

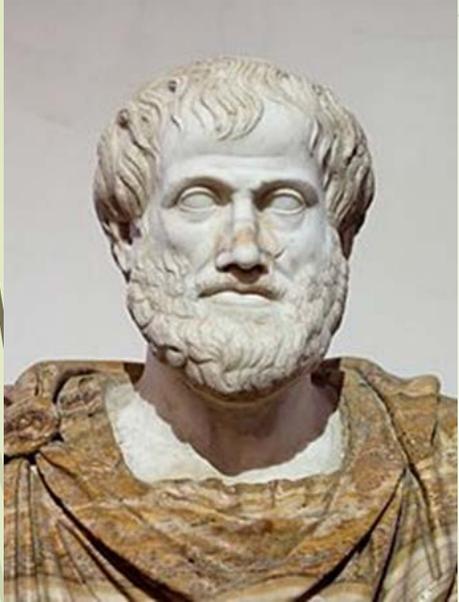


# The Heidelberg Theses

The Positive Case for Luther's Theology—Appearances versus God's Word, the Christ.

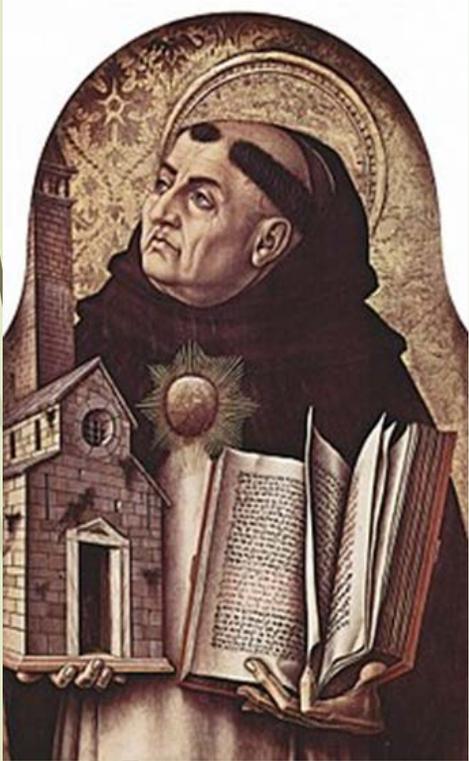
# Some Context--Philosophers Luther Addresses in the Theses

## Aristotle (384-322 BC)



- The major ancient philosopher used by the Middle Ages.
- Most theologians depended on him.
- To find truth--place things in proper categories by comparing their qualities (accidents or appearances). Truth is found by exploring relationships to other things.
- Ethics based on practicing good habits by following the dictates of natural precepts.

# Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD)



- Greatest Dominican Theologian and still the primary theologian of Roman Catholics.
- Harmonized Plato (through Augustine), Aristotle and Scripture—only one truth, not necessarily pagan vs. Christian truth.
- Taught that human potential is realized through seeking God's will. By this means we become developed (actualized, fulfilled) as we become more like what God has declared we should be.
- For human beings this means becoming more of a seeker and finder of God as well as doer of God's will, by means of His grace.
- Realized potential through the assistance of grace, especially through the sacraments and prayer (scripture too, when available).

# William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel



- ▶ William of Ockham (or Occam) 1287?-1347—Nominalist Philosopher.
- ▶ Nominalism (school of Aristotle)—Only the names are fixed—definitions are negotiable—there are no “real” meanings for words. Tradition and environment prevent this from becoming too wild.
- ▶ Only God and Faith are truly indispensable terms for Ockham.
- ▶ Ockham’s Razor—Eliminate all unnecessary terms in a logical statement.
- ▶ Gabriel Biel 1420/5—1495—Follower of William of Ockham—God, Faith and Scripture.
- ▶ Biel said, “Do all that is within you and God will take care of the rest” (facere quod en se est).

# Historical Context of the Heidelberg Theses



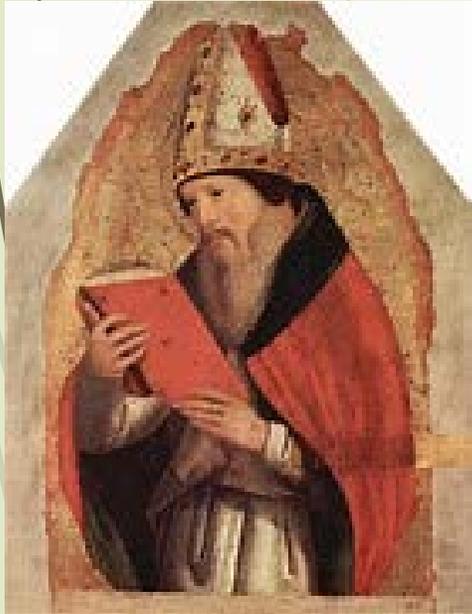
- ▶ Luther invited by Johann Staupitz, head of the order, to be primary speaker before the annual meeting of the Augustinians.
- ▶ Meet was in April (26) 1518 at Heidelberg.
- ▶ Was to be a less controversial presentation than the 95 Theses.
- ▶ Luther's explanations of the Theses are different—sola scriptura—my question is given their educational background, what would people in the actual audience have seen and heard in terms of implications from the theses themselves?
- ▶ Theological Theses 28; Philosophical Theses (directly against Aristotle, Scholasticism)<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ Others came who would later become prominent. Martin Bucer among them.

