



Vom abendmal
Christi/Bekendnis
Mart. Luther.

Wittenberg.

1 5 2 8.

M L

Schlecht vnd recht behuete mich.
psalm. 25.

Title Page from *Confession concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528

PART 1

Luther on Theology

The documents of Part I, written over a twenty-two year period, indicate both the Reformer's basic theological method and his basic theological priorities. As a medieval Roman Catholic, Luther sought the surest path to salvation offered by the Church: he became a Priest, an Augustinian Friar, and a Doctor of Theology. Through his studies at the University of Erfurt, he began to see how medieval theology influenced the life of the church.

In 1511, Luther became a professor at the then new University of Wittenberg. He lectured on assigned topics and employed the medieval teaching method of "disputations." At a disputation, Professor Luther presided over the public debate of students as they addressed topics (that is, "theses") assigned to them by him. The first three documents in Part I represent Luther's transition away from this kind of theologizing.

The concluding documents represent the basic content of Luther's reformation proposal, based on the Word of God in Scripture. They show how Scholasticism's detached, academic analyses could not contain Luther's sharp language and passionate proclamation of the gospel revealed in Jesus Christ.

Luther's theological work led to the Reformation and explains his enduring influence.

Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517)

In this crucial document from the early fall of 1517, Luther offers a set of topics for debate (“theses”) at the University of Wittenberg. They sharply criticize the currently reigning method of scholastic theology (with its high confidence in human reason and free will). The dependence of late-medieval theology on the philosophy of Aristotle, typified by Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), was initially a creative and worthwhile experiment. Luther, however, contends here that scholastic theology blunts the distinctiveness of the gospel.

Professor Luther would expect his students to debate (that is, “dispute”) the pros and cons of each thesis in a public academic event at the university. Therefore, he designs the theses only to provide initial clues to the positions. Their pointed, exaggerated nature is part of the intellectual challenge of the disputation method—students must defend and criticize the points under consideration.

Luther does not only offer a negative evaluation of scholastic theology; he also presents a number of the positive themes of his own developing theology. These themes emerged from his biblical lectures of the preceding years. And we can see that Luther had strong convictions on a number of issues, especially the relations between sin, grace, free will, and good works, even before the debate about indulgences began.

Luther’s language is sharp, but his official posture is deferential. He concludes the attack on scholastic theology with the claim that these theses reflect an essential agreement with the church catholic and her great tradition of creeds and ecumenical councils. That said, within weeks Luther would launch a debate about the selling of indulgences that brought him and his theology to the attention of the highest church authorities.

1. To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere. This is contrary to common knowledge.

2. This is the same as permitting Pelagians¹ and all heretics to triumph, indeed, the same as conceding victory to them.

3. It is the same as making sport of the authority of all doctors of theology.

4. It is therefore true that a human being, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil [Cf. Matt. 7:17–18].

5. It is false to state that one’s inclination is free to choose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.

6. It is false to state that the will can, by nature, conform to correct precept. This is said in opposition to Scotus² and Gabriel³.

7. As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil.

1. Pelagius (360?–420), a native of Britain, denied original sin. He held that justifying grace is given according to merit and regarded sinless perfection possible after baptism. His teachings were vigorously attacked by St. Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo.

2. John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) was the leader of the Scotist school that taught freedom of the will and the superiority of the will over the intellect. He denied the real distinction between the soul and its faculties.

3. Gabriel Biel (1425?–1495) was “the last of the scholastics” and the first professor of theology in the newly founded University of Tübingen. He was the author of *The Canon of the Mass* that Luther studied diligently as a young man.

8. It does not, however, follow that the will is by nature evil, that is, essentially evil, as the Manicheans⁴ maintain.

9. It is nevertheless innately and inevitably evil and corrupt.

10. One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.

11. Nor is it able to will or not to will whatever is prescribed.

12. Nor does one contradict St. Augustine when one says that nothing is so much in the power of the will as the will itself.

13. It is absurd to conclude that a fallible person can love the creature above all things, therefore also God. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.

14. Nor is it surprising that the will can conform to erroneous and not to correct precept.

15. Indeed, it is peculiar to it that it can only conform to erroneous and not to correct precept.

16. One ought rather to conclude: since a fallible person is able to love the creature it is impossible for him to love God.

17. Humans are by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, they want to be God, and do not want God to be God.

18. To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were. This is contrary to common teaching.

19. Nor can we apply the reasoning of Scotus concerning brave citizens who love their country more than themselves.

20. An act of friendship is done, not according to nature, but according to prevenient grace. This in opposition to Gabriel.

21. No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.

22. Every act of concupiscence against God is evil and a fornication of the spirit.

23. Nor is it true that an act of concupiscence can be set aright by the virtue of hope. This in opposition to Gabriel.

24. For hope is not contrary to charity, which seeks and desires only that which is of God.

25. Hope does not grow out of merits, but out of suffering which destroys merits. This in opposition to the opinion of many.

26. An act of friendship is not the most perfect means for accomplishing that which is in one.⁵ Nor is it the most perfect means for obtaining the grace of God or turning toward and approaching God.

27. But it is an act of conversion already perfected, following grace both in time and by nature.

28. If it is said of the Scripture passages, "Return to me, ... and I will return to you" [Zech. 1:3], "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" [Jas. 4:8], "Seek and you will find" [Matt. 7:7], "You will seek me and find me" [Jer. 29:13], and the like, that one is by nature, the other by grace, this is no different from asserting what the Pelagians have said.

29. The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole disposition toward grace is the eternal election and predestination of God.

