

“By Grace Through Faith”: Lutheran Theology

1. Introductory statement
 - a. He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.¹

2. Theology definition
 - a. Divinity; the science of God and divine things; or the science which teaches the existence, character and attributes of God, his laws and government, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice. (*Webster's 1828*)
 - b. A system or school of opinions concerning God and religious questions: (*American Heritage Dictionary*)
 - c. ...All of us are theologians in one way or another. Being a theologian just means thinking and speaking about God... Things happen. Accidents. Tragedies. Deaths and funerals. Natural disasters. Illness. Loss. Suffering. Disappointment. Wrongdoing. And so on and on. There is also good fortune. Perhaps unexpected success or escape from danger or certain disaster. Experience of great beauty or pleasure. Sheer grace. Chance encounters that determine our lives. Love. We begin to wonder. God pops into our thinking and conversation. We may cry out in agony, “Why God?” or in relief, “Thank God!”... We become theologians.²

3. History of Luther’s theology
 - a. Why Luther?
 1. Scriptures, Gospel, Epistles, Reformation, Awakening; i.e. Moses, Christ, Paul, Luther, Laestadius
 - b. Luther’s theology is not found in 95 theses.
 - c. Heidelberg Disputation
 - d. “As I have frequently advised, Christian and true theology does not present God to us in His majesty, as Moses and other doctrines do, nor does it command us to pry into the nature of God; but it orders us to acknowledge His will as set forth in Christ. It was God’s will that Christ should assume flesh, should be born and suffer death for our sins, and that this should be preached among all peoples.”³
 - e. Theology of Glory and Cross are Luther’s definitions. (Thesis 21)
 - f. Remember what we said earlier about being a theologian: We begin to think about God and become a theologian. “Becoming a theologian of the cross involves turning to face the problems, joys, and sorrows of everyday life.”⁴
 - g. The word “cross” here and in the entire treatise that follows is, of course, shorthand for the entire narrative of the crucified and risen Jesus. As such it includes the OT preparation (many of the foundational passages for the theology of the cross come from the OT!), the crucifixion *and* resurrection of Jesus, and his exaltation. It is important to include resurrection and exaltation because there is considerable confusion abroad about their place in a theology of the cross. It is often claimed, for instance, that a theology of glory is a theology of resurrection while a theology of the cross is “only” concerned with crucifixion. Nothing could be further from the truth. As

¹ Heidelberg Disputation: Thesis 25

² Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p11.

³ What Luther Says: Item # 4389.

⁴ Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p10.

a matter of fact, a theology of the cross is impossible without resurrection. It is impossible to plumb the depths of the crucifixion without the resurrection.⁵

4. Example: Worldview, may ask these questions (Luther worldview?)
 1. Where did we come from? (And why are we here?)
 2. What is wrong with the world?
 3. How can we fix it?
- b. Naturalist Worldview answers them thus
 1. We are the product of random acts of nature with no real purpose.
 2. We do not respect nature as we should.
 3. We can save the world through ecology and conservation.
- c. Christian Worldview answers them thus
 1. We are God's creation.
 2. The first parents sinned against God and subjected the whole world to a curse.
 3. God Himself has redeemed the world through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, which speaks of a promise of a better world.

5. Examples

- a. Glory: Hutterite flyer and photos
 1. Living the gospel of Christ is indeed possible, but one must first forsake the world with all its theologies, philosophies, and humanisms, and desire the sincere milk of God's word, that he may grow thereby and a Christian must grow to remain a Christian. His life is a lifelong pilgrimage and growth, which begins when one repents of his sins and is converted to Christ. The next step then is the confession of faith. Then comes the fiery trial, the battle with Satan and the flesh, which every individual is destined to lose without the help of Christ and a body of believers. A victorious and new life then follows if the believer completely dies to self and joins a church that lives according to the whole Gospel. The rebirth is then completed if the believer gives up all his personal possessions, and accepts the baptism of water as a sign of a new life in Christ. The lifework of the believer then consists of serving others with all that God has given him.⁶
- b. Cross: ELCA statement and photo
 1. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁷

6. Who is God?

- a. Glory: build their theology in the light of what they expect God to be.⁸

⁵ Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p1.

⁶ Are You a Bible-believing Christian? This Message is for You!: Tract from Fort Pitt Hutterian Brethren [10/6/09] <http://www.anabaptistchurch.org/FortPitt.htm>

⁷ ELCA Confession of Faith. [10/7/09] <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Statements-of-Belief/ELCA-Confession-of-Faith.aspx>

⁸ Trueman, Carl: "Luther's Theology of the Cross": [10/28/09] The Theologian. <http://www.theologian.org.uk/churchhistory/lutherstheologyofthecross.html>

