FREEING SALVATION: LUTHER'S PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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MARTIN LUTHER, PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

By 1516 Luther had become extraordinarily busy, belonging, as Scott Hendrix has suggested, to the "senior management of the Reformed congregation" of his Augustinian order.[2] In a letter to long-time associate John Lang, Luther spoke of spending all day responding to letters. He regularly preached at the monastery, and was daily asked to preach in the city church. He was appointed reader during meal times, overseer of the programme of study at Wittenberg University, and vicar of eleven cloisters.[3] Luther was not so much the introverted and troubled monk of popular imagination, as a busy professor, cleric, and administrator, deeply engaged in the affairs of his monastery, university, parish, and community. But he was not yet, and would not for several years become, the reformer we now remember him as. Still, his programme of renewal was underway.

Calls for reform were not uncommon in the late medieval west though Luther's idea of reform differed from that of some of his contemporaries. Some, like Erasmus, sought a reformation of morals, a return to apostolic simplicity amongst the clergy, and biblical forms of spirituality. Luther's reformation began as a reform of the theological curriculum at Wittenberg University, a turning away from the scholasticism of the high medieval period for a greater emphasis on the Scriptures and the writings of the church fathers.[4] But it would soon become clear that Luther was not interested in the renewal of theology for its own sake, or from a desire for novelty. Rather Luther saw clearly and presciently that the failures and foibles of the late medieval church were the result of a deeper, theological malaise. From the start, Luther's intense theological interests were yoked to pastoral concern for the life of the church, and the faith and worship of the common people. This dual focus is clearly observed in Luther's Ninety-Five Theses where he canvasses both theological and practical matters. In 2009 Timothy Wengert asserted as much:

> As Luther fans the world over are already gearing up for the celebration in 2017 of the 500th anniversary of their posting [i.e. the Ninety-Five Theses] on 31 October 1517, too often the celebrations will focus on Luther's break with Rome or his Reformation breakthrough rather than on Luther's own stated reason for the dispute: pastoral care for his flock in Wittenberg.[5]

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[1] Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology.
[2] Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 46.
[3] See Ibid., 45. The letter, dated October 26, 1516, can be found in *LW* 48: 27–28.
[4] See Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, Second edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 61–65. See also Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 106.
[5] Timothy J. Wengert, "Introducing the Pastoral Luther," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 5.

According to Robert Kolb, Luther believed that the biblical message was given to the church for pastoral reasons, and that the connection of biblical confession and pastoral practice stood at the heart of the Lutheran enterprise.[6] That this connection shaped Luther's own ministry is evident in the preamble to his Small Catechism. In 1528 Luther had undertaken a three-month "episcopal" visitation of congregations in Electoral Saxony and Meissen, and thus reported:

> The deplorable conditions that I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty![7]

Thus, Luther wrote his Large Catechism for pastors and teachers, his Small Catechism for lay persons and heads of households. He translated the Bible into the vernacular, and gave instructions on what to look for and expect in the gospels. His treatises include many examples of pastoral works such as his *Fourteen Consolations* (1519) written for his patron Fredrick the Wise during a time of serious illness.[8] Also worthy of note are his *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519), *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519), *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague* (1527), *A Simple Way to Pray for a Good Friend* (1535), and *A Comfort for Women with Whom Things Have Gone Awry during Childbirth* (1542). It is evident that Luther was, especially, a preacher. He also baptised, celebrated the Lord's Supper, visited the sick, and comforted the dying. Martin Luther was "more than anything else," suggests Timothy Wengert, "pastor and preacher for his Wittenberg flock."[9] His preeminent work was that of Christian formation. Before medieval Christendom could become truly Christian, old habits of thinking and acting had to give way to a new vision of what authentic Christianity implied. The medieval church was afflicted with a misguided and uncritical commitment to the wrong principles. What was required was not simply *Reformation* but *Re-Formation*.[10]

This paper explores Luther's work of pastoral re-formation and the theology underpinning this work by examining two important examples of his early expositions: his *Meditation on Christ's Passion* (1519), and his justly revered *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). Both these works set forth in positive terms, Luther's pastoral theology and vision.

