

## **Chapter Three: Historical and Systematic Evaluation on the Glory of Christ in the Thought of Martin Luther**

The Enlightenment, as one of the watersheds in the history of Christian theology, had led to a substantial shift in the center of the narrative from God to humanity. Today we tend to think that God is meaningful because He can fit in our life experiences, but in the period of Christendom, people believed that their lives were meaningful only when they were fit into the meta-narrative of God. In this chapter we will investigate what made Luther so significant a part of God's story in the battle of the Reformation from the perspective of the glory of Christ in his thought. For it is no longer "I," but Christ, whose story is the meta-narrative of the entire Bible, the story of God Himself in the human history of salvation to fulfill His good will and manifest His glory.

### **3.1 Sources and Methods**

#### **3.1.1 Sources**

*The Principle of Sola Scriptura*: "For Luther, doctrine *is* life, because what a person believes determines his behavior."<sup>121</sup> The battle of the Reformation that Luther fought for was fundamentally the battle of doctrine. The life-and-death battle of all battles, in fact, consisted of which was the highest authority: Scripture or the church? Does Scripture rule the church or the church prescribe Scripture? The answer from Luther and the reformers was straight forward: *Sola Scriptura* — the belief that Scripture alone, as God's inspired / breathed Word, is the infallible, sufficient, and final authority of the

---

<sup>121</sup> Sproul, "The Teaching Preacher," In *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, 2008, 75

church.<sup>122</sup> *Sola Scriptura* as the foundation of all theologies stands as the first principle of the Reformation.<sup>123</sup> “God and His Word do not require our certification and seal. But it is to our benefit that God’s Word is true. If it were not, we would be lost.”<sup>124</sup> Luther respected and valued tradition, especially early Christian doctrine, but Scripture is supreme, and tradition should be based on biblical truth and not add anything to Scripture or take away from it. All the doctrines and teachings of the church should be evaluated by Scripture and faithful to Scripture. The authority of Scripture and the authority of Christ come together.<sup>125</sup> If Christ is the true head of church, His revealed Word must rule.

***The breakthrough of Luther’s thought:*** However, in the Middle Ages, church and tradition ruled over Scripture; consequently, many traditional doctrines and church practices departed from Scripture. Luther as an Augustinian monk trained in the Occamic tradition, had been suffering from his spiritual anguish (*Anfechtung*) caused by these doctrines and their practices. Even when he got his doctorate in Holy Scripture and succeeded his spiritual mentor, Johann von Staupitz, as a young professor of Theology at the new University of Wittenberg in 1512, he did not yet know that men could not expiate their sins. From the seven years 1513 to 1518, he had lectured on Psalms (1513-1514), St. Paul’s Epistles to the Romans (1514-1516), to the Galatians (1516-1517), and the Epistle to the Hebrews (1517-1518); this teaching contained the basis of his thinking on reformation and demonstrated his spiritual and theological maturity at 35 years old.<sup>126</sup> He

---

<sup>122</sup> Barrett, “The Crux of Genuine Reform,” In *Reformation Theology*, 2017, 48

<sup>123</sup> Wellum, *Christ Alone – The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, 2017, 19

<sup>124</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 471

<sup>125</sup> Williams, “The Five Solas of the Reformation: Then and Now,” In *Unio CUM Christo (Vol.3 No.1)*, 2017, 13

<sup>126</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 2016, 17. “Preface” by its English translator and editor Wilhelm Pauck is an extremely valuable introduction with the story of Luther’s manuscript, hermeneutical principles, theological content and the significance of the Lectures.

had already read and taught the sacred Scriptures most diligently, privately and publicly, so he knew them nearly all by memory.<sup>127</sup> It was the reading of Scripture in the light of the Holy Spirit that brought him the breakthrough in his theology. The turning point, well known as his “Tower Experience” (in the tower of the Black Cloister at Wittenberg), happened sometime during his lecture series on the book of Romans, when he expounded Romans 1:17.<sup>128</sup> He discovered that the words “*righteousness of God*” (*Justitia dei*) that had troubled him as an “active righteousness of God” to punish the unrighteous sinner, was actually revealed by the Gospel as a “passive righteousness” with which a merciful God justifies us by faith,<sup>129</sup> that is, a “gift of God” springing from His mercy and made ours by faith in Christ.<sup>130</sup> This doctrine of justification by faith became the heart of Luther’s theology. Luther described that he extolled these sweetest words “righteousness of God” with a love as great as the hatred he had before, because, “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.”<sup>131</sup> The knowledge of Christ and the faith in Him whom he encountered in His Word granted him courage and motivated him to criticize traditional doctrine and contemporary piety.<sup>132</sup> The Word of God became his life-time focus; no matter how much he dealt with the process of the Reformation, he continued his teaching, preaching and pastoring as the minister of the Word up to the end of his life. It was not only in the presence of the emperor, Charles V, and the representatives of the pope at the Diet of Worms in 1521, that he declared in his famous “Here I Stand” speech that

---

<sup>127</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, 1999, 334

<sup>128</sup> Luther, “Fortress for Truth,” In *Pillars of Grace (AD 100–1564)* (Vol. 2), 2011, 399-400

<sup>129</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, 1999, 337. “Preface To the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings, Wittenberg, 1545”

<sup>130</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 2012, 21-22

<sup>131</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, 1999, 337

<sup>132</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 36

“...my conscience is captive to the Word of God,”<sup>133</sup> but also, later, when Luther preached on the true way of reform, that he affirmed, “I did nothing; the Word did everything.” The weapon that he fought for church revival was not by force, but by the sword of the Holy Spirit, *the Word of God*, which to Luther, *is living, acting, and achieving the will of God, is the action of God*:

I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; Otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept (Mark 4:26–29), or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; *the Word did everything*.<sup>134</sup>

***Luther’s Doctrine of the Word:*** Scripture stood supreme in Luther’s heart as the Word of God. To Luther, the words of God were not bare words, but were able to create true and existent realities — they *were* realities. He stated in his lecture (1535) on Gen. 1:5 where “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”:

“For God calls into existence the things which do not exist (Rom. 4:17). He does not speak grammatical words; *He speaks true and existent realities*. Accordingly, that which among us has *the sound of a word is a reality with God*. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God, in fact only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation. We, too, speak, but only according to the rules of language; that is, we assign names to objects which have already been created. But the *divine rule of language* is different, namely: when He says: “Sun, shine,” the sun is there at once and shines. Thus *the words of God are realities*, not bare words.”<sup>135</sup>

God speaks reality into existence. Luther was convinced by the power of the Word as *the divine rule of language*, through which God created all things by a method surpassing all reason and understanding. This is true especially on the fifth day of Creation, when he

---

<sup>133</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 1985–93, 1:460. “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

<sup>134</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 51: *Sermons I*, 1999, 77

<sup>135</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 21-22

said, “Nothing — even raising the dead — is comparable to the wonderful work of producing a bird out of water,” a being which clearly could not continue to exist in water by *a mere Word* spoken by God. If the Word is spoken, all things whatever are possible — “nothing but nouns in the divine rule of language.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, God through His spoken Word gave birth and strength to all things through His omnipotence.<sup>137</sup> In opposition to Aristotle’s Prime Mover, and Averroes’ forms, as the causes of the motions, Luther declared that “all these phenomena occur and are governed simply by the Word of God. He spoke, and it was done.”<sup>138</sup> All things in the world, like water and sea, are “servants” of God, submitting to His commands which surpass their nature.

It is also by *the Word that Christ reigns and Christians are born*. Christ rules by His Word and the church is His royal throne.<sup>139</sup> In his lectures on the Psalms in 1513, Luther said, “Rod of iron is the holy Gospel, which is Christ’s royal scepter in His church and Kingdom.”<sup>140</sup> The Word of God is also called a “sword of salvation” (Eph. 6:17), made of iron as Isa. 27:1 says: “In that day the Lord with His hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent.”<sup>141</sup> Luther pointed out in his lecture on Genesis that before the fall, Adam responded to God’s Word through his obedience and his worship of praise and thanksgiving, but Satan used his words to attack God’s Word and tempted man to leave the Word so to destroy his worship and submission to God’s will. Trying to be like God, Eve and Adam actually offended the Son of God who is God’s very image, and dispossessed His glory. Satan tried to build another reality by his lies to destroy the

---

<sup>136</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 49

<sup>137</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 25

<sup>138</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 29-30

<sup>139</sup> WA 3, 371, 12; 3, 372; 3, 374; 3, 463, 22; 4, 368ff.; AE 10 and 11

<sup>140</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 10: First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 1999, 35

<sup>141</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 10: First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 1999, 35

reality that God created through His Word.<sup>142</sup> The spiritual war is actually a war on the authority of the Word. Satan tried to mimic God and grasp his authority, however God defeated Satan with His Word, the promise of the Seed of woman (Gen. 3:15) to crush the serpent with all His powers — “this is a revelation of the depths of God’s goodness.”<sup>143</sup> Luther described the transforming power of the Word as the divine womb that conveys the forgiveness of sins and makes us new creations:<sup>144</sup>

Therefore just as in society a son becomes an heir merely by being born, so here faith alone makes men sons of God, *born of the Word, which is the divine womb* in which we are conceived, carried, born, reared, etc. By this birth and this patience or passivity which makes us Christians we also become sons and heirs. But being heirs, we are free of death and the devil, and we have righteousness and eternal life.<sup>145</sup>

He exalted the Word as the power of God. To Luther, the Word that Christ spoke when he was on earth the same in fact and in effect as the Word preached by a minister, because Jesus said, “He who hears you hears me” (Luke 10:16) and Paul called the Word “the power of God” (Rom. 1:6).<sup>146</sup> He realized that it was fatal to the church and God’s people when the voice of God had gradually vanished under various invented traditions of Rome. He repeatedly stressed this principle of the *Holy Spirit’s way of expression*:

Thus we see that the Holy Spirit also has His own language and way of expression, namely, that *God, by speaking, created all things and worked through the Word, and that all His works are some words of God, created by the uncreated Word*. Therefore just as a philosopher employs his own terms, so the Holy Spirit, too, employs His.<sup>147</sup>

Luther’s doctrine of the Word places *the Word of God at the center of all things*.

To Luther, reality existed, not because of its essence, nor any reason other than that God

---

<sup>142</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 146-147

<sup>143</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 193

<sup>144</sup> Kolb, “Bound, Freed, Freed to Be Bound: The Wittenberg Understanding of Justification,” In *Unio Cum*, 2017, 56

<sup>145</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, 1999, 392

<sup>146</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk*, 1999, 394-395

<sup>147</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 47

created the reality through His Word according to His will as He was pleased to do (Occamic nominalism). The Word that came from the mouth of God by His own will, created and governed all realities. The difference between Creator and creation is that of the permanent uncreated Word of speaking and the contingent created being, being spoken. The existence of the reality is not based on its essence, but on the Word of God. The meaning and the purpose of the existence of humanity and of this universe are determined by the Word of God and we can understand them only through His revelation. Reality is defined not by the linguistic proclivities of any human individual or community but by the Word of God,<sup>148</sup> which is especially significant for us today in the postmodern society in the definitions of marriage, sex, family and so forth. The Word is the core of spiritual warfare specially in the fields of education, media and publications.

***The Influence of Philosophy in Luther's Thought:*** Trueman pointed out that Luther's unswerving commitment to nominalism and to the priority of the Word in determining reality played a key role in the development of Luther's understanding of the power of God's Word. This is crucial to the understanding of all of Luther's theology and his approach to the Christian life for it points to the vital and creative role of God's Word.<sup>149</sup> But Berthoud argued that both Protestants and Roman Catholics failed to distinguish Luther's achievement between two stages of his work: the first was nominalist, the destruction of erroneous notions imposed on Scripture by using Occam's razor; the second realist, the constructive, creative rediscovery of the exact theological content of the Bible by recovering biblical realism.<sup>150</sup> Using Frame's perspectives on human knowledge

---

<sup>148</sup> Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*, 1999, 83

<sup>149</sup> Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*, 1999, 83-84

<sup>150</sup> Berthoud, "Luther and Erasmus: The Central Confrontation of the Reformation," In *Unio CUM Christo (Vol.3 No.1)*, 2017, 65-67

(existential perspective, situational perspective and normative perspective) we see that Luther (existential perspective) was trained and influenced by both traditions of Occamic nominalism and Augustinian realism (situational perspective), and yet it was under *the normative of Scripture* (normative perspective) where he firmly stood, that he had the advantages of both heritages and made use of them to their limits (his double swords).<sup>151</sup> Although Occamic nominalism played a magnificent role in his view of the sovereignty and omnipotence of God and His Word (which gave him dramatic courage and confidence to face all his obstacles in life), Luther opposed the eclectic, skeptical speculation in the absolute power of the divinity, as *God exlex* and in God's ordained justice, as revealed in the written law.<sup>152</sup> To acknowledge the incomprehensibility of God, he followed *the rule of simple faith* in the professed Word of God and not to engage in inquisitive discussions to avoid bringing lapses. But in the Eucharistic controversy, Luther lost his balance and took the words of Christ in the Lord's Supper too literally.<sup>153</sup> After he rediscovered Pauline thought of justification by faith alone, he completely rejected the Occamic views of justification, free will and good works in salvation, and turned his thought to that of Augustine. Influenced by nominalism, Luther considered that the Word of God was what the reality was and Christ was what reality meant; surprisingly, this eventually turned out to be a view of reality in Platonic terms.<sup>154</sup> All the opposites find their unity in Christ! "All

---

<sup>151</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 2015, 20, 205. "We cannot have a philosophy based on *fact* (situational) unless those facts are interpreted by God's norms (normative) and through the faculties of our minds (existential)."; "We will need then to interpret our subjectivity (existential perspective) by his Word (normative perspective), which gives us access to an environment far larger than our own minds, the created world (situational perspective)."

