

## **Chapter Four: The Significance of the Glory of Christ in Martin Luther's Thought from the Late Medieval Perspective**

On October 31st 2017, to mark the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the Lutheran church and the Catholic church issued a joint statement, giving thanks for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation as a result of the Ecumenical Movement starting in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>363</sup> Luther, once condemned a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church, was praised as a great reformer. However, today many still tend to think of the Reformation merely as an innovation of an old tradition or a positive force to weed out corruption. We also live in a post-modern pluralistic world which increasingly disparages authority and doctrine. It is definitely significant for us to stress that the nature and first significance of the Reformation was the reformation of Christian doctrine by returning to the ancient path of the good way (Jer. 6:16). Though the reformation of morals and the renewal of spirituality were, in themselves of importance, they were of secondary significance. The spirit of the Reformation that moved the reformers should be kept alive to renew our church today, that we may be delivered from the effects of secularization and liberalism. Sound doctrine gives glory solely to God and nothing at all to men. Luther realized the danger that true doctrine, that Satan could not endure, had gradually become corrupted in his time. Today Satan is still tempting the church away from sound doctrine of God by cutting or adding more to it as he did before. The key for the survival and the revival of the church and for conquering evil is to preach the truth, that is, Christ and His Word (Rom.10:17, Rev.12:11).

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<sup>363</sup> Vatican, *Catholics and Lutherans mark 500th anniversary of Reformation*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2017-10/catholics-and-lutherans-mark-500th-anniversary-of-reformation.html> (accessed on Nov. 12, 2021)

## 4.1 Sources and Methods

*The Significances of Luther's Principle of Sola Scriptura:* Luther's principle of *Sola Scriptura* attributes the greatest glory to God the Father as much as to Christ the Son, for Christ is the heart of Scripture, and Scripture is the heart of Christian doctrine. The most fundamental fight between Luther and Rome was in the source of God's revelation. The heart of the problems is who is the highest authority of the church. Luther stood firm on *Sola Scriptura*, as the only source of the infallible, sufficient, inspired Word of God (one single-source theory of doctrine) and the ultimate authority of the church. His stand was against Rome which adopted the dual-source theory of doctrine where the pope and tradition became the ultimate authority. Since the Middle Ages, Rome has professed the belief in the authority and inspiration of the Sacred Book, not like the modern liberal theology which denies the inspiration and authority of Scripture. To Rome, both tradition and Scripture are accepted and venerated with the same level of loyalty and reverence. This dual-source theory of doctrine has provided fundamental support for papal primacy of the Catholic church. Luther did not oppose authority and tradition, but opposed the authority of the Catholic church and the pope as being higher than the authority of Scripture. He challenged their unbiblical teachings, for he believed that his doctrines were in harmony with the church fathers and canon law. In fact, neither the authority of men, nor his own life was of his true concern, but it was God and His Word and the souls of Christ's flock that he was concerned about. What he, a simple monk at that time (being excommunicated by Rome a few months prior), stated humbly and solemnly for the first time at the Diet of Worms when he appeared to defend his teaching and was immediately pressed to recant his works, was that "This touches **God and His Word**. This affects the salvation of *souls*."

Of this *Christ* said, ‘He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father.’ *To say too little or too much* would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over.”<sup>364</sup>

The Word of God in Luther’s heart was put in the supreme position right next to God Himself. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once commented that faith in the authority of Scripture was the most urgent need for the church and for the world of his time, for losing such faith was the first factor that contributed to the decline of preaching.<sup>365</sup> This is still very true for us today. Luther committed his faith and life wholly to the Word which was closely associated with his spiritual struggles and experience with the living Word. He elevated preaching the Word as central to the church liturgy and as the sure mark of a true church. Luther went through many storms in his life. First, the lightning in the thunderstorm that struck one day in 1505 completely changed the life of young Luther. Soon after, going through spiritual storms of *Anfechtung* and struggling for years with the concepts of an angry God the Holy Judge, the corrupted self the weak sinner, and the roaring of Satan the evil accuser for years, he met another kind of “lightning” — the word of “the righteousness of God” in Rom. 1:17. This eventually shaped his teachings, becoming the “lightning of the Word” which shed light in the late medieval world, and unleashed the force that ended the Middle Ages and ushered in the modern era. Aquinas and the medieval scholastics might observe and perceive the lightning and thunder of God’s creation to know God through His invisible eternal power and divine nature (Rom. 1:20, Psalm 19:1, 29:3-4) and fell into the error of the theology of glory by human reason; whereas Luther listened to and understood the sound of the low whisper that once *spoke* to Elijah in the mount of God after a great and powerful wind, an earthquake and a fire (1 Kings 19:12), that is, the words of God that

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<sup>364</sup> Rusten, *The complete book of when & where in the Bible and throughout history*, 2005, 219

<sup>365</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 2015, 15-19

revealed His will for men. The light of nature is not sufficient to show the knowledge of God and of His will necessary for salvation. In fact, without the light of revelation through the Word of God, men cannot truly understand the light of nature. Holy Scripture is *most necessary* for proclaiming the truth and the way of life, building Christ's church/people against the corruptions from sin, the world and the devil, and advancing Christ's Kingdom of glory. True theology is *theocentric* theology driven from the Holy Scripture, that is, the living Word breathed out by God for His *divine glory* and for our wisdom for salvation.

Scripture is not only most necessary, but also *sufficient* and *supreme*. As Luther said, "To say too little or too much would be dangerous," taking from the Word or adding to it in the late medieval tradition, indeed proved to be dangerous for the salvation of souls. Roman teachings the doctrine, commandments and tradition of men, had made void the Word of God and their worship (Matt. 15:6, 9). Luther's faith in Christ and His Word led him to defend the proposition publicly that the pope was not the head of the church by divine right based on Scripture, but Christ through His sacred Word should rule. It should not that the church judge Scripture, but the church itself should be grounded on Scripture and judged by it. The authority of Scripture is not from the church, but from God the Father and Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit, as the primary Author and Speaker<sup>366</sup> — the living God Himself *spoke* to His apostles and prophets (Heb. 1:1-2, Eph. 2:20, 3:5), not through any agent like an angel (Islam, Mormonism), guardian (Buddhism, Confucianism, Falun Kong), or witness (Jehovah's Witness). Scripture is the foundation of Canon Law and true doctrine. All doctrines must be tested and judged by Scripture. Therefore, Luther and the

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<sup>366</sup> In the OT, the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face (Ex. 33:11, Nu. 12:8, Dt. 5:4, 34:10) and the words came to His prophets from the Lord (Sameul, Isaiah, Jeremah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea...); in the NT, Jesus said to His apostles ("truly, truly, I say to you..."), and the Holy Spirit spoke to the apostles and His church (Act. 9:29, 10:19, 13:2, 21:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Cor. 2:13; Rev. 2-3, 14:13, 22:17).

reformers strove for the exaltation of Christ and His Word through replacing the wrong authority in the late medieval church with the right authority of Christ and His Word in the Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* became the first principle of the Reformation because the doctrine of revelation functioned a foundation for the other doctrines. Roman doctrines of revelation and papal primacy were at the heart of the problems of Roman doctrine and the church. They are still the heart of the problems today when considering the unity of Protestant and Roman Catholic Church.

Luther's principle of *Sola Scriptura*, broke the medieval pattern of understanding Scripture in the overall normative context of church "tradition" which had developed the "rule of faith" for many practices and generated legalism, formalism and ritualism, to be replaced by true repentance, faith and freedom in Christ. *Sola Scriptura* declares that Scripture is the final authority in interpretation, this freeing Scripture from subjection to church tradition.<sup>367</sup> When Luther found that the voice of God had almost vanished from public worship which was characterized by performances of music, Latin reading, Eucharist and unbiblical preaching, he reformed the church liturgy and brought the Word of God back to the center of church services. No matter the music ("preaching in sounds"),<sup>368</sup> sermons, or sacraments, all of these were the external manifestations of the Word, the Gospel of Christ proclaimed. Luther exalted the power of the Word, and made preaching the Word the very heart of a true church and the very foundation and instrument of reformation. Luther reversed the general view of public worship. The idea was not that men served God in the worship as good works offered to God so to please Him (Rome in

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<sup>367</sup> Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, 1999, 114

<sup>368</sup> Kartawidjaja, *Music in Martin Luther's Theology*, 2021, 81-91

fact, made worship the Law according to its doctrine of merits), but that God Himself served and benefited His people by bestowing His gracious gifts through His Word and sacraments. Thus, it is called God's divine service where *God acts*, to *speak* to His people, to reveal and forgive sins, and to feed the souls with His living water through the Word, visibly manifesting what Jesus said, "Just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28) Worship is the Gospel, and Christ is the center and Immanuel granting grace of life and salvation. God's people do not only play a passive role in the service, by mainly listening and receiving the grace and love of God in this spiritual banquet, but also meet the Word of creation and of incarnation, and respond to Him with faith from His Word and Spirit by giving prayers, thanks and glory to Him and by witnessing what we believe. Luther stressed God's descent in a way of Christ-centeredness, different from the worships and songs in our age that tend to subjectively feel the presence of God in a human-centered way. What we sing does not only express thanks and praises, but also shapes what we believe. The liturgy, songs, and preaching should lead us turning to the external and objective Word of God, looking upon the cross, the only place where we can find assurance and hope. Grace is from outside, given to us in the promises of the Word.