- b. Cross: revealed in the incarnation, ultimately on the cross of Calvary.⁹
- c. All human efforts to climb to heaven, and thus to know God, are futile. Such efforts are what Luther calls a “theology of glory.” This theology seeks to know the divine being in itself, in its own glory, while ignoring the enormous distance between God and humans. In the final analysis, a theology of glory seeks God in those things that humans consider most valuable and praiseworthy, and that is why it is so concerned with the power of God, the glory of God, and the goodness of God. But this is little more than creating God after our own image, and we deceive ourselves into believing that God’s nature is what we would like it to be.¹⁰
- d. God’s highest self-disclosure takes place in the cross of Christ, and therefore Luther proposes, instead of a theology of glory, a “theology of the cross.” Such theology seeks God, not where we choose, nor as we would like God to be, but in the divine revelation of the cross. There God is seen in weakness, in suffering, as a stumbling block. This means that God acts in a radically different way than we would expect.¹¹
- e. John 14:6-9; John 12:28-33

7. In matters of the will.

- a. Glory: God responds to goodness like any other human.¹²
- b. Cross: God loves the unlovely and unrighteous before they love him.¹³
- c. “Luther’s teachers were from a particular branch of medieval scholasticism (Nominalism) that held that if we “do what is in us,” that is, if we do our best, we can be assured that God will not fail to give us the desired grace. ...’little bit,’ one of the telltale signs of the theology of glory.”¹⁴
- d. “I wish that the expression ‘free will’ had never been invented. It is not recorded in Scripture either and should more justly be call self-will, which is worthless.”¹⁵
- e. The problem is that it is not free but bound. It is rather captive and thus bound to sin.¹⁶
- f. I John 4:10, 19; John 15:16

8. In matters of justification.

- a. Glory: Justified by works.¹⁷
- b. Cross: Justified by faith.¹⁸
- c. The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him.¹⁹
- d. It is common among evangelical Christians to believe that we can’t perfectly fulfill the law, but we often try to because we assume that *if we only could* we would do it. So

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gonzalez, Justo L. The Story of Christianity Prince Press, Peabody, MS. 1984-5. Vol. II p31.

¹¹ Gonzalez, Justo L. The Story of Christianity Prince Press, Peabody, MS. 1984-5. Vol. II p31-32.

¹² Trueman, Carl: “Luther’s Theology of the Cross”: [10/28/09] The Theologian.

<http://www.theologian.org.uk/churchhistory/lutherstheologyofthecross.html>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p 50.

¹⁵ What Luther Says: Item # 4651.

¹⁶ Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p 53-54.

¹⁷ Trueman, Carl: “Luther’s Theology of the Cross”: [10/28/09] The Theologian.

<http://www.theologian.org.uk/churchhistory/lutherstheologyofthecross.html>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 1.

we believe that we must try to do something at least, and then, it is assumed, Christ will make up for our “shortcomings.”²⁰

e. Romans 1:17; Romans 3:28; Romans 4:4-5

9. In matters of repentance.

- a. Glory: ...defines repentance as a sinner being sorry for his sins and determining not to sin again...determination to live a better life.²¹
- b. Cross: ...defines repentance as contrition and faith rather than contrition and human determination.²²
- c. Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.²³
- d. Repentance is the work of God in man, who, in himself, is entirely helpless. Through repentance and faith in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, an unbeliever is brought to salvation. God's grace, which is the unmerited work of redemption, is freely given to him.²⁴
- e. Romans 2:4; II Corinthians 7:9-10

10. In matters of sanctification.

- a. Glory: Once you are saved you are given a list of do's and don'ts. Rededication may be necessary.²⁵
- b. Cross: The preaching of the law does not provide you with a list...rather intended to drive you back to the Cross through the hearing of the Gospel.²⁶
- c. The Pentecostals (and Charismatics) add another step on the ladder of holiness. They promote a baptism in the Spirit with speaking in tongues which gives you spiritual power that you didn't have before. Former Southern Baptist pastor Charles Simpson said, "Before I got baptized in the Spirit I almost wore out my re-dedicator." In other words, now that he has received power, unlike other Baptists, he no longer has to rededicate his life.²⁷
- d. Living in a theology of the Cross never makes you any "better" than anyone else. Every day in every way you are not getting better and better. In fact, the preaching of Law and Gospel will not lead you to an awareness of your holiness, but rather to greater awareness of the depth of your sin. As a result, you will develop an ever-increasing faith in and appreciation for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.²⁸
- e. I Corinthians 1:30-31; Hebrews 13:12; I Corinthians 6:11

²⁰ Forde, Gerhard O. On Being a Theologian of the Cross Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. p 24.

²¹ Matzat, Don: "A Theology of Glory and a Theology of the Cross", [10/28/09] Issues, etc. <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar51.htm>

²² Ibid.

²³ "The Augsburg Confession" Article XII. Repentance.

²⁴ "Principles of the Doctrine of Christ": Apostolic Lutheran Book Concern, Battle Ground, WA. 1996. p. 2.

²⁵ Matzat, Don: "A Theology of Glory and a Theology of the Cross", [10/28/09] Issues, etc. <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar51.htm>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

11. What about us?

- a. Doctrines of our church (mainly Sacraments)
 - 1. Confession & absolution
 - 2. Baptism
 - 3. Holy Communion