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[6] See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 55.
[7] Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 471.
[8] See Andrew Towner, "Martin Luther, Reformer Pastor: The Pastoral Theology of the *Tessaradecas Consolatoria*," *Churchman* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 45–59.
[9] Wengert, "Introducing," 1–2.
[10] David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, Second edn. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 127.

MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST

In 1519 Martin Luther wrote a short "Meditation on the Passion of Christ" for Holy Week. His Good Friday sermon begins with three *wrong* ways by which to meditate on Christ's passion. Some do it to vent their anger at the Jews or at Judas. Others do it superstitiously or blindly, carrying pictures, booklets, letters or even crosses on their person as a kind of talisman to ward off evil and misfortune. "Christ's suffering is thus used to effect in them a lack of suffering contrary to his being and nature,"[11] as though Christ's suffering on our behalf frees us from our own sufferings. Others feel pity for Christ, lamenting and bewailing his innocence.

The correct way to meditate on the passion, however, is to see his wounds as *our* sins, and so let our conscience be terrified and weighed down by the reality of human sin and divine wrath. For Luther, it is only at the cross that we gain true insight into the nature and consequence of sin, and so into our own nature and situation as sinners. The suffering and death of Jesus was the consequence of our sins, the price of redemption. Luther drives home the existential meaning of the cross in the strongest terms: "You must get this thought through your head and not doubt that you are the one who is torturing Christ thus, for your sins have surely wrought this."[12]

> We must give ourselves wholly to this matter, for the main benefit of Christ's passion is that man sees into his own true self and that he be terrified and crushed by this. Unless we seek that knowledge, we do not derive much benefit from Christ's passion. The real and true work of Christ's passion is to make man conformable to Christ, so that man's conscience is tormented by his sins in like measure as Christ was pitiably tormented in body and soul by our sins. This does not call for many words but for profound reflection and a great awe of sins.[13]

But Luther does not leave us in torment. Although the crucified Christ is an "earnest mirror" which does not "lie or trifle" but drives us to a true self-assessment, it is also and simultaneously the place where the divine mercy is seen in all its splendour and fullness. Having been fully awakened to our own sin, we must now also turn fully to Christ, "pouring" our sins, as it were, back onto Christ, casting them from ourselves and onto him in order to free our conscience from them. The believer is to "stake everything" on verses such as Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24, and 2 Corinthians 5:21, and tenaciously cling to them, all the more as conscience torments, for nothing else will secure peace of heart and mind.[14] Further, we see in the resurrection of Christ his triumph over the wounds and sins by which he suffered. We see also his love, and

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[11] Martin Luther, "A Meditation on Christ's Passion," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 165.
[12] Luther, "A Meditation," 166–67. "They contemplate Christ's passion aright who view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience. This terror must be felt as you witness the stern wrath and the unchanging earnestness with which God looks upon sin and sinners, so much so that he was unwilling to release sinners even for his only and dearest Son without his payment of the severest penalty for them. … You must get this thought through your head and not doubt that you are the one who is torturing Christ thus, for your sins have surely wrought this."
[13] Ibid., 168.
[14] Ibid., 170.

that of the Father, in his bearing of sins on our behalf. True meditation on the passion of Christ must thus progress from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

> If we allow sin to remain in our conscience and try to deal with it there, or if we look at sin in our heart, it will be much too strong for us and will live on forever. But if we behold it resting on Christ and [see it] overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot remain on Christ, since it is swallowed up by his resurrection. Now you see no wounds, no pain in him, and no sign of sin. Thus Paul declares that "Christ died for our sin and rose for our justification" [Romans 4:25]. That is to say, in his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it, but through his resurrection he justifies us and delivers us from all sin, if we believe this.[15]

Although this counsel may seem foreign to modern sensibilities, Luther's advice was in accordance with medieval devotional practices. Markus Wriedt suggests that Luther learnt this approach to the cross from his mentor Johannes von Staupitz who taught him—when his own soul was in terror on account of his sense of divine wrath—to see in the suffering of Christ a revelation of the love and mercy of God.

