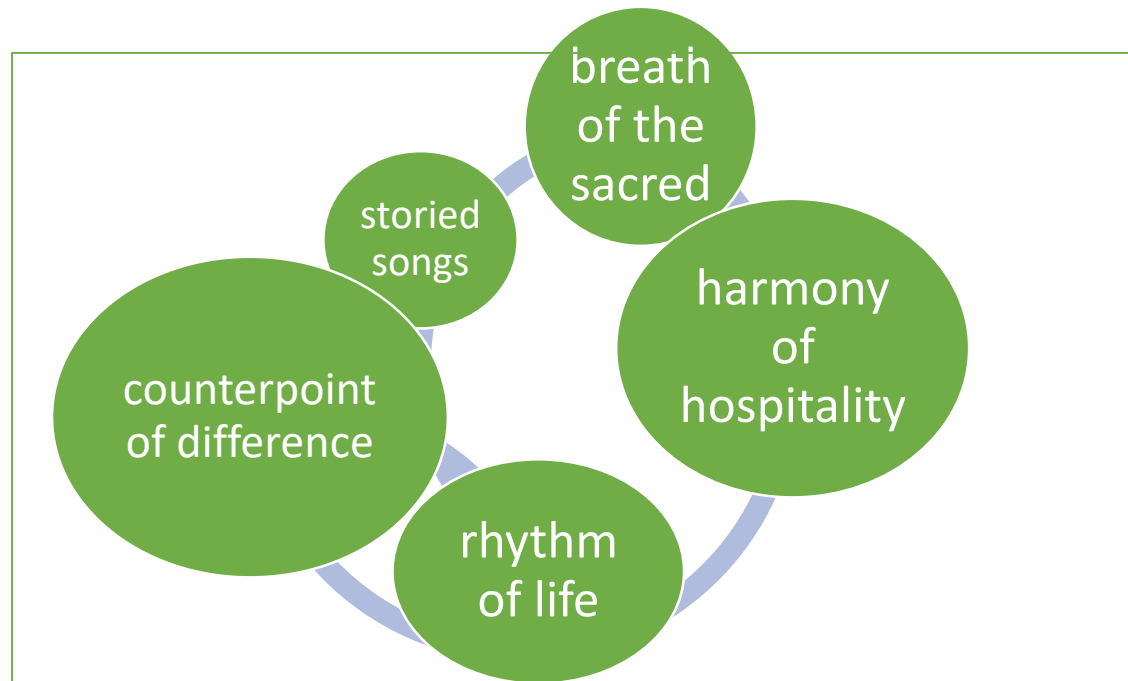
- What is the experience of singing global song in a North American church context?



- How does singing together shape worldview?

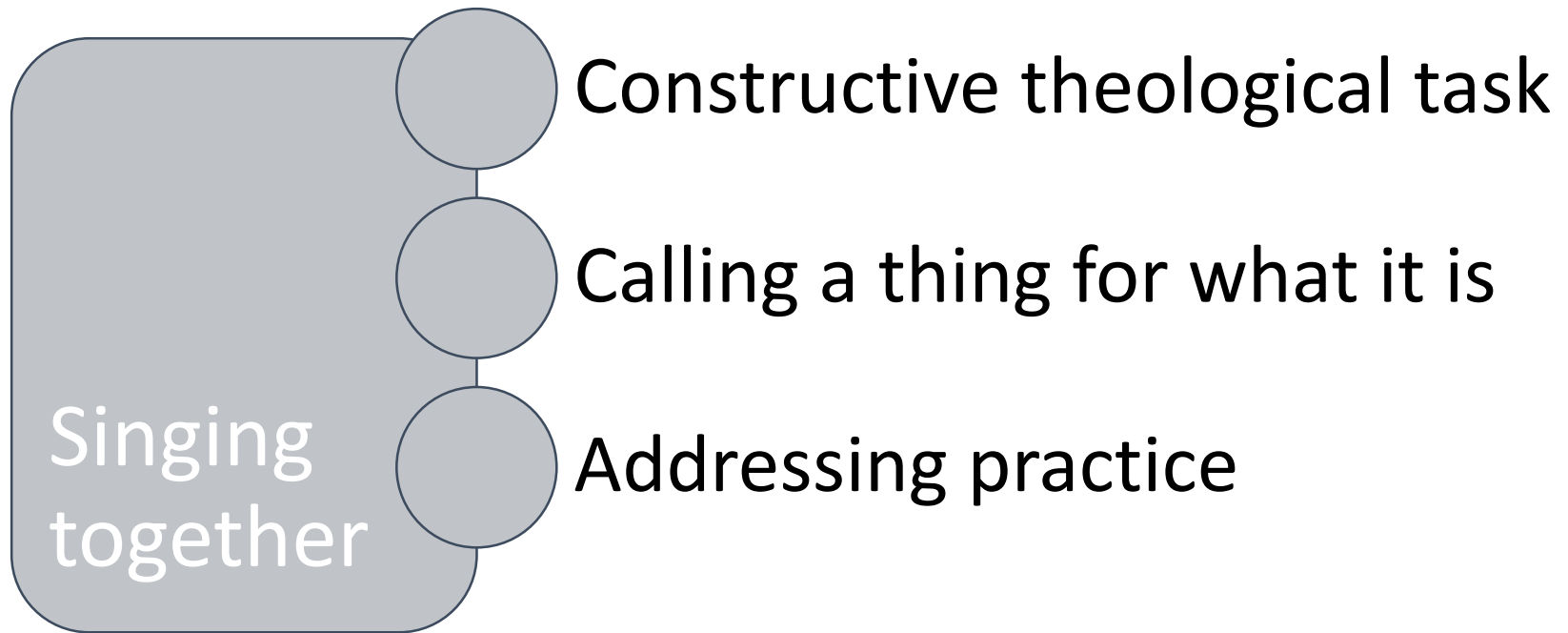
Narrative  
Inquiry

Ludolph, 2020





# Luther's musical dialectic



# Why congregational song?

- Singing is gift from God – the Spirit will be unleashed in this act
- Singing together grants experiential knowing and makes contributions to “doing theology”
- Singing together is not a case of linear understanding or immediate changes; provides a “dwelling-in” experience; grants assurance as hold uncertainties
- Singing together has the capacity to hold paradox and ambiguity – multi-dimensional . . . And more

Singing  
faithfully  
into  
context:  
*always*  
*more than*  
*one voice*

*What voices are  
missing from our  
songs in our multi-  
cultural, multi-faith  
world? What are the  
"rood screens" that  
prevent access to a  
flourishing life?*

The Earth does not belong to us,  
but we belong to Earth,  
this radiant sphere of green and  
blue, our home and place of birth.

The web of life connects us all,  
each strand its vital role,  
for what affects a single one  
affects the living whole.

*attributed to Chief Seattle*