# The First Two Theses



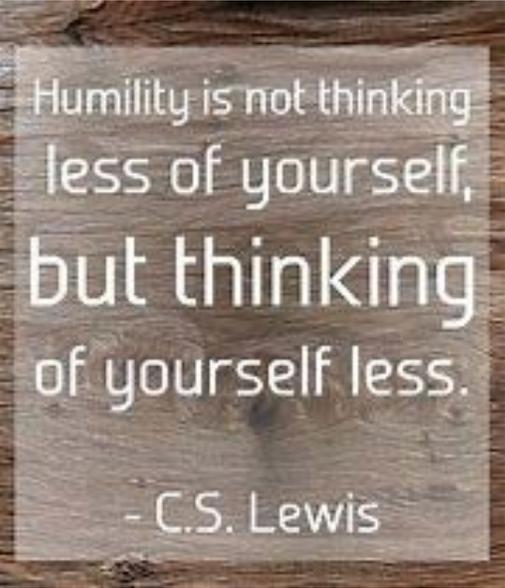
- 1 The law of God, although the soundest doctrine of life, is not able to bring man to righteousness but rather stands in the way.
- 2 Much less can the works of men, often "repeated", as it were with the help of natural precept do so.
- Paul declares that the work of the Law is to heighten sin so that it becomes obviously sinful. Romans 7:13 "Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."
- The repeated works approach (habits, habitus) is about the ethics of Aristotle. Luther contends that this approach does not work, particularly in the presence of God's word.

# Follow the bouncing (baby) being—"is" vs. "appears" "what the meaning of is, is"



- ▶ 3 The works of men may always **be** attractive and seemingly good. It **appears** nevertheless that they are mortal sins.
- ▶ 4 The works of God may always **appear** to unattractive and seemingly bad. They **are** nevertheless truly immortal merits.
- ▶ 5 It is not that the works of men (we are talking about the seemingly good ones) are deadly, in the sense that they are crimes.
- ▶ 6 It is not that the works of God (we are talking of those performed through man) are merits, in the sense that they are not sins.
- ▶ The "is", vs. the "appears".
- ▶ Augustine and the good. Only the good is in fact created by God and eternally real.

# Theology of Humility



Humility is not thinking  
less of yourself,  
but thinking  
of yourself less.  
- C.S. Lewis

- ▶ 7 The works of righteous people would be deadly, if they were not feared to be deadly, by these righteous people themselves in pious fear of God.
- ▶ 8 The works of men are all the more deadly when they are done without fear, and with pure and evil assurance.
- ▶ Luther has a theology of humility at this stage of his career and he is also speaking to monks. This would be greatly appealing to them. It also fits really well with the teachings of the Psalms and Proverbs. Particularly the Psalms would have appealed to the assembled monks and priests.

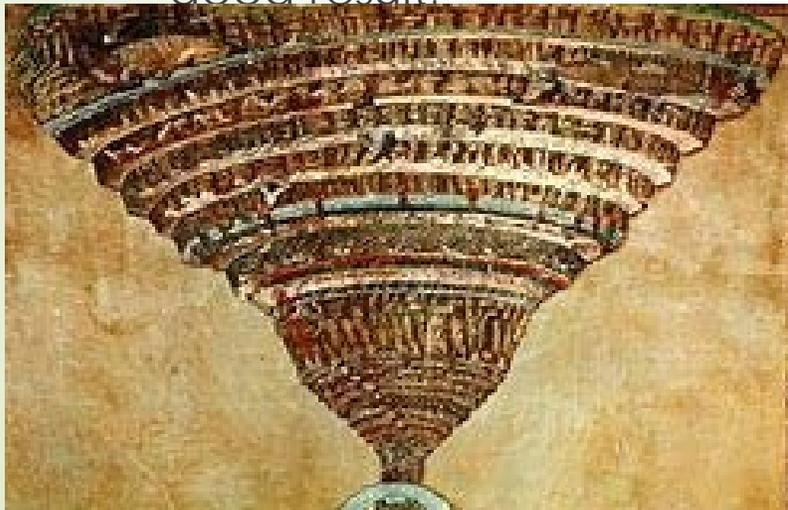


# Accidents vs. substance, Deadly vs. dead.

- ▶ 9 To say, as it were, that works without Christ are dead, but not deadly, seems to be a dangerous surrender of the fear of God.
- ▶ 10 Indeed, it is very difficult to see how a work would be dead and nevertheless not a harmful and deadly sin.
- ▶ Luther argues that deadly is truly bad, as it is also the quality of those things that are dead and make us dead. This is against the potential relativism of Scholastic nominalism.