> We can be certain that Staupitz counselled Luther mainly along the lines of late medieval devotional practices strongly influenced by mysticism and a meditation on Christ's wounds by Bernard Clairvaux. The deeply humane exhortations by the vicar general not to become lost in the examination of one's own sinful nature, but to put confidence in God's love and mercy, certainly touched Luther…deeply.[16]

Luther repeats his mentor's counsel to his own hearers:

> Unless God inspires our heart, it is impossible for us of ourselves to meditate thoroughly on Christ's passion. … You must first seek God's grace and ask that it be accomplished by his grace and not by your own power. That is why the people we referred to above fail to view Christ's passion aright. They do not seek God's help for this, but look to their own ability to devise their own means of accomplishing this. They deal with the matter in a completely human but also unfruitful way.[17]

'Correct' meditation on the passion is not a religious work or something accomplished through our own (somewhat morbid) self-effort. There is no moral self-flagellation here, but good and necessary pastoral wisdom from Luther, which also went unheeded by some in the Puritan and Pietist traditions—and still today. Those who seek to uncover their own sinfulness, to convince themselves of their own moral filthiness, and dredge over sins and errors time and again, have, as St Paul has said, "to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but [such

[15] Ibid., 170–71.
[16] Marcus Wriedt, "Luther's Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 89–90.
[17] Luther, "A Meditation," 169.

activities] are of no value against fleshly self-indulgence" (Colossians 2:23).[18] Luther obviously understands true meditation on Christ's passion to be a *theological* activity, interpreting his sufferings through the lenses of such Scripture passages as "Christ died *for our sins*" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We look only to Christ and not to ourselves. In him we see both our sin and its remedy, and in him the pattern and the source of strength for truly Christian life.

The depth of theological reflection and pastoral wisdom Luther has packed into this sermon is nothing less than remarkable. Multiple themes bristle in this short piece. Luther appeals seamlessly to penal and *Christus Victor* metaphors of the atonement—without seeking to "explain" the cross in terms of either.[19] We see the very prominent focus on the *conscience* and so also on the *individual* before God. Of course, justification and faith are present in his discussion, as is his prominent focus on the *pro me*, *pro nobis*—for *me*, for *us*: "Of what help is it to you that God is God, if he is not God to you?"[20]

This is obviously a message for Christians rather than non-believers, though non-believers also might benefit from it. Having come to Christ, we learn that we are sinners. It is from the cross that we learn this, and from the cross and resurrection that we learn we are forgiven and loved. And learning that we are thus loved and forgiven is the basis—the only basis—for Christian life and sanctification.

In this sermon, then, Luther's *theology of the cross* comes to prominent expression, together with his distinction between the *two kinds of righteousness*—both central emphases which emerged in the Reformer's theology in this period.[21] Luther's theology of the cross is an epistemological and hermeneutical principle forever at odds with every human attempt to know and describe God on our own terms. God—the hidden and true God—is known only in the cross. Luther is trenchant: *Crux sola est nostra theologia!* ("The cross alone is our theology!").[22] There, at the very place where his wrath against sin is poured out, God is revealed as the loving and merciful God who saves us and makes us new. Here, too, true humanity is also made known—as Luther notes in the citation above: "In his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it."

> Luther taught that God's true righteousness—his true nature, his essence—is revealed in the cross, and it turns out that he is love and mercy. … Apart from his sacrifice of his own life as

[18] Note that this is my comment rather than Luther's.