30. On the part of humans, however, nothing precedes grace except indisposition and even rebellion against grace.

4. Manichaeism is a form of religious dualism consisting of Zoroastrian dualism, Babylonian folklore, and Buddhist ethics superficially combined with Christian elements. It was founded in the latter half of the third century by the Persian prophet Mani (215?–276?). According to Mani, everything material and sensual is created evil and must be overcome.

5. "To do what is in one" (*facere quod in se est*) is a scholastic phrase that implies that, if Christians do their best, even when they fall short of perfection, God will bestow grace enough to make up the difference between human unrighteousness and divine righteousness. In this sense, then, humans can "merit" salvation.

31. It is said with the idlest demonstrations that the predestined can be damned individually but not collectively. This in opposition to the scholastics.

32. Moreover, nothing is achieved by the following saying: Predestination is necessary by virtue of the consequence of God's willing, but not of what actually followed, namely, that God had to elect a certain person.

33. And this is false, that doing all that one is able to do can remove the obstacles to grace. This in opposition to several authorities.

34. In brief, a person by nature has neither correct precept nor good will.

35. It is not true that an invincible ignorance excuses one completely (all scholastics notwithstanding);

36. For ignorance of God and oneself and good work is always invincible to nature.

37. Nature, moreover, inwardly and necessarily glories and takes pride in every work which is apparently and outwardly good.

38. There is no moral virtue without either pride or sorrow, that is, without sin.

39. We are not masters of our actions, from beginning to end, but servants. This in opposition to the philosophers.

40. We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds. This in opposition to the philosophers.

41. Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This in opposition to the scholastics.

42. It is an error to maintain that Aristotle's statement concerning happiness does not contradict Catholic doctrine. This in opposition to the doctrine on morals.

43. It is an error to say that no one can become a theologian without Aristotle. This in opposition to common opinion.

44. Indeed, no one can become a theologian without becoming one with Aristotle.

45. To state that a theologian who is not a logician is a monstrous heretic—this is a monstrous and heretical statement. This in opposition to common opinion.

46. In vain does one fashion a logic of faith, a substitution brought about without regard for limit and measure. This in opposition to the new dialecticians.

47. No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms. This in opposition to the Cardinal.⁶

48. Nevertheless it does not for that reason follow that the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts syllogistic forms. This in opposition to the same new dialecticians and to the Cardinal.

49. If a syllogistic form of reasoning holds in divine matters, then the doctrine of the Trinity is demonstrable and not the object of faith.

50. Briefly, the whole Aristotle⁷ is to theology as darkness is to light. This in opposition to the scholastics.

51. It is truly doubtful whether the Latin-speakers comprehended the correct meaning of Aristotle.

52. It would have been better for the church if Porphyry⁸ with his universals had not been born for the use of theologians.

6. Luther refers to the Cardinal of Cambrai, Pierre d'Ailly (1350–1420), a French theologian, a commentator on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and guiding spirit of the conciliar movement—the movement that led to the calling of the Council of Constance (1414–1418).

7. The logical and metaphysical writings of Aristotle were well known in the medieval period and were incorporated in scholasticism. When his scientific writings later became known to Europeans, they caused much concern because they contained statements contrary to received Christian teachings. Luther refers to these writings as “the whole Aristotle.”

8. Porphyry (233–303) was a Neo-Platonic follower of Plotinus and a bitter opponent of Christianity.

53. Even the more useful definitions of Aristotle seem to beg the question.

54. For an act to be meritorious, either the presence of grace is sufficient, or its presence means nothing. This in opposition to Gabriel.

55. The grace of God is never present in such a way that it is inactive, but it is a living, active, and operative spirit; nor can it happen that through the absolute power of God an act of friendship may be present without the presence of the grace of God. This in opposition to Gabriel.

56. It is not true that God can accept a person without divine, justifying grace. This in opposition to Ockham.⁹

57. It is dangerous to say that the law commands that an act of obeying the commandment be done in the grace of God. This in opposition to the Cardinal and Gabriel.

58. From this it would follow that “to have the grace of God” is actually a new demand going beyond the law.

59. It would also follow that fulfilling the law can take place without the grace of God.

60. Likewise it follows that the grace of God would be more hateful than the law itself.

61. It does not follow that the law should be complied with and fulfilled in the grace of God. This in opposition to Gabriel.

62. And that therefore, whoever is outside the grace of God sins incessantly, even when they do not kill, commit adultery, or become angry.

63. But it follows that people sin because they do not spiritually fulfill the law.

64. Spiritually, people do not kill, do not do evil, do not become enraged when they neither become angry nor lust.

65. Outside the grace of God it is indeed impossible not to become angry or lust, so that not even in grace is it possible to fulfill the law perfectly.

66. It is the righteousness of the hypocrite actually and outwardly not to kill, do evil, etc.

67. It is by the grace of God that one does not lust or become enraged.

68. Therefore it is impossible to fulfill the law in any way without the grace of God.

69. As a matter of fact, it is more accurate to say that the law is destroyed by nature without the grace of God.

70. A good law will of necessity be bad for the natural will.

71. Law and will are two implacable foes without the grace of God.

72. What the law wants, the will never wants, unless it pretends to want it out of fear or love.

73. The law, as taskmaster of the will, will not be overcome except by the “child, who has been born to us” [Isa. 9:6].

74. The law makes sin abound because it irritates and repels the will [Rom. 7:13].

75. The grace of God, however, makes justice abound through Jesus Christ because it causes one to be pleased with the law.

76. Every deed of the law without the grace of God appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin. This in opposition to the scholastics.