***The Significances of Luther's Hermeneutic Principles:*** Luther turned from the scholastic four-fold exegesis of his time to the historical-Christological exegesis, to deliver clear, precise, and applicable messages to his audiences. A willing captive of the Word and being alert to spiritual warfare, Luther committed himself to the living Word of God as the power of God, Christ as the very heart and exaltation of his message, and the cross as the only way of doing theology and Christian living. Rejecting the speculation of medieval

scholastic theology apart from Scripture, he followed “*the rule of simple faith*” (the principle of simplicity) in professed Word of God to acknowledge the incomprehensibility of God. He warned people not to engage in speculative discussions that might bring error to the Word of God. Reformed theologians should take note of this cautionary approach when trying to explore deeper and deeper the mystery of God’s Word and works. Luther kept his *biblical-Christocentric* interpretation and applied the significance of salvation and the cross to Christian life, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 10:5, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” His hermeneutical principle that *Scripture itself is its interpretation*, also functions against the authority of Rome that limited the translation of Scripture to Latin rather than other languages. Rome limited the translation so to prevent personal mis-interpretation of Scripture and heresy, however, it also limited the proclamation of the Word and the Gospel to the whole world, and led to many teachings and traditions of Rome which departed from Scripture. For Luther, Christ came and brought the clearest light to *the external perspicuity (claritas) of Holy Scripture* through the ministry of the Word, and to *the internal perspicuity of Holy Scripture* through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the heart. In his lifetime, Luther translated Scripture into German and gave it back to God’s people as God’s holy priesthood. When Luther found that the ecclesiastical hierarchy hindered rather than helped the believer in his personal, direct approach to God, he applied another fundamental principle of the Reformation which came from Scripture: the universal priesthood of believers. Since Scripture possesses clarity in itself, lay people can read and understand Scripture, which is the true treasure of the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God. Luther also abandoned the monastic spiritual practice of meeting God subjectively,

inwardly, and turned to the truth of Scripture objectively, outwardly. Since God is present in His Word, opening the Bible and reading it is the way to approach God directly in person and listen to His speaking through His Word by faith. True piety is to love God and His Word and to live out the Gospel among one's neighbors. Luther's approach is rather simple and direct, to faithfully engage with the Word in both personal and ecclesiastical matters, in contrast to the church of today looking for new and attracting way to draw audiences such as the miraculous practice of spiritual gifts. The temptation is always the "need" for something else like miracles and wisdom that the pagans seek (1 Cor. 1:22) more than God's Word.

*The Challenge of Our Time*, is to avoid the pitfall of "being entertained to death" where we are surrounded with all kinds of commercial marketing orientated programs and information through the media and the internet. There is no middle ground for us. We are either shaped by the Word of God, or shaped and subverted by the world. In fact, we have already been shaped by the environment in which we grew up, including our spiritual appetite. Only the Word of God can regenerate and reshape us through the work of the Holy Spirit. We should confess that we often look down on the Word, lacking sensitivity, or with no sensitivity, or even despising it. For Luther, the Word has the creative power that can smash the illusion created by the lie of the ancient snake and bring us back to the reality created by the Word. As Jesus lay His confidence completely in the power of the Word while facing the full force of Satanic temptations in the wilderness in the weakness of His incarnate state, Luther claimed in his song "A Mighty Fortress" ("just as that *haughty*



*beggar* Dr. Luther sings so proudly and boldly in those words of his hymn”), “One *little* word shall fell him.”<sup>369</sup> We should rest our confidence there, too.

***The Significances of Luther’s Doctrine of the Word of God:*** Luther’s doctrine of the Word is rooted in the fact that the Word is the power of God (Rom. 1:16), and thus is powerful and profound — this affirmation permeates all of his works. The emphasis on the Word not only gives the glory to God as a Trinity, but also brings assurance in faith and freedom in conscience to men. Taking note of God’s power in His works through His Word, we are given full assurance concerning all the promises in His Word. It is the art of Luther’s preaching that relates the Word and the power of God to our faith and life. Here is a vivid example in his lecture on Genesis:

Since God is able to bring forth from the water the heaven and the stars, the size of which either equals or surpasses that of the earth; likewise, since He is able out of a droplet of water to create sun and moon, could He not also defend my body against enemies and Satan or, after it has been placed in the grave, revive it for a new life? Therefore, we must take note of God’s power that we may be completely without doubt about the things which God promises in His Word. Here full assurance is given concerning all His promises; nothing is either so difficult or so impossible that He could not bring it about by His Word. The heaven, the earth, the sea, and whatever is in them prove that this is true.<sup>370</sup>

Luther placed ***the living Word of God back at the center of all things***, especially in God’s church and people, and gave it afresh to the world. The Word creates, defines, preserves and reigns in all things. All things and their meanings and purposes are determined by the Word, on which we should rest our world-view as the children of God. The Word is also the powerful weapon to conquer evil, when Satan, the father of liars, uses his words to attack God’s words. Spiritual warfare in all ages is the warfare of the words of God and the words of Satan. Sometimes, Satan mimics the power of God’s words in

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<sup>369</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, 1999, 186

<sup>370</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis*, 1999, 49

very cunning words to confuse people, such as the mysteries in the New Thought movement (positive thinking, etc.) and the New Age movement. At other times, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, such as in the modern theology where biblical terms such as the Kingdom of God, Gospel, Messiah, etc., have their original meanings replaced with different concepts (demythologization, etc.). These false doctrines take away the life and the power of the Gospel, like the unbiblical doctrines of the late Middle Ages. In the Reformation, Luther revitalized Christianity by bringing back the biblical doctrines which had in them the promise and potency of life in them at the Reformation. He exalted the entire Scripture as the Word which God speaks to us, as powerfully and omnipotently as He spoke at the beginning of the world to bring all things into being from nothing, as effectively as Jesus spoke on earth (Luke 10:16). Jesus claims, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63b) The revealed Scripture is the Word of Christ, the second person of the Godhead. In God’s time, the Word of God from eternity was incarnate and became the Son of man, Jesus Christ who has two natures: fully God and fully man. When God spoke to men (Heb. 1:1), the breathed-out words of God were written down in human writing as Holy Scripture through the inspiring and preserving work of the Holy Spirit (called “inscripturation”).<sup>371</sup> Neither does the fact that the confession of Scripture “*is* the Word of God” rob its humanness, nor does God’s speaking to us through the words of Scripture “deify” these human words. In reformed theology, this powerful and beautiful nature of Scripture containing the divinity and humanity related to its content and form, is described as “theanthropic.” Scripture is like the incarnate Christ, in which the Word of God took a servant-form by the work of the Holy Spirit and has entered this fallen

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<sup>371</sup> Gaffin, *God’s Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavink on the Doctrine of Scripture*, 2013, 13-33

world to fulfill its work of salvation. Like Christ, Scripture has participated in human life and history, and has been judged and accused. Scripture has sometimes been copied with mistakes by men, which reflects its humanity; and yet men were only the agent of the Holy Spirit to write down the words. The Holy Spirit is the first Author of the Bible which autography was inerrant. As Christ, “The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45), being “Lord and Teacher” in a deep and exalted manner, yet who washed the feet of His disciples; this exaltedness does not nullify the service but is manifested in this humility (John 13:12–14). In the same way, *Scripture is a great servant with authority and exaltedness*.<sup>372</sup> Both Luther and Calvin fully recognized the divine nature of Scripture, as the early church recognized Scripture “to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture.”<sup>373</sup> Only the Holy Spirit, the first Author of the Sacred Bible, reveals it in the heart of God’s children to obtain its full authority as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.

*The Epistemology of Reformed Theology*, summarized by Cornelius Van Til: “Science, philosophy and theology find their intelligible contact only on the presupposition of *the self-revelation of God in Christ — through Scripture understood properly by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>374</sup> Only if we begin with *the self-identifying Christ (or self-authenticating Christ)*, can we bring “the ‘facts’ of the space-time world into intelligible relation to the ‘laws’ of this world.” God is not *exlex* (outside the law), but self-

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<sup>372</sup> Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 1975, 196

<sup>373</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, 2011, 74-76. “But I repeat, the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of Himself in His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”

<sup>374</sup> Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 1969, iii

contained; He is the Law of all laws. The end of the law and of history is Christ (Rom. 10:4, Rev. 22:13), in Whom there is the law of the Holy Spirit of life which has set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Van Til distinguished the most basic Christian faith from other religions by a two-layer theory of reality: being that of God's being as self-contained, and created being as dependent upon Him,<sup>375</sup> just as Luther said that "Let God be God, let sin be sin, let holiness be holiness, let everything go and stay where it pleases." Luther's doctrine of the Word and his theology of the cross reveal that his thought is significantly distinct from scholastic theology which relied on human rational thinking that had led men away from Christ-centeredness and aimed at the rational autonomy and self-sufficiency in theology. Separating nature from grace through his synthesis of theology and philosophy, Aquinas set "the natural man" free from "the supernatural grace"; he may be the real father of liberalism. Frame pointed out well the problems of medieval philosophy:

Although the medievals critically analyzed Greek philosophy in its details, they never fully broke away from its *commitment to human autonomy and its attempt to contain divine transcendence within a form-matter scheme*. Medieval philosophers did seek to do justice to God's grace, but (especially with Thomas Aquinas) they regarded the realm of grace not as God's lordship directing all of life, but as a supplement to a realm of nature, which in turn was subject to an autonomous natural reason.<sup>376</sup>

Surrounded by various secular postmodern philosophies and highly academic thought, Christian theologians face even more challenges and temptations to compromise with the concept of human autonomy. Reformation theologians are needed to bring a more radically biblical way of thinking to face the new conditions today that the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thought becomes more evident. As Frame said,

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<sup>375</sup> Van Til & Edgar, *Christian apologetics*, 2003, 9

<sup>376</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 2015, 160, 1

spiritual warfare in philosophy as the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview, continues down through the ages.