[19] See Forde's comment: "Theologians of glory are always driven to seek transcendental meaning, to try to see into the invisible things of God, to get a line on the logic of God. They look at the cross and ask, "What is it all about?" they wonder what is "behind" it all. There is a reason for this, of course. If we can *see through* the cross to what is supposed to be behind it, we don't have to *look at* it! It is, finally, a matter of self-defense," in Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 76, original emphasis.

[20] Luther, "A Meditation," 166.

[21] The literature on Luther's theology of the cross is voluminous. See especially theses 19–21 in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 in Lull, ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 43–44. For an introductory essay, see Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Lull's anthology also contains a copy of Luther's *Two Kinds of Righteousness.* For a discussion of this work see Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness."

[22] Cited in Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 152. The original appears in the Weimar edition of Luther's works (WA 5.176.32–3).

> the substitute for his people under the law's condemnation, there is no life. Exactly how and why it is so is never explained in Scripture. … God's Word simply presents us the cross. The fury of God's wrath appears there in all its horror. God's anger reveals the horror of sin and how it has ruined the human creature whom he loves. But that very presentation of God's wrath appears at that place, Golgotha, where God has poured himself out in order to bury our sinful identity and give us new life.

The real and true work of Christ's passion, says Luther, is to make humanity "conformable to Christ": the sinner must die. Luther's theology of the cross is no sentimentalised reflection on Jesus' sufferings or the vulnerability of God, but an offensive theology that confronts us as much in our good works and religion as it does in our sin.[23] The cross spells the end to all human performance as an attempt at righteousness; we are rendered passive before God as Christ was passive on the cross. "The theology of the cross labels as a lie the idea that human performance can establish human identity as a child of God and a true human being."[24] True human righteousness exists in two distinct and inseparable forms.[25] First is the *alien* or *passive* righteousness which comes to us as a divine gift, from outside of ourselves and without any work on our part, reconstituting the original righteousness lost to us in the fall, and establishing the Christian's new identity as a beloved child of God. This is an "infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment," for Christ himself becomes our righteousness as we, through faith, become one with him.[26] This is a relational rather than substantive reality, the gift of right relationship with God, established and characterised by joyful trust toward God.[27] Inseparably connected to and deriving from this first form is *actual* righteousness, that by which we are righteous in relation to other creatures. This form of righteousness is active rather than passive, horizontally-oriented rather than vertical, and issuing in true human goodness through a life of good works. According to Luther, this righteousness is the "product, fruit and consequence" of the first type and goes on to complete the first kind.[28] The two forms belong together because both are the result of our union with Christ. Luther identifies three directions in which actual righteousness moves. First, it is directed toward the self in crucifying the flesh and sinful desires. Second, it is directed toward the neighbour in works of love, justice and service. Finally, it is directed in humble devotion, meekness and fear toward God.[29] Actual righteousness, therefore, comes to expression in these three domains of everyday existence.

Luther uses the analogy of marriage to explain how this occurs:

> Therefore through the first righteousness arises the voice of the bridegroom who says to the soul, "I am yours," but through the second comes the voice of the bride who answers, "I am yours." Then the marriage is consummated; it becomes strong and complete in accordance

[23] Forde, *On Being a Theologian*, viii-x, 1-2.
[24] Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," 54.
[25] See Luther's "Two Kinds of Righteousness" Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 155–64.
[26] Ibid., 156.
[27] Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," 42–43, 50–51.
[28] Luther, "Two Kinds," 158.
[29] Ibid., 157-58.

> with the Song of Solomon [2:16]: "My beloved is mine and I am his. Then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others.[30]

Luther's use of the marriage analogy is famous in other contexts for emphasising the blessings that accrue to the believer through their union with Christ. Here, however, the analogy is used to speak of the reciprocal response of the bride, which answers to and reflects the self-giving of the groom. It is in this responsive self-donation that actual righteousness—sanctification—emerges. Only now is the marriage consummated, and now the bride lives from this union. Luther argues that Christian righteousness involves self-donation and servanthood not only towards God but to one's neighbour. He insists that "each individual Christian shall become the servant of another in accordance with the example of Christ."[31] Actual righteousness is restorative, seeking to vindicate and pardon the other, serving them and taking their needs and cause as one's own. Further, such self-giving is possible only because one has received the prior gift of divine righteousness that frees them from the need to establish their identity and relation with respect to God. The call to the Christlike life is grounded in the grace given us in Christ. Without the prior gift of God that frees us from self-seeking, we could not truly serve others.

