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Preach One Thing: The Wisdom of the Cross

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In the first three chapters of this book, Edward Schroeder describes the heart of the theology of the Augsburg Confession, the hub of the Augsburg “wheel” to which all articles of the Confession are necessarily connected. In this first chapter, he makes the case that the cross is both form and content for that theology.

“Eck does not even have an inkling of the theology of the cross.”¹

“Ever since the scholastic theology . . . began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned upside down.”²

“A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.”³

These three comments from Luther in 1518 summarize what he himself had learned in his first years as professor at the University of Wittenberg:

1.) The scholastic theology⁴ dominating the life and teaching of the late

1. *WA* I, 290, 38f. Edward Schroeder’s personal translation.

2. *LW* 31:225.

3. *LW* 31:53.

4. Scholasticism is the name for the teaching and learning that dominated European universities during the late Middle Ages (1100–1600 CE), including Luther’s own education at University of Erfurt. A major source of medieval scholasticism was the rediscovered fourth-century BCE Greek philosopher Aristotle. As scholasticism—and Aristotle along with it—moved into the medieval university, theology too was taught in scholastic fash-

medieval church was in conflict with the Bible's message centered in the cross of Christ.

2.) This conflict was fundamental, not trivial. Theology of the cross and theology of glory—now as in the time of the apostles and prophets—constituted an either/or alternative.

3.) Scholastic teachers contemporary with Luther had no antennae for perceiving there was a conflict because they were ignorant of the word of the cross at the center of biblical theology.

Scholars continue to debate what events triggered this learning on Luther's part. The locale for his learning, though, is clear: his daily work as professor of biblical theology. *Doctor in Biblia* was his professional degree granted on October 19, 1512. That was what he was called to do at Wittenberg, from then on to the end of his life. The very terms "theology of the cross, theology of glory" had come from the scriptures, especially from St. Paul. Yet those words were not Paul's alone. The "word of the cross," the message of the crucified Lord and Savior, was at the heart of the entire New Testament and even of the Old, for those who have eyes to see.

The scholars' debate noted above refers to the question of Luther's "break" with Western (or Roman) catholicism. Scholars have tried to find out what the decisive breakthrough was and when it occurred. Luther's reminiscences in his later years suggest there was something akin to a Damascus experience in his blinding-flash understanding of the "righteousness of God." One of those reminiscences about those early years, this one from the Table-Talk, goes as follows:

For a long time I went astray and didn't know what I was about. To be sure, I knew something, but I didn't know what it was until I came to the text in Rom. 1:17, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." That text helped me. There I saw what righteousness Paul was talking about. Earlier in the text I read "righteousness of God." I related the abstract ("righteousness of God") with the concrete ("the faith-righteous human") and became sure of my cause. I learned to distinguish between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of the gospel. I lacked nothing before this except that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I regarded both as the same thing and held that there was no difference between Christ and Moses,

ion. After Luther's breakthrough to the "theology of the cross," scholastic theology became for him the very opposite of that theology. In taking its signals from Aristotle, Luther said, scholastic theology became an attempt by sinners to reach God through human wisdom rather than receiving God's wisdom, namely, the gift of mercy in Christ crucified and risen. The opening chapter of 1 Corinthians, where St. Paul contrasts God's wisdom with the wisdom of the world, was Luther's anchor text for setting the theology of the cross against scholasticism.

except the times in which they lived and their degrees of perfection. But then when I discovered the proper distinction—namely that the law is one thing, and the gospel is another—I made myself free. [German: *Da riss ich her durch* = That was my breakthrough.]⁵

As dramatic as Luther makes this discovery sound, most scholars have abandoned the search for a Damascus experience—a singular, private, internal, isolated, existential event—and looked instead for evidence of a steady growth sequence rooted in Luther’s job of studying and teaching the Bible. This suggests an unfolding series of “Aha’s” rather than the “eureka” of the blinding flash.