77. The will is always averse to, and the hands inclined toward, the law of the Lord without the grace of God.

78. The will which is inclined toward the law without the grace of God is so inclined by reason of its own advantage.

79. Condemned are all those who do the works of the law.

80. Blessed are all those who do the works of the grace of God.

9. William of Ockham (ca. 1280–1349) was a Franciscan theologian, a so-called “nominalist,” who stated that reason could not be applied to theology. He published commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry.

81. Chapter Falsas concerning penance, dist. 5, confirms the fact that works outside the realm of grace are not good, if this is not understood falsely.

82. Not only are the religious ceremonials not the good law and the precepts in which one does not live (in opposition to many teachers);

83. But even the Decalogue itself and all that can be taught and prescribed inwardly and outwardly is not good law either.

84. The good law and that in which one lives is the love of God, spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

85. Anyone's will would prefer, if it were possible, that there would be no law and to be entirely free.

86. Anyone's will hates it that the law should be imposed upon it; if, however, the will desires imposition of the law it does so out of love of self.

87. Since the law is good, the will, which is hostile to it, cannot be good.

88. And from this it is clear that everyone's natural will is iniquitous and bad.

89. Grace as a mediator is necessary to reconcile the law with the will.

90. The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the will, lest it err even in loving God. In opposition to Gabriel.

91. It is not given so that good deeds might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed. In opposition to Gabriel.

92. It cannot be denied that love is superfluous if a person is by nature able to do an act of friendship. In opposition to Gabriel.

93. There is a kind of subtle evil in the argument that an act is at the same time the fruit and the use of the fruit. In opposition to Ockham, the Cardinal, Gabriel.

94. This holds true also of the saying that the love of God may continue alongside an intense love of the creature.

95. To love God is at the same time to hate oneself and to know nothing but God.

96. We must make our will conform in every respect to the will of God (in opposition to the Cardinal);

97. So that we not only will what God wills, but also ought to will whatever God wills.

In these statements we wanted to say and believe we have said nothing that is not in agreement with the Catholic church and the teachers of the church.

2

The Ninety-Five Theses (1517)

This famous document, officially The Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences, shows the Reformer's early concern about the right formulation of the gospel message. For Luther, the distinctive character of God's gracious action in Jesus Christ lies at the center of the church's proclamation. And, therefore, he wants his students publically to discuss, debate, and dispute the theory and practice of selling indulgences in relationship to the gospel of the forgiveness of sin.

Indulgences developed slowly in the medieval period. Originally, an indulgence involved only the removal of the temporal or earthly punishment that the church had the right to enforce as part of the sacrament of penance. Luther, with his strong pastoral heart, saw that many people did not understand indulgences in this way—and that those who sanctioned their sale had their own stake in keeping the theology of indulgences obscure.

Therefore, Luther wrote these ninety-five theses as a call for debate, similar to his earlier call for a disputation about the nature of theology. Tradition holds that he offered these theses for discussion on October 31, 1517; however, historical sources (and historians) do not agree as to where and how Luther published the theses.

While the initial reaction to his call for disputation was disappointing, the subsequent translation into local languages and the publication of the document set off shock waves throughout Europe. Clearly, Luther touched a vital nerve, evidenced by both the support that he generated and the hostility with which many authorities of church and empire began to view his work.

Although Luther would soon considerably alter his ideas on purgatory, papal authority, and the sacraments expressed here, he clearly focuses on the centrality of a right understanding of sin and forgiveness as core features of the gospel.

Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following theses will be publicly discussed at Wittenberg under the chairmanship of the reverend father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology and regularly appointed Lecturer on these subjects at that place. He requests that those who cannot be present to debate orally with us will do so by letter.¹

In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh.

4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

1. The formal academic event never took place. However, because the contents of the ninety-five theses were soon widely disseminated by word of mouth and in print, a vigorous debate about Luther's ideas took place that has lasted to the present.

5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.²

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time God humbles believers in all things and makes them submissive to the priest, the divine vicar.

8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.

9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.

10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.

11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept [Matt. 13:25].

12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.

13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.

14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.

15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near the horror of despair.

2. The canons, or decrees of the church, had the force of law. Those referred to here and in Theses 8 and 85 are the so-called penitential canons.

16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.

17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.

18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or Scripture, that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.

19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.

20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words “plenary remission of all penalties,” does not actually mean “all penalties,” but only those imposed by himself.

21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error when they say that a person is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.

22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.

23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.

24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

25. That power which the pope has in general over purgatory corresponds to the power which any bishop or curate has in a particular way in his own diocese or parish.

26. The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys,³ which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them.

3. This is not a denial of the power of the keys, that is, the power to forgive and to retain sin, but merely an assertion that the power of the keys does not extend to purgatory.

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.

29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed, since we have exceptions in St. Severinus and St. Paschal,⁴ as related in a legend.

30. No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.

31. The one who actually buys indulgences is as rare as the one who is really penitent; indeed, such a person is exceedingly rare.

32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

33. People must especially be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which one is reconciled to God.

34. For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction⁵ established by man.

4. Luther refers to this legend again in the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, LW 31:178. The legend maintains that these saints, Pope Severinus (638–640) and Pope Paschal I (817–824), preferred to remain longer in purgatory than they might have greater glory in heaven.

