



# REFORMATION PHILOSOPHY

## THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER

Dr. Stephanie Spoto  
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Monterey Peninsula College  
GENT 8/408: Late Renaissance and Reformation (1520-1600)

# Widows as Priests

## *correction*

- “women are not excluded from the priesthood, but are chosen less often, and only if they are elderly widows. The wives of the priests are the chief women in the whole country, except for the women priests” (pp. 75-76)

Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. H. V. S. Ogden (New York, 1949)

# Martin Luther (1483-1546)



- Christian theology: focus on God's revelation through Christ: "In the crucified Christ there is true theology and knowledge of God"
- Doesn't have a "philosophy of religion" in traditional sense → no general theory of religious consciousness or God without revelation in Christ
- But Luther has interpretation of Christian faith which has complex relationship between theology and philosophy

# Concern with Academic Aristotelianism

- Essence of theology is biblical interpretation
  - ▣ Bible is most authoritative book of human self-understanding
- Most theology developed in university setting
  - ▣ Luther concerned that medieval theology makes it difficult to express truth presented in scripture.
- Luther targets Aristotle for criticism
  - ▣ Philosophy found in Aristotle's texts
  - ▣ Medieval interpretations of Aristotle
  - ▣ Theology that assimilates Aristotle into its doctrine
  - ▣ Institutional "Aristotelianism" – medieval organization of academia

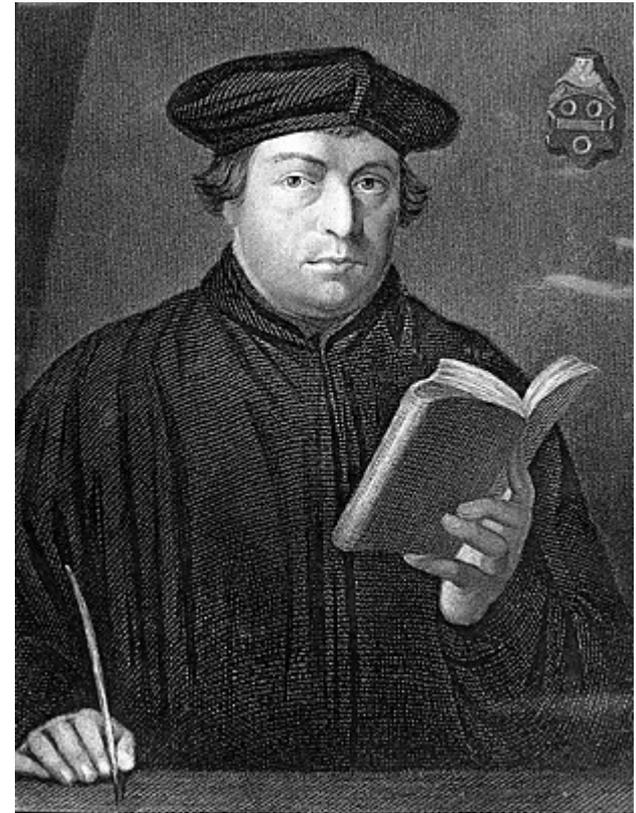
# The limits of reason

*Disputatio de homine* (“The Disputation Concerning Man”, 1536)

- Philosophy: related to human reason
  - ▣ Humans are embodied animals separated by reason → relies on sensory experience
  - ▣ Considers humans on purely mortal terms
- Luther agrees that in this context philosophy is right to view reason as
  - ▣ “the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine”
  - ▣ In this, “it is the inventor and guide of all the arts, medicine, law, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory human beings possess in this life.”
- Reason is a divine gift → but since philosophy is confined to reason it has real empirical constraints

# Concept of God

- All humans have natural concept of God  
→ evident when we turn to God for him in time of crises
- But humans are less certain about what God is
- In *Large Catechism*, Luther writes: “A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all we need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart...For those two belong together, faith and God.”



# Consequences of Faith and Trust based evidence for God

- This implications of this are far-reaching.
- Basic orientation towards God is trusting (not thinking or acting) → but trusting leads to activity/action
- Doesn't require arguments in proof of God's existence (like the Ontological Proof).
- More interested in the relationship between humans and God.
  - “Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.”
  - “It is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God.”
- Our trust is “true” when the object of that trust is the one true God.