A winsome case for that point of view is Leif Grane’s *Modus Loquendi Theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie, 1515–1518*.⁶ Grane takes the daily workplace where Luther prepared his lectures and the classrooms where he delivered them as the locale for the renewal. And the chief agent for the renewal was not some blinding flash, even less some psychological need or theological idea that mesmerized Luther. Much more ordinary and low-key, it was the apostles and prophets, the writers of the Old and New Testament, who pushed Luther from scholasticism to the Bible, from Aristotle to the apostles and prophets, from theology of glory to theology of the cross.

Grane picks 1515 as his opening date, when Luther began his lecture series on Romans. Although Luther had been lecturing on the Psalter for most of the two previous years, it was not until the Romans lectures that he moved into direct attack upon scholastic theology and became fully aware of his own opposition to it. Such sharp and unmistakable conflict with scholasticism is not apparent in Luther’s Psalms lectures, although these lectures do include expressions of the theology of the cross.

For his Romans lectures, Luther made use of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings as a help for his understanding of St. Paul. That combination—Augustine and Romans—provided the basis for Luther’s reflection on the theological presuppositions implicit in trying to coordinate St. Paul with the late medieval scholastic heritage. Grane shows that there is growing clarity from the Romans lectures onward about the two modes of language for theology: scholasticism’s theology of glory in contrast to the Bible’s theology of the cross.

At first we might think that this contrast was nothing more than two different modes for handling the same material. However, the key terms cross and glory signal here at the outset that the conflict is over the substance(s) as well. Method (mode) and substance—form and

5. *LW* 54:442f.

6. Leif Grane, *Modus Loquendi Theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie, 1515–1518* (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1975.

content—are corollary to each other. New wine needs new skins.⁷ Scholastic theology “abrogates” theology of the cross. Try to put the latter in the skins of the former and one or the other will be “completely turned upside down.”

Luther Sharpens His Attack on Glory Theology

It is not our concern to trace the development, the series of “Aha’s” leading up to the 1518 quotations with which we began. But a bit of chronology may help for seeing the trees as well as the forest.

1.) After getting his degree, Luther’s first biblical course began with the Psalms. “They kept him busy for two years, from the beginning of the summer semester 1513 until the end of the winter semester of 1515.”⁸

2.) For the next three semesters he lectured on Romans—Easter 1515 until early September 1516.

3.) Next, he taught the letter to the Galatians (winter semester 1516–1517) followed by the Letter to the Hebrews (summer semester 1517 and winter semester 1517–1518). Then he went back to the Psalms for a second time.

Teaching biblical courses was Luther’s bread and butter. But during the months that he was lecturing on Hebrews (March 1517 to March 1518) Luther also drew up several sets of theses for purposes of academic disputations. These disputations were the serious “fun and games” of sixteenth-century academic life. With them, students were tested for their mastery of their disciplines and here professors also proved their mettle. On September 4, 1517, Luther put Francis Gunther of Nordhausen on the stand to earn his “baccalaureate in the Bible” by responding to ninety-seven theses that Luther had composed as a “Disputation against Scholastic Theology.” The next month, October 1517, Luther composed the much more famous Ninety-five Theses, the “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.”

In the spring of the next year, 1518, toward the end of April, came yet a third set of theses as Luther joined his fellow Augustinians at Heidelberg for the general chapter meeting. There he and his fellow Wittenberg Augustinian Leonhard Beier presented the arguments for the forty-nine Heidelberg Theses, which Luther had composed to inform the brothers of what was going on in Wittenberg.

These three sets of theses—along with Luther’s “Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses” (170 pages in *LW* 31)—reflect what he had been learning in his lectures on Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. For

7. *Ibid.*, 17f.
8. *LCC* 15:xix.

example, Heidelberg theses 9 and 10, which rehearse the deadliness of good works done without faith in Christ, are lifted nearly verbatim from his lecture notes on Heb. 9:14: “How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” The same is true of the other earlier disputation theses. In each instance the theses reflect the exegetical work Luther was doing for his classroom lectures.