This connection between the two forms of righteousness comes to clear expression in the third and final movement of Luther's "Meditation on the Passion of Christ." As already noted, these two forms of righteousness exist for Luther in indissoluble unity, but also in an irreversible order. Once the passive righteousness has done its work in us we may legitimately embark upon the active life.

> After your heart has thus become firm in Christ, and love, not fear of pain, has made you a foe of sin, then Christ's passion must from that day on become a pattern for your entire life. Henceforth you will have to see his passion differently. Until now we regarded it as a sacrament which is active in us while we are passive, but now we find that we too must be active, namely, in the following.[32]

Having been conformed to the Crucified One in his death we are now conformed to him—the Crucified One—in our life. The cross now serves as the pattern for the entire life of the Christian. Luther goes on to discuss the nature of a cruciform life, using the image of Christ's suffering to resist temptation and the despair or sloth that may issue from adversity.

THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN

1520 was a pivotal year in Luther's career. On June 15, the papal bull of excommunication against him was published, though it would it take some three months to reach Luther, and would be burnt publicly by Luther on December tenth. During this year Luther printed no fewer than five publications, the most

[30] Ibid., 158.
[31] Ibid., 160–61.
[32] Luther, "A Meditation," 171.

important being his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and his *De Libertate Christiana—On Christian Liberty*, or as it is commonly known, *The Freedom of a Christian*.[33] Luther's *Freedom* was a bestseller, reprinted thirty times between 1520 and 1526, in two versions (Latin and German), and translated into other languages or dialects.[34] Although only a short treatise, it is rightly regarded as one of the classic texts of the Christian theological tradition. Due to constraints of space, only a brief outline of Luther's *Freedom* can be provided in this essay.

The treatise opens with a brief preamble in which Luther sets out two thematic propositions which he will go on to discuss. He explicitly notes that he has prepared this treatise "for the unlearned—for only them do I serve,"[35] and he indicates that the overall concern of his work has to do with the Christian experience and life of faith. The two thematic propositions structure the treatise with one major section devoted to each of the propositions. The work concludes with an appendix addressing a recurrent criticism directly related to the theme. It is worth noticing that Luther refers to *freedom* eighteen times in the treatise. By contrast, he refers to *faith* 161 times and *works* 189 times, which suggests that the tractate is largely concerned with the relation between faith and works.[36]

Luther's thematic propositions are well-known:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.[37]

Luther approaches his discussion of these seemingly contradictory propositions by means of an understanding of the constitutional nature of human being as body and soul, as outward and inward. He begins with discussion of the inward nature or soul which is coordinated with the first proposition, before continuing with discussion of the second proposition which is coordinated with a person's bodily and outward nature. For Luther, no external factors can touch the inner life with respect to producing righteousness and freedom: this belongs solely to the ministry of the Word of God, and the faith generated by that Word. Certainly, for Luther, the Word contains both law and gospel, commandments and promises. From the former we learn that we are sinners, unable in ourselves to do the good required of us. But here the word of promise contained in the gospel of Christ comes to our aid.

> Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfil what the law prescribes so that all things may be God's alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments. He alone commands, he alone fulfils.
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> Since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness, the soul which clings to them with a firm faith will be so closely united with them

[33] See Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 83-98.
[34] Timothy J. Wengert, "Introduction," in *The Annotated Luther Volume 1: The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 468.
[35] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 596.
[36] Brett J. Muhlhan, *Being Shaped by Freedom: An Examination of Luther's Development of Christian Liberty, 1520-1525* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 50.
[37] Luther, "Freedom," 596.