5. Satisfaction is that act on the part of the penitent, in connection with the sacrament of penance, by means of which one pays the temporal penalty for one's sins. If at death one is in arrears in paying the temporal penalty for venial sins, one pays this penalty in purgatory. Indulgences are concerned with this satisfaction of the sacrament of penance—they permit a partial or complete (plenary) remission of temporal punishment. According to Roman Catholic theology, the buyer of an indulgence still has to confess one's sins, be absolved from them, and be truly penitent.

35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges⁶ preach unchristian doctrine.

36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt,⁷ even without indulgence letters.

37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted to the Christian by God, even without indulgence letters.

38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said [Thesis 6], the proclamation of the divine remission.

39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.

40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them—at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.

41. Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.

42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.

43. Christians are to be taught that the one who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than one who buys indulgences.

6. These are privileges entitling the holder of indulgence letters to choose one's own confessor and relieving the holder of certain satisfactions.

7. To justify the placing of absolution before satisfaction, contrary to the practice of the early church, theologians distinguished between the guilt and the penalty of sins.

44. Because love grows by works of love, a person thereby becomes better. A person does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.

45. Christians are to be taught that the one who sees a needy person and passes by, yet gives money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.

46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.

47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.

48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.

49. Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.

50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.

51. Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.

52. It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.

53. They are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.

54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.

55. It is certainly the pope's sentiment that if indulgences, which are a very insignificant thing, are celebrated with one bell, one procession, and one ceremony, then the gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.

56. The treasures of the church,⁸ out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ.

57. That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many [indulgence] preachers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.

59. St. Laurence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.

60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church,⁹ given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure;

61. For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved to him.

62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last [Matt. 20:16].

8. The treasury of merits is a reserve fund of good works accumulated by Christ and the saints upon which the pope could draw when he remitted satisfaction in indulgences.

9. The office of the keys: the preaching of the gospel, the celebrating of the sacraments, the remitting of sins to the penitent, and the excommunicating of impenitent sinners.

64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.

67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.

68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.

70. But they are much more bound to strain their eyes and ears lest these men preach their own dreams instead of what the pope has commissioned.

71. Let whoever speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed;

72. But let whoever guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed;

73. Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatsoever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.

74. But much more does intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.

75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.

76. We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.

77. To say that even St. Peter, if he were now pope, could not grant greater graces is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.

78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in 1 Corinthians 12[:28].

79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers, is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.

80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.

81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned people to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity,

82. Such as: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."

83. Again, "Why are funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continued and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded for them, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again, "What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a person who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God and do not rather, because of the need of that pious and beloved soul, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again, "Why are the penitential canons, long since abrogated and dead in actual fact and through disuse, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the

richest Crassus,¹⁰ build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?”

87. Again, “What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?”

88. Again, “What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?”¹¹

89. “Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?”¹²

10. Marcus Licinius Crassus (115–153 BCE), also called Dives (“the Rich”), was noted for his wealth and luxury by the classical Romans. Crassus means “the Fat.”

11. The indulgence letter entitled its possessor to receive absolution once during one’s lifetime and once at the approach of death.

12. During the time when the jubilee indulgences were preached, other indulgences were suspended.

90. To repress these very sharp arguments of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved. Indeed, they would not exist.

92. Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Peace, peace,” and there is no peace! [Jer. 6:14].

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Cross, cross,” and there is no cross!

94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22].

Heidelberg Disputation (1518)

In April 1518, the German Augustinian order held its General Chapter meeting in the southwestern German city of Heidelberg. By this time (six months after the publication of The Ninety-Five Theses), Luther was under a great cloud of controversy. When his superiors asked him to present his ideas to the Brothers, he used the form of a modified disputation; he wrote these theses, not for a debate he would chair in professorial style, but rather as a way to present his theology.

Already in this early document, Luther develops some characteristic theological themes as he expands his understanding of sin, grace, and free will. And in doing so, he offers his distinctive proposal for reform of the church—a reform centered in the “theology of the cross” (theologia crucis). Moreover, the Reformer moves beyond the mere content of theological propositions to offer a cross-centered method of theologizing.

Luther had come to think that the main problem with the Scholastic theological tradition was its commitment to philosophical rationalism. Thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas unblinkingly followed the rationalistic trajectories of their first principles. Therefore, their opening theological moves tended to dominate the systems they developed.

For example, because the Scholastics believed they could prove the existence of God with philosophical reason, Luther thought they moved too smoothly from what could be known in nature to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Though Thomas himself was clear that reason could not explain the “saving mysteries,” much of the energy of subsequent Scholastic theology went into these foundational questions.

The Reformer thought the Scholastic project obscured what Paul had taught: the cross of Christ is not a concept compatible with conventional philosophy. To reason, the cross is foolishness and offense. The meaning of Christ’s death cannot be explained—that is, without obscuring its scandalous character. Therefore, writes Luther, the true theologian does not build a rational system, based on visible and evident things (following Aristotle). Rather, the paradox of the cross teaches that the ways of God are hidden (deus absconditus), even in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Here Luther provides not only theological and philosophical theses; he also elaborates each thesis as he connects the issues at stake with the Scriptures and various theologians.

Here we see Luther’s radically grace-centered theology, as he sets the righteousness of God not only against philosophical claims of “wisdom,” but also against all the best moral achievement of humanity. Thus, the Reformer appeals to the strong voice of St. Augustine, especially in his controversy with Pelagius, which apparently had become muted even in the Augustinian order.

Brother Martin Luther, Master of Sacred Theology, will preside, and Brother Leonhard Beier, Master of Arts and Philosophy, will defend the following theses before the Augustinians of this renowned city of Heidelberg in the customary place.