Luther Presents Cross Theology as an Alternative to Scholastic Theology

The ninety-seven theses against scholastic theology juxtaposed Aristotle’s dominant role in that theology against Paul’s theology in Romans. According to Luther, Aristotle’s optimistic view of human potential for redemption contradicted Paul at every point. The “glory” at the center of such scholasticism was the presumed human potential to meet the demands of moral law. Yet the biblical truth is that the human will at the center of human potential and the law of God “run counter one to another.” Luther noted, “In relation to God’s law the [human] will is always perverse. . . . What the law wants the will never wants,” for the law wants the death of the sinner! Thus “the law is a tyrant over the will, and is never conquered save by ‘the little child born for us.’”

The ninety-seven theses expose scholasticism’s contrariness to the theology of the cross, but they do not yet construct the cruciform alternative. That comes a few months later in the Heidelberg theses. Luther was working on his “Explanations” to his ninety-five indulgence theses at the same time that he was composing the agenda for Heidelberg.

It was also when, as part of the winter semester of 1517–1518, the Letter to the Hebrews was Luther’s regular classroom assignment. For the first time in any set of theses, the Heidelberg theses present the substance of theology of the cross, Luther’s proposal for replacing scholastic theology. The Bible’s alternate *modus* for its alternate theology of the cross—drawn from Romans, Galatians, and currently Hebrews—is at the center of the presentation.

Luther seemed to be unhappy that the Ninety-five Theses against indulgences had created such a fuss. Eck had launched his own counter-charge with a set of theses against Luther’s ninety-five. The publicity media of the day had quickly cast Luther as an angry young man attacking indulgences. Yet the jugular that Luther was going for was the theology behind the church practice of indulgences. Even though the practice of indulgences did merit a hefty critique, it was scholasticism’s

Pelagianism that was cooking on Luther's front burner. When Luther chides Eck for not having "even an inkling" of the theology of the cross, Luther is also saying even such a first-rank theologian as Eck is unaware of what the real issue is that has surfaced in the university theology from Wittenberg.

Since the themes of cross and glory do not surface explicitly in the text of the Ninety-five Theses, it is not surprising that Eck and other respondents do not notice the larger issue at stake in Luther's critique of indulgences. So the "Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses" make the connection.

These themes from the "Explanations" reappear in the Heidelberg theses, but in a revised form. The first eighteen theses contain Luther's attack upon the scholastic teaching about an individual's natural powers, namely, the human's free will and the scholastic favored formula *facere quod in se est* (i.e., to do [at least] that which you are able to do). Scholastic definitions and distinctions, says Luther, only serve to conceal the human's need to despair of oneself in order to desire grace (thesis 18).

In his classroom lectures at this time and in Heidelberg, Luther is out to destroy the security that scholastic theology elicits no matter which of the several schools of scholasticism it comes from. Luther responds to the objection that he thereby leaves human beings in despair. Such an objection, Luther says, misses its target. For not until one learns from the law that one is a sinner does any space for hope even appear; the one who does despair of self has nothing left but grace on which to set his hope and trust.

The way Luther uses the terms "the visible and invisible things of God" in theses 19, 20, and 22 must genuinely have struck his contemporaries as *paradoxes* (which was the actual word Luther used for his theses in the title he gave them). Concerning the invisible things of God that a theology of glory seeks after, the words of Paul in Rom. 1:19ff. apply: "They are without excuse, did not honor God, futile in their thinking, claiming to be wise, they become fools. Therefore God gave them up."

In contrast, the theologian worthy of the name is the one who according to 1 Cor. 1:21ff. knows God via God's *visible data*, namely, via God's human presence in Jesus. Here the data are not only visible; they are reprehensible: foolish, weak, low, despised. "Therefore in Christ crucified is the true theology and the knowledge of God."⁹ In the offensive weakness of the cross, not in his majesty and glory, we come to know God.