***The Crisis of Very Low View of the Bible:*** As for us today after the Enlightenment, the development of *biblical criticism independent of Scripture* has worsened people's view on the Bible more than any era before, and shaken the foundation of the Christian church. Calvin would have answered this, "As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men! For they mock the Holy Spirit when they ask: Who can convince us that these writings came from God?"<sup>377</sup> Today we do need to re-recognize the Scripture and the authority and power of the Word of God, and listen to the voice of God that has its own accent and own sound, which is as powerful as the sound of many waters, as Berkouwer describes,

This voice has its own accent and its own sound. The voice of the Lord is so powerful that it breaks the cedars of Lebanon (Ps. 29:5); it is full of majesty (Ps. 29:4); it is the wondrous voice that Israel heard out of the midst of the darkness (Deut. 5:22), the voice of the Almighty (Ezek. 1:28) falling from heaven (Dan. 4:31) like the sound of many waters (Ezek. 43:2). Thinking about God's speaking in and through the words of men should bring to mind the many biblical expressions for the voice of God. It seems as if we pass from the truly spectacular, exalted, and majestic "voice of God" to the ordinary and simple "word of men" of Holy Scripture. It is possible here to forget the glory of God, the sound of many waters, when one is intensely busy with the phenomenon of human writing that is so familiar to us.<sup>378</sup>

***Conclusions:*** Therefore, departing from the late medieval dual-source theory of doctrine and scholastic methods, Luther established the first principle of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, deepened the doctrine of the Word and turned his hermeneutics to biblical and Christological centeredness. To Luther, Scripture is not only the ultimate authority of all things, but also the powerful Word of God that creates, determines, sustains and

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<sup>377</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, 2011, 75

<sup>378</sup> Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 1975, 195-196

achieves all things. “Let God be God,” and “let the Word of God be the Word of God,” would have been what Luther would say to us today. As reformed people, we may also recall the statement of Paul: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” (1 Cor. 8:1)

## **4.2 Christ in His Person**

### **4.2.1 The Word**

It is very central in Luther’s thought that Christ as the Word and the Son of God is the *reality* of God’s revelation. Luther honored and addressed Christ as the Word of God, the second person in the Godhead in a very beautiful and glorious way, beginning with his lectures on the Psalms and Paul’s letters to the end of his sermons and works. Christ is not only the center, toward which the prophets and apostles and the whole of salvation history point, but also the beginning and the end toward which the history of the world points:

(1) Creation: From all eternity the Word is as a Speech, a Thought, a Conversation and the spoken Wisdom revealing the divine heart of God the Father, and is the real Creator of all realities, defining and revealing all realities;

(2) Re-creation and Revelation: Being the incarnate Word, the Word is the Fountain and Origin of life, the true Light and eternal Life of all men, the Truth and the glorious Message of God’s Gospel to all the faithful, giving new life and re-creating new realities in the fallen world, and manifesting the whole divine nature and the brightness of the glory and image of God;

(3) Consummation: To the end time, the Word is the Promise of God ultimately leading toward the final reality of glorification of the faithful and of the whole cosmos — to unite all things in Him as a plan for fulfilment according to the eternal purpose that God has realized in Him, to the praise of His glory (Eph.1:10, 3:11).

For Luther, using Platonic terms, Christ as the Word is the central idea which gives meaning to all realities; He is indeed what reality means — “all thing were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:16b-17).” Lienhard commented:

One of the central affirmations of Luther, is that Christ offers Himself to us by the Word, with the salvation bound to His person, which means a sure sovereignty of Christ over the church which does not dispose of salvation, but only bears witness to it. It also means that the reformer separates himself from all kinds of attempts at mystical union without *the Word as exterior means*.<sup>379</sup>

By faith, Luther *grasped both Christ and His Word (as exterior means)* as a wonderful union. Abraham Kuyper also observed and described this union: the Word of God came to us in two ways, one was in the manger, the Word became our Immanuel in life; the other was in the Bible, the Word became our Immanuel in mind. These two ways of the revelation of the Word belong to each other, just as our life and our mind belong to each other. These two mysteries are parallel, and the mystery of Scripture lays in the union of both factors.<sup>380</sup> Both incarnation and inscripturation were the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in a humble way, as Christ says, His words are life and spirit. The difference is their essence. When one day we see the glorious image of Christ face by face, the exterior means of Scripture will pass away. For now, we need to grasp both faithfully, just as Luther grounded his thought on the Word as the exterior means of conveying the truth and followed Christ as the Way and the Truth and the Life. His Word is a sharp double-edged sword (Rev. 1:16), which granted Luther both a solid foundation and a living and active weapon (Heb. 4:12) to fight against the late medieval thoughts of mystical spirituality and

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<sup>379</sup> Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 1982, 141-142

<sup>380</sup> Gaffin, *God's Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavink on the Doctrine of Scripture*, 2013, 13-33, 55-57

scholastic speculations. He was able to make a significant departure from the late medieval spirituality of the cross to the marrow of his thought on *theologia crucis*. He also opposed the medieval scholastic philosophical interpretation which led away from the true meaning of the Gospel. Rather, the incarnate Word to us is “not to treat of the divine, almighty, eternal Word of God nor talk of it except in terms of *the flesh and blood which sojourned here on earth*” (Luther’s small Catechism is an outstanding example of this).<sup>381</sup> We do not need to run after Him and speculate as did the followers of the philosophers, who speculated how the divine Word had illuminated the reasoning powers of men and thus to emphasize the light of reason. For Luther, these philosophical thoughts lead us away from Christ into ourselves, whereas the evangelist, the author of the Gospel, wants to lead us away from ourselves into Christ — the Word of God, the Light of men (John 1:1, 4). This light must be understood as the true light of grace in Christ, not the natural light which sinners have. Thus, Luther stressed, like St. Paul, the Gospel teaching *doctrinam pietatis*, doctrine of piety — a teaching which made man rich in grace and gave all the glory to God.

Luther observed that the root of the problems planted by Satan and by original sin into our wretched nature was that we disregard the Word which God set before us for our salvation and blessing, and turn to our own thoughts. This is the reason why the world has become more and more chaotic under the influence of anthropocentric worldviews — which is happening to seminaries, churches, families, countries and societies in this postmodern world of today. Luther accused the pope as the antichrist in his time, not because he wanted to fight against him or any scholastic theologian, but because the pope

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<sup>381</sup> Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 52: *Sermons II*, 1999, 56-57



neglected Christ's Word and prevented him from following sound doctrine and Christ Himself. Thus, Luther chose to be faithful to Christ and His Word.<sup>382</sup>

However, there is *a danger worthy of caution*, if we interpret or follow the Word in a too "literal" way, for example, in Luther's Eucharistic controversy, that pushed his Christology to the ubiquity of the two natures of Christ, neglecting the humanity of Christ. What a different world it would have been if Luther and Zwingli would have come to agreement on this matter. Establishing the doctrine based on a more literal reading (like "This is my body") which is then applied to similar verses results in error. We minister the words of Christ, not as the letter, but as the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6) and the Word is Life. Do not be led astray by the letter, but aim for good balance using biblical principles provided by the Spirit to follow God's will. *Frame's perspectives of existential perspective, situational perspective and normative perspective* is a magnificent tool for us to keep our thoughts and lives in better balance, especially by making normative perspective primary: putting all things under the entirety of biblical principles. Through the interaction of these three perspectives, Stephen Tong's reformed evangelical vision that turns our mind back to God's Holy Word, our emotion to God's divine love and our acts to God's eternal will responding to the need of our age, fits well into the Golden Triangle of Frame's Triperspectivalism.<sup>383</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The King

The Papacy of Rome elevated the authority of the Pope and church tradition over Christ and His Word in the church, which humiliated Christ as the Lord and King of His

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<sup>382</sup> Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 12: Selected Psalms I*, 1999, 277

<sup>383</sup> Tong, *The Eternal Christ and the Historical Christ*, 2010, 53-54; *The Retrospect and the Prospect of the Reformed Evangelical Movement*, 2010, 129-142

church and Kingdom. Rome taught the deity of Christ, but Christ as a mighty King and terrifying Judge was far away from the believer, thus Mary and the saints and the priests as mediators were placed between Him and the believer, and one had no way to access Him except through them. In Rome's view, Christ was depicted as a helpless babe in Mary's arms or as a dead Christ upon a cross. Both offered no help for the believer, hence Christ had little to do with people's daily lives. People did not have access to the Bible in the Middle Ages and only had the teachings of the church and tradition. Therefore, they lacked the true knowledge of Christ and the true worship of their King and Savior. Christ was dispossessed of His glory as a strong, living personal God and King to lead their lives, and denied His role as a daily companion and personal Savior who hears and answers prayers.