<sup>152</sup> Berthoud, "Luther and Erasmus: The Central Confrontation of the Reformation," In *Unio CUM Christo (Vol.3 No.1)*, 2017, 34-35

<sup>153</sup> See more details in this Chapter, 67-69

<sup>154</sup> WA 3, 368, 18; AE 10, 311. "Therefore, Christ is the end and center of them all. To Him they all look and point, as if they were saying: 'Look, He is the One who is reality, but we are not; we are only signs.'";

things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).” Indeed, Christ is all, and in all (Col.3:11). Lienhard also found this amazing unity in Luther’s first lectures on Psalms:

The Commentary teems with dualism and paradox: spiritual/carnal, hidden/manifest, invisible/visible, heavenly/terrestrial, interior/exterior. All these paradoxes and tensions find their unity, and, from the point of view of eschatology, their solution in Jesus Christ: “*Fere omnis contradictio hic conciliatur in Christo.*”<sup>155</sup> Christ is the *simul* who unites all contradictions: God and humanity, judgment and grace, etc. And He is that, not only as an image or figure of an ultimate unity that lies beyond Him. But He is in truth that place where all these things and contradictions have found their unity!<sup>156</sup>

**Conclusions:** As Frame concluded, “So epistemologically, going beyond Occam, Luther bases his whole theology on divine revelation, *sola Scriptura.*”<sup>157</sup> Scripture itself played a decisive role in Luther’s thinking. His theological thought was mainly influenced by Scripture, and only then by traditional church doctrine and theologians, such as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Dionysius, Occam, and Biel, etc. Luther obviously affirmed the doctrine of the traditional church to be fundamental in his thought as a materially correct summary of Scripture,<sup>158</sup> but he presupposed the Word of God as the solid foundation of his theology and as the ultimate authority over that of the church and tradition. As the Bible professor at the University of Wittenberg all his life, he so diligently meditated day and night on Scripture that “The Holy Scriptures are a vast and mighty forest, but there is no single tree in it that I have not shaken with my own hand.”<sup>159</sup> Two of his significant achievements were the publications of his translations of the German New

---

WA 3, 341, 1; AE 10, 285; WA 3, 375, 29; AE 10, 317-318; Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 43

<sup>155</sup> WA, 3, 52, 24

<sup>156</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 43-44

<sup>157</sup> Frame, *An Introduction of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 2015, 170

<sup>158</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther’s theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 2011, 208-209, 219-221

<sup>159</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 227

Testament in 1522 and the complete German Bible in 1534, “providing people with a trustworthy and highly readable rendition of the Bible from the original languages,”<sup>160</sup> so that everyone can directly meet God through His Word. His mind was so filled with Scripture that he was able to freely express his thought through Scripture, that is, the Word of God formed his thought.

### 3.1.2 Methods

*Luther’s Principles of Hermeneutics* reflect his reformation themes of Scripture alone and Christ alone. His exegesis is not only biblical, but also Christocentric. These two principles formed the foundation of his hermeneutics. Luther believed that Scripture is clear, for “Scripture is its own interpreter (*Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*).”<sup>161</sup> The true method of interpretation was to put Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way. Luther referred to the practice of the church fathers by taking the clear, lucid passages to shed light on obscure and doubtful passages.<sup>162</sup> His writings were “saturated with quotations from Scripture and are largely exegetical in character. Luther is always primarily oriented to Scripture, and often only to Scripture.”<sup>163</sup> Luther saw the Old Testament and the New Testament as a great and awesome unity in relation to Christ, the Lord and Sovereign of Scripture, both testifying of God and revealing His majesty and glory.<sup>164</sup> Stressing Christ as the unity of Scripture,<sup>165</sup> he stated, “Every prophecy and every prophet must be understood as referring to Christ the Lord, except where it is clear from

---

<sup>160</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 227-228

<sup>161</sup> WA 7:97.23 (*Assertio omnium articulorum*;1520)

<sup>162</sup> Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, 1999, 114

<sup>163</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 1966, 3

<sup>164</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 230

<sup>165</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 229

plain words that someone else is spoken of. For thus He Himself says: ‘Search the Scriptures, ... and it is they that bear witness to Me’ (John 5:39).”<sup>166</sup> As Lienard and Congar pointed out in their research, those Scriptures, speaking of the presence of God in Christ, had been particularly significant for Luther,<sup>167</sup> especially Col. 2:9, John 14:9 and 14:10.<sup>168</sup> Luther summarized well his epistemology here on how to know God based on God the Trinity, His Word, that is, Christ and Holy Scripture:

In the first place, it is certain that God wants to be known by us, here on earth by faith, yonder by sight, that *He is one God and yet three Persons*. And according to John 17:3, this is our everlasting life. To this end He gave us *His Word and Holy Scripture*, attested with great miracles and signs. We must learn from it. To attain that knowledge of God, it is surely necessary that He Himself instruct us, that *He reveal Himself and appear to us*. By ourselves we could not ascend into heaven and discover what God is or how His divine essence is constituted. Well, for this purpose He employs visible elements in His creation, as Scripture teaches us, so that we may comprehend this; for invisible creatures do not make an impression on our senses.<sup>169</sup>

In his early period in 1513, Luther applied the *fourfold method of exegesis* practiced in his time by the scholastics to his lectures on Psalms: literally (historical exegesis questioning the reported facts or synonymous with prophetic or Christological), allegorically (refers to church as the ecclesiological meaning), tropologically (applies a text to individual believer) and anagogically (shows things to come as the eschatological meaning).<sup>170</sup> The latter three ways were governed by the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6) and the same truth stated historically elsewhere, “Otherwise Scripture would become a mockery.”<sup>171</sup> In his interpretation Luther paid great attention on Christology as well as

---

<sup>166</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, vol. 10: First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75*, 1999, 7

<sup>167</sup> Lienard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 37-38

<sup>168</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 15*, 1999, 305; *Luther's works, vol. 24*, 1999, 59, 97; *Luther's works, vol. 24*, 1999, 59, 72, 97-98; *Luther's works, vol. 31*, 1999, 53; *Luther's work, vol. 2*, 1999, 48-49

<sup>169</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 15*, 1999, 306-307

<sup>170</sup> Lienard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 39-42

<sup>171</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, vol. 10: First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 1999, 3-5

tropology.<sup>172</sup> He stressed Christologically what the Psalter said not only about the majesty but also about the suffering and humiliation of Christ in *persona sua*, “For the cross of Christ occurs everywhere in the Scriptures (*Crux enim Christi ubique in Scripturis occurrit*).”<sup>173</sup> As a result, his interpretation of Scripture was characterized as a commentary on the cross. Luther also emphasized the tropological aspect with respect to the application of the reality of Christ to the life of the believer. Thus, his Christology was associated tightly with his soteriology.

While in his second lecture series on the book of Romans in 1515, Luther started to avoid both the rigid partition of the fourfold interpretation, but “worked his way toward a *historical-Christological interpretation* that was to be the core and center not only of his teaching but also of his preaching and living.”<sup>174</sup> He gave up the ratified speculation of the scholastics and stuck with the simple meaning of Scripture after that.<sup>175</sup> Luther critiqued the way of scholastic theologians used reason apart from Scripture. Acknowledging the incomprehensibility of God, he followed what he called “*the rule of simple faith*” in professing the Word of God as a holy anchor, not engaging in inquisitive discussions to avoid corrupting the Word of God<sup>176</sup> (however, this principle and the influence of nominalism once trapped him into a too literal way of interpretation of Christ’s words about the Lord’s Supper).<sup>177</sup> To Luther, the “corrupt word” meant, not only the ministry of the spoken Word, but also the inner convictions or opinions that are in disagreement with the Word of God. He claimed at the Diet of Worms that he could not recant his writings unless

---

<sup>172</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther’s theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 2011, 222

<sup>173</sup> WA 3, 63, 1

<sup>174</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 1999, xi

<sup>175</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 95

<sup>176</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 147

<sup>177</sup> See Chapter Three, 67-69

convinced by “Scripture and right reason” — that is, “Scripture rightly interpreted and applied by godly thinking.”<sup>178</sup> He had been influenced by Occamic philosophy from his Augustinian tradition; that remained a secondary and peripheral addition to his methods.<sup>179</sup>

**Conclusions:** In his lifetime, Luther stood firmly on Scripture as the foundation and fountain of his thought, the Word as the power of God, Christ as the very heart and exaltation of his theology, and the cross as the methodology of doing theology and Christian living. Luther kept his biblical-Christocentric interpretation and its significance in salvation to the end of his life. His theology is not abstract, but always dynamic and relevant to personal and daily life.<sup>180</sup> As Bayer described, “Intellectual knowledge about faith is not separated from the affective experience of faith; the art of disputation serves the task of caring for souls.”<sup>181</sup>

### 3.2 Christ in His Person

Unlike modern theology and the church today, influenced by liberals and charismatics, downplaying His divinity, Luther emphasized the glory of Christ both in His divinity and His humanity in all his works. Influenced by his Occamic and Augustinian traditions, his Christology was displayed in a paradoxical way, which embodied the two extremes in the relationship between the majestic divinity of God and the humble humanity of man that could be united in Christ by the love of God.<sup>182</sup> Due to the limited scope of this thesis, we will only investigate the glory of Christ in His Person as the Word, the King and the High Priest in Luther’s thought.

---

<sup>178</sup> Frame, *An Introduction of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 2015,170

<sup>179</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 1966, 3

<sup>180</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 41-42

<sup>181</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 2008, xvi-xvii

<sup>182</sup> Yeung, *The Study of Martin Luther’s Theology*, 2002, 137

### 3.2.1 The Word

*The Word as a Speech, a Thought, or a Conversation of God:* Concerning the divinity of Christ, Luther viewed the books of Moses as its golden mine and the Gospel of John as its foundation. The New Testament is nothing but a revelation of the Old, which confirmed the divinity of Christ.<sup>183</sup> He proposed to discuss and preach the Gospel of John as long as he was able, to the glory of Christ and to our own welfare, comfort, and salvation.<sup>184</sup> He described *the Word as a Speech, a Thought, or a Conversation of God* with Himself in His divine heart from all eternity and through Him God created heaven and earth:

Thus God, too, from all eternity has a Word, a speech, a thought, or a conversation with Himself in His divine heart, unknown to angels and men. This is called His Word. From eternity He was within God's paternal heart, and through Him God resolved to create heaven and earth. But no man was aware of such a resolve until the Word became flesh and proclaimed this to us. This we shall see later in the words (John 1:18): "The Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed it to us."<sup>185</sup>

The divine Word that existed before all creatures and through which all creatures were made, must be *an eternal Being*, that is, *an eternal God*, and *the pre-existence of Christ, the second person of Godhead from God the Speaker*. Luther did not hesitate to designate the plural term that Moses used to speak of God's work of creation in the first sentence of Scripture, to the one true God as a hint of the Trinity and the plurality of Persons in one single divine nature and most perfect unity,<sup>186</sup> even though the clear teaching of the Trinity was reserved for the Gospel. The Word provided the dark and unformed mass with life and separated it. These were "the functions of the Second Person, that is, of Christ, the Son of

---

<sup>183</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 52: *Sermons II*, 1999, 41-42