> and altogether absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them. If a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this most tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word. … Just as the heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul.[38]

Luther's "He alone commands, he alone fulfils" is a powerful affirmation of the divine grace which not only initiates but also accomplishes salvation. Through the divine Word of promise, this grace is communicated to the soul to such an extent that the believer becomes the possessor, as it were, of all of the grace of that Word. The soul, like the iron in the fire, begins to glow with the life and power, grace and freedom of the divine Word. If this is true, then the believer has all they need already in faith, with no further need either of works or law to justify them. In faith and by the Word of promise they are freed from all such works and laws.

Not only is the believer united by faith to the liberating and enlivening Word of promise, but the incomparable benefit of faith is that the soul is united to Christ as a bride is united with her groom. Here Luther utilises the marriage analogy to describe the blessed exchange whereby all that which belongs to the soul—sins, death, and damnation—is taken by Christ, while all that which belonged to him—grace, life, and salvation—is given to the soul. In its union with the risen Christ the soul is freed not only from sin, death and hell, but from every possibility or need to secure its own justification by means of human work and performance. In its union with the risen Christ the soul reigns as king with Christ over sin, death and hell. This is a spiritual and eschatological victory; Luther has no place for a prosperity gospel. In the world the Christian will endure evils, sufferings and death but these cannot touch the victory of Christ given to us by faith: in all these things we are, as Paul says, "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). A Christian, then, through their union with Christ by faith, is a perfectly free lord, subject to none. Through faith alone, they are united with Christ, risen with Christ, seated with Christ, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—free indeed (John 8:36).

The eschatological horizon of Luther's thought becomes clearer when he turns his attention to the second proposition. Were we perfectly and solely spiritual beings, or had we already inherited the eternal kingdom, works would be unnecessary. This, however, is not the case.[39] Although justified wholly by faith, our bodily and outward existence is still subject to an alien will which must be brought under subjection.[40] Further, the Christian must not confuse the various relationships in which they stand. When speaking of the Christian as lord, free and subject to none, Luther speaks of the soul in its vertical relationship to God. When speaking, however, of the Christian's relation to themselves or to others, he speaks of horizontal relations in this world. Confusing these relations results in Christians seeking to relate to God by way of works instead of faith, thereby neglecting the true works which should characterise their life in the world.

[38] Ibid., 601.
[39] Ibid., 610.
[40] Ibid., 610–11.

Luther identifies two such forms of works which should characterise the believer's life. The first refer to bodily disciplines which restrain its appetites and subject the flesh so that it will obey and conform to the new creation within. This first category of works must not be confused with justification. Rather they arise from justification towards the crucifying of the flesh out of a desire to please God. Luther insists, on the basis of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:18, that works do not make a person good or evil, but the person brings forth works in accordance with the kind of person that they are: the fruits do not bear the tree but the tree bears the fruits.

Luther's exposition reaches its climax as he discusses the second category of works which are concerned with the believer's interactions with others.

> Lastly, we shall also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbour. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others.[41]

As was the case in his sermon on the two kinds of righteousness, so here Luther turns especially to Paul's account of Christ in Philippians 2, and its implications for Christian life. The truly Christian life is faith active in love, in works of "freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done."[42] Just as Christ, rich in God and having no need of works or sufferings, humbled and emptied himself in order to serve us, so the Christian ought "in every way to deal with his neighbour as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him."[43]

> He ought to think: … "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbour, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbour, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ." … As our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbour through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.[44]