With this assertion, Luther mounts his attack on scholastic or

9. LCC 16:291.

philosophical (i.e., Aristotelian) theology. There is no doubt that he identifies scholastic theology with glory theology, although he does not explicitly say so as he had in the “Explanations.” For Luther, the speculative theology that had created the medieval systems is linked with the morality of works-righteousness. Consequently the theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. He prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross. In a nutshell he loves what is lovely and thereby proves himself to be an enemy of the cross of Christ. “Unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil, it is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works.”¹⁰

The theology Luther opposes consists not merely of a false teaching, but of a false approach, a false starting-point, that cannot lead to theology. It winds up with a pseudo-theology instead.

Luther Exposes the “Ladder” in Glory Theology

The thesis of this book is that the cross gives both form and content to Luther’s theology. The cross is the paradigm for his hermeneutics and for the subject matter of the theological enterprise. Of course, the clash with glory theology is more than verbal. It’s not as though glory theologians never treat the cross and vice versa for cross theologians. “Glory” is in the vocabulary of cross theology—the glory of the crucified Messiah. And, yes, glory theology treats the cross, but it wastes it, turns it upside down. Commenting on thesis 62 of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther says, “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God. . . . The (cruciform) gospel is not very well known to a large part of the church . . . [but] the true glory of God springs from this gospel.”¹¹

The cross of Christ as proclaimed in the scriptures gave Luther a picture of what biblical theology is in its entirety—and how that theology stands against the scholastic tradition. In the crucified Christ, say the apostles, God acts contrary to the reasonable expectations of seriously religious people. The cross exposes the rule of opposites which is God’s basic ground rule. In the crucified Christ God exposed his secret—mercy through judgment, life through death, exaltation via humiliation. But note well, it is not simply *my* exaltation via *my* humiliation at God’s hands, *my* achieving life via *my* going through death—although that is true. The greater paradox is that I receive mercy via Christ’s undergoing judgment, life for me through Christ’s death under God’s law, *my* ultimate exaltation via Christ’s humiliation. In

10. *LW* 31:53.

11. *LW* 31:230f.

fact the prior sentence is true only because of the latter: my death, my humiliation, my condemnation are not salutary per se, but *only if I am linked to the Christ* in his humiliation and death. As Luther puts it, “therefore in Christ crucified is the true theology and knowledge of God.”¹²

Glory theology in its scholastic forms is different all down the line. Taking a cue from Aristotle, not from the scriptures, it presupposes continuity between God and humans, between God’s ways and human ways, especially between the human will and the divine will. Not so, says cross theology. Contradiction and conflict is the state of humanity’s normal situation with God. Scholastic theology fudges on the primal situation of original sin and the enslaved human will. For cross theology, our dilemma with God is not spatial separation of two otherwise compatible partners. Instead it is that, though spatially very close (God has not departed the planet), we are at enmity with God and, consequently God, too, with us. It is this “bad” situation that glory theology calls “good,” while the cross theologian calls it what it really is.

When glory theology starts with this spatial notion of separation between the human and divine, there is already implied an entire picture of what salvation for such a person would entail. She must move across the gap that still exists between her and God—using the god-like resources that are in her (*facere quod in se est*) to meet God who is graciously working from the other side. The visual picture is that of a ladder. The task is to climb the ladder either via moral or mystical or ascetic or rational performance. Apart from the God visible in the crucified one, we are teased by the invisible things of God to do just that. Thus such ladder-climbing attempts are not impossible.

In fact, says Luther, the yen to get to God via ladder theology is itself a sin-symptom of the ladder-climber. The worst thing that could happen to such a climber is success. If, as the scriptures claim, God has acted in the crucified Christ to come “down to earth” to work out our salvation (in the visible, lowly sin-saturated realm of the law of sin and death), then it is rank rebellion on my part to try any ladder theology. Were I to succeed in finally encountering God atop my ladder—bereft as I would have to be of the crucified Christ since he is at the opposite end of such ladders, yes the opposite of all ladder theologies—God would simply overwhelm me. First Corinthians 1 and Romans 1 have just such a person in mind with their words of categorical condemnation. Yet glory theology calls such ladder-topping achievement “good.” Cross theology calls it what it really is, “bad.”