The pope regarded himself as the vicar of Jesus, representing Christ, the glorious King of heaven on earth, but allowed people to kiss his feet like the king of all kings. This was entirely contrary to the example of the true King, Christ Himself, as a servant, washing the feet of His disciples before the Last Supper. The pope, who usurped the role of Christ as Lord and King in the church and society and promoted the applications of the unbiblical doctrines (such as of the Eucharist and icon worship which are still going today leading people into idolatry and a false worship of God), had led the church in departing from Christ and His Word. The pulpit lacked the true preaching of the Word. The sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, became the focal point of the worship service. The abuse of the hierarchy of the papal system led to severe corruption and scandal among the popes and the bishops. The glory of the King and His Gospel was obscured by human-invented traditions and the papal system.

Luther exalted *Christ as the King who reigns in His church and Kingdom* by His Word, and brought the true Gospel back to the church as Christ's royal scepter. The rule of Christ is exercised by means of faith according to His humanity which He derives from David as the *Lord's Anointed, or Messiah, King over Zion*. He is now the glorious Lord and King seated at the right hand of God with all majesty and divine power, calling all creatures in heaven and on earth to worship. In this post-modern era, we often see the salvation from the perspective of meeting our needs and separating His Kingship and Lordship from our life. There is an urgent need to regain the Kingdom view and commit to His Kingship and Lordship in our life and ministries. And the glory of this King is that of a Servant, the Servant-like King, the One who brought salvation through suffering and resurrection. The present rule of this King is through the proclamation of the Gospel, the Word and the sacraments mediated by the Holy Spirit, through which Christ continues to serve His people and expand His Kingdom. Luther brought the Bible back to God's people and the true worship of Christ back to the church. The devil, with all the resources of the world, can never destroy the church, founded on the eternal throne of Christ. Luther knew how important the Word of God and Christ's Kingship was to His people and how significant pulpit ministry was for teaching and preaching the truth of God, to lead the church back to God's will and advance His Kingdom over the kingdom of Satan.

Luther *rebuilt the true worship of the King* in spirit and truth by faith based on the Word of God, while Rome separated worship from the Word through its doctrine of sacraments which departed from the pure truth of the Gospel. Luther taught the Lord's prayer in his Small Catechism: first, "God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according

to it.” The second, is “God’s Kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.” The third, he answers how “God’s good and gracious will” is done in both negative and positive ways: “When He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His Kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.” His final prayers for the dear churches in his country were to *keep God’s Word pure and true*; and he asked his friends to pray for his work and the Gospel to be prosperous even on the last evening of his life in his home town of Eisleben. This great servant and soldier of God rested in the Lord in the early morning of February 18, 1546.

#### **4.2.3 The High Priest**

*Rome’s full dependence upon the priesthood* of the saints and the clergy became the heart of the problem of its system, which was totally contrary to the biblical teaching that Christ was the only Mediator and High Priest, that the sacrificial priesthood was abolished, and that the universal priesthood of believers was established in its place. Rome’s teachings made the dear Savior a terrifying Judge which led people to run away from Him to the Virgin Mary and other saints as intercessors and mediators. Further more, Rome placed a human priesthood between the people and God, teaching that the forgiveness of sin was received only if it were confessed to a priest and absolved by absolution and where the sinner seeks reconciliation by means of various kinds of good works. Roman Catholicism was a religion of faith plus works, misleading people under the temptation of achieving worth by going to the sacraments, seeking righteousness in themselves as opposed in Christ. There was no need for grace if righteousness were based

on our own merits and worthiness. By ourselves and our works, we will certainly never become righteous by God's standard. Thus, the object of faith turned from Christ to the saints and the priests and human beings. As a result, many corruptions of the church resulted from its human-centered doctrine of the priesthood and its authority over Scripture.

Luther exalted *the eternal priesthood of Christ*, reformed the whole priesthood of the church and significantly applied the principle of priesthood of all believers to the individual life. He addressed that Christ as our sweet Savior and High Priest, not as a stern Judge, has overcome all evils and reigns in the Kingdom of heaven. As the only Mediator, He offered Himself as the Sacrifice for our sins and presented Himself before God as our intercessor. He also became the Preacher of the Gospel and sent His disciples out to spread the Gospel. Luther stressed that the exclusive identity of Christ as the Donor of grace, not as a Moses, a tormentor, or an executioner. This view was against the Roman doctrine of merits. He emphasized that it is through Christ alone, as the Holy Ladder to heaven, that we can approach God because of His merciful love and grace, and only Christ is called the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). This refuted every doctrine of meritorious work and self-righteousness, and all other comfort and confidence in other means. Good works contributes nothing to justification and salvation, but is the fruit of the righteousness.

Luther considered that the *office of Mediator* of Christ had one symbol — the Holy Ladder to heaven and three roles: King, Priest and Preacher, similar to what Calvin developed later the threefold offices of Christ as Prophet, King and Priest. Luther stressed the twofold office of the believers as priests and kings. Based on the principle of the universal priesthood of all believers, Luther effectively reformed the hierarchy of the church and demolished the special sacramental priesthood of the priest. However, it raised

the question in the Protestant ranks: Would one need a special calling to the pulpit ministry? Is ordination necessary for the pastoral office? Obviously, not every believer would preach, nor perform the Eucharist, nor baptize. The church should keep a proper order through proper preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments according to the Word of God. Luther and other reformers later developed the concept of ordination to the offices in the Protestant church. The principle of the universal priesthood has been very significant when applied to our personal callings in our vocations and families to serve others and witness to Christ, following Christ's example of the incarnation and the cross.

*As for the Eucharist*, Luther stressed the sacramental union of Christ with His people by faith through His Word in the sacrament, manifesting the glorious Gospel of Christ. Rome, on the other hand, held the Mass as a sacrifice of Christ's body and blood offered to God again and again for the merits for salvation, humiliating the glory of Christ as our King and High Priest. Because the Roman doctrines of sacrament and transubstantiation departed from the heart of the Gospel. Rome's emphasis on the merits of sacrament for salvation turned people's faith from Christ to good works and the Eucharist to idolatry, which denied Christ's sacrifice once for all (Heb. 7:27). Luther changed the whole sacramental view by asserting that *faith in Christ alone* determined the sacrament and made it effective in order to receive all the promises from Christ. Without faith in Christ, the sacrament was in vain, and sins were not forgiven. He bound the sacrament as the visible Word of God to the preached Word of God, through which the Holy Spirit nourished the living faith of His people by grace. He reformed the holy Christian church by preaching the truth and purity of the Gospel, and administered the

sacraments according to the Gospel as declared in the Augsburg Confession (Article VII) announced in 1530.

***The Fractures of Luther's Christology:*** However, Luther confused the two natures of Christ and neglected the humanity of Christ in his theory of consubstantiation. First, his commitment to nominalism in his doctrine of the Word made him interpret the words of Christ in the Lord's Supper in a plain and literal way. He believed that God's Word surpassed the nature of the reality and defined the reality, and followed the rule of simple faith in the professed Word of God. Second, in Luther's eschatological view, he believed that when Christ ascended into heaven, His humanity had been completed and transformed to divine being, to the point of fullness of divine essence, not limited as His creaturely body was. Christ sitting on the right hand of the Father meant whenever God was at work, there the divine-human Christ was at work. This turned to the ubiquity or omnipresence of Christ's humanity, which was against the Chalcedonian Definition where the two natures of Christ are unconfused. According to Scripture, the resurrected Christ is visible and now in heaven in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb. 9:24). Though His divinity is omnipresent, His humanity is not omnipresent. He will come again only on the Last Day and will be seen by all the tribes of the earth (Luke 24:39, Acts 3:21, Matt. 24:30). These are the fractures of Luther's Christology. It is important to put all things under the entirety of biblical principles as the normative perspective.

***The reformed view of Eucharist*** defines the Lord's supper as a spiritual banquet wherein Christ attests Himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls are fed unto true and blessed immortality. The bread and wine are signs, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ, indicating the spiritual

presence of Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, by union with Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father, we enjoy fellowship with Christ and with all the saints, and look forward to His glorious return.

**Conclusions:** Therefore, against late medieval thoughts of mystical spirituality and scholastic speculations, the doctrines of the saints, the papacy and the sacrament, which blurred the unique status of Christ as the only Savior and Mediator, Luther manifested the glory of the exclusive identity of Christ by exalting the excellency of Christ as the Word, the King and the High Priest.

