The Greek word for gospel, evangelion, comes from the same root as that for "gossip" attesting that telling stories to narrate the Christian experience is a time-honored, and etymologically-appropriate, theological and literary strategy. However, in the decades prior to the Reformation, Catholic preaching had become increasingly centered in parabiblical texts, with friars drawing examples of heroic faith from the Golden Legend and the Lives of the Saints with greater frequency than they had recourse to the Bible. One of the greatest contributions of Martin Luther and the evangelicals who followed him was to reinstate the Bible, and its treasure-chest of inspirational narratives, at the heart both of the individual believer's spiritual experience and of the community of the Christian church. Telling stories was thus a foundational tool in Reformation theology and ecclesiology, a textual strategy to confess the power of the Lord and, as though penning a plot, to trace His workings in human lives.

This new evangelical dramatization rehearses vivid tableaux vivants, vignettes in which individuals describe their walk with God, highlighting their particular way of experiencing and perceiving the salvation narrative. These evangelical evocations rely most heavily on New Testament writings: they gossip about the Gospels. Protestants initiated a new way of talking about sins; they encouraged a group confession, to be recited in church, in the presence of fellow believers and fellow sinners. They gave voice to the sin, dramatizing it in a kind of community theater, rendering it both more individual (each man was responsible for his own sin; no priest or intermediary presumed to absolve him) and more communal (in that the naming of the sin required the presence of a multitude of others as witnesses). The Protestant confession was highly dramatic, an exemplary text to be rehearsed and learned from, rather than a pat set of words uttered in isolation. It was a story, not a formula.

Jesus said, "wherever two or more of you are gathered, there am I." For Protestants, telling a story about Christ, dramatizing his saving grace, establishes...
an instant network of Christians. The reader and the author thus already constitute a core of believers. Luther inaugurates this new Protestant textual tradition with his colorful sermons composed of compelling stories, as well as with his earthy, homey *Table Talk*. “Table talk” composes a dialogue about Christ, a narrative manifestation of the eucharistic feast. But “table talk” is also the recital of those spiritual truths in a familiar, ordinary context: around the hearth, among friends, who, banqueting, joking and rejoicing, enact the joy of redemption from sin through the sharing of stories about grace.

**Marguerite de Navarre**, an evangelical Catholic, writer of prose, plays and poetry, also read and translated several of Luther’s works. A striking stylistic similarity links Luther and Marguerite’s textual treatments: they both craft highly dramatic *tableaux* drawn from daily life, enabling the comprehension of more recondite doctrine. At least two factors contribute to Marguerite’s choice of the *tableau vivant* narrative. First, Gary Ferguson has shown that Marguerite, as an evangelical, was more influenced by Protestant than by Catholic theology in her theater. What Marguerite develops in her theatrical writings, I argue, she now incorporates in her prose. The *Heptameron*, generally construed to be a more secular work, is of at least equal theological importance. In addition, not only Luther’s doctrinal formulations, but also his anecdotal style, constitute a major influence on her prose.

In Luther’s *Treatise to the Christian Nobility*, he describes a town set on fire by brigands. He explains how unthinkable it would be, were everyone simply to stand around, letting the town burn to the ground, because they could not find the mayor, and hesitated to act without his authority.

Surely it would be an unnatural proceeding, if fire were to break out in a town, if everyone should stand still and let it burn on and on, simply because no one had the mayor’s authority, or perhaps because it began at the mayor’s residence. In such a case, is it not the duty of each citizen to stir up the rest and call upon them for help? Much more ought it to be the case in the spiritual city of Christ, were a fire or offense to break out, whether in the pope’s regime or anywhere else. The same argument would hold were an enemy to attack a town...

Luther uses this vivid *tableau* to demonstrate that, if the Pope fails as the spiritual head of the church and is allowing the sale of indulgences, the appropriate response is to rise up in outrage rather than cower in indecision like the townspeople.