12. *LW* 31:53.

Scholasticism did incorporate Christ into its theology, even the grand finale of his ministry in Good Friday and Easter. But even when scholasticism used the cross of Christ, it was “abrogated,” was turned “upside down.” It’s no wonder that this was the case. Scholasticism—by holding on to the anthropology of Aristotle—always had an open door to the whole ladder scenario. The handles to the door—better yet, its hinges—were the free will it ascribed to humanity and the ethic of performance-righteousness it proposed. A door swinging open on such hinges automatically stimulates our yen to achieve by performance. So it fits: I am free enough *facere quod in se est* (to do [at least] what one is able to do). I have the yen to achieve righteousness by performance. Performance is the way that righteousness comes. Righteousness equals salvation.

Cross Theology Necessitates Repentance

Central in scholasticism’s knowledge of God was its perception of God’s relationship to humans in metaphysical terms: causality—first cause, unmoved mover—and our correspondence with the divine in terms of the *analogia entis* (God’s being is like our being refracted by the metaphysical differences between divine and human being). God is pure reason, and so humans are reason creatures. God is (or has) free will; so too—with modification—do humans. God acts and achieves his own proper destiny; so do humans.

But does such a God and such people actually exist? The scriptures claim that such a God cannot be correlated to Christ crucified and also that no such humans exist on the planet either. Scholasticism affirmed the contrary and led all those who were so convinced into the damnable *securitas* of medieval salvation schemes. Salvation, though difficult, was workable.

The concluding theses of Luther’s Ninety-five Theses on indulgences give the response of cross theology to scholasticism’s salvation scheme: “(92) Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, ‘Peace, peace,’ and there is no peace! (93) Blessed be all those people who say to the people of Christ, ‘Cross, cross,’ and there is no cross! (94) Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; (95) and thus be confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace.”¹³

The failure here of glory theology is not merely its invented deity and fictitious human beings—not even its erroneous built-in model of

13. *LW* 31:33.

performance-righteousness. Worst of all, it hoodwinked the populace and provided them with no practical resources for dealing with the realities of human lived experience: the tyrants of devil, conscience, death, sin, doubt, and God's own accusing law.

For Luther, God is indeed creator, but that is more than cause. Day in, day out, with no time off, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve live their lives *coram deo* (face to face with God). That means being called to account. The one who donates our existence to us unceasingly also calls us to give an account of our stewardship of this gift. Since all humans have a de facto link with their creator from the very beginning, the truth about themselves and about God (where scholasticism was wrong on both counts) will come only by God speaking first. The theology of the cross demonstrates and embodies this link between us and our creator when it lifts up the crucified Christ and draws from his "true theology," that is, the truth about God and about us.

If human beings are chronic glory theologians, as cross theology affirms, then there needs to be a change in the theologian before "true theology" can be done. The hermeneutics of the cross put the *theologian's own repentance* as the prolegomena for theologizing. The mind that is doing the theology is never a neutral entity. The cross theology itself needs to take the theological mind captive so that the theologian does not simply use the theological method that is automatic and natural with every human being. Constant contact and conversation with the biblical writers and their alternative theology was Luther's program for contrasting cross theology and glory theology. This approach is not sacrificing one's intellect by affirming what I know to be untrue. It is rather "having this mind in you which you have in the mind of Christ." So for the theologian too, cross theology is the hopeful (not despairing) self-confession that says: "O wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" That's a "true theologian" doing "true theology."

Cross Theology: Both Law and Gospel

Our chapter began with citations that used two different paired sets of opposites—law and gospel, glory theology and cross theology—as Luther's own key for what was new in his exegesis of the scriptures. The two paired sets, however, are not completely synonyms. Yes, glory theology is always a proposal for salvation by the law, and cross theology is salvation by the gospel. At that point they are synonyms.