### **4.3 Christ in His Work**

*The doctrines of salvation and justification* are vital for the life of the church as well as for the human soul. Both the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant church agree with the significance of these doctrines, but have disagreed on their core theological interpretations since the Reformation. From the Middle Ages to the present, Rome has always taught that justification is based on faith, on Christ, and on grace, but the difference with protestants lays in the protestant view of *monergism*, that is, salvation through regeneration is exclusively the work of God through the Holy Spirit alone, regardless of the cooperation of man with God's grace, which is the Catholic view of synergism. The protestant view of Luther, Calvin and the other reformers was summarized well in the five great *solas*. *Sola Scriptura* which emphasizes the glory of God's sufficient Word, *solus Christus* which is the glory of Christ's uniqueness as our Savior alone, *sola gratia* which is the glory of Christ's Gospel of grace, *sola fide* which is the glory of Christ's sufficient work for salvation, *solī Deo Gloria* which is the self-glorification of God in Christ as the final purpose of the entire creation. However, since the sixteenth century at the Council of



Trent (1545-63), Rome has resisted Reformation theology, and especially condemned the doctrine of justification by faith alone: “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema (Canon 11).”<sup>384</sup>

*The late medieval doctrine of salvation was a synergistic soteriology:* Christ plus Mary and other mediators, grace plus merit, and faith plus works dispossessed the glory of Christ as our only Savior and Redeemer and denied His sufficient work for salvation. Rome proclaimed that divine grace was necessary and infused to man’s soul for salvation, but man must also cooperate with God in his justification by his free will and good works in order to truly merit eternal life. This generated a sort of semi-Pelagianism that Augustine fought against before and that the Council of Orange (529) formally refuted, but somehow was forgotten by the church. The root cause of this synergism, in fact, which is the most fundamental difference of the late medieval doctrines from that of those of the reformers, lies in the doctrine of anthropology and sin, for soteriology is linked to hamartiology. It is worth noticing that among the reformed and evangelicals, there has recently been a new wave of interest in Aquinas who is being rehabilitated as belonging to the patristic and Augustinian tradition.<sup>385</sup> However, our study in Chapter Two showed that influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, Aquinas held a high view of human nature that fallen men retained the natural capacity of reason to know God, and that with the help of infused grace as the first mover, man had the inclination to virtue and to gain inherent righteousness, which

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<sup>384</sup> Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1978, 42-43

<sup>385</sup> Sidharta, *Theology and Human Flourishing: A Thomistic Account*, 2020, 1

departed from the thought of Augustine on grace and sin. The late medieval theologians, such as Ockham and Biel, inherited this over-estimated view of human capacity, and further developed a covenant theology (*via moderna*). They believed that man by nature could love God above all things and do his best to prepare himself for God's saving grace — the root of this synergism of medieval covenant theology entirely differs from the reformers' view of total depravity. In the Roman system, both the definition of justification (inherent righteousness) and the progressive way of justification were based on the thought of Aristotle. Justification itself starts from baptism with infused grace (the first justification) and entails the sanctification of the whole being (the second justification). Man must repent from his sins and do good works in cooperation with divine grace to merit justifying grace. To the reformers, this view of double justification mixes up justification with sanctification; the former is a one-time act of God out of His sovereign grace to change the status of a believer from the state of sin to the state of righteousness based on the work of Christ alone, and the latter is a continual process of God's transformation of a believer's whole being to conform to the image of Christ in his lifetime. The Roman doctrine of justification was also ecclesiologically-centred instead of Christ-centred. The popes and the church hold the authority to grant remission of sins from the treasury of merits and to administer the salvation of souls based on their mis-interpretation of Matt. 16:19 and John 20:23; in fact, such authority only belongs to God Himself. Rome's doctrine of the treasury of merits was entirely unbiblical, against the teachings of Christ and the apostles. The meritorious works such as sacraments become the necessary basis of salvation besides grace. Man is capable of climbing up the ladder of various kinds of merits to heaven to gain glory. Christ's work of atonement becomes operative only after man has proven himself worthy of it. The

Catholic view that people could get into heaven if they do sufficient good works for saving grace, essentially eliminates the need of a Savior. Moreover, because of the fallibility of the human nature, man could not obtain the assurance of salvation, leaving their consciences in a state of uncertainty and unease. The medieval scholastics invented the concepts of various kinds of faith (implicit faith and explicit faith) and merits (congruous merit and condign merit) which prevented people from having true repentance and real faith through knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Their doctrines of sacraments, indulgence, penance, and purgatory were mixed with human traditions that departed from Scripture and the pure Gospel. These anthropocentric teachings neglected and despised the grace of Christ and the sufficiency of His work and thus, deprived God of His majesty and glory.

*Luther rediscovered the true and glorious Gospel of Christ* from Scripture that fallen man was spiritually disabled and wholly dependent on the grace and merit of Christ for his salvation. Luther restored the *biblical doctrine of grace*: the sufficient work of Christ and justification by faith in Christ alone as a gift of God, giving all the credits and glory to Christ. *The Holy Ladder to heaven* is only given by God out of His mercy and grace, that is, Christ Himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther proclaimed the necessity of true repentance, the sufficiency of the atonement and faith in Christ alone, the deficiency of superstition and indulgences, and the importance of godly living, especially in caring for one's neighbor. Love is the fruit of faith. Without love, "faith" is not true faith, but a mere profession of faith. Although Luther was highly influenced by nominalists Occam and Biel, he rejected their doctrines of free will, good works and justification, and turned his thought more to that of Augustine and of the apostles.

Luther held a *radical view of sin* with an insight of spiritual truth and warfare, stressed the evil power of sin that only Christ can defeat and man's total inability to contribute to his own salvation. Salvation depends entirely on the work of Christ, which is the sovereign grace of God, and thus, attributed all the glory to Christ. The Pelagian (saved by oneself), semi-Pelagian (saved by God's help), and Arminian (saved with one's consent), exalted men. Luther exalted God, denying human works and free will taking part in one's salvation. The frailty of fallen man and his works cannot satisfy God's Law. The nature of sin makes man curved in upon himself and withdraw from God, departing from God-centeredness to human centeredness. Luther considered that sin was not just the absence of good as Augustine viewed, but a substantial evil power. Calvin had a similar view. Sin is such "an omnipotent tyrant" that when the papists, monks, nuns, priests, Mohammedans, and sectarians seek to abolish and overcome sin with their own traditions, works, satisfactions and so forth, all those sects were doing so in vain, because they were seeking to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting to God's righteousness (Rom. 10:3). All religions that put weight on free will, human wisdom and works instead of God's revelation and promises in Christ, try to build themselves a ladder to heaven to know God and to save themselves. This is just another form of the tower of Babel, to replace the glory of Christ with their own glory (*theologia gloriae*). Luther pointed out that not only sins, but also good works that men naturally thought God should accept by reason, could be mortal sins, because they turned men to self-dependency. Even good works of the righteous during their sanctification can not be the ground of salvation, as it says in Isa. 64:6, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment in the sight of God. To Luther, man without God's grace can will nothing but evil. Human will after the fall is free only to sin and bound

to sin. The will is the captive and slave of sin and evil, as Paul says, “sold under sin,” and “following the prince of the power of the air” (Rom. 7:14, Eph. 2:2). No power of any creature, whether angelic or human, can overthrow or expel sin, which is a cruel and powerful tyrant over all men throughout the world, but only the infinite and sovereign power of Jesus Christ can. We are *beggars* in the presence of the God of holiness and righteousness. There is nothing but only *sin, death and hell* found in sinful men, and yet God out of His mercy and love proclaims in His Word a promise to make Christ’s life an offering for sin (Isa. 53, Heb. 4-10) so to justify one by his faith in Christ apart from works of the Law (Rom.3-5, Gal. 2-3). Only when man is humbled by the Law and the wrath of God, in total despair of himself, is he prepared for God’s grace, and then he turns from his inner self to the outward and upward, that is, the Son of God, who was given for him. As in the thought of Augustine, the principle of humility is an important theme in Luther’s thought. Humility is founded on a deep understanding of sin; it is the complete self-despair and then the complete surrender to God’s mercy. True faith which is rooted only in Christ and His Word, has real humility and the fear of God; otherwise, self-righteousness and arrogance cannot be avoided. This faith is different from that in the Word of Faith movement which tried to control the power and blessings of God by speaking His words. The church today is still at risk of weakening the concept of sin and the Gospel, such as the prosperity Gospel which stresses the grace, love and blessings of God to bring a new and prosperous life in Christ, but does not preach the judgement of hell and the holiness and wrath of God. This would twist the pure Gospel and turn objective salvation into achieving personal wills instead, leading to a false faith, like those idol worshippers deceived by the lies of Satan. If the sin that we often downplay due to hardened hearts, caused the God of

mercy and love to pour down His wrath through the flood of Noah's time and through the death of His most precious Son on the cross, how much wrath do sinful men deserve in the future, the judgement of eternal fire of hell?! And by how much grace are we saved through Christ? Luther's insight of sin was tightly connected to the cross and the doctrine of humility and grace, and is still very relevant for the church today in preaching and Christians living in this highly secularized world.