<sup>184</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 5

<sup>185</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 9

<sup>186</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 12

God: to adorn and separate the crude mass which was brought forth out of nothing.”<sup>187</sup> Before any creatures existed, this Word that God had with which He spoke, assuredly cannot be a creature as all creatures came into being through the speaking of this same divine Word.<sup>188</sup> Hence the Word in existence before all creatures above “time” and “creature,” must be an eternal being other than a creature; as a matter of fact, “time” and “creature” came into being and had their beginning through the Word. Thus, on the basis of Moses’ text, “the Word of God, which was in the beginning and through which the creatures came into being, must be an eternal God and cannot be a creature.”<sup>189</sup> There were two persons in the Godhead from eternity prior to all creatures, “the one derives His nature from the other and the other derives His nature from nobody but Himself.”<sup>190</sup> These two persons are one complete God, that “each one is the one, true, complete, natural God, who has created all things, and that the Speaker has His nature not from the Word, but that the Word has its nature from the Speaker — although the Word is in every respect eternal and in eternity distinct from all creation.”<sup>191</sup> The Word now became the weapon that Luther used to oppose vigorously Arius and Sabellius, “It is one nature of divine essence and yet not one person only; and each person is full and complete God in the beginning and eternally. These are the statements upon which our faith is founded to which we, too, must cling.”<sup>192</sup> To Luther, Christ was the uncreated Word, a divine thought and an inner command which abides in God, the same as God and yet a distinct Person; God reveals

---

<sup>187</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. I: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 9

<sup>188</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 42

<sup>189</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 42

<sup>190</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 43

<sup>191</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 43-44

<sup>192</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 49-50

Himself to us as the Speaker through the uncreated Word, “through whom He created the world and all things with the greatest ease, namely, by speaking.”<sup>193</sup>

*The Word as the Spoken Wisdom of God* that Luther further described, *is the real Creator*. “Christ is true God, who is with the Father from eternity, before the world was made, and that through Him, who is *the wisdom and the Word of the Father*, the Father made everything.”<sup>194</sup> The speaking God is one person and Christ as “another — not in nature but in person — is the Word, through whom all things were created and are preserved up to the present day, as the author of the letter to the Heb. 1:3 says: ‘Upholding all things by the Word of His power.’”<sup>195</sup> He quoted the verse in Psalm 33:6, “The heavens are made by the Word of God” and related it to the verses from Solomon in Pro. 8:22–32, “where he speaks of the wisdom of God and describes with many beautiful words how it existed with God before all things” — the thoughts taken from the “mine” of Moses that “all prophets had worked assiduously and dug up treasure.”<sup>196</sup> He gave an example of this when John said, “all things are made through Him,” and this is to be understood that “except Him through whom all things were made, and apart from whom there was nothing that was made,”<sup>197</sup> was derived from Moses, Gen. 1:3, 6, 7, etc., “where all the creatures whom God has made are enumerated, and where every time He says: ‘God said ... and it was so’ He shows they were all made through the Word.”<sup>198</sup> Luther stressed that “*this Word is God and the real Creator* of all that is created, since without Him nothing was made that was made.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, “This Word is God; it is the omnipotent Word, uttered in the divine

---

<sup>193</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 22

<sup>194</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 17

<sup>195</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 21

<sup>196</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 44

<sup>197</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 51

<sup>198</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 51

<sup>199</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 51

essence. No one heard it spoken except God Himself, that is, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>200</sup>

*The Word of God as the Expression of Heart of God*, is above all words, carrying *His whole essence of the divine nature of God*, that is, *the brightness of His glory and Image*. Luther compared this Word of God to the word of humans, “If human words expressed a pure heart or the intention of the heart or if the meaning of the heart were words, the comparison would be perfect.” But then he stated it is impossible, for “this Word of God is *above all words* and there is none like it among all creatures.”<sup>201</sup> Luther regarded His words to be as great as the greatness of Him who speaks them. Since the Word that God spoke within Himself remained within Him and never separated from Him, Luther concluded that God must carry on *a dialogue with Himself*. “That is exactly as it is with God. His Word is so much like Himself, that the Godhead is wholly in it.”<sup>202</sup> Thus, *God uttered a Word from Himself*, not merely an exhalation or a noise, but carried with it the whole essence of the divine nature, as He says in the Epistle, *the brightness of His glory and image*. Luther explained that the divine nature of the Word was formed to accompany the image and it became the very image itself; and the brilliance also radiated the glory so that it merged with the glory. Therefore, God Himself speaks His Word so that the Godhead followed the Word and remained with its nature in the Word, and is there in its essence. Luther then directed his readers to what the apostle called, *Christ an image of the divine essence and a brightness of divine glory*, to the glorious image that Moses had witnessed when God spoke a word concerning Himself; which cannot be anything else but an image

---

<sup>200</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 19

<sup>201</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 46

<sup>202</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 52: Sermons II*, 1999, 46

which represented Him. For Luther, every word of God is a sign with a meaning. Since the meaning is naturally in the sign or in the word, which is not the case with other signs, it was correctly called an essential image or sign of His nature.<sup>203</sup>

*The Word Incarnated as the Fountain and Origin of Life, the Word of Life and the Eternal Life* given to men, is *the true Life and Light of all mankind*. Luther addressed that only the re-creation work of the Holy Spirit in His listeners and pupils made them believe that, “the Word is God, that God’s Son is the Word, and that the Word became flesh, that He is also the light who can illuminate all men who come into the world, and that without this Light all is darkness.”<sup>204</sup> Based on what Christ said in John 14:6 and the witness of the apostle in 1John 1:1, Luther called Christ, “the fountain and the origin of life, that everything that lives has life of Him and through Him and in Him.” From this Word of life, all men have eternal life.<sup>205</sup> From the beginning, Christ is the Word of God, and now “dwells in the flesh and brings us to life through the flesh” and “God Himself must be our life, food, light, and salvation.”<sup>206</sup> Luther exalted a sure sovereignty of Christ alone over the church for salvation.

*The Word as the Truth, the Glorious Preaching Message of the Gospel*, is “concerning His Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies.”<sup>207</sup> Christ does not boast in a carnal way, but He glories in the truth when He says: “Therefore My testimony is true. It is the truth, for I know whence I come and whither I go.”<sup>208</sup> The Word is the true living revelation of God, “*I say*

---

<sup>203</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 52: *Sermons II*, 1999, 45

<sup>204</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 8

<sup>205</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 52: *Sermons II*, 1999, 53

<sup>206</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 52: *Sermons II*, 1999, 54-55

<sup>207</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 346

<sup>208</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 23: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 331

to you” instead of “thus said the Lord.” It can satisfy the thirsty soul. For Luther, if the soul has the Word of God, it is rich and lacks nothing; if the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul, “since it is the *Word of life, Truth, Light, Peace, Righteousness, Salvation, Joy, Liberty, Wisdom, Power, Grace, Glory, and of every incalculable Blessing.*”

209

*The Word as the Promise* is given by God for the future world. Luther’s exegesis is not only literally historic, but also literally prophetic,<sup>210</sup> and eschatological. When he explained God’s creation on the third day, stocking our kitchens and providing supplies in Gen. 1:11, he addressed the fact that even before we were created, God had created a world out of His care, solicitude, and generosity to us, to provide a ready and equipped home into which we were brought to enjoy all the riches of so splendid a home. Then he continued to direct us from this world as a type and figure of the future world to the joyful everlasting mansions that our Redeemer has prepared for all saints in our Heavenly Father’s house:

There is a similar beneficence of God toward us in His spiritual gifts. Before we were brought to faith, Christ, our Redeemer, is above in the Father’s house; He prepares mansions so that when we arrive, we may find a heaven furnished with every kind of joy (John 14:2). Adam, therefore, when he was not yet created, was far less able to concern himself with his future welfare than we are; for he was not yet in existence. We, however, hear these *promises given us by the Word of God*. Therefore, let us look upon the first state of *this world as a type and figure of the future world*; and so let us learn *the kindness of God, who makes us rich and gives us wealth before we are able to concern ourselves with ourselves*. It is far better to meditate and wonder at this concern, care, generosity, and benevolence of God, both in this life and in the one to come, than it is to speculate about why God began to equip the earth on the third day.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 345-346

<sup>210</sup> Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, 1999, 116

<sup>211</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 39

### 3.2.2 The King

*The Theme of the Kingship of Christ* was increasingly emphasized in Luther's works starting from his first lectures on the Psalms. To Luther, Christ reigned over His church and Kingdom by the Word. "Rod of iron is the holy Gospel, which is Christ's royal scepter in His church and Kingdom."<sup>212</sup> This King's Rod "of iron," first, is hard and opposed to the flesh through the cross against greed, lust of the eyes, pride of life, sensual pleasure and lust of the flesh; second, is inflexible and of an invincible straightness being true and unconquered against any heretics or corrupters; third, crushes and crumbles, subdues and shapes everything; in the same time, as the Rod, it guided by its straightness. It is light to be carried by hand without burden (Matt. 11:30), and bare and uncovered like the truth of the Gospel without a covering.<sup>213</sup> The church is this King's royal throne, and the pope and the bishops should remain in their place and acknowledge this King, humbly bow before Him, and embrace *HIS* Word.<sup>214</sup> The kingship of Christ is exercised by the means of faith, according to His humanity which He derives from David as the *Lord's Anointed, or Messiah, King over Zion*, from the person spoken of being called the Son of God.

*The Son of God is the Glorious Lord and King* being seated at the right hand of God with majesty and divine power, for all creatures in heaven and on earth to worship. Luther interpreted Psalm 110:1 corresponding to Eph. 1:20-22 in one short phrase "sit at My right hand." Christ was raised from the earth and exalted above all the heavens to sit on a royal throne next to God at His right hand, to rule and become the glorious Lord and

---

<sup>212</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 10: *First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 1999, 35

<sup>213</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 10: *First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 1999, 35-36

<sup>214</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 12: *Selected Psalms I*, 1999, 74

King who “possesses the very majesty and power that is called divine,” “a King inconceivably glorious and of unspeakable power.”<sup>215</sup>

Not over that beggarly palace in Jerusalem or the imperial throne of Babylon, Rome, or Constantinople, or the whole earth which would indeed represent tremendous power. Not merely king of the heavens, the stars, and anything else the eye can see! This is something far higher and more important, for it means: “Sit next to Me on the exalted throne upon which I sit, and be My equal!” To sit next to Him—at His right hand, not at His feet—means to possess the *very majesty and power that is called divine*. Surely, by this one short word *Christ is raised from the earth and exalted above all the heavens*, as St. Paul says, and becomes a King inconceivably glorious and of unspeakable power.<sup>216</sup>

Luther explained Heb. 1:6, which quoted from Psalm 97:7: “And again, when He brings the Firstborn into the world, He says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship Him,’” with the introduction that, “The Lord has become King; let the earth rejoice.” Luther continued to profess that no one had become King but the Son, in Psalm 2:6 saying: “I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill,” and also in 1 Chr. 17:14: “I will confirm Him in My Kingdom forever.” Thus, Psalm 97:7 proves Him true God, saying: “All the angels of God shall worship Him.”<sup>217</sup>

*The Kingdom that Christ* has established is *the new Kingdom of grace*. Luther addressed that, “He wanted to establish a Kingdom and initiated His Kingdom with such absurd simplicity as was certain as a Kingdom of grace, and in which nothing but God’s grace would have currency, no matter how good and valuable it might be otherwise.”<sup>218</sup> Luther defined the principle of the “new rule of Christ” as “the wonderfully beautiful difference between law and faith.” The victory of Christ over sin, death and the devil has disarmed the law of its function as accuser. He explained Psalm 5:2 in accordance with

---

<sup>215</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, 1999, 233

<sup>216</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, 1999, 233

<sup>217</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 15, 1999, 337

<sup>218</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 189-190

Phil. 3:8 that “the people of the law do not seek God’s mercy (*miseriordia Dei*), but trust in their own works, whereas the people of faith only hope for God's mercy and regard their own righteousness as excrement,” for God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud.<sup>219</sup> Luther challenged the pope as to why he allowed his feet to be kissed and wanted to be king of all kings — “something even Christ Himself did not do? Where is the figure fulfilled here?”<sup>220</sup>

***King as Servant vs Servant as King:*** Luther also paradoxically presented the glory of this King as Servant, Servant as King in the dimension of his theology of the cross which is the fundamental principle of his whole theology. The way of Christ that led to His resurrection and glorification from the form of a servant to that of His divinity, appears parallel with the humiliation which led Him to the form of a servant, according to which He fulfilled the fulness of God by ascending into heaven.<sup>221</sup> His glory was revealed in His suffering humanity, in the humiliation of the flesh, in the bread and wine of the sacrament.<sup>222</sup> In his lecture on Isa. 52-53, Luther explained “this scandal” that the prophet spoke of the Head of the Kingdom, the person of the King as a servant and the manner of His deliverance through suffering and resurrection.<sup>223</sup> It is in such an offended and astonished form that the ministry and glorification of Christ and this glorious King will reach the whole world.<sup>224</sup> This King possesses two contradictions: “In Christ there coexisted both the highest joy and deepest sorrow, the most abject weakness and the greatest strength, the highest glory and the lowest shame, the greatest peace and the deepest

