Martin Luther: 1483-1546 [NB: nine years old in 1492]

Key Anxiety: Can I trust God to fulfill his promises?

- Last of Medievals:
  - theology of alienation
  - crisis of mediation
  - nominalist: pessimism over knowledge and arbitrariness / absolute power [irrationality] of God

- First of Moderns:
  - solution: I
  - atomistic, not organic worldview
    - NOT: community; not belonging; not actions / merit / what I do --- not “God has taught thus” or “The Holy Spirit has revealed thus”
  - RATHER: Scripture alone / Faith alone
    - Here I stand: I read; I interpret; I believe

First: What is a “Theology of Alienation”?

Christianity: founded on belief that God became incarnate in human person Jesus

One belief but different implications:
- i.e., different theologies of what “incarnation” means
  - “Theology of Alienation” <dialectical theology>:
    - cf. Calvin: human corruption is so great that gap between human beings and God can be bridged only by God’s unilateral movement toward us (“grace”). Our actions [merits] cannot bridge.
  - “Theology of Reconciliation” <e.g., Great Chain of Being>:
    - -- Humanity and God in one continuous chain.
    - -- God’s “grace” works through human nature which is sinful but not thoroughly so.

Examples of Theology of Reconciliation:

Thomas Aquinas (essentialism) Italian Renaissance
Examples of “Theology of Alienation”:

- Letters of St. Paul
  [apocalyptic: end is near]
- St. Augustine [4th-5th cc.]
- Nominalists:
  - Scotus / William of Ockham

Note Influence on Luther:
1) Augustinian monk [1505]
2) Nominalism -- Ockham
3) Converted by reading St. Paul’s letter to the Romans

Luther:

- a “theology of alienation” between God and the World.
  - “I am like ripe shit, and the world is a gigantic a--hole. We probably will let go of each other soon.”

Luther:

God v. World --- antagonistic;
not “organic” or “humanist”; rather: dialectic [dualistic]

- Douglas: bodily fluids --- blood, spit, semen, mucous, feces … symbolize margins on social body
- “I am like ripe shit, and the world is a gigantic a--hole. We probably will let go of each other soon.”
- Luther: does not feel himself part of the world

2. QUESTION POSED:
Mediation / Alienation

MEDIATION: INDULGENCES --- MASSES FOR THE DEAD

Fundamental crisis in TRUST

Anxious question for post-1348: Does mediation work? [Especially since our whole societal order depends on it!] Or is it smoke and mirrors? are appearances deceptive?
ALIENATION:
A Crisis of Mediation = crisis of Reason
The Remoteness of God from the World and the seeming arbitrariness of his will

3. PHILOSOPHICAL ANSWER
FOUND:
Nominalism

REVIEW:
14th century: essentialism vs. “NOMINALISM”
L. nomen = “name”

There is no essential connection between a thing and the name (model meaning) we give it

IN OTHER WORDS: names --- and meanings --- are ARBITRARY and CONTINGENT agreements

Shakespeare:
“A rose by any other name would still smell sweet as a rose.”

REVIEW:
• Nominalism = end of rational religion (i.e., “creation makes sense”)
  – Scotus: “God could have willed the inverse of the 10 commandments”: “Thou shalt steal!”
  – Ockham: “If God had willed the absolute opposite of the 10 commandments [“Thou shalt commit adultery”] they would have been binding absolutely
  – God’s will is not reasonable --- it is arbitrary and yet absolutely binding.

Luther: Heidelberg Disputation Theses [1518]:
#3. Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.
#4. Although the works of God are always unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless real eternal merits.

APPEARANCES DECEIVE
The names we give to things aren’t what they really are.”

We cannot know by evidence of our senses the difference between good and evil.

#14. “Free Will” after the fall [of Adam and Eve] has the potentiality toward good as an unrealizable capacity only; towards evil however, always a realizable one.

#18. It is certain that a man must completely despair of himself in order to become fit to obtain the grace of Christ.

ALIENATION:
HUMAN MERIT VS. DIVINE GRACE
NB: Opposite of Italian Renaissance solution
The consequences of becoming human

Luther Thesis #21: “The ‘theologian of glory’ [e.g., AQUINAS!] emphasize the Incarnation] calls [NAMES] the bad good and the good bad. The ‘theologian of the cross’ says [NAMES] what a thing is.”

(Italians: “theologians of glory”: emphasize the positive.

Luther: sees himself as a “theologian of the cross”)

NB: nominalist anxiety! saying what a thing is = giving right name

Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith? What commandment is there that such obedience has not completely fulfilled? What more complete fulfillment is there than obedience in all things? This obedience, however, is not rendered by works, but by faith alone. On the other hand, what greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what if this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful?—that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one’s self but lying and vanity to God? Does not a man who does this deny God and set himself up as an idol in his heart? Then of what good are works then?