From the spiritual and relational perspective of man with God, Luther stated that *the image of God* in fallen man was *lost*, which is different from the view of Rome and the view of most reformers. Man's unique status created in the image of God, indicates his close relationship with God. Man was created to glorify God, but after the fall, human beings have been wholly defiled by sin and spiritually separated from God. They do not honor God as God, instead they make themselves enemies of God (Rom. 1:21-31, Eph. 2:1-2, 4:17-19, 22, Col. 3:5-8). Luther considered Augustine's view of the Trinity in man as the image of God (that is memory, mind/intellect and will) attractive, but he was wary of its speculative nature because it was infused with the idea of Aristotle, more than with the biblical truth. Luther questioned if Satan whose memory, intellect and will were much superior than that of human beings, had the image of God. To Luther, the image of God in the innocent state of Adam could not be fully understood by our defiled mind after the fall. He stated that the image of God was lost in a sinner, who was spiritually dead — a view of total corruption of God's image. This lost image can only be restored in Christ by the work of Holy Spirit through His Word. On the contrary, Rome considered that the image of God as part of the natural human goodness remained intact, but the supernatural grace as the likeness of God was lost, originally based on their misinterpretation that the image of God

and the likeness of God (Gen 1:26) were two different things, separating natural grace and supernatural grace as I displayed in Aquinas' thought. In the Greek and the Vulgate translation of Gen 1:26, there was an "and" between the image of God (Tselem) and the likeness of God (Demut), which originally was not there in Hebrew. This led to the misinterpretation of these two parallel phrases into two meanings. In fact, their usage is a repetition to stress each other in the same meaning. The same usage of these two phrases appeared in the case of Adam and his son in Gen. 5:3. Different from the views of Luther and Rome, Calvin and other reformers believed that the image of God was corrupted, but not totally annihilated and destroyed in man, which was more coherent with overall Scripture. For no one is good except God alone (Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19). The inner goodness of the souls within fallen man has been lost, resulting in the loss the motivation, direction and purpose to glorify God (salt which has lost its saltiness). There is no one righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10-12), and all are dead in trespasses and sins. Only by grace have the elect made alive with Christ (Eph. 2:1-6). For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), which means that all do not yet lose all the glory of God, just "fall short of" it. After the fall, Scripture still states that God made man in the likeness of God (Gen. 5:1, Jam. 3:9), in His own image (Gen. 9:6), which also indicate there is no difference in these two phrases. Therefore, the image of God is the same thing as the likeness of God, and is not totally destroyed after the fall. Men retained some characteristics and functions that only attribute to God, such as creativity, morality, eternity, freedom, etc. The reformers all agreed that the perfect excellence of human nature had been marred, and the defections have occurred in all aspects of human nature and life, that is, the total depravity of man. Some parts of the defections still remain in the righteous even after they

have been reborn in the spirit. The image of God in man will attain its full splendor when Christ returns in His glory. As Calvin said, “Now we see how Christ is the most perfect image of God; if we are conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence we bear God’s image.”<sup>386</sup> Through Christ, God restores our immortal and dominant position as God’s representative on earth; therefore, the Great Commandment and the culture mandate have been granted to the elect who reborn in Christ through Holy Spirit, to live for His glory.

Luther and the reformers agreed with the total depravity of man and the loss of free will after the fall, but *opposed the speculations* of the philosophers or the scholastics. To Calvin, the principle those philosophers held, that man as a rational animal possessed free choice of good and evil, and that man could distinguish between virtues and vices if he ordered his life by his own planning, mixed up heaven and earth, because they were blinded by sin and hidden from spiritual truth. Calvin warned those who professed to be disciples of Christ, were “playing the fool when, *by compromising between the opinions of the philosophers and heavenly doctrine*, so that these touch neither heaven nor earth, in man — who is lost and sunk down into spiritual destruction — they still seek after free choice.”<sup>387</sup> The root problem of the medieval theologians was that they accepted the idea from Greek philosophy about human nature downplayed the corruption of sin on human nature and spirituality, and turned to anthropocentric theological thought, which led to human autonomy, self-righteousness, and self-justification. A small step of compromise of the biblical doctrine with secular philosophy driven by human autonomy will gradually

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<sup>386</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, 2011, 190

<sup>387</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, 2011, 195-196



lead to the disaster if false teachings over years. Philosophy could be a useful tool for theology but only under *the normative of Scripture*. Going through his spiritual torment of *Anfechtung*, Luther recognized deep within himself the fallenness of man, and eventually saw the light of the pure Gospel from Scripture and opposed the teachings of the scholastics on free will and justification. He rediscovered the very heart of the Gospel that justification comes only from the grace of God who imputes an alien righteousness, that is not man's own inherent righteousness from free will and good works, but the righteousness of Christ, a gift to the unworthy sinner to declare him righteous. Thus, a Christian is simultaneously righteous and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*). Luther considered repentance a lifetime process and the Word of the cross is the power of God to kill the old self and put on the new self with the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 23-24, Col. 3:10).

Luther emphasized *the significance of the doctrine of justification by faith* in the whole Christian doctrine was about knowledge of truth, life and salvation, by which the church stands or falls. This is the key to distinguishing our Christian faith from all the other religions that require works for salvation. His forensic view of justification manifests the sovereignty of God as a merciful Judge who imputes the righteousness of Christ to the sinner by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, which was fundamentally different from the synergism of Rome. Both Rome and Protestants agreed on the objective part of salvation: the work of Christ in the redemption or the atonement, and the forensic justification of God declaring the believer righteous. The difference was in the subjective part: to Rome, a person was justified based on his inherent righteousness through the process of sanctification; to Luther and the reformers, justification was the believer's

present event that was grounded on the alien righteousness of Christ alone through imputation. The sufficient work of Christ is the only foundation of justification, for Christ fully submitted to the will of God and thus fulfilled the requirements of the Law. Not only does the perfect righteousness of Christ become the sinner's through imputation, but also the wisdom, sanctification, redemption, freedom, grace and life of Christ become the sinner's. Meanwhile, the sins, sufferings, curses, death and hell of the sinner become Christ's. This is what Luther referred to as a dramatic "joyful exchange" of the great Royal Bridegroom and His chosen royal bride through faith. Christ granted Himself to His bride as a present through the cross, which means He shares all His blessings with her and makes her His holy, glorious bride. Differing from Anselm's view of Christ's satisfying the Law of God, Luther emphasized more Christ's suffering as the Son to appease the wrath of the Father and as a substitute for us to reconcile God with man and impute the benefits that Christ has won for His bride. Luther drew the intimate link between Christology (reflection about the person of Christ) and soteriology (the work of Christ) and demonstrated that these two were inseparable. The historical works of Christ in creation and His revelation as the Word of God in the incarnation, on the cross and His return as the Son of God and the Son of man, played a central and significant role in Luther's thought and were stressed as the acts of the Trinitarian God in human redemption history. Christ is the Beginning and the End, who is all, and in all (Rev. 22:13, Col. 3:11). God Himself, out of His overflowing love, dramatically came into human history, marvellously offered Himself as a gift, paradoxically defeated sin, death and evil through His death and resurrection, and gloriously revealed Himself and His creative love through the Word of the cross. This was to fulfill His eternal will according to His good pleasure, so that the faithful in Christ could

become the new creation and the image of God could be restored in them for the glory of the Triune God. Luther's view of salvation is dramatic, compassionate, and aggressive, manifesting the glory of Christ in His sufficient works of justification and revelation.

To Luther, *faith as trust only in God's promises*, that is Christ and His Word, gives the highest honor to God. Faith is not good works, nor based on good works, but is the foundation of all good works. Faith justifies us alone without works, by uniting us to Christ, whose works and merits become ours. Our faith is wholly the work of God in us through the Holy Spirit, which kills the old Adam and transforms us into Christ's image from one degree of glory to another. Outside of Christ, there is no real faith and hope, and true faith in Christ sets one free. Luther urged God's people to fortify a hearty faith in Christ to get the light and the sound instruction of the Lord to make free judgments about every way of life. Good works do not bring acquired faith, but true faith is the work of God that makes a person free to do good works for God's pleasure, not to earn merits. Rome feared that the doctrine of justification by faith alone denied good works, so they attacked this very heart of Gospel. Luther affirmed two kinds of righteousness: the alien righteousness of God imputed to man by grace through faith alone, and the proper righteousness of man which is neither the basis of justification, nor the active righteousness from his works by the Law, but the righteousness that works with the alien righteousness as its product and fruit. This proper righteousness follows the example of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21) and results in transformation into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). To Calvin, in Christ we receive the double grace of His justifying righteousness and His sanctifying Spirit. Faith justifies alone; however, the faith that justifies is never alone, but brings salvation and is followed by good works. Although Roman scholastics also emphasized that faith was necessary and

fundamental for justification, it was not sufficient, for one may still lose salvation if one committed mortal sins. They invented different ideas of faith between *fides informis* and *fides caritate formata*, between *fides implicita* and *fides explicita*. The Scripture, on the other hand, shows nothing of these manifold distinctions; rather, it proclaims the faith which puts its trust in nothing but God's promise and grace, without any merit of human works. Rome's emphasis on faith was a mere assent to the Gospel and to church tradition, and thus, it was weak, for it denied the personal, relational knowledge of Christ that faith appropriated. The reformers considered the scholastic doctrine of implicit faith as entirely fictional, as it utterly destroyed true faith by requiring obedient submission to the church without understanding the Gospel.<sup>388</sup> The reformers rejected these specious, unbiblical notions, and connected the saving faith with the preaching of the Word to increase the hearer's understanding of the saving truth as a precondition of faith (Rom. 10:17). True faith must be based on Christ alone as its object, not upon human works. Today, the doctrinal differences between sovereign grace and the merits of good works still form a wall of disagreement that separates the Roman Catholic church from the Protestant church.