---

<sup>219</sup> Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, 2004, 102

<sup>220</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 39: Church and Ministry I*, 1999, 84

<sup>221</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 39: Church and Ministry I*, 1999, 53

<sup>222</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 361-362

<sup>223</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah*, 1999, 215

<sup>224</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah*, 1999, 216-217

trouble, the most exalted life and the most miserable death.”<sup>225</sup> The divine nature of Christ is hidden in the human nature; His weakness on the cross hides the power of God. The cross is not God’s final message, but points to the resurrection and glorification when Christ rules as the Son of God with power through the work of the Holy Spirit who glorifies Him and witnesses His true identity. The present rule of Christ is through the proclamation of the Gospel, the Word and the sacraments mediated by the action of the Holy Spirit, through which Christ continues to serve His people and expand His Kingdom, for “He is a servant, that is, a minister of the Word, an apostle and an ambassador.”<sup>226</sup> His rule is a glorious victory, “which shows the power and efficacy of the Word, for it pushes forward to success and good fortune and does not give up until it has gained many people.”<sup>227</sup>

*This King is the Victor* who has won the battle over sin, death and Satan. Luther had such a strong sense of *spiritual warfare* that he viewed the history of the world as an unceasing combat of Satan opposing God, attacking His creation, His Gospel and His church. However, the presence of our God and King encourages us to fight and the success of the battle has been promised:

Therefore we should despair if we were to see all these dangers and plans of Satan. But our God and King comforts us, saying: “Be strong in battle. Fight. You have missiles and sharp arrows. Hurl them at the enemy. You will be successful.” How poorly matched this contest is! What am I—indeed what are a thousand of our men in comparison with one devil? Here we must say with Elisha (2 Kings 6:16): “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Where there are twenty devils, there are a hundred angels, and if that were not so, we should long since have perished. *We are on the battle front whenever we teach the Word, whenever we preach and glorify Christ*, and then live, as far as possible, according to the Gospel and the Word of God.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> WA 5, 602, 22; WA 5, 227, 11ff

<sup>226</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 17: *Lectures on Isaiah*, 1999, 215

<sup>227</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 12: *Selected Psalms I*, 1999, 225

<sup>228</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 12: *Selected Psalms I*, 1999, 227

### 3.2.3 The High Priest

Luther did not manifest the glory of the true divinity of Christ at the expense of His humanity, instead, he constantly stressed *the reality and the glory of Christ's humanity* in His humility and voluntary submission to the Father's will and to the law, His suffering and solidarity with other human beings, and His revelation of the Father and His heart. He addressed the person of Christ, in that the Son of God was sent to us by the love of the Father as *the greatest gift and our Savior*, not like late medieval thought stressed, as a terrifying Judge, or an example (following Christ to gain the saving grace) — only after He is followed. Luther made every effort to follow the light of Scripture to bring the doctrine and the church back to Christ-centeredness (*Solus Christus*) that Rome and its teachings had departed from.

In his lectures on Hebrews in 1518, Luther stressed *Christ as the supreme Sacrificer*. The characteristic of His work is to take away sin by offering up Himself also as sacrifice to reconcile God and men, but the depth of the priestly office of Christ had not been developed in these lectures. Christ was addressed as present before God as our only assurance, as the *Destroyer of sin and Author of justice and salvation*:

Christ is not announced to us as chastising sinners or as judge, but first of all as *supreme Sacrificer, Destroyer of sin, and Author of justice and salvation*; and even greater consolation yet for afflicted consciences, He is not described as present with us, but present before God, there where He is most needed and where we are most accused and most guilty.<sup>229</sup>

In his lectures on Galatians, Luther exalted *Christ as our sweet Savior and High Priest* who had overcome all evils and sit at the right hand of the Father in the Kingdom of

---

<sup>229</sup> WA 57, 2, 165,23; 57, 2, 54, 13-17

heaven. To Luther, this recognition of Christ brings joy even to the angels in heaven: that Christ is not a Moses, a tormentor, or an executioner, but the *Mediator* for sins and the *Donor of grace* who loves to the point of giving Himself for our sins.<sup>230</sup> This Mediator, who is God and man, putting off His innocence and holiness and putting on our sinful person, bore our sin, death, and curse; He became a sacrifice and a curse for us, in order to set us free from the curse of the Law and the wrath of the Father.<sup>231</sup> Luther emphasized that it is only by faith in this altogether pure and innocent Person who has been granted by the Father as our High Priest and Redeemer, even as our Slave, that we truly have Him. The priesthood of Christ consists of sitting at the right hand of God, being our life and our righteousness, and making intercession for us miserable sinners before the Father.<sup>232</sup>

*Eternal Priestly Office of Christ and Universal Priesthood of Believers:* Luther attributed the glory, might, and power to the eternal priestly office of Christ, for Christ stands before the Father as our Intercessor and the Mediator to make us sinners acceptable to the Holy Father and as our dear King and Priest to represent us before God forever. This is the theme that Luther constantly presented in his writings. Christ also teaches us internally in the heart, as a spiritual, internal priest.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, Christ is an eternal Priest, who makes us all into a priesthood; He rules in such a way that He and His Christians will enter glory and eternal life *through cross and death*.<sup>234</sup> It is this eternal priestly office of Christ that is the basis of the priesthood of all believers. Luther did not use the exact phrase “*universal priesthood*,” but he emphasized a general priesthood that all baptized Christians

---

<sup>230</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 38, 93

<sup>231</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 288

<sup>232</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 11

<sup>233</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 39: *Church and Ministry I*, 1999, 80

<sup>234</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, 1999, 348

are “priests” and “spiritual” in God’s sight (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10) in his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), in order to oppose the medieval view of dividing humanity into two classes of “spiritual” & “secular” in the present life and in the hierarchy of the Roman system. Luther stressed the twofold honor of the believers, that of priesthood and that of kingship.<sup>235</sup> All believers who are united with Christ by faith, are kings and priests in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). For as kings, we are by faith exalted above all things and rule over all things in a way that all things cannot harm us including the cross, the death and the evil, but all things work together for good for our salvation. “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>236</sup> For as priests, even more excellent than being kings, we are worthy to present before God prayer for others and to teach one another divine things. During the Reformation, Luther put forward and applied this principle of universal priesthood to the daily life of the believer. This doctrine became significantly meaningful for every believer to see his identity and his vocation as God’s calling to the priesthood in different areas of his life to witness Christ and to live for God’s glory.

*Christ is also the “Ladder to Heaven”* solely through which we come to the Father, who is the center of our faith. Luther again addressed the presence of the Trinity: “For since Christ, who is one undivided Person, God and man, speaks thus, it is certain that God the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is, the whole Divine Majesty, is also present and speaking.”<sup>237</sup> Christ alone is called the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), which

---

<sup>235</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 353

<sup>236</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 344

<sup>237</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 98

powerfully refutes every doctrine of meritorious works and self-righteousness, and all other comfort and all confidence in other means:<sup>238</sup>

With a view to the beginning, He is called the Way; He is the Truth with regard to the means and the continuation; He is the Life by reason of the end, For He must be all—the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation. He must be the first stone, the stone on which the other stones are placed and on which the entire vault or roof is constructed. He is the first, the middle, and the last rung of *the Ladder to heaven* (Gen. 28:12). For through Him we must make the beginning, continue, and conclude our journey into yonder life.<sup>239</sup>

Christ was also addressed as *the Anointed Preacher* of the people of Israel, especially of the wretched people who have been humbled by the Law, as Christ Himself declares: “The Lord has anointed Me to bring good tidings to the afflicted,” (Is. 61:1). He works with His people as the Preacher of His Gospel until the Last Day, “in which He proclaims sheer grace and mercy to us in the Father’s name, who sent Him for that purpose and who Himself works all things in us through Him.”<sup>240</sup>

***Christ as the Visible Word in the Eucharist:*** Concerning the medieval belief that the Mass was a sacrifice, Luther considered it as the greatest and most “dangerous stumbling block of all,”<sup>241</sup> because Christ could not be sacrificed over and above the one single time He sacrificed Himself.<sup>242</sup> He opposed the magic concept of transubstantiation in the Eucharist. Just as salvation results from the true Word of God, damnation results from the corrupt Word of God. The “corrupt word” that Luther meant is not only the corrupt ministry of the spoken Word, but also the inner convictions or opinions that disagree with

---

<sup>238</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 52

<sup>239</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 48

<sup>240</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 15: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7*, 1999, 328-329; *Luther’s works, vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*, 1999, 325

<sup>241</sup> LW 36:51. *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*

<sup>242</sup> LW 37:143. *This is my Body*

the Word of God — corrupting the Word.<sup>243</sup> Thus, He regarded the rule of simple faith in professing the Word of God as a holy anchor, not engaging in inquisitive discussions to avoid corruption of God’s Word. He applied this rule to Christ’s words about the Lord’s Supper, “This is My body which is given for you” and “This is the cup of the New Testament in My blood” in a literal way as the clear and plain words of Christ. In his Small Catechism, Luther defined the Lord’s supper as the “sacrament of the altar,” which “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink,” known as consubstantiation. He accused “the fanatics” (Zwingli and those who agreed with him, who viewed the bread and wine as a symbol or memorial sign)<sup>244</sup> of departing from faith in these words, because they were deceived by the devil and gradually got to the point where they simply denied the Word of God and attacked it. To Luther, taking the real presence of Christ out of the bread and wine meant the removal of Christ and the Gospel. He believed that the powerful words of Christ were the reality; the sacraments are like signs or seals of His words.<sup>245</sup> The very first thing necessary in the Eucharist was faith in these words and signs, “it is in the Word alone that the bread is the body of Christ, that the wine is the blood of Christ. This must be believed; it must not and cannot be understood.”<sup>246</sup> He asserted that “he who in faith physically eats Christ’s body in the Supper eats spiritually and lives and walks spiritually precisely in the physical eating.”<sup>247</sup> Luther called it a “sacramental union,” because Christ’s body and the bread were given to people as a sacrament in His words.<sup>248</sup> But he refrained from

---

<sup>243</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 147

<sup>244</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III*, 1999, 18

<sup>245</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II*, vol. 32, 1999, 15–16

<sup>246</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 157

<sup>247</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III*, vol. 37, 1999, 95

<sup>248</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III*, 1999, 300

explaining this mystery of sacramental union.<sup>249</sup> The sacrament was instituted as a means of grace through which Christ once more gave Himself to us, the feeding of His people — a true partaking of the one Jesus Christ. It is a means to receive the benefit of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation which are given to us through these words “Given and shed for you” for the forgiveness of sins. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. Christ as the visible Word is present in the Eucharist, freeing one and giving one assurance. To Luther, there is no magic of transubstantiation and no merit that we give to Him or do in His and others’ presence, but God’s grace received through faith in His Word of promise can refresh and strengthen the faith of believers. In his Eucharistic controversy, Luther placed himself in an eschatological situation, exposed to the attacks of Satan who tried to reduce Christ and His Gospel to nonexistence as mere a symbol or a sign in the sacrament. To him, to lose Christ was to lose all; to have Christ was to have all.<sup>250</sup> Therefore, Luther kept his view of consubstantiation so to be faithful before Christ even until the final judgement. The Eucharistic controversy pushed his Christology to the limits, challenging the accepted doctrine of the two natures of Christ, that is, after His resurrection and ascension Christ’s humanity is with His divinity everywhere inseparable (the ubiquity or omnipresence of Christ’s exalted body), thus, Christ’s body presents around and in the bread and is given to people along with the bread in the Eucharist through His divine wisdom and power beyond human understanding.<sup>251</sup> To Luther, Christ’s body is “at the right hand of God,” that is, wherever and whatever God’s right hand is in reality and in name (God’s right hand is everywhere), there is Christ, the Son of man. This was

---

<sup>249</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 200-201, 250

<sup>250</sup> WA 23,207,27; WA 26, 499,21; WA26, 500, 21

<sup>251</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III*, vol. 37, 1999, 56-66, 207

against the Chalcedonian Definition where the two natures of Christ are unconfused. No matter for Luther or for Zwingli, because of God that we are in Christ, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), we approach the sacrament through faith in Christ according to His promised Word.