Yet both law and gospel properly distinguished belong to cross theology—always and only, of course, with the proper distinction

(*discrimen* is the term from the Table Talk). The absence of the distinction was one, if not *the*, fundamental defect in Luther's own earlier scholastic glory theology before his breakthrough. After his breakthrough, law and gospel properly discriminated are the heart and soul of the theology of the cross.

Chapter 2 of this book will delve more deeply into Luther's distinguishing of law and gospel. Here, though, we note that Luther saw that glory theology (scholastic theology) had no inkling that there even was such a discrimination to be made within the scriptures. Thus scholastic theology with this cardinal defect was *unable* to let God's law and God's gospel work as God intended. As Luther says: "God makes a man a sinner that he may make him righteous."¹⁴

In contrast, glory theology took all the words and actions of God to be qualitatively the same stuff. Moses and Christ were both spiritual. Law and gospel, moral instruction and holy absolution, God's judgment and God's forgiveness, God's preserving and God's redeeming were all of a piece—all "godly." The godly quality distinguished them from things earthly, human, natural, secular. Yes, glory theology does make a distinction, but the distinction in glory theology is *between human and divine*, secular and sacred, nature and grace, finite and infinite—in short, the Chalcedonian categories of the ancient church's christological debates. But if the work of God is "to make a man a sinner (the law's *alien work*) so that God may make him righteous," how does the divine-human distinction of glory theology help?

One way to pinpoint the difference between cross and glory theologies is to look at where they locate the fundamental *distinction*, the fundamental either-or. Glory theologies located the either-or at the divine-human dividing line. Luther's cross theology found it *within* the divine component itself—and as a corollary, within the human component as well. God speaks two qualitatively different words to a human being, resulting in two qualitatively different people. Luther distinguishes two opposite God-human *relationships*, not between two opposing—divine versus human—realms of being. Because of God's odd propensity to be operating "*auf die Erde nieder*" ("down on the ground"), I am always in some sort of linkage with God. Being a creature at all is existence *coram deo*, living "in front" of God, inescapably linked to God. What is crucial is the kind of linkage, the type of relationship we have with God: is it based on law (God my critic, I God's rebel) or on gospel (God my merciful Father, I God's forgiven sinner)?

The divine-human distinction of glory theology is the standard in

the rhetoric of Christian history up to the sixteenth century and down to our time. Even in our allegedly secularized atheistic age, the terms “divine” and “human” continue to be the dominant theological currency of conversation. Thus the God in whose existence most Western atheists don’t believe is the god of the supernatural, the infinite, the nonmaterial spirit, the god up there or out there in some other world. In keeping with spatial imagery, then as now, God was at the top of the ladder we have yet to climb.

Luther Affirms God as Creator and Always Present in Human Life

Luther’s eventual dismay with this standard vocabulary and visual picturing for God does not come from some skeptical strain within him. Luther was no logical positivist born too soon. Rather his skepticism comes from his work with the Bible. The Bible does not present God and humans this way. Luther frequently chastised the scholastics for their basic vocabulary of newfangled terms that obliterated the plain meaning of scripture. His “Answer to Latomus, 1521” is replete with such critique of the current theological terminology.¹⁵ And not just the newfangled words of the recent scholastics, but even the shibboleth of Nicea, *homoousios* (“same substance, of one being”), gets its comeuppance from Luther as a nonscriptural word that brings a mixed blessing.

Why did Luther rail against these key terms and concepts themselves, instead of confining the critique to the mis-managers of the vocabulary storehouse? Answer: the new wine of the Bible’s cross theology can’t be contained in such skins. The vocabulary of glory theology aided and abetted the yen to move from earth to heaven, from the human to the divine—away from the creaturely world where the creator placed us, “up” into the creator’s realm where he did not, away from work and pain and suffering to leisure and power and limitless existence. This yen is the original sin of Genesis 3—to vacate our location in creation and “be like God,” that is, moving into God’s habitation. This is the sin of not trusting (*sine fiducia*) that *where God has put us* is good for us—and that in that very locus, *God* is good for and to us.