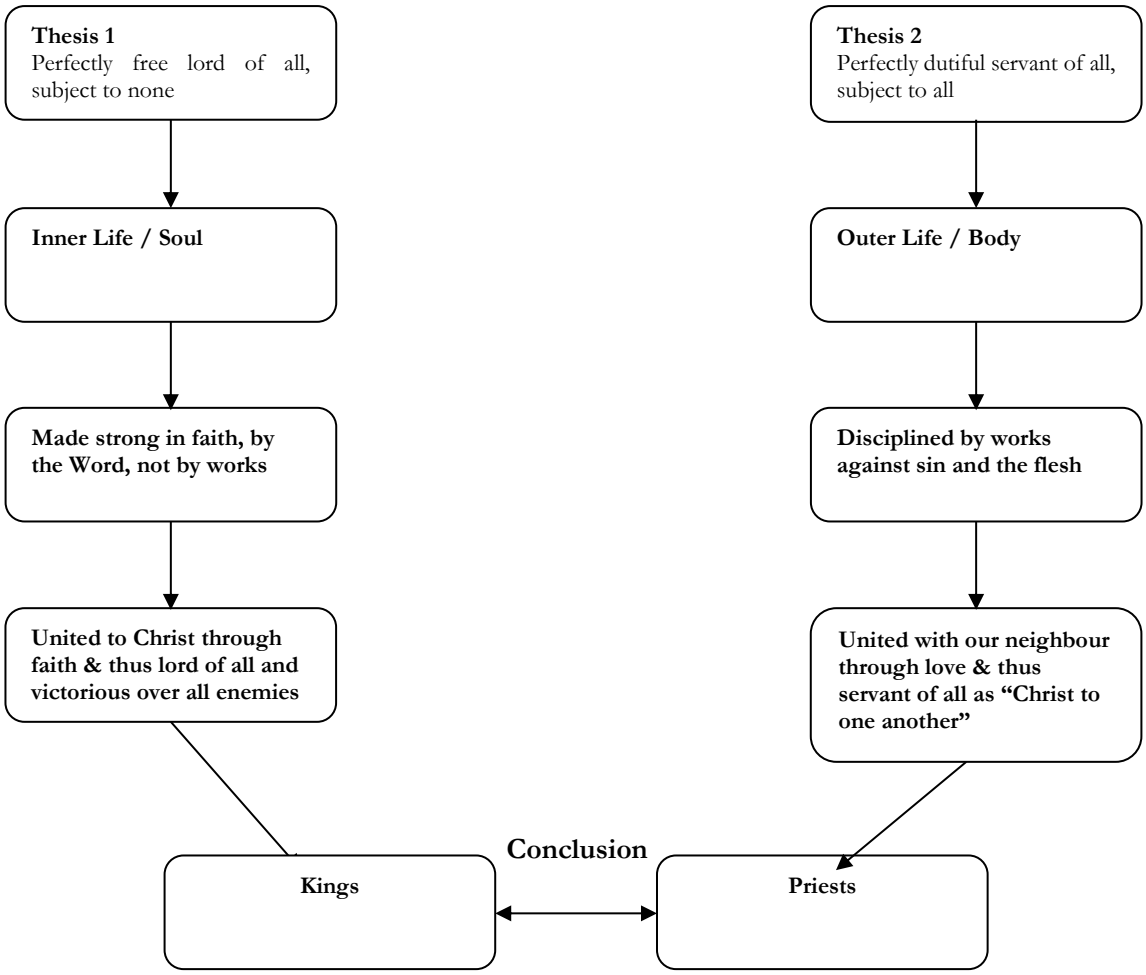
With these remarkable and profound words Luther teaches that just as believers united to Christ by faith gain a share in his kingly reign, so also in their union with Christ they gain a share in his priestly ministry. United to Christ they become as Christ to others. This priestly ministry is the privilege and responsibility of every believer and not merely that of a priestly caste. Luther presents an astounding vision of Christian existence in terms of a spirituality of faith and love, or better, of faith active in love (Galatians 5:6). This is a faith that frees the self from its own self-possession, liberating it not *from* service but *for* service (Galatians 5:13). In this way Luther not only expounds his doctrine of justification by faith but defends it

[41] Ibid., 616.
[42] Ibid., 617.
[43] Ibid., 618.
[44] Ibid., 619–20.

from the common accusation that his doctrine undermined Christian ethics by removing the need for good works.