In particular, Luther emphasized *the distinction of the Law and the Gospel as an antithetical unity of God's spoken Word*, which manifested Christ's glorious grace in His Gospel. Rome distorted the Gospel in the Middle Ages by making no difference between the Law and the Gospel. Luther once suffered a spiritual torment in his young age because Rome changed the Gospel of grace to works by the Law, which also led to the corruptions of medieval Christendom. The swords from the world cannot destroy the church, only the doctrinal deviation from the pure Gospel within the church can shake the foundation of the

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<sup>388</sup> ICR III.2.2

church and demolish it from inside. To Luther, the Law functions as God's alien work humbling men through the recognition of sin so to kill the pride and self-righteousness of men and lead men to Christ; and the Gospel functions as God's proper work fulfilling the promise of God about Christ to give new life. The Law demands perfect works and brings the curses and the wrath of God in the ministry of condemnation, while the Gospel bestows grace and brings the remission of sin and new life in the ministry of righteousness. Both the Law and the Gospel exist in all time of human redemption history. When the Old Testament is understood as offering the promise of Christ, it is the Gospel. For example, Genesis is an exceedingly evangelical book of God's promise and grace from the perspective of the Seed of the woman and the Seed of the Abraham. When the New Testament is understood as following the example of Christ as the requirement for salvation, it is the Law, as demonstrated by the sacramental theology of Rome. Even though late medieval men knew that only God's grace could save them, they were to do something to merit the saving grace, for God would not deny grace to those who tried to do their best, so the scholastics taught. Rome downplayed both views of sin and grace, and expected man to do the work of God by his own strength. Luther insisted on the heart of the Gospel of grace that justification by faith only relies on the deeds and life of Christ, that is, the righteousness of Christ, an alien and passive righteousness, having nothing to do with human works. The art of proper preaching constitutes a good balance of both the Law and the Gospel through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Today, many preachers do not like to preach the issues of the Law and sin, focusing on the grace and love of God in order to appear positive. To Luther, this is the lie of Satan, not the Gospel. The Law is necessary to terrify man so that he despairs of himself and his own ability; thus, he expects nothing from

himself but everything from Christ. Only when we are terrified by the Law can we recognize what a great thing Christ has done for us and taste the sweetness of His grace. Only grace can put an end to the accusing voice of the Law, offer help and do what the Law demands, to love God and one's neighbors. Luther's emphasis on peaching the distinction of the Law and the Gospel helped to avoid both legalism and antinomianism. Reformed theology emphasizes more the union with Christ through one covenant of grace in the human history of redemption, which maintains the continuity between the Law and the Gospel through one covenant of God in Christ based merely on His love and grace. The Law of the OT is about the promise, the type, the shadow of Christ and the Gospel of the NT is the fulfillment, the reality of Christ (Act. 3:18, Heb. 10:1, Col. 2:17). The mystery of God, which is Christ and the Triune God, has been progressively revealed from the OT to the NT, and demonstrates the revelation of the entire Bible is united in Christ as one organic whole. Therefore, through the entire doctrine of the Bible under the sovereignty of God, a wider view of the doctrine of salvation is obtained compared to that of the Lutheran focusing on the doctrine of justification by faith.

*Luther's Eschatological View* was not a reclusive belief in the world to come, but a realistic belief in the eschatological Gospel depicting the battle of his Savior, the final Judge, and Satan, the deceiver, which made him a great instrument of God in fighting for the biblical doctrines and in defending the glory of Christ, which eventually changed history and world. His eschatology addressed not only the personal level of standing firm on the faith in Christ for the final judgement, but also the ecclesiological level of leading the church to reformation so as to proclaim God's truth and to prepare His church as the holy bride for Christ and His Kingdom to come. His theory of the two kingdoms of Christ

and the devil was not entirely inherited from Augustine's city of God and city of the world, but was influenced by his more *integrated view* of earthly government which Luther saw more positively because of its support for his reformation (there is always a risk of heavenly doctrine integrated with earthly thought, which resulted in the tragedy of the comprise of the German Christian Movement to Hitler's Nazi regime in World War II and the Russian Orthodox church to Putin's government in today's Russo-Ukrainian War). But Luther held fast not to worldly swords and laws, but to Christ, the King and the Lord reigning in heavens, and to His Word, being aware of the power of Satan in this world and Satan's schemes devised to lead the church into trying to do away with the Word, faith, and worship of God. He saw the papacy as the true realm of Anti-Christ from the doctrinal perspective, not just because of the corruptions of Rome, but because the pope elevated his authority over the Word of God, rejected the biblical doctrine of justification and twisted the Gospel through the doctrine of merits. Luther had a strong sense of mission and calling from God to "fight the good fight" for Christ's Gospel and His Kingdom, and in conscience to maintain faithful till the day when he would to see His Savior and Victor face to face in His heavenly home with everlasting joy. The church today lacks the awareness of spiritual warfare and fighting spirit that both St. Paul and Luther had, and often compromises with the multicultural post-modern world. However, Luther's apocalyptic thought of history prevented him from objectively explaining the history from a comprehensive historical-philosophical perspective.<sup>389</sup> Luther's "battle theology" of demons led him to some wrong and drastic conclusions in his early writings against Zwingli in the Eucharistic controversy and in his later writings and sermons against the Jews. He was also a man limited by his

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<sup>389</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 2008, 9, 333

times. We must always take precaution against the lies of the ancient serpent, and eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in Christ (Eph. 4:3, 6:12-13), for no purpose of God's can be thwarted and Christ's Kingdom will be advanced through the work of the Holy Spirit and His Word.

**Conclusions:** Luther rediscovered the doctrine of grace and gained confidence from his biblical doctrine of justification and salvation in Christ alone to condemn the teachings of Rome and made clear the glory and blessings of Christ. He rejected Roman sacramental theology of infused grace and merits, the doctrine of indulgences and purgatory, and their offering of the Mass, the veneration of Mary and other saints, which undercut Christ's all-sufficient and complete work. The reformers confessed *solus Christus* in the light of the glory of Christ's unique person and all-sufficient work, and further developed the thought that Christ, the incarnate Son, is not only our One Savior, but also our One new covenant head.<sup>390</sup> Christ's active and passive obedience as our Mediator had appeased the wrath of God and satisfied all the demands of His law against us, "both as to obedience of life and the suffering of death, as to satisfactory virtue by which it has freed us from the guilt of death and the curse by enduring the punishments due to us, and as to meritorious power by which it has reconciled the Father to us, and has acquired for us a right to life."<sup>391</sup> Christ's work in all of His perfection, fullness and completion becomes ours by virtue of our new-covenant union in Him. Thus, Luther and other reformers brought the doctrines of salvation and justification back to being Biblically-based and Christ-centered: Scripture alone – not plus tradition; Christ alone – not plus other mediators; grace

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<sup>390</sup> Wellum, *Christ Alone – The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, 2017, 265-267

<sup>391</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:439-440; ICR II.16.5



alone – not plus merit; and faith alone – not plus works, lifting up the glory of Christ for the glory of God alone – not plus Mary and other saints.

#### 4.4 The Theology of the Cross

From his tradition, Luther must well have known Tertullian's famous warning against speculation: "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? ... After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research."<sup>392</sup> Tertullian denied rationalism but affirmed "a remarkable kind of rationality in the Gospel: God is able to save by means that are foolish to the world, and that very foolishness is, to Christians, a mark of their credibility." Like Luther, he was fully convinced by the transcendent way, wisdom and power of the cross:

The Son of God was crucified: I am not ashamed — because it is shameful.  
The Son of God died: it is *immediately* credible — because it is silly.  
He was buried, and rose again: it is certain — because it is impossible.<sup>393</sup>

In differing from Tertullian, Luther was indeed influenced by the philosophies (nominalism in his doctrine of the Word of God and realism in his dichotomous Christology) of his time, although he repudiated scholasticism because of its philosophical reliance on Aristotle. However, his thought was under *the normative of Scripture*. The Word of God is the foundation and Christ is the center of his thought. As Luther stated in the beginning of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, his theological paradoxes of *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae* were deduced from St. Paul and St. Augustine. His principle of faith in Christ and

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<sup>392</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription of Heretics*, 36

<sup>393</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 2015, 97-98. Ernest Evans, trans., *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), 5.4

His Word as the *presupposition* of all theological debate made his thought powerful and influential in countering the late medieval scholasticism.

From *the Paradoxical and Hermeneutic Dimension*, Luther exalted *the Truth* of *the cross* through conceiving *theologia crucis* as a systematic hermeneutic of Scripture by quoting many Bible verses, and engaging the question of justification by faith or by works which arose out of his concrete historical situation.<sup>394</sup> The inverting message of the cross that Christ engulfed death through death to redeem us to life, leads to its paradoxical dimension. These paradoxes were expressed as suffering/cross vs glory; invisible things (the power and wisdom of God in Rom. 1:20) vs visible things (the cross/suffering of Christ as “God’s back” in Ex. 33:23); God hidden (Christ’s divinity) vs God revealed (Christ’s humanity). Furthermore, in his theology of the cross, the ugliness, foolishness and suffering of the cross put an end to human works, free will and wisdom for justification and the knowledge of God *theologia gloriae* appealed to, which, paradoxically, displayed the beauty, wisdom and sovereign love of Christ, thus manifesting the absolute glory of Christ and His absolute humility. Man cannot truly know what salvation and relationship with God mean to him if he approaches God through works, free will and reason, that is, the way of the Law, the way of glory, which simply operates as a human-centered defense mechanism against the cross and the grace of Christ. Luther deepened the doctrine of sin, while *theologia gloriae* downplayed it and over-estimated human capacity. To Luther, *theologia gloriae* completely inflates man, blinds him and hardens him. In fact, different forms of the theology of glory continuously appear in human history, for example, science

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<sup>394</sup> Buhler, “Theology of the Cross: Its Meaning in Luther and Some Stages of its Reception History,” In *Martin Luther – A Christian between Reforms and Modernity* (1517-2017), 2017, 699

embraced evolution, society embraced Marxism, religion embraced liberalism, and post-modern culture embraced the New Age, whose essence was the exaltation of humanity to replace God. But the cross intervenes, kills every pride, every glory of man, leaving no room for human works. Luther stressed that God justified man not through his inherent righteousness by works, but through the righteousness outside of himself, that is, Christ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). By having despaired of himself and dying to the old self, man can live in Christ and look forward to being raised with Him. The cross is the only way, for Christ has been humiliated and died in our place for our sins to calm the wrath of God and satisfy the righteousness of God, so as to bring us reconciliation with God through our faith in Christ alone. Hence, we can find strength and hope in the Gospel, not relying on the wisdom of the world, but relying only on the folly of the cross, and to firmly preach the glorious Gospel of Christ without fear of the ridicule of the world, the intimidation of the devil, and the threat of the kings of the world.

