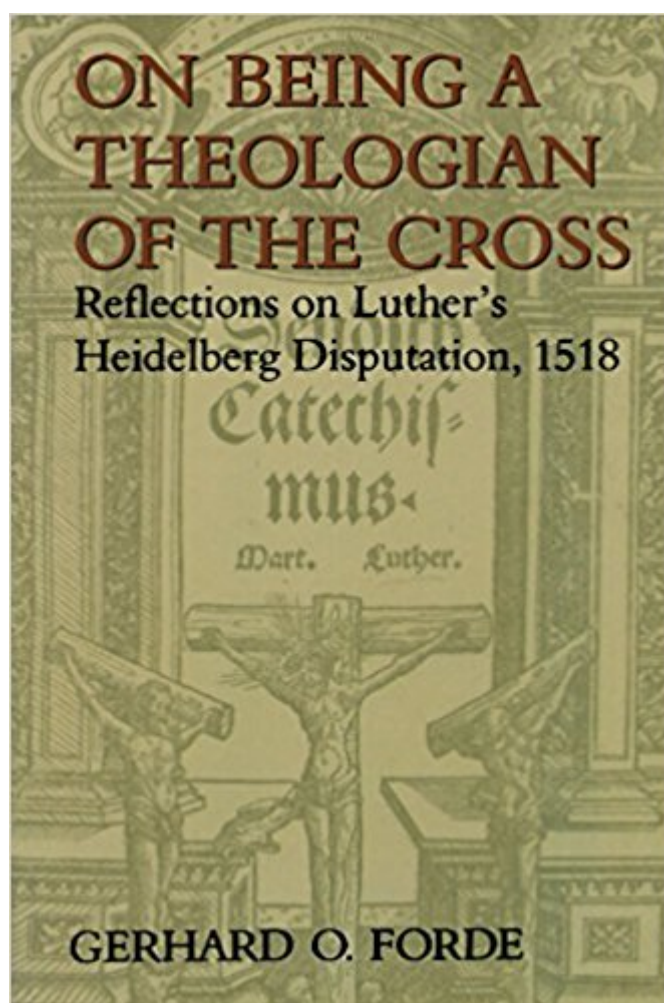


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On Being A Theologian Of The Cross: Reflections On Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518 (Theology)



Synopsis

While there is increasing interest in the "theology of the cross," few people have specific knowledge of what makes it different from other kinds of theology. In *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, Gerhard O. Forde provides an introduction to this theological perspective through an analysis of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, the classic text of the theology of the cross. The book first clarifies the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross and explains how each perspective shapes the very nature of being a theologian. The main body of the book provides commentary on the Heidelberg Disputation—the only complete analysis of this document currently available. Underlying Forde's exposition is the contention that one ought not to speak of the theology of the cross merely as another item among a host of theological options; instead, one must pursue what it means to be a theologian of the cross and to look at all things through suffering and the cross.

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Customer Reviews

If you want to know the seed of the Protestant Reformation through the preaching of the gospel, read these reflections on Luther's 1518 Disputations at Heidelberg. Everybody knows Luther for nailing 95 theses in Wittenberg on October 31st 1517. However those 95 theses are not theologically relevant for Christians today. The best was yet to come. After that event the Pope Leo X asked Gabriel De Volta, General of Augustine Monks to rebuke Luther and to finish the controversy.

Instead of doing that, they invited Martin Luther to Heidelberg to explain his beliefs. Based on the Bible and Augustine teaching, Luther prepared 28 theses which he called paradoxes to explain his theology. Gerhard Forde comments on those 28 theses grouped by these topics: "The Problem of Good Works" (Theses 1-12); "The Problem of the Will" (Theses 13-18); "The Great Divide: The Way of Glory versus the Way of the Cross" (19-24); and finally "God's work in us: The Righteousness of Faith" (Theses 25-28). This is one of my favorites theses by Luther: "The law says, "do this", and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this", and everything is already done." (Martin Luther - Thesis #26).