# Two Types of Theology

## *Heidelberg Disputation (1518)*

### Theology of Glory

- Philosophy must be treated as theology of glory
- Uses religion to shore up power and privilege
- Desire to minimize painful and difficult things in life.
- Cross is a means to and end → salvation
- Luther: the theologian of glory 'does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil'

### Theology of the Cross

- Without theology of the cross, humans use even the best tools in the worst way
- We should not speculate about the nature of God, which is hidden behind the flesh in Christ
- Cross is God's ultimate statement of involvement on Earth
- Accepts the difficult → doesn't avoid pain
- God is "hidden in the suffering"

# God as the goal of one's life

- God as the end or goal of one's life is a metaphysical requirement
- A person that does not have God as their end goal will always see herself as the end goal and will seek her own interest in everything
- God hides himself in his opposite: weakness, suffering and foolishness
- Aristotelian concept of happiness as the goal of human life exemplifies this selfishness to Luther

Thus, either a human being turns away from such a God, or his or her striving and willing will be changed. Such a change cannot be a matter of human decision, since human striving and willing is determined by self-seeking in everything. Thus the transformation of a human being can happen only in suffering and passivity.

-Theodor Dieter. *Early Modern Philosophy of Religion*, ed. G. Oppy, et al., 2014.

# Doctrine of Justification

- Doctrine of justification → oriented towards God's grace and human faith
- In conflict with philosophy, esp. relationship between person and their actions
- Humans must “justify” their existence, either by accepting or denying themselves. This happens in three places:
  1. The forum before oneself
  2. The forum before other human beings
  3. The forum before God
- Here judgements are made about a person and what they desire, will, and do. Criteria will be different for each forum.
- Acts that seem moral in the eyes of others may seem different to one's own conscience or may be bad in theological perspective.

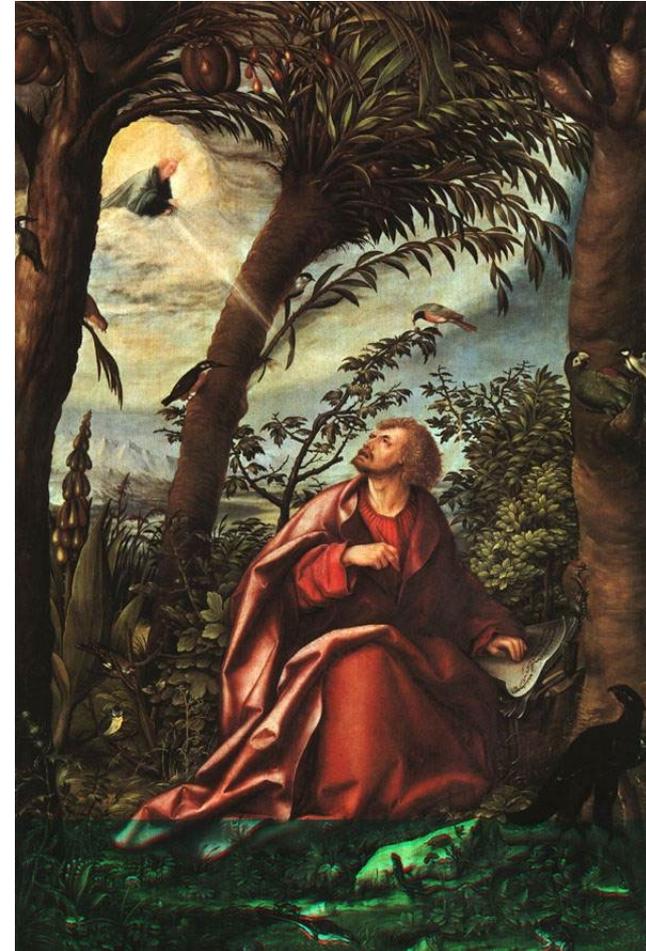
# Freedom through judgement

- Human judge different than divine judge
- God's justice is a *communicative divine attribute* → conveys his righteousness to humans → humans receive it and become righteous.
- In *Treatise on Christian Liberty* → expresses relationship between soul and Christ as marriage.
  - ▣ The possessions of the groom become possessions of bride, and vice versa.
  - ▣ Groom possesses righteousness, and bride possesses sin.
  - ▣ In marriage, the soul receives the groom's righteousness and loses her sins.
- In losing sins, freedom is found → no obligation to work or act to realize justification
- Righteousness not the result of action but of receiving its gift