Theological Theses

Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, “Do not rely on your own insight” [Prov. 3:5], we humbly present

to the judgment of all those who wish to be here these theological paradoxes, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ, and also from St. Augustine, his most trustworthy interpreter.

1. The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance persons on their way to righteousness, but rather hinders them.

2. Much less can human works, which are done over and over again with the aid of natural precepts, so to speak, lead to that end.

3. Although the works of human beings always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.

4. Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.

5. The works of humans are thus not mortal sins (we speak of works which are apparently good), as though they were crimes.

6. The works of God (we speak of those which he does through humans) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless.

7. The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.

8. By so much more are human works mortal sins when they are done without fear and in unadulterated, evil self-security.

9. To say that works without Christ are dead, but not mortal, appears to constitute a perilous surrender of the fear of God.

10. Indeed, it is very difficult to see how a work can be dead and at the same time not a harmful and mortal sin.

11. Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.

12. In the sight of God sins are then truly venial when they are feared by people to be mortal.

13. Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.

14. Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity.

15. Nor could free will endure in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity.

16. The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

17. Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

18. It is certain that human beings must utterly despair of their own abilities before they are prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].

20. One deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by humans is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15].

24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross one misuses the best in the worst manner.

25. One is not righteous who does much, but the one who, without work, believes much in Christ.

26. The law says, "Do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "Believe in this," and everything is already done.

27. Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work and our work an accomplished work, and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.

28. The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

Philosophical Theses

29. Whoever wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to their soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.

30. Just as persons do not use the evil of passion well unless they are married, so no one philosophizes well unless they are fools, that is, Christian.

31. It was easy for Aristotle to believe that the world was eternal since he believed that the human soul was mortal.

32. After the proposition that there are as many material forms as there are created things had been accepted, it was necessary to accept that they all are material.

33. Nothing in the world becomes something of necessity; nevertheless, that which comes forth from matter, again by necessity, comes into being according to nature.

34. If Aristotle would have recognized the absolute power of God, he would accordingly have maintained that it was impossible for matter to exist of itself alone.

35. According to Aristotle, nothing is infinite with respect to action, yet with respect to power and matter as many things as have been created are infinite.

36. Aristotle wrongly finds fault with and derides the ideas of Plato, which actually are better than his own.

37. The mathematical order of material things is ingeniously maintained by Pythagoras, but more ingenious is the interaction of ideas maintained by Plato.

38. The disputation of Aristotle lashes out at Parmenides's idea of oneness¹ (if a Christian will pardon this) in a battle of air.

39. If Anaxagoras posited infinity as to form, as it seems he did, he was the best of the philosophers, even if Aristotle was unwilling to acknowledge this.

40. To Aristotle, privation, matter, form, movable, immovable, impulse, power, etc. seem to be the same.

Proofs of the Thesis Debated in the Chapter at Heidelberg, May, 1518

1

The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance people on their way to righteousness, but rather hinders them.

This is made clear by the Apostle in his letter to the Romans (3[:21]): "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." St. Augustine interprets this in his book, *The Spirit and the Letter*: "Without the law, that is, without its support." In Romans 5[:20] the Apostle states, "Law intervened, to increase the trespass," and in Romans 7[:9] he adds, "But when the commandment came, sin revived." For this reason he calls the law a law of death and a law of sin in Romans 8[:2]. Indeed, in 2 Corinthians 8[:6] he says, "the written code kills," which St. Augustine throughout his book, *The Spirit and the Letter*, understands as applying to every law, even the holiest law of God.

1. Parmenides (early fifth century BCE) was a well-known pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who, with Zeno, headed the Eleatic school and taught a monistic cosmology.

2

Much less can human works which are done over and over again with the aid of natural precepts, so to speak, lead to that end.

Because the law of God, which is holy and unstained, true, just, etc., is given to human beings by God as an aid beyond their natural powers to enlighten them and move them to do the good, and nevertheless the opposite takes place, namely, that they become more wicked; then how can they, left to their own power and without such aid, be induced to do good? If people do not do the good with help from without, then they will do even less by their own strength. Therefore the Apostle, in Romans 3[:10–12], calls all persons corrupt and impotent who neither understand nor seek God. All, he says, have gone astray

3

Although the works of a person always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.

Human works appear attractive outwardly, but within they are filthy, as Christ says concerning the Pharisees in Matthew 23[:27]. They appear to the doer and others good and beautiful, yet God does not judge according to appearances but searches “the minds and hearts” [Ps. 7:9]. For without grace and faith it is impossible to have a pure heart. Acts 15[:9]: “He cleansed their hearts by faith.”

The thesis is proven in the following way: If the works of righteous people are sins, as Thesis 7 of this disputation states, this is much more the case concerning the works of those who are not righteous. But the just speak in behalf of their works in the following way: “Do not enter into judgment with thy servant, Lord, for no one living is righteous before you” [Ps. 143:2]. The Apostle speaks likewise in Galatians 3[:10], “All who rely on the works of the law are under the curse.” But the

works of humans are the works of the law, and the curse will not be placed upon venial sins. Therefore they are mortal sins.

In the third place, Romans 2[:21] states, “You who teach others not to steal, do you steal?” St. Augustine interprets this to mean that people are thieves according to their guilty consciences even if they publicly judge or reprimand other thieves.

4

Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.