### **3.3 Christ in His Work**

To Luther, the work of Christ is tightly associated with soteriology, the saving acts of God. By the love of God to lost men enslaved to sin, His Son has been sent to the world, became one with sinners, submitted Himself to the law, offered Himself to the wrath of the Father, bore our punishment and died on the cross for our sins; and He resurrected and triumphed over sin, death and the devil. The incarnate Word then came to us as the proclaiming Gospel, offered Himself to the faithful as the righteousness we present before God, enables us to conform with His death and with His resurrection and offers us sacraments. He triumphs over all the powers that enslaved us and restores the glory of God's image in us for His glory.

#### **3.3.1 The Incarnation**

*The Central Place of Incarnation in Luther's thought:* As Luther fixed his eyes on the saving acts of God, the incarnation as the beginning of the whole of Christ's events on earth, like "the gate of heaven open," has a central place in Luther's thought no less significant than the cross and the resurrection.<sup>252</sup> For Luther, incarnation belongs to the

---

<sup>252</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 19, 373, 380; Seeberg, Erich, *Luthers Theologie; Luthers Theologie in ihren Grundzügen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Maurer, Wilhelm, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, Zwei Untersuchungen zu Luthers Reformationschriften 1520/21; "Die Einheit von Luthers Theologie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 75, 1950, 245-252; "Die Anfänge von Luthers Theologie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 77, 1952, 1-12

“historicity” (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of God, through which God has participated fully in human history and showed Himself a reality, and revealed Himself in the Trinity. Luther emphasized the significance of incarnation in both the dimensions of revelation and Trinity. Luther spoke naturally of Christ as “God incarnate” in whom that *God was present to the highest degree: praesentissimus*.<sup>253</sup>

***God Incarnate as the Gift:*** It is by incarnation that He brought grace and salvation to us. Incarnation is out of God’s life-giving, pleasant and lovely will of grace, the will of His divine good pleasure ordained from eternity, because it is the covering in which the Son of God, the Divine Majesty offered Himself to us with all His gifts, becoming present in order to lead us to come to the Father and lift us up into hope and assurance of salvation:

The incarnate Son of God is, therefore, the covering in which the Divine Majesty presents Himself to us with all His gifts, and does so in such a manner that there is no sinner too wretched to be able to approach Him with the firm assurance of obtaining pardon. This is the one and only view of the Divinity that is available and possible in this life. But on the Last Day those who have died in this faith will be so enlightened by heavenly power that they will see even the Divine Majesty Itself. Meanwhile we must come to the Father by that way which is Christ Himself; He will lead us safely, and we shall not be deceived.<sup>254</sup>

***God Hidden vs God Revealed:*** Incarnation is the “indwelling of God” concealed in humanity, as God hidden and acting in and under the humanity of Christ. Luther discovered the dialectic of God hidden and revealed in the incarnation. The Divine Majesty does not hide Himself in the highest, far from men, instead, He hides Himself in the humanity of Christ in order to be revealed to faith. If He were not hidden there, there would be no faith; if He were not there, there would be no assurance.<sup>255</sup> What concerned Luther was where to find God and how to participate in this saving reality of Christ. The humiliation of Christ

---

<sup>253</sup> WA 4, 53,22; 4, 7, 12; 3, 93, 12; 4,125,10

<sup>254</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 48-49

<sup>255</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 22-23

in the incarnation is the revelation of God hidden in weakness, through which wretched men can come to know and approach the Father.

***Incarnation as an Indivisible Work of the Trinity:*** We should note here that Luther emphasized incarnation as “an indivisible work of the Trinity,” and only the person of the Son was united with human nature and became incarnate:

...this is “*an indivisible work of the Trinity,*” a work which all three Persons created as one God and Creator of one and the same work. Thus the angel Gabriel says to the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:35: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” “Not only the Holy Spirit,” says he, “will come upon you but also the Most High, that is, the Father will overshadow you with His power, that is, with His Son, or Word. And ‘the Child to be born of you’ will be called the Son of the Most High.” Thus *the entire Trinity* is present here as one Creator and has created and made the one work, the humanity. And yet it was only the Person of the Son that united with the human nature and became incarnate, not the Father nor the Holy Spirit.<sup>256</sup>

***The Person of the Son “Put on” Humanity,*** entered into our history by incarnation and by the cross, and thus came near to us to make relationship between God and persons possible reflecting the Son’s relationship to the Father. Different from the “naked God” discovered by the mystics or speculation, this is God made flesh, who has revealed Himself only by the Word and only to the faithful.<sup>257</sup> Luther accused Rome of letting the devil occupy the church and dishonor Christ and the Trinitarian God, and he claimed:

*I let God be God.* Before this the devil occupied the place of God. But now I am reinstating God, who offered Himself to me, who spoke to me, whom I served, who also *revealed Himself to me in His Word and Sacraments.* Not in His majesty but in His state of humiliation and humanity He speaks to us and offers us His Sacraments. There this God, who becomes man, who suffers, dies, and rises from the dead, is proclaimed to me, enters my ears, and by way of my ears enters my heart. Whoever dishonors this Christ, also blasphemes God; for He is *one Person of the Trinity.*<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 15, 1999, 305

<sup>257</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 380-381

<sup>258</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 471

*Incarnation as an Open-gate Event of Heaven:* To Luther, the incarnation is so significant that heaven is open for us to become citizens of the true city above. Before Christ's incarnation heaven was closed. But when the Child, Jesus, was born, and the angels preached their nocturnal sermon about the good news of great joy, proclaiming the birth of this Child to the shepherds before the town of Bethlehem (Luke 2:10); heaven has been opened for men to have citizenship among the angels, as St. Paul tells the Ephesians (2:19) and the Philippians (3:20): "We are citizens and members of the household of God with the saints. Our commonwealth is not worldly and earthly, but is in heaven, from which we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Luther expected, "There we find the true city and the true Jerusalem, where we are citizens and members of the same household with the angels, fellow countrymen of those who live and have their being in heaven."<sup>259</sup>

### 3.3.2 The Salvation

For Luther, *the glory of salvation was exclusively in Christ and His cross from His pure Gospel*, not shared with human good works, and thus attributes all the glory to Christ. By God's mercy and grace, *salvation depends only on the sufficient work of Christ*; human merits take no part. Christ's work offered us sufficient atonement.<sup>260</sup> In his turning point called, "Tower Experience," which happened during his lectures on Romans (1515-1516), Luther rediscovered the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which is the heart of Pauline theology.<sup>261</sup> This is a significant break from the late medieval synergic soteriology, and a return simply to sound biblical doctrine.

---

<sup>259</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 203

<sup>260</sup> Macleod, "The Work of Christ," In *Reformation Theology*, 2017, 378-380

<sup>261</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 48: Letters I*, 1999, 67. In the covering letter for the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* to John von Staupitz, Luther said, "All these definitions (the Greek word "repent" in

***Doing Penance vs True Repentance:*** Concerning God’s work in saving souls hindered by scholastic theology and indulgences, Luther posted two theses in the fall of 1517. One is the *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, in which he attacked the whole of scholasticism, influenced by the thought of Aristotle, in order to “restore the theology of Christ.”<sup>262</sup> The other is the well known, *Disputation Against Indulgences*, which originally intended to raise an academic disputation, which never happened; instead, it was soon published and spread around Germany and Europe, igniting the firestorm of reformation. In these *Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther first clarified what true repentance consisted of: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matt. 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”, and “This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.” He clarified that the Vulgate translation “*poenitentiam agite*” of the Greek word “*metanoete*” in Matt. 3:2, would have a better Latin translation “*transmentamini*,” which actually means “repent,” having a change of spirit, instead of doing penance.<sup>263</sup> Christ’s teaching is a true repentance done in spirit and in truth, which must be applied to all men throughout their whole life.<sup>264</sup> He questioned the efficacy of indulgences and the pope’s power to forgive sins and the dogma of purgatory. He warned that inner repentance, unless “it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh,” was useless. The true repentant Christian shared “in all the blessings of Christ and the church granted Him by God, even

---

Matt. 3:2) agree so well with Pauline theology that, at least in my opinion, almost nothing could illustrate Paul’s theology better than the way they do.”

<sup>262</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 7

<sup>263</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 83-84

<sup>264</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 83-84

without indulgence letters.” However, he did not clearly indicate his doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>265</sup>

***Active Righteousness vs Passive Righteousness:*** Two years before 1517, Luther had already displayed his “skillful” understanding of the righteousness of God in his lectures on the book of Romans.<sup>266</sup> He stated in the very beginning, “The object of this Epistle is to destroy all wisdom and works of the flesh no matter how important these may appear in our eyes or those of others, and no matter how sincere and earnest we might be in their use.” Luther knew that we could run to Christ wholeheartedly, only if “Everything turns about the point that our righteousness and wisdom must be destroyed and rooted out of our hearts and our self-complacent minds.” God desires to save us, neither by our own wisdom nor by our *active righteousness*, that one should accomplish salvation based on his good works as Aristotle believed (“distributive justice”), but through a *passive righteousness*, an *alien righteousness*, which in every way comes from without and is entirely foreign to us (*extra nos*) — “the righteousness of God” as a gift from heaven, that God gave Himself to sinners by His grace and makes sinners righteous through faith in Christ (Rom. 1:17-18).<sup>267</sup> This is justification by faith alone. Good works follow as a result and fruit of justification. Luther wrote to his spiritual mentor, Johann von Staupitz in 1518: “I teach that people should *put their trust in nothing but Jesus Christ alone*, not in their prayers, merits, or their own good deeds.”<sup>268</sup> This most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, which God imputes to us through faith without works, is neither political nor ceremonial, nor legal, nor work-righteousness — all these are *active*

---

<sup>265</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 25

<sup>266</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 1999, xii

<sup>267</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 1999, xi

<sup>268</sup> Luther, Letter to Johann von Staupitz (March 31, 1518), WABr 1:160

*righteousness*, but it is a merely *passive righteousness* through which receive and permit God to work in us.<sup>269</sup> He also found in other Scriptures that it was as “the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise,” and “the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God,”<sup>270</sup> echoing 1 Cor. 1:30, “And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” For Luther, between these two kinds of righteousness, the active righteousness of the Law and the passive righteousness of Christ, there is no middle ground for salvation.<sup>271</sup> When man turns to his own works, relying on active righteousness, he actually seeks to establish his own, not submitting to God’s righteousness — the end result is that he has lost Christ. Our proper righteousness should be the second kind of righteousness which is the fruit and consequence of the first, alien and passive righteousness. This manner of life is characterized firstly, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self (Gal. 5:24); secondly, in love to one’s neighbor; and thirdly, in meekness and fear toward God.<sup>272</sup> Luther saw the very heart of the battle: “*If the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole church is lost,*” because “the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time”. However, “if it flourishes, everything good flourishes — religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.”<sup>273</sup> Thus, the proclamation that we are wholly reliant on Jesus Christ for reconciliation with God, is crucial, as that upon which the church stands or falls.

---

<sup>269</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 4-5

<sup>270</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 34: *Career of the Reformer IV*, 1999, 337

<sup>271</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 9

<sup>272</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 299.

<sup>273</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 1999, 3

***Holy Catholic Church vs “Church” Meaningless:*** Luther realized in the current situation, the word “church” had already become meaningless — ironically, we also face the issue of *Christless church and Christless Christianity* today in a highly secularized society.<sup>274</sup> To Luther, many “Christian people” in the church, who neither truly believed in Christ, nor did they lead a holy life, did not actually have the Holy Spirit within to fight against sin. They were not holy, nor Christians, but rather the wicked and shameful people of the devil. Those to whom he pointed, were the pope and his followers; they could not be “*sancta et catholica ecclesia.*”<sup>275</sup> Since this word “church,” was used in the Children’s Creed (Luther’s term for the Apostles’ Creed), they had applied both the name and the image of the church to themselves and to their harm, under the meaningless word *ecclesia.*<sup>276</sup> Not the stone house with gorgeous paintings called a church, *Ecclesia* should mean the holy Christian people, from the days of the apostles, to the end of the world. There is always a holy Christian people on earth, in whom Christ lives, works, and rules, *per redemptionem*, “through grace and the remission of sin,” and the Holy Spirit, *per vivificationem et sanctificationem*, “through daily purging of sin and renewal of life.” We do not remain in sin but are enabled and obliged to lead a new life, abounding in all kinds of good works, as outlined in the Ten Commandments, and not following the old, evil works that one believed one had the free will and ability to do.