Luther, of course, continued all his life to use the inherited terminology of the theological tradition and to do so without qualifications: body and soul, divine and human, God up in heaven and we down on earth. But the fundamental dualism of Greek antiquity—divine and human as the blueprint for Christian theology—Luther would consciously revise and even turn on its head.

15. *LCC* 16:308–64; *LW* 32.

So in 1539 (*On the Councils and the Church*) he reflects on the impassibility and immortality of God (i.e., divinity by definition cannot suffer or die). Luther writes, “For God in his own nature [by Greek definition?] cannot die; but now that [in the crucified Christ] God and man are united in one person, it is called God’s death. . . .”¹⁶ The word of the cross turns the classical predicate of God’s immortality upside down. For Luther, the grounds for claiming a god who can suffer and die are the grounds of salvation. “If it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man [died], we are lost.”¹⁷

Thus the primary defect of the dualist universe of nature and super-nature—with God’s abode above and ours below—is finally a soteriological defect. The Bible’s Good News of salvation won’t fit. God is separate from us not by space but rather because God is God and we are not. Worse yet, the normal pattern of such a two-story universe leaves our bottom story normally devoid of God just by the very nature of the case. In the dualistic universe of glory theology, God is present in the bottom story only by choosing to cross the dividing line, the metaphysical line of two qualitatively different and even mutually exclusive beings. This crossover—in principle impossible for us—is not going to be easy for God either.

No, counters Luther, ever since the creation began God has remained inside this created hemisphere. God never vacated it.

The glory theologian works from created things (our lower hemisphere) to the invisible things of God (the upper hemisphere). Thus the glory theologian never hears the criticism addressed to humans by God in the data of our lower hemisphere. The glory theologian mishears the law data which really are God’s condemning call to repentance, and perceives that data to be invitations to climb the ladder. He sidesteps the law’s *opus alienum* (alien work), with the even more tragic result that the gospel’s *opus proprium* (proper work) then passes him by. Lacking the law-gospel discrimination, he loses both works of God. That is a big loss.

The Resurrection Certifies Cross Theology

It is perhaps easier to see triumphalism rather than legalism as the enemy of cross theology, especially in the recent history of the West with its ostensible mastery, technology, and economic and managerial control of the planet. Surely that suggests hubris as the besetting sin of the race. Against this hubris, cross theology proclaims the alternative

16. *SWML* 4:296.

17. *SWML*, 4:295.

of weakness, defeat, and the foolishness of Jesus Christ to be the very power, victory, wisdom of God for salvation.

This perspective (cross theology vs. triumphalist hubris) trademarks much of the renaissance of cross theology. Thus these contemporary cross theologians walk a very tight rope when it comes to the resurrection. These theologians—most notably Douglas John Hall—are wary of giving quarter to the triumphalism they have just abolished with the suffering-servant mode and posture of the cross. As a result, they have difficulty working with the resurrection. Attempting to follow the rubrics of the New Testament, they suggest that the resurrection of Jesus does not displace cross theology, but completes and clarifies what the word of the cross is all about—for those who have eyes to see.

The second *discrimen* in Luther's Heidelberg theses (law and gospel) would help here. Remember, it is not glory per se, victory per se, wisdom per se, strength per se that is the antithesis of cross theology. Rather, it is cross-less glory—victory, wisdom, strength without the cross. The cross-less-ness refers not only to Christ's cross, but also to the crucifixion of the ones whom Christ's cross is to save.

The crucifixion of that one to be saved (as also of the crucified One who saves us) is the work of God's law. The cross-less preaching of God's law is invariably a legalist preaching of that law, one that contradicts Heidelberg thesis 23: "The law works wrath: it kills, curses, makes guilty, judges and damns everyone who is not in Christ." Scholasticism when compared with the hefty biblical texts supporting thesis 23 (Gal. 3:13; 3:10; Rom. 2:12, 23; 4:15; 7:10) was simply law-shy—not allowing God's law to work such harsh operations as are predicated to it in those biblical verbs of thesis 23.