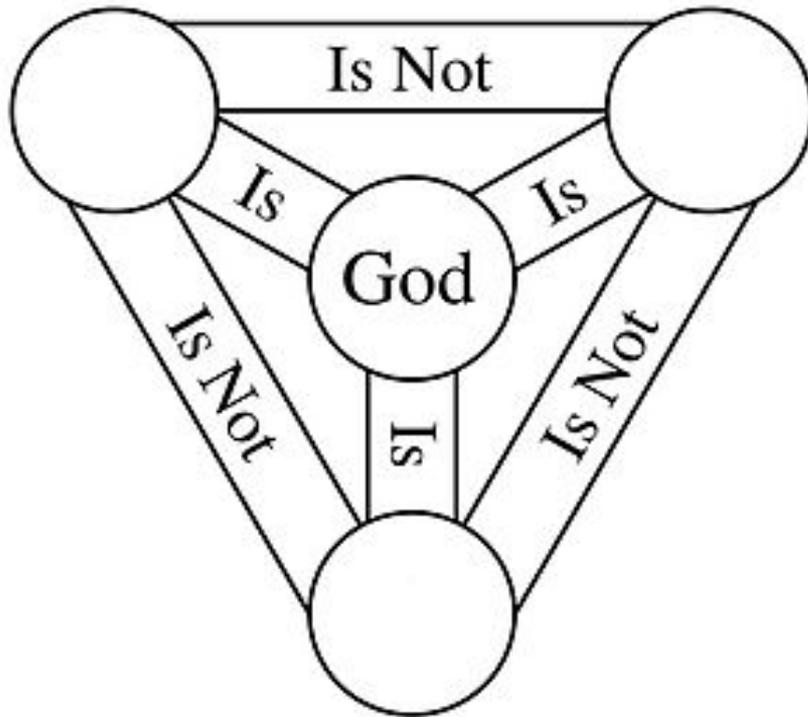
# The Doctrine of Double Truth

## *The Word was Made Flesh (1539)*

- ❑ Criticizes the Sorbonne: “The Sorbonne, the mother of errors, very badly laid down that the same thing is true in philosophy and theology.”
- ❑ Many of Luther’s contemporaries wanted to argue that philosophy should have some autonomy from theology → Luther argues the opposite.
- ❑ Philosophy is different from theology: “Thus we would do better if we leave dialectic or philosophy in their realm and learn to talk in new tongues in the reign of faith outside of the sphere of those disciplines”.



# Separation of philosophy and theology



- Separation between philosophy and theology necessary → for example, in doctrine of Trinity
- Impossible for reason and philosophy to grasp this, because reason is developed in the realm of creatures. Here, no structure “three things are one thing”
- Trinitarian language established not by reason but by the revelation that Holy Scripture expresses.

# Conclusion: Theology & Philosophy

- Theology and philosophy are often in dialogue → dealing with the “same” themes and questions
- However, approaching them differently
  - ▣ Theology: revelation → through Christ
- Theological statements difficult to understand through philosophical reasoning:
  - ▣ God is a human being
  - ▣ God is one and three
  - ▣ This is my body (priest pointing to Eucharist)
- Luther critical of reception of Aristotle in medieval philosophy, and esp. medieval theology

# Max Weber

*The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)*



- Countries with more successful Reformation movements were more likely to embrace industrialization and capitalism.
- Shift in values from Catholicism to Protestantism
- Charity, donation to church, good works no longer assurance of salvation → people began to look for other signs
  - ▣ One of these signs became material prosperity
- Any occupation raised to the level of a vocation → no longer used for church service alone

# Shifts in values

- “Spirit of capitalism” → relates to set of values
- Shift in values: greed and hoarding wealth no longer considered a sin
  - ▣ Charity and giving to the poor no longer considered a good deed, but encouraging laziness (elevated sin)
  - ▣ By not working one failed to glorify God
- Using money to purchase luxury goods considered a sin → better to hoard and invest the money