***Free Will vs the Bound Will:*** In 1525, Luther was enthusiastic about finding an opponent, Erasmus, in the debate on free will, who challenged him on the real crux of the problem. This gave birth of his masterpiece: *The Bondage of the Will*, one of the only two

---

<sup>274</sup> Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, 2015

<sup>275</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 41: Church and Ministry III*, 1999, 144

<sup>276</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 41: Church and Ministry III*, 1999, 144-145

works that he valued deserved preservation of all his writings; the other being the *Small Catechism*. He even praised Erasmus for this issue,

“I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles (for trifles they are rather than basic issues), with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success. You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot.”<sup>277</sup>

The vital spot is to touch the corner-stone, the very heart of the Gospel and the foundation of faith: “good works are an impossibility not just because our wills are corrupted; they are an impossibility because our wills are utterly bound to sinful ends.”<sup>278</sup> Luther also defended the external perspicuity of Holy Scripture, which serves Christians as “a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun, especially in what relates to salvation and all essential matters”.<sup>279</sup> Erasmus defined “free will” as a power of man’s will by which man may apply himself to the good works that lead to salvation. Thus, free will was seen as co-operation, the preceding and efficient cause of salvation.<sup>280</sup> Luther denied “free will” of man in relation to God and His things (free will remained only in relation to the worldly things), since fallen man is enslaved to sin and Satan, and always curved in upon himself apart from God. Man’s will is placed into the middle as a beast of burden, which either God rides, willing and going where God wills (Psalm 73:22), or Satan rides, willing and going where Satan wills.<sup>281</sup> For Luther, sin was not just the privation of good, but a substantial, evil power which was “an omnipotent tyrant”<sup>282</sup> that made fallen man lose the

---

<sup>277</sup> LW, 33:294; Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*, 2015, 59

<sup>278</sup> Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*, 2015, 60

<sup>279</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 2012, 124-125, 70-74

<sup>280</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 61-64

<sup>281</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 1999, 65

<sup>282</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, 1999, 33

image of God.<sup>283</sup> He raised a powerful argument that after the fall, intellect, mind, and will were most depraved and most seriously weakened, utterly leprous and unclean; if these powers were the image of God, then Satan also had the image of God, since he surely had “these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.” Did Satan carry any image of God if his final fate is to be destroyed on the Last Day? To Luther, the image of God was something most excellent, which included eternal life, everlasting freedom, an enlightened reason, a true knowledge of God, a most sincere desire to love God and his neighbor, a glorious lordship to rule over the other creatures with great ease, and everything that was good. However, this image was so obscured and corrupted through sin that we cannot grasp it even with our intellect.<sup>284</sup> Luther viewed the loss of the image of God in man as the loss of the original and sound functions from both spiritual and physical aspects; while Calvin held a slightly milder position in that “God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.”<sup>285</sup> After the fall, man’s will by his sinful nature, is always hostile to God. Man can do nothing but sin against God. However, as Luther showed in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), the Roman church had been captured by the unbiblical doctrine of sacraments, depending on merits and good works for salvation, instead of faith in Christ alone. What was most needed for the church and the entire late medieval world, was a light of the living Word, that is, the proclamation of the pure Gospel.

---

<sup>283</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 63

<sup>284</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 65

<sup>285</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, 2011, 189; ICR I.15

*The Law vs the Gospel:* To Luther, the Law and the Gospel seem to be an incompatible pair of old and new law, judgement and grace, death and life. The Law and the Gospel are both sharp demands, which convict men of sin and are also a freeing promise and gift, which save. Luther stated, “Just as the chief teaching of the New Testament is really the proclamation of grace and peace through the forgiveness of sins in Christ, so the chief teaching of the Old Testament is really the teaching of laws, the showing up of sin, and the demanding of good.”<sup>286</sup> The people, kept within the office of Moses by the correct understanding of the law, are driven to Christ, the Gospel. The Law is to make us guilty, humble us and kill us for the sake of life, so that we may be justified, exalted and made alive and lifted up to heaven, and endowed with all things.<sup>287</sup> “The law humbles, grace exalts.”<sup>288</sup> However, Luther did not simply distinguish the Old Testament (OT) as the Law and the New Testament (NT) as the Gospel. He pointed out the two worse practices regarding the New Testament “as law books in which is supposed to be taught what we are to do and in which the works of Christ are pictured to us as nothing but examples,”<sup>289</sup> — which legalism and liberalism still do today. He considered the book of Genesis an exceedingly evangelical book having the promise of the Seed of the woman.<sup>290</sup> Thus, the key is how to apply the teaching: one may preach the NT as the Law if demanding what we should do or following Christ merely as an example like the liberals; or one may preach the OT as the Gospel from the perspective of the promise of God about Christ. There is only one Gospel about Christ in Scripture, that He is the Son of God and became man for

---

<sup>286</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 237

<sup>287</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, 1999, 345

<sup>288</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 50-52

<sup>289</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 117

<sup>290</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 237

us, that He died and was raised, and has been established as the Lord over all things.<sup>291</sup> You must accept Christ as a gift and the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation before you take Christ as an example and serve your neighbor as Christ served you, to fulfil God's commandments in faith and in love. To Luther, "As widely as a gift differs from an example, so widely does faith differ from works, for *faith possesses nothing of its own, only the deeds and life of Christ.*" The Gospel is not a law book, but "a book of divine promises in which God promises, offers, and gives us all His possessions and benefits in Christ."<sup>292</sup> A real theologian should master the art of exact distinction between the Law and the Gospel.<sup>293</sup> It is important but also challenging for the preacher to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel, and properly to preach both of them; God alone should and must be our holy Master:<sup>294</sup>

The lower and upper millstone are properly said to denote hope and fear or Law and Gospel. The Law is the Word of wrath, the upper millstone; it preserves fear and humbles men through the recognition of sin. The Gospel, the Word of grace, preserves the conscience by faith, so that it does not tremble. The preaching of both is necessary. In a general figure it means: Let nothing be overdone in either direction. Neither punish sin too strictly nor treat the sinner too gently. Neither console too much nor terrify too much. For the debt denotes sin, because of which the lower millstone is removed if the punishment is too severe; on the other hand, the upper one is removed if too much indulgence is given.<sup>295</sup>

***A theology of Promises:*** Bayer argued about the turning point of the breakthrough in Luther's theology, that it is not the righteousness of God (justification by faith), but the grace of promises. These are actually two sides of the same coin, displaying no conflict but the same theme of salvation, with both going against the Catholic doctrine of merits. The theme of promise plays a significant role in Luther's thought, which is given through the

---

<sup>291</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 118-120

<sup>292</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 120

<sup>293</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 271.

<sup>294</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 54: Table Talk*, 1999, 127

<sup>295</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, vol. 9: Lectures on Deuteronomy*, 1999, 244

living Word of God. Luther pointed out that the Gospel in Genesis proves that from the very beginning, salvation relied only on God's promises offered by faith, not by works, laws or merits:

...before the coming of the law of Moses, he teaches whence help is to come for the driving out of sin and death, namely, not by the law or men's own works (since there was no law as yet), but by "*the Seed of the woman,*" Christ, promised to Adam and Abraham, in order that *throughout the Scriptures from the beginning faith may be praised above all works and laws and merits.* Genesis, therefore, is made up almost entirely of illustrations of faith and unbelief, and of the fruits that faith and unbelief bear. It is *an exceedingly evangelical book.*<sup>296</sup>

Luther exalted the Seed of a woman, the divine blessing, being not only a man, but also God, because Moses imputed to this Seed the power which belonged to no creature but to God alone, namely, to abolish death and the murderer, sin, and God's wrath, and to restore righteousness and life. This must call for a mightier and more exalted man than all angels and creatures, whom Jews and Muslims should think about. The work to abolish sin and death, to bestow righteousness and life, and to defeat Satan, is not the work of a human being or of an angel, but the exclusive domain of the one eternal and divine Majesty, the Creator of heaven and earth. Luther emphasized that the work of salvation was the act of the Triune God. This is because the One who gave the promise and the One who was being promised must be two persons, with the third Person being there to express these words about the two Persons orally through Moses or the angel. The utterance of the oral word is the special function and the distinctive revelation of the Holy Spirit, just as Christ's humanity is His particular and special revelation.<sup>297</sup> The Trinitarian work of redemption and salvation ensures that the glorious victory of the Son of man becomes ours.

---

<sup>296</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 237

<sup>297</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 15, 1999, 324-325

*The Theme of “Joyous Exchange” and Union with Christ:* Luther described the intimate union of a believer with Christ as similar to marriage. It is through faith with the Word that God’s people, His church, is united with Christ, as the bride with the bridegroom. This marriage parable is related to an important theme of “joyous exchange” in Luther’s thought on what significant impact this union with Christ has on His bride. This image of the bride and bridegroom and their “joyous exchange” from the monastic-mystical tradition had been shown early in Luther’s career.<sup>298</sup> The “joyous exchange” theme had already appeared in his lectures on Romans and became fundamental on *The Freedom of a Christian*.<sup>299</sup> We see how fully Luther described this dramatic “royal marriage” followed by “the riches of the glory of this grace” in the following words:

Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So He takes to himself a glorious bride, “without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26–27) of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hos. 2:19–20 says.<sup>300</sup>

Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by Him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all His is mine and all mine is His,” as the bride in the Song of Solomon 2:16 says, “My beloved is mine and I am His.”<sup>301</sup>

Luther’s lectures on Galatians also reflected this “joyous exchange”:

So long as sin, death, and the curse remain in us, sin damns us, death kills us, and the curse curses us; but when these things are transferred to Christ, what is ours becomes His and what is His becomes ours. Let us learn, therefore, in every temptation to transfer sin, death,

---

<sup>298</sup> Kolb, “Bound, Freed, Freed to Be Bound: The Wittenberg Understanding of Justification,” In *Unio CUM Christo (Vol.3 No.1)*, 2017, 51-52

<sup>299</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 60

<sup>300</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 352

<sup>301</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 352

the curse, and all the evils that oppress us from ourselves to Christ, and, on the other hand, to transfer righteousness, life, and blessing from Him to us.<sup>302</sup>

In his lectures on the Gospel of John, Luther addressed what the true Christian church should be with reference to this marriage relationship by emphasizing the role of the Word:

The true Christian Church is *one body with Christ through faith, the bride of Christ, and His very own possession; He is her Bridegroom and Head*. And it is the wish of the Groom that through faith in Him the bride partake of all His goods, as, for instance, eternal righteousness, holiness, and blessedness. To make her great and resplendent before God, He adorned and decked her with heavenly wisdom and strength. Wherever the Christian Church is, where *God's Word is preached in its purity and the Sacraments* are faithfully administered in accordance with the Word of God, where this Word is heard and accepted with a believing heart, and where the articles of our Christian faith are observed unadulterated—there heaven is wide open, never to be closed again.<sup>303</sup>

Therefore, Luther made use of the intimate relationship of marriage and its “joyous exchange” to address the richness of the glory of Christ and His work and His grace toward His beloved people, by the wedding ring of faith. Luther ensured that we must be made lovely by an alien loveliness, when we hear and believe and forget our righteousness, relying on nothing except the adornment of the Bridegroom Christ. The King will desire our beauty, for “Christ, our King, takes pleasure not only in the Word and faith but is stirred and transported by love toward us such as a bridegroom has for his bride, that He spontaneously pursues us,” and “We press Him to this if only we hear the Word, believe, and forget our own righteousness.”<sup>304</sup> It is the Bridegroom Christ, the King who took the initiative from heaven, became incarnate, came to His bride and entered into a union with her to save her and share all His goods with her, to be one body in Him. And more precisely Luther explained this union is made through faith on His Word, which is different from the

---

<sup>302</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, 1999, 292

<sup>303</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 22: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 202-203

<sup>304</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 12: *Selected Psalms I*, 1999, 278-279

late medieval mystical spirituality of union with God, stressing one's inner experience, or the passion of Christ and the imitation of Christ as a model, an example.<sup>305</sup> Luther stressed the reality of Christ and the blessings that He brings into our lives through His Word, "Thus it is that Christ takes a glorious bride, without spot or blemish; He purifies her, in the bath of His Word of life, by faith in His Word, in His life, in His righteousness, and in His salvation."<sup>306</sup>

### 3.3.3 The Return

Luther's thought displayed a strong *apocalyptic characteristic*, stressing the righteous Christ as the final Judge and as the Victor over death, sin and the devil. The new life of Christians in Christ by faith is *simul iustus, simul peccator* — a new life which has already begun, but will only be complete at the end time at the glorious return of Christ. Living in the critical political and social situation of his time (externally the Turkey War, internally the Peasants' War, the split of various confessional groups and the Black Death), Luther like other people in the early sixteenth century, always placed himself in an eschatological time frame, in the fight against the final attacks of Satan. The devil was a significant figure for people in the Middle Ages. Influenced by the legacy of his families' history, Luther believed that the devil and his followers were everywhere and attacked people's bodies and souls. It was difficult for him to throw off all the superstitions; however, over time he gained a more theologically responsible view of spiritual warfare.<sup>307</sup> Influenced by his Augustinian tradition but also different from it, Luther held the view which we call an eschatological view of history, that is, the history was a mutual battle of