From *the Epistemological Dimension*, Luther exalted *the Way of the cross* by pressing what Jesus declared to His Jewish critics, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also,” (John 8:29), and held a dramatically restrictive view of revelation in Christ alone. Luther emphasized that God revealed Himself to humanity in the incarnation and the supreme moment of that revelation was on the cross at Calvary. Christ crucified functioned as “God’s back” that visibly manifested God and His glory in a very contradictable way that one might not reasonably anticipate Him to do (Ex. 33:23). Luther asserted that Christ the Son was the only way to know the Father, mainly because he opposed any rational, skeptical, metaphysical speculations apart from

Scripture of the late medieval scholastics, the mystic spiritual pietists, the fanatics. Young Luther had suffered through his spiritual anguish (*Anfechtung*) arising from the covenant view of nominalism on salvation. He did not deny some knowledge of God through works and the laws of God. But as Paul says in Romans 1, this does not lead to adoration of God, but only leads to idolatry and does not produce true knowledge of God. Luther also opposed the mystic view of “naked God” (Majesty of God not covered), but rather obeyed the principle of simplicity, that is we should not speculate on the unrevealed part of God and let it remain as incomprehensible. It was not because of the arbitrariness seen in the nominal view of God *exlex*, but because of God’s sovereignty that He had the freedom to hide Himself from man. To Luther, true theology and true knowledge of God are not recognized through His works (*Deus manifestus ex operibus*) or by human wisdom (*theologia gloriae*), but through the Word of the cross, in which God was hidden in His suffering (*Deus absconditus in passionibus*).<sup>395</sup> To Calvin, the general revelation of God through His creation was so clear to men (Rom. 1:19-20); however, having no Mediator, men concealed the signs of divinity within and possessed only a fleeting knowledge of God, so that he could not truly know God the Father and His mercy (1John 2:23, John 1:8, 8:19). As Calvin said, “since we have fallen from life into death, the whole knowledge of God the Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless faith also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ.”<sup>396</sup> Jews, Muslims, liberals, and the Christless church today, who fail to confess Christ for who He truly is, all substitute an idol in place of the true God. St. Paul firmly proclaims that he knew nothing except *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* (1 Cor. 2:2b),

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<sup>395</sup> Buhler, “Theology of the Cross: Its Meaning in Luther and Some Stages of its Reception History,” In *Martin Luther – A Christian between Reforms and Modernity* (1517-2017), 2017, 700

<sup>396</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed., 2011, 341-348; ICR II.6.1-4; ICR I.5.4,15

which is the same calling we received to speak out and to live out the Word of the cross so as to witness and glorify the only true God. Outside of Christ, there is no way to the Father, no truth about the Father, no life for us with the Father (John 14:6). Christ is the incarnate God who is the subjectivity of Truth in person.<sup>397</sup> Christ is the mystery of God that has gradually been revealed in human redemption history from the OT to the NT, manifesting the works of the Trinitarian God. Christ is the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) who has crushed the head of Satan, the offspring of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth have been blessed (Gen. 12:3, 28:14), and the Son of King David, the throne whose Kingdom has been established forever (2 Sam. 7:16). He is the fulfillment and culmination of God's revelation. Indeed, Christ Himself is the full revelation of God, the exact and complete expression of the invisible God and the glorious hope in our hearts (Col. 1:26-27, 2:9; Heb. 1:3). The cross of Christ is the only *Way* for our prodigal reason, emotion and will to turn back to the divine truth, love and will of God.

From *the Dimension of Criteriological Function*, Luther exalted *the Life* of the cross through distinguishing two kinds of theologies and theologians by their different ways of doing theology and their living. The cross assesses everything (*crux probat omnia*). The theologians of the cross who know God through suffering and the cross of Christ — having a theocentric theology, are the true theologians. They observe the facts and speak the truth, and embrace the Word of the cross as the most precious treasury in their lives, exalting Christ. They hold the right presupposition of the self-revelation of God in Christ through Scripture in light of the Holy Spirit that Van Til illustrated. Therefore, all theologies and religions and philosophies outside Christ, are deceiving theologies, the

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<sup>397</sup> Tong, *The Eternal Christ and the Historical Christ*, 2010, 45-62

enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), all of which are the theology of glory. The theologians of glory who know God by His invisible glory, power and works through human wisdom apart from Christ — having an anthropocentric theology, are not true theologians. They call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. In fact, we are born as the theologians of glory and are ingrained as theologians of glory, who make every effort to not be persecuted for the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:12). That is the reason why liberalism, charismaticism, and prosperity theology had/has been so popular, for there was no cross, no suffering as Christ had. Our understanding of the evil and good are different from that of God's. The theology of the cross is the right antidote to these spiritual illnesses. Luther resonated with Paul's proclamation in Gal. 6:14, "*far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." The Word of the cross, as the transcendent wisdom and the power of God, is the only way for us to kill *theologia gloriae* in our hearts and turn our eyes to the cross of Christ and His revelation, so as to help us to know God and His grace and creative love, and to submit our lives to Him alone. The cross, then, becomes our story. We commit to God and any trial that God allows in our lives as our own cross, because of our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, God eventually can turn all the sufferings to be blessings and glory, and transform us into the glorious image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18).

***The cross alone is our theology***, for Christ crucified is the Way, the Truth and the Life, through whom we come to the Father (John 14:6). Christ alone is the transcendent wisdom and power of God. The cross is the death of sin and the death of the sinner. The cross acts as the "*bottoming out*." The cross is the "*intervention*" that extinguishes self-

strength and self-glorification, and brings an end to the pride of man. The cross does the *inversion*, where Mount Horeb and Mount Zion, heaven and earth, man and God, the momentary and the eternal, all meet in Christ, transforming death, curse, suffering, and shame to resurrection, peace, joy, and glory (Heb. 12). For we have died, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God, Christ is our lives (Col.3:3-4). Thus, we become Christ's precious servants and instruments as we carry out the glorious offices of prophet, priest and king as bridges between heaven and earth, man and God, the momentary and the eternal, so that in everything Christ might be preeminent (Col. 1:18), for He is Lord of all lords and King of all kings (Rev. 17:14).

**Conclusions:** Thus, Luther's theology of the cross, in contrast to the theology of glory, attributes the highest glory to Christ, which is truly the *theocentric theology of Holy glory*. Luther did not only deliver the Word of the cross, but also creatively generated a theology of the cross which displayed its profound richness in various dimensions, bringing the glory back to the Word and the work of Christ. In comparison to the late medieval meditation on the passion of Christ, to Luther, the cross referred to the hidden form of God's *revelation* in Christ in the epistemological dimension and to the *exclusive way* of doing theology and living in the criteriological dimension, not just to the being of God, hidden in mystery. Luther also deepened the confession and connotation of *sin*, for a deepened understanding of sin helps us to realize what had sent Christ to the cross and how tremendous the love and grace of the Son and the Father have been manifested on the cross, and motivates us to crucify the old self for a new life. Then the cross becomes our story. The sinner's passive and helpless submission to God was replaced by the active modelling of *life* upon the cross of Christ, with a willing and cheerful heart to endure whatever

sufferings which become trivial compared to those of Christ. Faith in Christ alone enables us to trust the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He is going to bring good out of any suffering to His eternal blessings and glory. Luther counted it all joy, to experience various trials and have this grace and glory to receive these treasures which are only for the most elect of God's children. This is the Way, the Truth, the Life of the cross, the transcendent wisdom and power of God. Therefore, differing from late medieval mystical spirituality which focused on the passion meditation and the imitation of Christ, Luther's theology of the cross is not just a step forward as Tomlin proposed, but in fact, a significant theological breakthrough from late medieval theology, which has impacted many modern theologians, such as Martin Kähler, Walther von Loewenich, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gerhard Ebeling, Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann, etc.<sup>398</sup>

The entire life of Christ is a cross, beginning with His incarnation. Through Christ's positive obedience in His earthly life and negative obedience on the cross He fulfilled God's will, revealing to us the incarnate path to glory and victory over sin, death and the devil. Though there are many other moments in His life that displayed His glory besides the cross, such as His baptism, transfiguration, many miracles, etc., Luther stressed the knowledge of God's glory more on the cross and the suffering of Christ as the Way, the Truth, the Life; Calvin emphasised God's glory in Christ moving more from the beginning of the cross more to the resurrection as the complete revelation of His glory.<sup>399</sup> The richness of the Word of the cross is indeed an inexhaustible theological treasure trove.

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<sup>398</sup> Buhler, "Theology of the Cross: Its Meaning in Luther and Some Stages of its Reception History," In *Martin Luther – A Christian between Reforms and Modernity (1517-2017)*, 2017, 705-711

<sup>399</sup> Kristanto, *Sola Dei Gloria – The Glory of God in the Thought of John Calvin*, 2011, 73-74; Calvin, ICR. II. xvi. 14, 16