# Humility and what's really a "bad" sin.

- ▶ 11 Presumption cannot be avoided, nor can there be true hope, unless the condemning judgment is feared in every work.
- ▶ 12 Sins are truly venial in the sight of God, when they are feared by men to be deadly.
- ▶ Human judgment mixes up the appearance of bad things that drive a person to repentance, with things that are worse in that they make a person self-confident and harden the heart.
- ▶ Honest sin is easier to confront than secret sin, or sin that appears to have a good result.



# Free will is nothing but a name.



- ▶ Luther deals with eternal realities vs. appearances in these theses.
- ▶ 13 "Free Will" after the fall is nothing but a word, and as long as it is doing what is within it, it is committing deadly sin.
- ▶ 14 "Free Will" after the fall has the potentiality toward good as an unrealizable capacity only; towards evil, however, always a realizable one.
- ▶ 15 Nor was free will able to remain as a realizable potentiality in the state of innocence. Even there it was an unrealizable possibility, not to speak of making any progress toward the good.
- ▶ 16 A man who thinks that he wants to attain righteousness by what is doing what is in him is adding sin to sin, so that he becomes doubly guilty.
- ▶ Names as realities in our culture. Attack on the nominalists.
- ▶ Who is he attacking here?



# The Grace of Christ

- ▶ 17 To say this does not mean to give cause for despair, but rather for humility, and for stirring up the eagerness to seek the grace of Christ.
- ▶ 18 It is certain that a man must completely despair of himself in order to become fit to obtain the grace of Christ.
- ▶ Not by our own reason or strength.
- ▶ Broken, then fit to be remade.

# Our Perception and God's Reality— How can we see things God's way?

- ▶ 19 The one who beholds what is invisible of God, through the perception of what is made [cf. Romans 1:20], is not rightly called a theologian.
- ▶ 20 But rather the one who perceives what is visible of God, God's "backside" [Ex. 33:23], by beholding the sufferings and the cross.
- ▶ Appearances cannot find the truth. Only God's Word seen through the cross can do that.
- ▶ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [I Cor. 5:21].
- ▶ Theology of the cross versus theology of glory. A clearer understanding might be theology of appearances versus the reality of God's Word (Christ).
- ▶ The cross is the highest example, but the entire ministry of Christ can be applied here.





# Calling things what God calls them.

- ▶ 21 The “theologian of glory” calls the good bad and the bad good. The “theologian of the cross” says what a thing is [what God also has called it].
  - ▶ Because the theologian of appearances doesn’t see beyond the surface appearance of things, he calls the good bad and the bad good, the opposite of what God calls them.
  - ▶ Because the theologian of the cross has studied and become new through the Word of Christ, he or she begins to see things the way God sees them and begins to value them as good or bad, true or false, in the same way God does.
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# Works as the Appearance of Righteousness.

- ▶ 22 That wisdom that beholds the invisible things of God as perceived from works,--puffs up, blinds, and hardens man altogether.
- ▶ It is the human belief in participation in their own salvation that is the primary cause of the damnation of man.
- ▶ Good appearances mean that one must remove those layers of false goodness before real repentance can occur.

I'd rather spend time  
with  
a rough-around-the-edges sinner  
than  
a well-polished hypocrite.



# The Effect of Grace and Works

- ▶ 23 The law also brings about the wrath of God,-- it kills, reviles, makes guilty, judges, condemns all that is not in Christ.
- ▶ 24 Nevertheless, this wisdom is not bad nor is the law to be fled. But without a theology of the cross, man misuses the best things in the worst way.
- ▶ 25 The one who does much "work" is not the righteous one, but the one who, without "work", has much faith in Christ.
- ▶ 26 The law says: "Do this!", and it never is done. Grace says: "Believe in this one!", and forthwith everything is done.
- ▶ The goodness of the law, but its inadequacy—the wrong tool for the job.
- ▶ The total sufficiency of Christ's work of salvation, rather than our own work.



# What the Theology of the Cross brings about. Relationship of Creator to man, man to Creation...

- ▶ 27 The work of Christ shall rightly be called an active work, and ours that which is worked, so the one which is worked is well-pleasing unto God, thanks to the active work.
- ▶ 28 The love of God does not find its object but rather creates it. Human love starts with the object.
- ▶ Two Kinds of Righteousness
- ▶ God as subject creates objects of his Love. We only deal in the realm of ideas and material realities God has already created. We move from the object of God's Word to the derived objects we "create".



# Credits

- ▶ Text of Theses—Dillenberger, John. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings.
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