> We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbour. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.[45]

Luther's argument in the *Freedom* tractate might be sketched as follows:



Sometimes the smallest facts provide the greatest illumination. Born—we think[46]—late on November 10, 1483, and christened the next day on the feast of St Martin of Tours, Hans and Margarete *Luder* named their new son Martin. How and when did Martin *Luder* become Martin *Luther*? It is clear that the change had already occurred by the time Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses. Both the introduction to the Theses

[45] Ibid., 623.
[46] For a discussion of critical issues around the date of Luther's birth see Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 17–18.

and his letter to Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz use the new name.[47] Historians note that it was not unusual for humanists to adopt a Greek form of their name to produce a scholarly pseudonym. For example, the brilliant young humanist Philip Schwarzerd, who entered the University of Heidelberg at the tender age of twelve, is better known by his Greek name: Philip Melanchthon.[48] Martin Luder, too, adopted a Greek name and began signing his letters *Eleutherius*—the "free one," the one who had been liberated, or the one who would liberate. Heinz Schilling, however, suggests that as Luder's work took him out of the academy and into the world of the common folk among whom the Greek name would be meaningless, "he preserved a reminder of the freedom that was at the heart of reformed theology: the central *th* in the Greek form of his name was carried over into his family name. Martin Luder became Martin Luther."[49] Luther's very name is itself testimony to the heart of his theological and pastoral vision: a theology of freedom issuing from the free grace of the free God who makes his people free. Hendrix concurs: "From this point on, freedom for Luther meant living bound to Christ, and that freedom made him much more than a protester against indulgences or a critic of the pope. Now he was a man with a larger vision of what religion could be and a mission to realize that vision by making other people free."[50]

The exposition of these two documents from the early period of Luther's career clearly show the theology that grounded, framed and supported his pastoral ministry. Fundamental to his pastoral theology is the theology of the cross and the associated doctrine of justification by faith. For Luther, the cross of Jesus declared the end of every human attempt at self-salvation, the futility of any and all self-assertion before God, and the utter incapacity of human good works to achieve reconciliation with God. Rather the human agent is reduced to passivity before God, crucified, annihilated—and reborn, for the cross is not only the locus of the divine judgement, but even more the revelation of loving mercy of God toward sinners. This cross is also the paradigm of Christian existence, as those united to Christ learn to share in his ongoing ministry through them in the world. Here clearly, we see also the two kinds of righteousness, and the ineluctable relation between justification and sanctification, both grounded in the reality of our union with Christ. The documents show the eschatological and anthropological dimensions of Luther's theology, as well as the centrality and power of the divine Word of promise and its reception in faith. And of course, this is a theology of freedom. Luther was freeing salvation from the strictures of the medieval penitential system and the semi-Pelagian theology that had obscured the promise of the gospel and the free grace of God. He longed for Christians to be freed in their conscience from both the weight of sin and the fear of punishment. His doctrine of union with Christ freed believers from the power of sin, death and the devil.

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[47] See Timothy J. Wengert, ed. *The Annotated Luther Volume 1: The Roots of Reform* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 34 and 55. Note that in the introduction to the Theses, the name is spelt "Lutther." Note further Lohse's observation that the first evidence of this change of name occurs in Luther's letter to Albrecht. See Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 101.

[48] Gill R. Evans, *The Roots of the Reformation: Tradition, Emergence and Rupture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 273.

[49] Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*, trans. Rona Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139. See also Wriedt, "Luther's Theology," 86. Wriedt also suggests that "Luder" bore the connotation as such words as 'dirt' or 'garbage.' Whether in the sixteenth century the word had the colloquial connotations it does in the modern period—i.e. as a reference to a "common" woman considered an immoral "hussy"—I cannot say.

[50] Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 115. See also Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 140.

His careful delineation of the relation between faith and works aimed at freeing the Christian life from legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other. Luther was both freeing salvation and proclaiming a salvation that frees.