That the works of God are unattractive is clear from what is said in Isaiah 53[:2], “He had no form of comeliness,” and in 1 Samuel 2[:6], “The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.” This is understood to mean that the Lord humbles and frightens us by means of the law and the sight of our sins so that we seem in the eyes of men, as in our own, as nothing, foolish, and wicked, for we are in truth that. Insofar as we acknowledge and confess this, there is no form or beauty in us, but our life is hidden in God (that is, in the bare confidence in God’s mercy), finding in ourselves nothing but sin, foolishness, death, and hell, according to that verse of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 6[:9–10], “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as dying, and behold we live.” And that it is which Isaiah 28[:21] calls the alien work of God— that God may work in us (that is, he humbles us thoroughly, making us despair, so that God may exalt us in Divine mercy, giving us hope), just as Habakkuk 3[:2] states, “In wrath remember mercy.” Such people are, therefore, displeased with all their works; see no beauty, but only their ugliness. Indeed, they also do those things which appear foolish and disgusting to others.

This ugliness, however, comes into being in us either when God punishes us or when we accuse

ourselves, as 1 Corinthians 11[:31] says, "If we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged" by the Lord. Deuteronomy 32[:36] also states, "The Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants." In this way, consequently, the unattractive works which God does in us, that is, those which are humble and devout, are really eternal, for humility and fear of God are our entire merit.

5

The works of humans are thus not mortal sins (we speak of works which are apparently good), as though they were crimes.

For crimes are such acts which can also be condemned before men, such as adultery, theft, homicide, slander, etc. Mortal sins, on the other hand, are those which seem good yet are essentially fruits of a bad root and a bad tree. Augustine states this in the fourth book of *Against Julian*.

6

The works of God (we speak of those which God does through humans) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless.

In Ecclesiastes 7[:20], we read, "Surely there is not a righteous person on earth who does good and never sins." In this connection, however, some people² say that the righteous person indeed sins, but not when a person does good. They may be refuted in the following manner: "If that is what this verse wants to say, why waste so many words?" or does the Holy Spirit like to indulge in loquacious and foolish babble? For this meaning would then be adequately expressed by the following: "There is not a righteous person on earth who does not sin." Why does the Spirit add "Who does good," as if another person were righteous who did evil? For no one except a righteous person does

good. Where, however, the Spirit speaks of sins outside the realm of good works the Spirit speaks thus [Prov. 24:16], "The righteous fall seven times a day." Here the Spirit does not say, "A righteous person falls seven times a day when he does good." This is a comparison. If someone cuts with a rusty and rough hatchet, even though the worker is a good craftsman, the hatchet leaves bad, jagged, and ugly gashes. So it is when God works through us.

7

The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.

This is clear from Thesis 4. To trust in works, which one ought to do in fear, is equivalent to giving oneself the honor and taking it from God, to whom fear is due in connection with every work. But this is completely wrong, namely to please oneself, to enjoy oneself in one's works, and to adore oneself as an idol. He who is self-confident and without fear of God, however, acts entirely in this manner. For if he had fear he would not be self-confident, and for this reason he would not be pleased with himself, but he would be pleased with God.

In the second place, it is clear from the words of the psalmist [Ps. 148:2], "Enter not into judgment with thy servant," and Psalm 32[:5], "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,'" etc. But that these are not venial sins is clear because these passages state that confession and repentance are not necessary for venial sins. If, therefore, they are mortal sins and all the saints intercede for them, as it is stated in the same place, then the works of the saints are mortal sins. But the works of the saints are good works, wherefore they are meritorious for them only through the fear of their humble confession.

In the third place, it is clear from the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses" [Matt. 6:12]. This

2. By "some people" Luther means St. Jerome above all.

is a prayer of the saints, therefore those trespasses are good works for which they pray. But that these are mortal sins is clear from the following verse, “If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses” [Matt. 6:15]. Note that these trespasses are such that, if unforgiven, they would condemn them, unless they pray this prayer sincerely and forgive others.

In the fourth place, it is clear from Revelation 21[:27], “Nothing unclean shall enter into it” [the kingdom of heaven]. But everything that hinders entrance into the kingdom of heaven is mortal sin (or it would be necessary to interpret the concept of mortal sin in another way). Venial sin, however, hinders because it makes the soul unclean and has no place in the kingdom of heaven. Consequently, etc.

8

By so much more are the human works mortal sins when they are done without fear and in unadulterated, evil self-security.

The inevitable deduction from the preceding thesis is clear. For where there is no fear there is no humility. Where there is no humility there is pride, and where there is pride there are the wrath and judgment of God, for God opposes the haughty. Indeed, if pride would cease there would be no sin anywhere.

9

To say that works without Christ are dead, but not mortal, appears to constitute a perilous surrender of the fear of God.

For in this way we become certain and therefore haughty, which is perilous. For in such a way God is constantly deprived of the glory which is due him and which is transferred to other things, since one should strive with all diligence to give him the glory—the sooner the better. For this rea-

son the Bible advises us, “Do not delay being converted to the Lord.”³ For if that person offends him who withdraws glory from him, how much more does that person offend him who continues to withdraw glory from him and does this boldly! But whoever is not in Christ or who withdraws from him withdraws glory from him, as is well known.

10

Indeed, it is very difficult to see how a work can be dead and at the same time not a harmful and mortal sin.

This I prove in the following way: Scripture does not speak of dead things in such a manner, stating that something is not mortal which is nevertheless dead. Indeed, neither does grammar, which says that “dead” is a stronger term than “mortal.” For the grammarians call a mortal work one which kills, a dead work not one that has been killed, but one that is not alive. But God despises what is not alive, as is written in Proverbs 15[:8], “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.”

Second, the will must do something with respect to such a dead work, namely, either love or hate it. The will cannot hate a dead work since the will is evil. Consequently the will loves a dead work, and therefore it loves something dead. In that act itself it thus induces an evil work of the will against God whom it should love and honor in this and in every deed.