Thus it is not merely the chronic legalism that barricades one from the work of the gospel of the glory and grace of God. *God's law itself is the sinner's nemesis*. The law aims to kill the sinner. The folly of the legalist is that "[w]hosoever glories in the law as being wise and learned glories in his own shame: he is glorying in being cursed, he is glorying in the wrath of God, he is glorying in death."¹⁸

The cross-theology renaissance—represented by Douglas Hall, Stanley Hauerwas, Jürgen Moltmann, and others—could use a fuller dose of Luther's own cross theology to counteract its inclination toward law-shyness. The corollary to their law-shyness is some timidity about Christ's resurrection. For Luther's exegesis of St. Paul exposes a law of God in operation in the normal interfaces of daily life that is not "good news." The human dilemma is worse than the indisputable data of our

18. LCC 16:293.

idolatry, our cursed pride in self-justifications. The sinner's life proceeds "under" God's law and its curse. Not just our legalisms, our idolatries need to be overcome. The "unending voice" of God's own law, our constant critic, needs to be silenced. And that is what Easter proclaims.

The crucifixion that cross theology commends to believers is more than the meek and lowly imaging of Jesus the suffering servant in the conviction drawn from his life and work that such is the way of God through the world—although it is that. Even worse (or better) than that, cross theology is the brave reception of the crucifixion of the Adamic self, administered by the law of God itself. The resurrection of Christ certifies not only that God-trusters survive the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune administered by wicked and vain glory theologians. Even more scandalously, the resurrection certifies that gospel-trusters survive the death of the old Adam administered by God's rightful and just execution of sinners.

Thus there is no danger that the resurrection message might supplant cross theology with glory theology. The real "cross" is God's law as it is properly administered to mortify sinners (Heidelberg thesis 23). Preaching and believing the resurrection of Christ as *my* shared conquest of the law of sin and death is prerequisite for preventing my cruciform lifestyle from devolving either into despair or hubris (or even prideful humility). Such a person

knows that it is enough if he suffers and is broken through the cross, nay rather is utterly brought to naught. But this is exactly what Christ says in John 3:7: "Ye must be born again." If we are to be born again we must first die and be exalted (resurrected) with the Son of Man. I said, "Die," and that means to find death ever present in all experiences.¹⁹

It is not just any old suffering and weakness that constitutes theology of the cross. What made the suffering and weakness of Jesus salvific was that "*God* was in Christ" doing the suffering and being crucified—"him being made sin for us [i.e., under the powers of sin, death, wrath, and law] . . . so that we might become the righteousness of God." And what finally made that suffering and cross redemptive is again not merely that it was God enduring it. Rather it is that—in the Good Friday finale of that suffering—God breaks through that very law of sin and death that is the mortal enemy of all sinful people. Easter announces that one like us, our friend of sinners, has broken through the law of sin and death. He has directly encountered those powers and conquered them by full and open admission of their claims upon him and the sinners he was befriending.

19. LCC 16:293 comment on thesis 24 of Heidelberg.

The theology of the cross is not simply a theology of suffering. It is theology of Christ-connectedness in view of the kind of Messiah Jesus really was. What needs crucifying in our old Adam is more than our ethics of triumphalism, of achievement, of pride. True that all is, but the core lies deeper. The deepest fault of glory theologies is *not* that they are lifestyle proposals (ethics), but rather that they are salvation proposals (kerygma and dogma). Cross theology calls for more than discomfort, disestablishment, divestiture, denial. It calls for the death of that Old Adam at the center of the sinner's life.

The death of the Old Adam may or may not occur in the experience of negativity. For it is within the power and skill of Old Adams to utilize suffering and humiliation as moral achievements, moral plusses, on the basis of which to pursue yet another ladder theology. Cross theology calls for the death of the ladder-building and ladder-climbing person by linkage with the Crucified One. Whatever good, grand, glorious consequences follow upon that—and they do—are not theology of glory. They are first fruits from the First-born from the dead, the glory of the crucified Messiah in his people.