4. THEOLOGICAL ANSWER FOUND:

Paul’s Letter to the Romans

Since, therefore, this faith can rule only in the inner man, as Rom. 10 [:10] says, “For man believes with his heart and so is justified,” and since faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inner man cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any outer work or action at all, and that these works, whatever their character, have nothing to do with this inner man. On the other hand, only ungodliness and unbelief of heart, and no outer work, make him guilty and a damnable servant of sin. Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, our Lord and

NB: “inner” v. “outer” man ---

“anxieties over passing for saved”
• KEY ANXIETY: Can we **trust**
  God’s word that he will save us???
• FAITH ALONE
  – **[SOLA FIDE]**
• IN GOD’S **WORD ALONE**
  – **[SOLA SCRIPTURA]**
• NEW WAY TO SOLVE THE
  PROBLEM OF “DISTANCE OF GOD”
  – i.e.: **NOT MEDIATION!**

5. From facts to causes:

   **Why** this anxiety…?

One answer:

   **personal history**

Another answer:

   cultural / geographic

   “Northern [German/Flemish] Renaissance

Northern “Renaissance”:
Different Cultural Mood than Italian Renaissance
Shift in cultural mood:  
**WHATEVER**
- Despair over arbitrary world / human action: “What’s the use of doing anything at all?”
- Macabre / grotesque
- Images:
  - disease
  - pain
  - skeletons
  - judgment
  - sado-masochistic torture

*Pieta, 1400s*

“German”

Note geography:
There are no ancient Greco-Roman ruins lying around!

*Totentanz: Berlin, 1490*

* Totentanz  
* Danse Macabre  
* The Dance of Death

http://www.totentanz.de/totentanz.htm
Ingmar Bergman (Sweden):  
*The Seventh Seal* [1957]

Set in time of Black Plague

“Seventh Seal”: from the *Apocalypse*

> “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.”  
> *Apocalypse* 8:1-2
Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) [Netherlands]

A world of monsters, beacons, sadism, punishment for sin

Procession of Flagellants during Black Death

Bergman uses music: *Dies Irae, Dies Illa*
Bosch: Sur-real!!!
Matthias Grünewald [1470-1528]

Crucifixion

Painted to hang in chapel of hospital for victims of “rye” syndrome

Luther Heidelberg Thesis #21:

“The ‘theologian of glory’ calls the bad good and the good bad.

The ‘theologian of the cross’ says what a thing is.”

Northern v. Italian Renaissance representations
Shift in cultural mood: A world of Monsters

**CHAOS = WHATEVER**

- Despair over arbitrary world / human action: “What’s the use of doing anything at all?”
- Macabre / grotesque
- Images:
  - disease
  - pain
  - skeletons
  - judgment
  - sado-masochistic torture
“A Christian should and could be happy, but then the devil shits on him.”

1517: “Ninety-Five Theses” Wittenberg

“Geography of ideas”
cf. Rubenstei: Ockham flees to Munich; nominalism travels to backwaters of German-speaking lands

The Folly of Indulgences
“The Birth of the Pope and his Roman Curia”

From Luther:
Against the Roman Papacy:
An Institution of the Devil
[1545]
Emphasis on excrement: What would Mary Douglas say???

An ordered system disintegrating . . .?

**NOTE INVERSION OF VALUATION:**

Luther takes anxiety and spins it as something positive:

- God’s will is --- and must be --- absolutely arbitrary and remote. -- or else it would not be absolutely free
- Human will is --- and ought to be --- despairo of

Otherwise: God’s will would not be all-powerful; would depend in some way upon us; somehow be subject to the world.

Our trust in God’s ABSOLUTE POWER DELAYS Not trust in ourselves

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**honor him whom we trust. Could we ascribe to a man anything greater than truthfulness and righteousness and perfect goodness? On the other hand, there is no way in which we can show greater contempt for a man than to regard him as false and wicked and to be suspicious of him, as we do when we do not trust him. So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. The very highest worship of God is this that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallow's his name, and it is to be treated according to God's good pleasure. According to God's promises, it does not doubt that he who thus trusts will do, dispose, and provide all things well.**

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**Luther: composes BOTH texts + music**

The “Lutheran chorale” --- why important?

1. Based on Scripture [sola scriptura]
   http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Poetry/A-Mighty-Fortress.html
2. In language of the people [i.e., “vernacular”, not Latin, language of clerics
3. SUNG BY CONGREGATION [i.e., by “the people” --- not by a professional trained choir
   Contrast: Dufay, “Kyrie” from Missa ‘Si la face est pale’

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**Die schönsten Choräle von Martin Luther**

Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

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**Verse 1:**

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need
That has us now overtaken.

The old evil Foe
Seriously means us woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On Earth is not his equal.
Verse 2:

With might of ours can naught be done
On our own we'd soon be losing.
There fights for us a righteous Man
The man of God's own choosing.
Do you ask who that might be?
Christ Jesus, it is he!
Lord Sabaoth his name,
there is no other God.
He holds the [battle-field] forever.

Verse 3:

The [painted] word they [the devils] still shall let remain
Nor any thanks have for it.
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.

And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child and [our] wife, ***
Let these all be gone,
They yet have nothing won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

*** Allusion to Book of Job

If God is more remote,
how can we connect to God?

New revolutionary answers:

-- Bypass the visible church
and turn to invisible “Church of the Elect”

-- Mysticism: direct contact
with God

-- Private meditation on
scripture

• Conservative answer:
  -- give more money to mediating
  institutions --- masses, indulgences, bequests

  -- Italian Christian Humanism
  -- Hybrid: both conservative and
  yet innovative: reworking of
  Great Chain of Being