11

Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.

This is clear from Thesis 4. For it is impossible to hope in God unless one has despaired in all creatures and knows that nothing can profit one without God. Since there is no person who has this pure

3. This quotation is from Sirach 5:8. The Vulgate Bible contained the apocryphal books.

hope, as we said above, and since we still place some confidence in the creature, it is clear that we must, because of impurity in all things, fear the judgment of God. Thus arrogance must be avoided, not only in the work, but in the inclination also, that is, it must displease us still to have confidence in the creature.

12

In the sight of God sins are then truly venial when they are feared by humans to be mortal.

This becomes sufficiently clear from what has been said. For as much as we accuse ourselves, so much God pardons us, according to the verse, “Confess your misdeed so that you will be justified” [Cf. Isa. 43:26], and according to another [Ps. 141:4], “Incline not my heart to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds.”

13

Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.

The first part is clear, for the will is captive and subject to sin. Not that it is nothing, but that it is not free except to do evil. According to John 8[:34, 36], “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Hence St. Augustine says in his book, *The Spirit and the Letter*, “Free will without grace has the power to do nothing but sin”; and in the second book of *Against Julian*, “You call the will free, but in fact it is an enslaved will,” and in many other places.

The second part is clear from what has been said above and from the verse in Hosea 13[:9], “Israel, you are bringing misfortune upon yourself, for your salvation is alone with me,”⁴ and from similar passages.

4. This is a free rendering of the passage, “I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you?”

14

Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity,⁵ but it can always do evil in an active capacity.

An illustration will make the meaning of this thesis clear. Just as a dead person can do something toward life only in a passive capacity, so can dead people do something toward death in an active manner while they live. Free will, however, is dead, as demonstrated by the dead whom the Lord has raised up, as the holy teachers of the church say. St. Augustine, moreover, proves this same thesis in his various writings against the Pelagians.

15

Nor could free will endure in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity.

The Master of the *Sentences*, quoting Augustine, states, “By these testimonies it is obviously demonstrated that humans received a righteous nature and a good will when they were created, and also the help by means of which they could prevail. Otherwise it would appear as though they had not fallen because of their own fault.” He speaks of the active capacity, which is obviously contrary to Augustine’s opinion in his book, *Concerning Reprimand and Grace*, where the latter puts it in this way: “He received the ability to act, if he so willed, but he did not have the will by means of which he could act.” By “ability to act” he understands the passive capacity, and by “will by means of which he could,” the active capacity.

The second part, however, is sufficiently clarified by the Master in the same distinction.

5. This is Luther’s way of stating that free will could actually choose “the Good” before the fall. That it could do so after the fall would seem likely because of its name, but not in actual fact.

16

The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

On the basis of what has been said, the following is clear: While persons are doing what is in themselves, they sin and seek themselves in everything. But if they should suppose that through sin they might become worthy of or prepared for grace, they would add haughty arrogance to their sin and not believe that sin is sin and evil is evil, which is an exceedingly great sin. As Jeremiah 2[:18] says, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” that is, through sin they are far from me and yet they presume to do good by their own ability.

Now you ask, “What then shall we do? Shall we go our way with indifference because we can do nothing but sin?” I would reply, By no means. But, having heard this, fall down and pray for grace and place your hope in Christ in whom is our salvation, life, and resurrection. For this reason we are so instructed—for this reason the law makes us aware of sin so that, having recognized our sin, we may seek and receive grace. Thus God “gives grace to the humble” [1 Pet. 5:5], and “whoever humbles himself will be exalted” [Matt. 23:12]. The law humbles, grace exalts. The law effects fear and wrath, grace effects hope and mercy. “Through the law comes knowledge of sin” [Rom. 8:20], through knowledge of sin, however, comes humility, and through humility grace is acquired. Thus an action which is alien to God’s nature results in a deed belonging to the Divine nature: God makes a person a sinner so that God may make that sinner righteous.

17

Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

This is clear from what has been said, for, according to the gospel, the kingdom of heaven is given to children and the humble [Mark 10:14, 16], and Christ loves them. They cannot be humble who do not recognize that they are damnable, whose sin smells to high heaven. Sin is recognized only through the law. It is apparent that not despair rather hope, is preached when we are told that we are sinners. Such preaching concerning sin is a preparation for grace, or it is rather the recognition of sin and faith in such preaching. Yearning for grace wells up when recognition of sin has arisen. Sick persons seek the physician when they recognize the seriousness of their illness. Therefore one does not give cause for despair or death by telling sick persons about the danger of their illness, but, in effect, one urges them to seek a medical cure. To say that we are nothing and constantly sin when we do the best we can does not mean that we cause people to despair (unless they are fools); rather, we make them concerned about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

18

It is certain that a person must utterly despair of personal ability before such a person is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

The law wills that humans despair of their own abilities, for it leads them into hell and makes them poor and shows them that they are sinners in all their works, as the Apostle does in Romans 2 and 3[:9], where he says, “I have already charged that all are under the power of sin.” However, those who act simply in accordance with their abilities and believe that they are thereby doing something good

do not seem worthless to themselves, nor do they despair of their own strength. Indeed, they are so presumptuous that they strive for grace in reliance on their own strength.

19

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].

This is apparent in the example of those who were “theologians” and still were called fools by the Apostle in Romans 1[:22]. Furthermore, the invisible things of God are virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth. The recognition of all these things does not make one worthy or wise.