---

<sup>305</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 31-32, 60

<sup>306</sup> WA, 7, 55, 20

<sup>307</sup> Kartawidjaja, *Music in Martin Luther's Theology*, 2021, 103-114

good and evil. This was displayed in his complex view as two groups of two kingdoms going on together in his works: the spiritual kingdom and the temporal kingdom, the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan.<sup>308</sup> The two kingdoms of the first group are parallel, not against each other and God has used them to reign in the spiritual order for the good of the souls and the temporal order for the needs of the bodies. The two kingdoms in the second group have been bitterly opposed to each other and this will continue until the final day comes. Satan is the god of this world, the ruler of the authority of the air, who is forever plotting and fighting against the Kingdom of Christ with all his powers.<sup>309</sup> Luther's marriage with his Katie (Katharina von Bora) in 1525 during the Peasants' War, was not only to obey God's creative will as the sign of faith in God the Creator, but also in the midst of the apocalyptic lightning bolts, to spite the devil and keep his courage and joy from the peasants. Since he sensed that "in just a little while the righteous Judge will come," Luther lived and thought in the perspective that the final judgement and appearing before the throne of God was about to happen. But he refused to speculate or predict the exact date of the end. He interpreted "the thousand years" in Rev. 20:3-7 as the history of the church, thus, he was an amillennialist like Augustine.<sup>310</sup> To Luther, the devil, our adversary, who prowls around and seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8), tried to take away the pure doctrine of faith from us and to substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. Therefore, he had a strong sense of mission through being God's instrument to ensure the sound doctrine of faith was continually read and heard in public.<sup>311</sup> Since it was confirmed in the beginning as the original doctrine of the apostles, it was not necessary to have new

---

<sup>308</sup> Yeung, *The Study of Martin Luther's Theology*, 2009, 174-176, 83-93

<sup>309</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 1999, 287, 293.

<sup>310</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 1999, 334

<sup>311</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, 1999, 3

revelation or special revelation, nor miracle,<sup>312</sup> which charismatics still pursue today. Such signs as the Mass for the dead, purgatory, pilgrimages, and the idolatry of the saints confirmed this. These were the new doctrines of Rome that were contrary to the Gospel of Christ, required the devil to employ mighty signs to suppress the Gospel and to uphold his lies. To Luther, the papacy in his time was the final reign of the antichrist, who was sitting in church and who had elevated himself over Scripture and destroyed the order of God in the world based on a whole set of unbiblical doctrines, especially replacing the Gospel with works. He saw the religious struggles of his day as the apocalyptic contest between Christ and the antichrist. The serpent knew he would be crushed, which is why until the Last Day he will rage with such great fury against the Gospel, the church and the Son of God.<sup>313</sup> However, the incarnate Christ who had entered human history and accomplished the redemption for His people, has resurrected and overcome the devil as the Victor, and He will continue to win till His final victory and destroy all His enemies, especially the antichrist at the end point of history. Currently standing between the dramatic fight of Christ and Satan, whenever Luther discerned the work of God or of devil, he would rather die to do God's will and fight against the work of devil to the end. This "battle view of history" sometimes led him into trouble, making wrong decisions such as in the Eucharistic controversy with his Protestant adversaries. Luther tried his best to be faithful to Christ until the time comes when He returns in His glory and finally frees all from every evil.<sup>314</sup> He will fill the whole earth with righteousness, salvation and life, and re-establish the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ's glorious return is one of the three comforts (the dwelling

---

<sup>312</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 24: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 368-369

<sup>313</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 199-200

<sup>314</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 24: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 367

places or “mansions,” Christ’s power, and Christ’s return) that is against the devil, the world, and every evil. The righteous are to be freed from sins, death, the devil, and all evil and be brought into heaven to Christ into His blessed, everlasting Kingdom.<sup>315</sup>

Luther had the *vision of a gracious Lord and faithful Savior*, who ascended on high and is now preparing our home for us, and who at the same time will be and remain with us.<sup>316</sup> He stressed that this world was just the first state as a type and figure of the future world. Out of God’s kindness and benevolence, Christ, our Redeemer above in the Father’s house, has prepared mansions for us according to His Word of promise so that we may find a heaven furnished with every kind of joy when we arrive (John 14:2).<sup>317</sup> On the other hand, the ungodly will face the most terrible punishment of hell in eternity. They will wish to flee and yet will be unable to escape from God’s wrath and His presence.<sup>318</sup> For Luther, the nature of sin is to withdraw from God — “the farther man withdraws from God, the farther he still desires to withdraw; and he who has once fled and apostatized keeps on fleeing forever.”<sup>319</sup> It is worth noticing that when man was created, he was dignified in the glorious image of God.<sup>320</sup> Luther considered this as an indication that Adam had another and better immortal life than the physical one — eschatological perspective — these physical activities of food, drink, procreation would come to an end. Adam, together with his descendants if he had not sinned, would have been translated to eternal and spiritual life, like that of the angel (Matt. 22:30).<sup>321</sup> After the fall, we can only look for it through

---

<sup>315</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 316

<sup>316</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 24: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 29

<sup>317</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 39

<sup>318</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, 1999, 93

<sup>319</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 173

<sup>320</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 56

<sup>321</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 56-57

the merit of Christ accomplished for us in His first coming. To Luther, by Christ's ascension into heaven, His humanity has been completed and translated to divine being,<sup>322</sup> which holds the promise of the resurrection of the dead. When we see Christ again at His second coming, He will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Luther, who seemed to be influenced by the platonic view from his Augustinian tradition, considered the flesh lowly and weak, and expected that it would be transformed to spiritual being when physical activities of food and drink would end on the Last Day. However, Christ showed His apostles that He could eat after His resurrection (Luke 24:43). It signifies that we must also be able to taste the fruit of the tree of life with great joy in God's fullness and glory one day in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 23:2). Thus, in contrast to the Scriptures, Luther displayed the tendency to neglect the characteristic of humanity in eternity. His eschatological view of humanity may be related to the ubiquity of the two natures of Christ in his thought of consubstantiation, neglecting the humanity of Christ.

### **3.4 The Theology of the Cross**

*The Significance of the Theology of the Cross (theologia crucis):* Luther first claimed, "*Crux sola est nostra theologia,*" (The Cross alone is our theology)<sup>323</sup> in his commentary on Psalm 22. Although *theologia crucis* might not be counted as the most important part in Luther's theology, it did indeed lay down the foundation of his thought and life. It is one of the most shining diamonds in the theological treasures that Luther had discovered from Scripture, because it attributes all glory to Christ and to the Father. However, the value of this theological jewel had not been rediscovered until after World

---

<sup>322</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, 1999, 147

<sup>323</sup> WA 5.176.32

War II, when the advancement of humanism, all the way from Aristotle, Pelagius to the Enlightenment, was brought into despair by the catastrophe of World War II.<sup>324</sup> That was the time the Christian church, deeply immersed in the power of humanism, began to wake up. In fact, the power of humanism as the motive and the theme of the theology of the glory, has never vanished from human history, especially peaking in this post-modern era, along with great advancements in science and technology. Luther's theology of the cross is still the right antidote to spiritual illnesses such as perceptualism, prosperity theology, and over-secular eschatology, etc. There is still a wakeup call from Luther to the church today, when he declares, "A true theologian must be a theologian of the cross." It is through the cross that a true theologian observes all things. The cross is, like the tool that is used to test real gold, the standard by which we verify all kinds of theologies and philosophic thoughts, and put an end to the theology of glory by extinguishing the thirst for glory, power, wisdom or positive thinking, and so forth.<sup>325</sup> No matter whether it be society or the church, when we depart from the cross, our fallen human nature will lead us to triumphalism, a type of the theology of the glory. The Word of the cross in which the ugly, foolish and suffering form that appears, under the transforming power of the Gospel, keeps working and proclaiming the glory of Christ and His Kingdom with all His beauty, wisdom, and sovereignty down to today.

***Historical Review of theologia crucis:*** In 1505, a sudden thunderstorm changed Luther's life from going to law school to entering the monastery; in around 1515, he had his "Tower Experience," a "Damascus Road" experience while studying the Book of

---

<sup>324</sup> McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 2011, 202

<sup>325</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 17

Romans that prompted his rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith; in 1510, sent by his monastery to Rome on a pilgrimage, this pious monk was struck by the secularity and corruption of Rome. Luther gradually realized and reflected on the fact that despite the outward prosperity and achievements of scholasticism and the Roman church, many clergy who were under the “glorious names” of theologians, popes, cardinals, and bishops, submitted themselves to neither to the church nor God, and had little knowledge about what the true church was.<sup>326</sup> In September 1517, Luther published his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, critiquing the whole approach that medieval theologians had used for centuries, but his disputation caused little effect. Even when Luther posted the *Ninety-five Theses* against indulgences in October 1517, which quickly spread out from Germany to the rest of Europe, no one actually realized that this would become the spark that lit the Reformation fuse. In April 1518, Luther was asked to present his theological work to be assessed in the meeting of the Order in Heidelberg. This *Heidelberg Disputation* that Luther presented articulated the theology that he had expressed in his September Disputation, and precisely and systematically expounded his idea of *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae*. This had significant influence on some future reformers such as Martin Bucer, Johannes Brenz and Theobald Billikan.<sup>327</sup> Luther began to developed the theme of *theologia crucis* during his lectures on Psalms, and gradually presented it in his lectures on the Hebrews (early, 1518), and the *Explanations to the 95 Theses* (August, 1518), and developed it in the *Heidelberg Disputation* to its full extent. *Theologia crucis* became more of a backdrop in his later works; however, the theme of the cross played a central role in

---

<sup>326</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, 1999, 143

<sup>327</sup> Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 37. They later spread the Reformation in Strassburg, Württemberg, and Nördlingen, respectively.

his thought towards the end of his works. The symbolism of Luther Rose, a red heart with a black cross at the center, reminding us that the righteous live by faith in Christ the Crucified,<sup>328</sup> reinforces that *the cross is at the very heart of his theology*. Luther made a significant departure from late medieval spirituality of the cross and generated the marrow of his thought: *theologia crucis*.<sup>329</sup> Influenced by Augustine, Luther handled his Christology in a platonic, dichotomous way, which manifested Christ's absolute glory and His absolute humility united on the cross, where Christ reveals Himself as the "Ladder to heaven" for us to know God and to be saved.<sup>330</sup> To Luther, when God the Father exalted Christ above all things when He cast Him down below all things, His very Passion was a "Passover," that is, a passing over to the highest glory.<sup>331</sup> "When dying, he lives! When suffering, he rejoices! When falling, he rises up! When loaded with the greatest ignominy, he enjoys the highest glory and honor!"<sup>332</sup>

### 3.4.1 The Ugliness

The ugliness of the cross looks like the weakness of God to men; ironically, manifesting, first *the glory of God's holiness and righteousness against sin and good works*, second *the glory of the perfect love of the Son God and of the Father God*. As 1 Cor. 1:25 says, the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. He chose to make the very nature of God nothing, but took a poor human form in the likeness of sinful flesh for the redemption of sin, so that men can be justified, and become strong and rich in Christ,

---

<sup>328</sup> Luther, *Meaning of Luther rose*, <https://www.faithlutheranconring.org/meaning-of-luther-rose> (accessed on December 12, 2021)

<sup>329</sup> Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, 1999, 154

<sup>330</sup> Yeung, *The Study of Martin Luther's Theology*, 2009, 137

<sup>331</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, vol. 29, 1999, 127.

<sup>332</sup> Luther, *Select Works of Martin Luther: An Offering to the Church of God in "The Last Days,"* 1826, 347

no longer being enslaved to sin (Phil. 2:6-7; Rom. 8:3, 30). This is the story of the cross, what God has done for us. Luther pointed out that, Christians are *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and a sinner); thus, we need to confess our sins in our life-time until Christ's return.<sup>333</sup>

The ugliness of the cross first exposes ***God's attack on the old sinner and the sinner's theology***, revealing the wrath of God and His judgment towards sin and sinners. The cross is not quiescent or dead, but is the action of God upon us, attacking the best we have to offer (our story of glory), not the worst. Luther first attacked human works, the outward being, as stated in theses 1-12 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.<sup>334</sup> Starting with the shocking fact that the divine law could not save man, but rather hindered him (Rom. 7), and neither the attractive and good works of man could save him (Isa. 64:4), Luther pointed out that the works of God, in contrast, always seemed unattractive and appeared evil. But such ugliness of His works (like the cross and the sufferings) was really eternal merit, by making us humble and thoroughly despaired, so that He might exalt us in His mercy, giving us true hope, for *humility and fear of God are our entire merit*.<sup>335</sup> This is the very heart of *theologia crucis*, which constantly seeks to “uncover and expose the ways in which sinners hide their perfidy behind pious facades”.<sup>336</sup> This explains why *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae* are always locked in deadly combat. The theologians of the cross attack human works, the way of law to salvation, which was the way of the theologians of glory. To Luther, the works of the law are used by sinners as a defense against the very

---

<sup>333</sup> Cooper & Lohrmann, *Introduction to 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles*, 2016, xlvi

<sup>334</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 21

<sup>335</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 44-45

<sup>336</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 4, 12, 17

unconditionality of the gift of grace. “A human work, no matter how good, is deadly sin because it in actual fact entices us away from ‘naked trust in the mercy of God’ to a trust in self.”<sup>337</sup> Luther deepened the concept of mortal sin here. The theologians of the cross must be like the fact of the cross, being killed and made alive by the cross alone as the story of the Son of God.