This book is a rare commentary on the Heidelberg thesis of Luther. "But we preach Christ crucified" 1 Cor. 1: 23a. If anything can be said about the great Reformer Martin Luther it is this that he echoed these words of Paul in his theological writings and preaching throughout his life with much conviction and rigor. One of these writings is the often under emphasized Heidelberg Theses or Disputation. Most are familiar with the famous 95 theses against indulgences. What was the significance of the Heidelberg Theses in the context of Luther's own life? The Heidelberg disputation was held on the 26th of April 1518. A disputation is a medieval way of defending your theology by writing theses (succinct theological statements) to defend them in the presence of other theologians. In 1518 a great convention of the Augustinian order was set in Heidelberg and on this occasion Luther was called to state and defend his Reformed theology. It was in 1517, during the time of these studies, lectures and writings, that Luther posted the now famous 95 theses as a result of these fruitful years of study of Scripture and lecturing. His state of heart and mind he expressed in the first two of the 95 theses: 1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Matt. 4, 17), he willed the entire life of the faithful to be one of repentance. 2. This word is misunderstood if it is taken to refer to the sacrament of penance that is received from time to time. During this time The voice of the now Reformation interpreter of Scripture still sounded unpracticed, . . . the experience of inner contrition, what Luther called 'plowing oneself,' was still the precondition for justification by faith. It is in this spirit that he wrote the famous 95 theses, and in light of which these need to read and understood. It was not until 1518 that Luther began to understand faith as such a great trust that the Christian could and should rely entirely on the word of absolution, "your sins are forgiven you." God was both plowman and forgiver, killer and savior. During that year Luther perceived one scriptural text in a most powerful way: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). Henceforth he was

encouraged to disregard (as condition) his inner state, believing entirely in the Word of God alone. "The last precondition had been eliminated." (Heiko Oberman) It is in this spirit that he wrote the Heidelberg Theses or Disputation. What the significance of the Heidelberg Theses for the Reformation? At Heidelberg Luther was in his own element, so to speak, and so he spoke with calm, ease and wit in the company of an eager crowd who absorbed it all and pondered over the outcome and significance of his Reformed theology. What is significant for the Reformed tradition and its beginnings is that among those who listened was the young man Martin Bucer, whom he gained as a convert. Bucer was to be the later Reformer of Strasbourg and a very influential person in the life of Calvin. Also in the audience was Johann Brenz who became an ardent follower of the reformation movement by becoming a Reformer of Württemberg and prolific writer himself. Thus it was at Heidelberg that Bucer and others heard for the first time the clear Reformation points on the meaning of the law, on man's works and God's work, and on what it meant to be a theologian of the cross and of God's love. It must be said that men like Bucer developed their Reformed theology in their own way on some of these points, after having joined the cause of the Reformation. In light of these limited but contextually very important observations, I believe it beneficial and good to re-visit these beginnings of the Reformation and listen to Luther, as once in the past great men like Bucer and Brenz. Standing as a Protestant Evangelical Faculty professor in the legacy of this great man of God, I believe that these Theses will be a blessing for the continual Reformation of the Church today. Dr. Forde's book is the best introduction to these theses. Take up and read!

After having spent my whole life in the church (I am 67 years old) Born raised Catholic, then Baptist, then Charismatic, I found myself secretly angry at the God that those faiths proclaim, I spent a couple of years silent before the paradoxical God that I thought ruled the universe. My son started attending a Lutheran Church, as he learned more of Luther's thoughts and shared them with me, I initially was indignant, and thought he was too simplistic in proclamations. But every time we talked I heard the Gospel from him, and it drew me away from myself to the Gracious God that Luther hunted for, and found. I started reading everything I could put my hands on, Next to Hans J. Iwand's book entitled "The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther" Gerhard Forde stands out to declare the explosive nature that turned Christianity around in the 16th century with Martin Luther. He has the ability to proclaim the thoughts of Luther (which were the Thoughts of Paul the Apostle) clearly and to the point not backing off. with human reason and deliberation. The Gospel is God's word to us from outside of us and is to be "heard" not deliberated in the courts of our own darkened minds. (inside of us) This book is not another slant on theology for us to consider, instead it has

Proclamation at its core, "Believe it or Not" The Just Shall live by Faith. Faith comes by the hearing of the Word. How shall they believe unless someone is sent.

"The Love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it." Thesis 28. My dog-eared copy of this book got that way through reading it during my daily commutes on the train through Heidelberg, Germany, where Luther delivered his Disputation in front of his Augustinian Order. As an Army Chaplain, and familiar with much suffering, I've found deep solace in knowing that suffering is God's "alien" work in me. He humbles me and brings me to the cross, the place of Christ's suffering, where I can do nothing but throw myself on His mercy. The Cross changes EVERYTHING, and this book has thrown that truth into sharp focus, both theologically and practically, in my living and my preaching. Through suffering God creates us for His love. "God simply refuses to be known in any other way." The cross alone is our theology, and this book has been indispensable, to me, in coming to that conviction. Chaplain Mark Nordstrom, US Army

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