20

One deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

The “back” and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, human nature, weakness, foolishness. The Apostle in 1 Corinthians 1[:25] calls them the weakness and folly of God. Because humans misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering—to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in the Divine works should honor God hidden in suffering. As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 1[:21], “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does one no good to recognize God in Divine glory and majesty, unless

one recognizes God in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise, as Isaiah [45:15] says, “Truly, thou art a God who hides yourself.”

So, also, in John 14[:8], where Philip spoke according to the theology of glory: “Show us the Father.” Christ forthwith set aside his flighty thought about seeking God elsewhere and led him to himself, saying, “Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father” [John 14:9]. For this reason, true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ. It is also stated in John 10: “No one comes to the Father, but by me.” “I am the door” [John 10:9], and so forth.

21

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glow to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for human beings not to be puffed up by their good works unless they have first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until they know that they are worthless and that their works are not theirs, but God’s.

22

That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by humans is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

This has already been said. Because humans do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires. Just as the love of money grows in proportion to the increase of the money itself, so the dropsy of the soul becomes thirstier the more it drinks, as the poet says: “The more water they drink, the more they thirst for it.” The same thought is expressed in Ecclesiastes 1[:8]: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” This holds true of all desires.

Thus also the desire for knowledge is not satisfied by the acquisition of wisdom but is stimulated that much more. Likewise the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise, and so on, as Christ shows in John 4[:13], where he says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again.”

The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it. In other words, he who wishes to become wise does not seek wisdom by progressing toward it but becomes a fool by retrogressing into seeking folly. Likewise he who wishes to have much power, honor, pleasure, satisfaction in all things must flee rather than seek power, honor, pleasure, and satisfaction in all things. This is the wisdom which is folly to the world.

23

The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15].

Thus Galatians 3[:18] states, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law”; and: “For all who rely on works of the law are under the curse” [Gal. 3:10]; and Romans 4[:15]: “For the law brings wrath”; and Romans 7[:10]: “The very commandment which promised life proved to be the death of me”; Romans 2[:12]: “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without law.” Therefore, those who boast that they are wise and learned in the law boast in their confusion, their damnation, the wrath of God, in death. As Romans 2[:23] puts it: “You who boast in the law.”

24

Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross a person misuses the best in the worst manner.

Indeed the law is holy [Rom. 7:12], every gift of God good [1 Tim. 4:4], and everything that is created exceedingly good, as in Genesis 1[:31]. But, as stated above, the one who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. Such a person thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God.

Those, however, who have been emptied [Cf. Phil. 2:7] through suffering no longer do works but know that God works and does all things in them. For this reason, whether they do works or not, it is all the same to them. They neither boast if they do good works, nor are they disturbed if God does not do good works through them. They know that it is sufficient if they suffer and are brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more. Christ

says this in John 3[:7], “You must be born anew.” To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man. To die, I say, means to feel death at hand.

25

He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.

For the righteousness of God is not acquired by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but it is imparted by faith, for “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (Rom. 1[:17]), and “A person believes with the heart and so is justified” (Rom. 10[:10]). Therefore I wish to have the words “without work” understood in the following manner: Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that one’s works do not make him or her righteous, rather that one’s righteousness creates works. For grace and faith are infused without our works. After they have been imparted the works follow. Thus Romans 3[:20] states, “No human being will be justified in God’s sight by works of the law,” and, “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3[:28]). In other words, works contribute nothing to justification. Therefore, a person knows that works done by such faith are not one’s own but God’s. For this reason one does not seek to become justified or glorified through them, but seeks God. One’s justification by faith in Christ is sufficient. Christ is such a person’s wisdom, righteousness, etc., as 1 Corinthians 1[:30] has it, that we may be Christ’s action and instrument.

26

The law says, “do this,” and it is never done. Grace says, “believe in this,” and everything is already done.

The first part is clear from what has been stated by the Apostle and his interpreter, St. Augustine, in many places. And it has been stated often enough

above that the law works wrath and keeps all humans under the curse. The second part is clear from the same sources, for faith justifies. “And the law (says St. Augustine) commands what faith obtains.” For through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us. Christ is just and has fulfilled all the commands of God, wherefore we also fulfill everything through him since he was made ours through faith.

27

Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work and our work an accomplished work, and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.

Because Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which Christ does are the fulfillment of the commands of God given to us through faith. If we look at them we are moved to imitate them. For this reason the Apostle says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” [Eph. 5:1]. Thus deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which Christ has saved us, as St. Gregory says: “Every act of Christ is instruction for us, indeed, a stimulant.” If Christ’s action is in us it lives through faith, for it is exceedingly attractive according to the verse, “Draw me after you, let us make haste” [Song of Sol. 1:4] toward the fragrance “of your anointing oils” [Song of Sol. 1:3], that is, “your works.”

28

The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

The second part is clear and is accepted by all philosophers and theologians, for the object of love is its cause, assuming, according to Aristotle, that all power of the soul is passive and material and active only in receiving something. Thus it is also

demonstrated that Aristotle's philosophy is contrary to theology since in all things it seeks those things which are its own and receives rather than gives something good. The first part is clear because the love of God which lives in a person loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For this reason human love avoids sinners and evil persons. Thus Christ says: "For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"

[Matt. 9:13]. This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35], says the Apostle. Hence Psalm 41[:1] states, "Blessed is he who considers the poor;" for the intellect cannot by nature comprehend an object which does not exist, that is the poor and needy person, but only a thing which does exist, that is the true and good. Therefore it judges according to appearances, is a respecter of persons, and judges according to that which can be seen, etc.