***Alien Work vs Proper Work of God:*** However, what a strange attack — the Son of God to suffer and die at sinners’ hands! All the curses had been poured down on His beloved innocent Son, in order to grant salvation as the free gift of God for sinners (Rom. 6:23). Luther called it God’s “alien work.” The work of God is twofold, namely proper and alien. God’s alien work is the suffering of Christ and sufferings in Christ, the crucifixion of the former man and the mortification of the old Adam. God’s proper work, however, is the resurrection of Christ, justification in the Spirit, and the vivification of the new man. As Rom. 4:25 says, “Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification.”<sup>338</sup>

Luther taught Christ’s followers the proper way to ***contemplate Christ’s passion:***

They contemplate Christ’s passion aright who view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience. This terror must be felt as you witness the stern wrath and the unchanging earnestness with which God looks upon sin and sinners, so much so that he was unwilling to release sinners even for His only and dearest Son without His payment of the severest penalty for them. Thus, he says in Isaiah 53 :8, “I have chastised Him for the transgressions of my people.” *If the dearest Child is punished thus, what will be the fate of sinners?* It must be an inexpressible and unbearable earnestness that *forces such a great and infinite person to suffer and die to appease it.* And if you seriously consider that it is God’s very own Son, the eternal Wisdom of the Father, who suffers, you will be terrified indeed. The more you think about it, the more intensely will you be frightened.”<sup>339</sup>

---

<sup>337</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 37

<sup>338</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 51: Sermons I*, 1999, 19

<sup>339</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 42: Devotional Writings I*, 1999, 8-9

The first step is to truly recognize how deep our sin is, causing God's very own Son to be broken on the cross for you: "When you see the nails piercing Christ's hands, you can be certain that it is your work. When you behold His crown of thorns, you may rest assured that these are your evil thoughts, etc."<sup>340</sup> Luther asked if the dearest Child of God was punished and suffered thus, what the fate of sinners would be. Unless we are frightened because of the stern wrath of God, we are not ready for grace.

Paradoxically, the more we realize the ugliness of the cross, the more we know *the beauty of the perfect love and goodness of Christ's heart*. The second step is that passing beyond Christ's suffering, we can feel "the heart beats of Christ with such love" for us and be filled with love for Him, and our faith will be strengthened. Furthermore, rising beyond Christ's heart, we can see the divine and eternal love in God the Father's heart for His betrayed children and get close to the Father through the Son. It was not in His might and wisdom but in His kindness and love (John 3:16) that we get to know God and be truly born anew: "We know God aright when we grasp Him not in His might or wisdom (for then He proves terrifying), but in His kindness and love. Then faith and confidence are able to exist, and then man is truly born anew in God."<sup>341</sup> Such faith and confidence are no more in self. *Theologia gloriae* is to know God through God's eternal power and divine nature from the philosophical perspective, while *theologia crucis* is to know God through the suffering God, who was hidden on the cross. To Luther, a proper grasp of the Gospel is "of the overwhelming goodness of God... which no heart could adequately fathom or marvel at," "the great fire of the love of God for us," "a joyful, good and comforting 'message.'"<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>340</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 42: Devotional Writings I*, 1999, 9

<sup>341</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 42: Devotional Writings I*, 1999, 13

<sup>342</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1999, 119-120

Luther gained insight from Scripture and his personal spiritual torment, that the ugliness of the cross, baring “the image of death, of sin and of hell” of the Crucified One, who endured and overcame the darkness of sin, of death and of hell by the power of His love, will enable us “to regard death from the viewpoint of life, sin from that of grace, hell from that of heaven.”<sup>343</sup> The sign and image will make us victorious over sin, death and hell, like the Crucified One — as He lives, we will live, even if we die.<sup>344</sup>

### 3.4.2 The Foolishness

The foolishness of the cross portraying a dead human form, reveals *the glory of God’s wisdom against human wisdom*. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, thus the cross kills all human pride leaving no space for human glory; but manifests Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1Cor. 1:24-25). Luther lived his life under such light of the cross and expressed this in his last written words, “*We are beggars: this is true.*”

The foolishness of the cross exposes God’s other attack: *the attack on human will and wisdom*. Luther first attacked human works, the outward being, and then attacked the inner being, on the question of human will as stated in theses 13-18, and of human wisdom in theses 19-24.<sup>345</sup> To Luther, the will is captive and subject to sin after the fall, and free will exists in name only; it is not free except to do evil, according to John 8:34, 36 and Augustine.<sup>346</sup> He opposed the position of scholastic theologians who held that man could obtain grace by doing what was in him as he could, because in this case, he sinned and seek himself in everything. He placed himself as the center of everything because he believed

---

<sup>343</sup> WA 2:691.25f; WA 2:688.35f

<sup>344</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 2008, 6

<sup>345</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 49-51

<sup>346</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 48-49

that he had the ability to save himself. Luther claimed, “if he should suppose that through sin he would become worthy of or prepared for grace, he would add haughty arrogance to his sin and not believe that sin is sin and evil is evil, which is an exceedingly great sin.”<sup>347</sup> He concluded that one must utterly despair of his own strength before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ who is our salvation, life and resurrection. This is the wisdom of God that He makes a person a despaired sinner so that He may make him righteous. We tend to choose a good religion or a good church, or even being a nice person like Christ according to our will. However, as for salvation, the message that Luther delivered based on the cross itself, is that we do not choose Him but that He chooses us (John 15:16). The cross stands with no possibility of free will, but must be a death and a resurrection, as the wisdom and the power of God.

Then, Luther turned to *attack human wisdom* in thesis 22, “That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened,” since “Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.” (Thesis 24)<sup>348</sup> To Luther, it was not through human wisdom or speculation on such invisible things as God’s wisdom, power and works that God’s revelation was made known. It was made known in the weakness and scandal of the cross of Christ, namely, the “back” and visible things of God. He asserted that a true theologian is the theologian of the cross who operates in the latter way; in contrast, the theologian of the glory who operates in the former way, does not deserve to be called a theologian. As Moses saw the “back” of God

---

<sup>347</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 50-52

<sup>348</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 40-41

in Exo. 33, Luther explained that the “back” of God was placed in opposition to the invisible, that is, His human nature, weakness, foolishness visible on the cross, as the apostle in 1 Cor. 1:25, called them the weakness and folly of God.<sup>349</sup> When Philip asked Jesus, “Show us the Father,” (John 14:8), to Luther, this was the theology of glory. Stopping him seeking God elsewhere, Christ led him to Himself, “Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) True theology and knowledge of God are in the crucified Christ (John 14:6).<sup>350</sup> To Luther, God can be found only in the suffering and the cross. The theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is, for he is faithful to the Word of the cross. The theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil, for he does not know God hidden in the suffering of Christ, and prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, thus, in general, good to evil. Luther actually pointed out here that Rome and the scholastics were the enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), for they hated the cross and suffering but loved works and the glory of works. In contrast, “the friends of the cross said that the cross was good and works were evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified”.

*The Theologian of Glory vs the Theologian of the Cross:* By nature, we are born as the theologians of glory who refuse suffering and the cross, but crave for glory that is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor for rule satisfied by power and authority, nor for praise satisfied by praise, nor for success satisfied by success, and so on, as Christ says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.” (John 4:13) To Luther, for a

---

<sup>349</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 52

<sup>350</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 53

person to be the theologian of the cross, he must first be deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's; thus, like a beggar, he turns from himself to seek God for grace through faith in Christ alone without works.<sup>351</sup> His works contributed nothing to justification, but were the fruit of it.

### 3.4.3 The Suffering

The suffering of the cross appearing in the humble form of a servant, reveals the *glory of God's way against the human way to glory*, and the *glory of God's sovereignty in all kinds of sufferings on earth*. Luther offered the highest honor to God, "**Let God be God.**"<sup>352</sup>

The suffering of the cross finally manifests *two amazing ways* to us. One is the way to righteousness by faith in Christ alone, the other is the love of God flowing forth and bestowing good all the way from the cross. From theses 1-24 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, we already find that the way of glory by the law, human works, human will, or human wisdom offers no hope for righteousness, for "*hope does not grow out of merits, but out of suffering which destroys merits*".<sup>353</sup> It is in the final part of the theological theses 25-28, that the way of God is revealed to us, that is, Christ, who "is just and has fulfilled all the commands of God, wherefore we also fulfil everything through Him since He was made ours through faith."<sup>354</sup> Hence grace and faith are infused without our works, for Christ had done all that we should do, to obey all the Law and submit to God's will. Our justification

---

<sup>351</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 53-54

<sup>352</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, 1999, 206; *Luther's works, vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 471; *Luther's works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1999, 72; *Luther's works, vol. 42: Devotional Writings I*, 1999, 105

<sup>353</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 10. *The Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, thesis 25

<sup>354</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 56

by faith in Christ is sufficient to us. Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). Furthermore, the grace of God that makes justice abound through Christ, causes us to be pleased with the law.<sup>355</sup> Since *Christ lives in us* through faith, He arouses us to do good works through that living faith in His work, for the works which He did, are the fulfilment of the commands of God given us through faith.<sup>356</sup> By the grace of Christ's acting work in us, our accomplished work is pleasing to God.

The suffering of the cross is *the fountain of God's sovereign love*, which has the power to *create* new life and new love in sinners, conquers sin, death and evil, heals the sick and the broken, and strengthens the weak and the small. "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." (Thesis 28)<sup>357</sup> God's love "which lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong."<sup>358</sup> Looking upon the cross, we can find true hope and assurance that cannot be found inside ourselves or in our works, because grace is external to ourselves, God's sovereign love in Christ that was ultimately manifested by the cross.

For Luther, "The cross *alone* is our theology."<sup>359</sup> The suffering of the cross is *the way of God to glory*, the most precious treasure of all that the theologian of the cross teaches and embraces:

---

<sup>355</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 14

<sup>356</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 56-57

<sup>357</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 57

<sup>358</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 57

<sup>359</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 7

A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasure of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology Himself has consecrated and blessed. He accomplished this by the touch of His most holy flesh, but also by the embrace of His exceedingly holy and divine will, and He has left these relics here to be kissed, sought after, and embraced.<sup>360</sup>

The suffering of Christ *ensures the certainty of our salvation*. There is no suffering in our life that God did not already win, for the scars of Christ are our biggest guarantee and our greatest security. Christ has overcome the sin, death and the power of Satan, showing the great mercy and glory of God on the cross. The cross draws us into itself so that we become participants in the story, because we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). If God could turn the greatest evil of the cross into the greatest blessing and glory, He can also transform the evils in human history, no matter how big or small they are, from individual tragedies to national disasters, to accomplish the ultimate goal of His goodness.<sup>361</sup> The cross assures us of God's goodness, so that we can praise God in all our circumstances. Suffering becomes an opportunity for us to suffer together with Christ, to share His life and death, to be more closely united with Him. Just as Christ was crucified so we also are crucified with Him. The cross makes us part of its story.<sup>362</sup> The cross becomes our story, as Paul says in Gal. 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." The more we go through trials in our lives, the more we will experience Christ's victory and see God's revelation.

---

<sup>360</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, 1999, 225

<sup>361</sup> Trueman, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, [https://www.opc.org/new\\_horizons/NH05/10b.html](https://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH05/10b.html) (accessed on March 20, 2021)

<sup>362</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, 1997, 7

By faith, we know that there will be God's great blessing after the sufferings. This is a great consolation and strength to the church in the midst of persecution and tribulation. For those Christians suffering under many different sorts of persecutions in Muslim countries, communist countries or India, the Word of the cross is a message of hope, an assurance that in the worst of circumstances, God is sovereign. He knows, He sees, He controls, and He has already won. There is no affliction that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord.