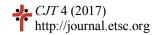
Published by the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo



Volume 4

2017



The Cairo Journal of Theology (CJT) is an online academic journal published by the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. The web address of the journal is: http://journal.etsc.org. An Arabic version is published under the title المصرية.

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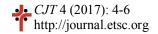
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Message from the Editor: The Five *Solas* of the Reformation

Michael Parker (mike.parker@etsc.org) Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo

At noon on October 31, 1517, the Eve of All Saints' Day, Martin Luther posted Ninety-five Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. The faculty and students at the University of Wittenberg used the door as a bulletin board, and the theses Luther posted there were printed in Latin on a single folio sheet. Luther, therefore, was simply trying to initiate a debate among academics on a subject he titled "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences." The result, however, was not an erudite squabble between theologians on arcane aspects of the doctrine of penance. Luther's theses mark the outset of the Protestant Reformation.

The specific debate on indulgences that Luther had sought never actually occurred. Rather the conflict between Luther and the Roman Catholic Church quickly escalated to issues involving the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. How is one saved? What authority does the Church possess for its theology? What is the purpose of our existence? The Protestants reformers of the sixteenth-century Reformation argued that the Church over the course of the Middle Ages had elaborated its tradition in ways that were no longer consistent with the teachings of the Bible or of the best insights of the Church Fathers. Therefore, they called for a return to biblical principles. Roman Catholic leaders at this time slowly came to realize the far-reaching nature of the challenge that Luther had posed, but rather than accommodate or compromise, they dug in their heels and stood their ground. At the Council of Trent, held in three sessions between 1545 and 1563, the Catholic Church clarified and affirmed the theology it had elaborated over the previous thousand years.

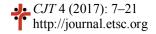
Parker: Message from the Editor

Protestant reformers, for their part, were far from unified. They agreed on much that they considered wrong with Catholic doctrine and practice, but they did not agree on what the Bible taught, the place of tradition within the church, or even how to organize the church. Soon the new-born Protestant movement splintered into four main parts: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist. One weakness of the Protestant movement in the sixteenth century and ever since has been its lack of unity. The Protestant churches have divided over nationality, interpretations of the Bible, church polity, theology, social issues, and much more.

In the year preceding October 31, 2017, when Protestants will celebrate their five-hundredth birthday, ETSC has held a series of presentations on five principles of the Reformation that Protestants have all traditionally embraced. They are known as the five *solas*. There is no single document in the sixteenth century that mentions all five by name, but these doctrines nonetheless have come to be seen as the first principles of the Protestant movement. They are the family resemblance that all Protestants share. *Sola* is a Latin word that means "alone" or "only." The five *solas*, then, are five slogans that sum up Protestant thought. They are *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone).

This edition contains three of the presentations on the *solas* that were presented recently at ETSC. The first is by Dr. Darren Kennedy on *Sola Gratia*, which was presented on February 22, 2017; the second is one that I presented on *Solus Christus* on November 24, 2016; and the third is by Dr. Tharwat Waheeb, which as presented on April 25, 2017. It is my hope that the other presentations on the *solas* will be published at a later time. Since these presentations were not originally intended to be published, the footnotes contained in the texts are partial.

On a completely unrelated topic, CJT is also pleased to include in this issue an article on the icon controversy in the Eastern Orthodox Church that occurred in the eighth and ninth centuries. This was written by Iakovos Menelaou, a PhD candidate, Greek Cypriot, and member of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The author does not engage Protestant thought, preferring to present the issue as it developed in its own time. Readers, however, will no doubt find the views of John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, and others insightful and challenging.



Sola Gratia

Darren Kennedy

Grace is one of those superlative words that none of us can fully comprehend in theology. Grace is at the heart of the gospel and a central word for understanding the Christian's experience of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." The Reformation cry of "Sola Gratia" or grace alone testifies to the passionate love and powerful action of the Triune God for us and for our salvation.

As we celebrate 500 years since Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door in Wittenberg, we are prompted again to look with joy and wonder at God's goodness and unmerited favor towards us. The theological implications of a word like "grace" are numerous and we will not exhaust them tonight. Nevertheless, I am grateful for this opportunity to focus on one of the great realities of Christian theology. Throughout this talk, I will focus primarily on the work and theology of two of the greatest Reformers: Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The Reformers discovered that the concept of grace centrally described the heart and character of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Anecdotally, this can be seen in Martin Luther's spiritual journey to become a Reformer. Late in his life, Luther looked back at the way God had transformed him from an anxious and fearful young Augustinian monk into the leader of the Reformation. His mind went to 1519, two years after his Ninety-Five Theses were posted. At the time, Luther wrestled mightily to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans but kept stumbling on the phrase "the righteousness of God" in Romans 1:17. Luther described his crisis this way,

For I hated that word, "the righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners...I was angry with God 1

Several parts of this quotation are notable. First, Luther clearly engaged with the Bible in a profound and reflective way. He attempted to live by the truth he was studying in the scriptures. Luther's theology was not merely academic but also practical and personal. Second, by thinking of God's righteousness in this theoretical way that he had been taught, Luther saw the futility of his own good works and literally began to hate the God he was working so hard to please. In essence, the teaching put him on a path that led precisely away from his theological goal. Finally, being written in 1519, we see the difficulty in establishing a precise date for the start of the Reformation. While Luther's Ninety-Five Theses certainly mark a significant event in the historical process, there were many reforming efforts before October 31, 1517 and—as this quotation reveals—even Luther himself was not yet a fully developed Reformer.

But Luther's account does not stop there. He goes on to write an eloquent testimony to God's grace and its impact on his life. Luther wrote,

At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the

¹ Martin Luther, "1545 Preface to Latin Writings" in *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writing*, ed John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 11.

Kennedy, Sola Gratia

righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.... And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.2

Obviously, this change had a radical impact on Luther's life and theology: his mind and his heart. At first, Luther understood justification as a human responsibility judged by the impossible standard given in the "righteousness of God." In such a framework, the only conclusion was anger and despair. Luther's breakthrough came in understanding "the righteousness of God" as a gift given by the Gracious God. Far from the angry God Luther had previously imagined, this God of Grace grants "a passive righteousness" to the sinner. In other words, out of God's gracious love for sinners, He imputes Christ's righteousness to sinners who could never attain it by their own efforts.

This autobiographical account of Luther shows the tremendous importance of grace in Reformation theology. Like this well-known picture of either two faces or one candlestick, Luther had originally focused so much on one picture of the righteousness of God that he could not see the other one that was right in front of him. Moreover, once the new picture of the gracious God broke through, Luther would spend the rest of his life developing his theology of grace. Luther once summed up

² Ibid., 11-12.

this life theme in a letter to fellow Reformer Philip Melanchthon, writing, "...for I seek and thirst only for a gracious God..."³

Imputed Righteousness

As his story indicates, Luther emphasized God's grace in imputing the righteousness of Christ to sinners. In other words, Christians are sinners who are granted the alien righteousness of Christ by grace. Luther explains this idea in his commentary on Galatians by explicating the meaning of "putting on Christ":

...to put Christ on is to put on righteousness, truth, and every grace, and the fulfillment of the whole law....you are righteous...because by believing in Christ you have put on Christ.4

Seen in this way, Luther understands Christians as simultaneously both righteous and sinners. They are righteous because God imputes the righteousness of Christ to them in grace, but they have not yet been fully sanctified and continue to battle sin in their lives.

Calvin's theology strongly resembles Luther's in regard to imputed righteousness. Calvin believed that grace immediately brought justification and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Calvin wrote.

Thus we say, in short, that our righteousness before God is an acceptance, whereby, receiving us into his grace, he regards us as righteous. And we say that this same consists in the remission of sins, and in this: that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us.5

³ Denis Janz, *The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 68.

⁴ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: It's Historical and Systematic Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999) 263.

⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: SCM, 1961), III.11.2.

Like Luther, Calvin developed Paul's analogy in Galatians 3:27. Here, the baptized Christian is "clothed in Jesus Christ." The idea is that we are judged on the basis of Christ's righteousness. This righteousness surrounds us like a robe. In contrast with sanctification, justification is complete in an instant. Calvin writes, God "does not justify in part, but so that the faithful, being clothed in the purity of Christ, may dare frankly to appear before heaven." Peter, the thief on the cross, and all Christians today are all wearing the righteousness of Christ. As such, we all confidently stand before the Judge in Heaven, not because of our good works, but because of Jesus alone. In justification, the focus is not on the person but on the effectual righteousness of Christ. It is also important to remember that we are clothed in Christ by living in union with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not receive Christ's righteousness apart from our living relationship with God in Christ.

Grace as Relational Rather than Material

To understand Luther's theology of grace properly, attention needs to be given to the philosophical foundations and presuppositions. The Reformers' doctrine of "grace alone" came in contrast to the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church of their day.

Catholic theology in the sixteenth century never fully abandoned grace as Luther and other Reformers like Calvin readily admitted. The primary debate was not so much the absence of grace in Catholic theology as requiring other things alongside it. In a sermon on Galatians 4:21-26, Calvin explained it this way:

For what is our greatest quarrel with [the Catholics] at this point in time? It concerns free will, meritorious acts of service, satisfaction for sin, and the rest. The [Roman Catholics] say that we can obtain favour in the eyes of

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.II.11.

God by our own efforts, and that we do not need the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they admit that there is some collaboration, and that God works within us up to a point; but they say that we are his helpers, and we would be most weak and useless if our virtue did not help us to gain God's favour. They also say that the grace of God is of no effect unless we add to it something of our own doing. Thus, they are building a doctrine based upon merit; the only way you can reach the kingdom of heaven is by pleasing God. You need personal merit in order to pay for the sins you have committed.7

Note the way that Calvin concedes that there is a role for the grace of God in Catholic theology. The issue for Calvin and for the rest of the Reformers was centrally about *sola gratia*, with all glory to God and without the addition of human merit. It is not as if the pre-Reformation Church ignored grace entirely, but rather that it added to it. Thus, it became common in the Middle Ages to speak of "faith *and* works" or "grace *and* human effort." In the view of the Reformers, these additions were really subtractions from and ultimately full negations of God's great gifts to humanity.

The issue here is not a small detail for the Reformers. The theology of grace alone means that God has opened a way for the salvation of sinners based solely on God's gracious work in Jesus Christ. Approaching the throne of grace with empty hands, we claim no credit or agency in our salvation. Luther made the qualitative—not quantitative—distinction on grace alone through the absolute rejection of the slightest contribution of human beings to salvation. In a sermon on Luke 16 given in 1522 Luther claims,

If I were to see heaven standing open and could earn it by picking up a piece of straw, I still would not want to do so; for I would not want to be in a position to say:

⁷ John Calvin, "Freedom from the Bondage of the Law" in *25 Inspiring Sermons: John Calvin*, ed. Simon Turner, (Amazon Digital Services, 2014), Kindle 426-31.

Kennedy, Sola Gratia

Behold, I have earned it. No, no! Not to my merit but to God be the glory, to God who has sacrificed His Son for me and destroyed my sin and hell.8

Luther's point is clear. He takes no credit for God's salvific action in his life. Calvin makes a similar point in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "Any mixture of the power of free will that men strive to mingle with God's grace is nothing but a corruption of grace." Calvin is concerned primarily with the attribution of power or effectuality to the human will *in abstraction* or apart from God.

One reason for this key conflict was that the scholastic Catholic way of speaking about grace as "an infused power" or "a habit or a virtue that enables us to fulfill the law in a meritorious way." ¹⁰ In each of these cases, grace is materialized rather than dynamically relational. One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation was a personal and relational understanding of grace, which was shift away from a material understanding. We see this in the Reformed Confessions of the sixteenth century. Jan Rohls contrasts the two traditions this way:

Contrary to Scholasticism's understanding of grace as a disposition of character (habitus), grace is not viewed here as a specific property or disposition, which is communicated to human beings. Instead, grace is a quality of divine relational behavior toward human beings as sinners 11

Seen as the loving "relational behavior" of God towards sinners, it is not surprising that Calvin so often writes of grace in terms of

⁸ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. II, ed. Weald M. Plass, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 923.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.5.15.

¹⁰ Janz, The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther, 69.

Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. Jeff Hoffmeyer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 119-120.

God's "fatherly goodness." Likewise, we hear an echo of Luther's lifelong delight in seeking the Gracious God.

This is a crucial key to understanding biblical concepts of grace that remains challenging for the church today, and we must be vigilant to keep grace in its primarily relational framework. John Leith explains,

Christian theology has always faced the temptation to materialize grace into a thing. Over against materialization of grace the first Protestants were adamant. Hence they refused to think of grace as some infused quality. Grace is God's personal engagement of human beings. God is related to human beings as free, moral, historical persons.12

Note how Leith emphasizes the relational encounter of God with fully human persons. In this way, grace cannot be separated from the Gracious God. One of the challenging aspects of understanding the Reformation's claim of *sola gratia* rests in properly understanding the nature or reality of grace itself.

Even in Protestant churches today, it can be easy to slip back into thinking of grace in material terms. In this view, grace seems to fuel the Christian life just as gas fuels a car. While we might be given the "gas" as a gift, we quickly move on and enjoy the gift apart from the giver. There are numerous reasons why this analogy fails, but the biggest problem is that it imagines a separation between the gift (grace) and the giver of that gift (God). Luther and Calvin both strongly opposed such an understanding of grace. Luther explains, "...faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ." Calvin makes this connection even more explicit in his

John Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 221.

Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 130.

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consistent description of the Christian in "union with Christ." Christians united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, Calvin explains, can never attempt to separate grace or salvation from God himself, for "...the Lord Jesus never gives anyone the enjoyment of his benefits save in giving himself." Here again, we cannot imagine that grace, salvation or any other benefit of Christ is a "thing" or "gift" that might be enjoyed apart from the person of Jesus Christ himself. Clearly, the living, relational presence of Christ cannot be missing in the Reformation understanding of grace.

Both Martin Luther and John Calvin strongly opposed materialized views. Instead, they argued that grace was about God's personal, relational interaction with human persons. Luther makes the concept clear in a comment on Psalm 51:

Grace signifies that favor with which God receives us, forgiving our sins and justifying us freely (gratis) through Christ. Do not consider it a quality (in man), as the sophists dream it is.15

Note Luther's use of active, relational verbs in describing God's grace. God receives, forgives, and justifies us freely through Christ.

Such a view of grace clearly demands a dynamic and living God as an active agent. The idea of grace begins with the heart of God not the human recipient. As Paul writes in Romans 5:8-10, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled will we be saved by his life." In this relational framework, the focus remains fully on the active love of God for sinners: that is grace. The doctrine of grace testifies to this enemy-loving God who does not love because of

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.16.1.

¹⁵ Luther, What Luther Says, 603.

something inherent in the sinner but because of the loving heart of God

Not a Denial of the Integrity of Human Action

One of the most persistent arguments against *sola gratia* and the celebration of God's grace alone is the claim that it robs humanity of any role in salvation and at times seems to deny the reality of human action. Often, our modern minds want to carve out a place, even a small place, for our own freedom *apart from God*. Typically, many people want to emphasize God's grace but only in cooperation with the individual's acceptance of Christ. In this view, one might imagine that God's grace is responsible for 99 percent of the work of salvation while human beings activate that work with a 1 percent contribution of effort as a causal agent in choosing Christ. The Reformers rejected this scheme, arguing that grace alone was a qualitative claim in the Bible and not merely a quantitative proportion. Robert Jenson summarizes this logic well,

There is indeed no escaping the logic: if at any step or stage of spiritual life my choice or action determines whether or not I am in fact to be sanctified, then indeed that is what it does, and God's role can only be to confirm my choice. Which is to say, God's grace is not free, and so is neither God nor grace.16

Jenson's comment illustrates the crucial importance of grace alone in Reformation theology because it is connected intimately to the freedom of God and therefore God's ability to rescue us from sin and death.

While every one of the Reformers preached and taught with the hopeful expectation that people would profess Christian faith, they refused the claim that such a profession or choice

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¹⁶ Robert W. Jenson, *On Thinking the Human: Resolutions of Difficult Notions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Kindle 409-14.

Kennedy, Sola Gratia

contributed to or causes our salvation. Calvin argues against precisely this view in his commentary on Ephesians 2:8-10:

Let godly readers weigh carefully the apostle's words. He does not say that we are assisted by God. He does not say that the will is prepared, and is then left to run by its own strength. He does not say that the power of choosing aright is bestowed upon us, and that we are afterwards left to make our own choice. Such is the idle talk in which those persons who do their utmost to undervalue the grace of God are accustomed to indulge.17

Calvin explicitly explains that Paul's argument does not allow for God to merely infuse the human capacity to choose salvation in Christ and then let us "make our own choice" This comment requires at least two clarifications. First, as stated above, grace is not a power, material, or thing that God offers apart from the dynamic relationship He has with His people. We experience the grace of God in and through a living relationship with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ and his benefits, including grace and salvation, are always experienced together. Jesus is not like Santa Claus who carries a bag of gifts around the world but leaves them for children to enjoy when he is gone. No. all the grace that we enjoy as Christians is inextricably bound to the living God in Jesus Christ. Second, Calvin's logic does not imply that the human choice to accept and follow Christ is unimportant; rather, he is simply arguing that it does not cause or contribute to salvation.

Here, I would like to suggest a clarification of vocabulary. In relation to salvation, the term "grace alone" indicates that God alone offers Himself to broken human beings who are dead in their sin and totally incapable of saving themselves or even contributing to their salvation. This Gracious God does not do this based on anything outside of Himself but based only on the

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, ed. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 229.

loving heart of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The dramatic and glorious news of the gospel is that while we were utterly dead in our sin (Ephesians 22:1, 5; Colossians 22:13), incapable of comprehending our need of salvation, much less earning that salvation, God acts on behalf of his enemies (Romans 5:8-10). In grace, God reveals himself to be our loving father rather than a wrathful judge. In terms of agency, God alone brings about our salvation by grace alone so that none of us may boast (Ephesians 2:9). Here, in grace alone, God acts in love through Jesus Christ and is the sole agent bringing about salvation. When we talk of causality, there is no room for a human contribution. It is God's grace alone.

So far, I have argued that the vocabulary of human "causality" is prohibited by the biblical and Reformation proclamation of grace alone. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that humanity does have a "role" in God's salvific work. The Reformers followed Augustine in stressing that grace alone does not diminish the importance and integrity of human action. John Leith explains,

Augustine, Luther, and Calvin knew quite well that, if from one perspective salvation is 100 percent the work of God, from another perspective it is truly a human act; yet it is a human act that is elicited by divine grace. Apart from the affirmation of the integrity of a human act, the doctrine of prevenient grace, of grace alone, of irresistible grace, became destructive of the human person.18

Leith's words helps to order and explicate the theology of grace. It is precisely the amazing grace of God that transforms the human heart in loving relationship and calls forth love and acceptance from the human. In this sense, there is certainly a role for the human being. As the Canons of Dort explain, "[Grace]

¹⁸ Leith, Basic Christian Doctrine, 222-3.

does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones"¹⁹ The question is not if there is a role for human beings in salvation or not, there is. At the very least, the sentence "God saves us by grace" gives us the role of the direct object of God's action. In the case of the direct object of this sentence, "us" is necessary but not causal.

But the role of Christians in both justification and sanctification is more than this. God's invitation into union with Christ transforms us in a living relationship that manifests itself in words and actions. Let me return for a moment to my simple automobile analogies. I would suggest that free human actions play a role that is similar to the exhaust of a running automobile. Just as no one can argue that the exhaust of a car causes it to run, so also are we prohibited from thinking that our decisions or actions cause our salvation. Nevertheless, a car necessarily produces exhaust due to the combustion that takes place within its running engine. In the same way Christians naturally and freely live out a life of proclamation and service in the dynamic of God's gracious salvation.

The Reformers continually and tirelessly called people to faith and action because they understood that these were essential elements of Christian life. They did not do this because they thought that they were causing salvation but in thankful obedience to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. For both Luther and Calvin, the Christian life of grace was a lively, active, and passionate adventure. According to the Reformers, grace empowers humans and grants them true freedom in relation to Christ. Listen to Luther's description of the Christian life of faith:

Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to

¹⁹ 'Canons of the Synod of Dort,' in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. II, part 4, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 587.

do, but before the question rises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them.20

Clearly, such an active life does not make Christian individuals into mindless pieces on a chessboard. The key theological issue is one of cause and effect. Luther explains, "We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds."²¹ Similarly, Calvin states that good works are "the fruit and effect of grace." 22

Perhaps one of the most convincing proofs of Calvin's affirmation of human action can be found in the lives of Christians seeking to live out their Christian discipleship according to his theology. A recent scholar described Calvin's legacy this way:

He formed an especially dynamic type of western Christianity in which faith in the efficacy of divine grace in no way limits the intensity of human striving, but powerfully stimulates it, and in which a strong consciousness of sin is connected with a no less tenacious struggle to be virtuous. From this resulted, not least of all, an ethos of work and vocation as a divine calling.²³

My prayer is that all of us would experience and live out grace here in the Middle East today.

Martin Luther, Commentary on Romans, Trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), xvii.

Martin Luther, "Disputation against Scholastic Theology, 1517" in Luther's Works, vol. 31, trans. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 12.

Calvin. *Institutes* II.3.13.

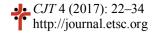
²³ Alexandre Ganoczy, 'Calvin's Life' in Cambridge Companion to John Calvin ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I would like to address a subtle irony. In our celebration of 500 years since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door in Wittenberg, we are addressing five "only" or "alone" statements. The difficulty here is that the essential meaning of only or alone precludes everything else, even other "only" statements. I think the Reformers' understanding of grace helps us to understand how these statements actually work and actually work together.

I have argued that "grace" for Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers was not a thing but a person or relationship with Jesus Christ himself. In this definition, "Grace alone" necessarily means "Christ alone." Likewise, we experience this gracious Christ through our God-given faith. Here again, to say "grace alone" immediately leads us to understanding "faith alone" as the only way to experience the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Turning to the Bible, this radical and revolutionary story of the Gracious God revealed in Jesus Christ can only be found where God alone guarantees to meet us – that is, in the words of Holy Scripture. Luther himself struggled all of his life to grasp this unfathomable grace and it was only in the bedrock promises of the Bible that this truth could be found, again and again. If these Reformation claims are true, then there simply is no place for any of us to boast, for it is to God that all glory must be given. In this sense, each one of these "only" statements is vitally connected to the others. They are as glorious, inspiring, and wonderful as they were 500 years ago when Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses.

Darren Kennedy is a professor of theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo.



Solus Christus

Michael Parker

We are soon to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the start of the Reformation, yet the basic truths of the Reformation are still debated and often not well understood. If you asked the typical American what she had to do to be saved, the response would be, "Lead a good, moral life and God will accept you in heaven when you die." The Reformers (Luther, Calvin and others) argued that we are saved by Christ alone (*Solus Christus*). We do no need to rely on our own good works or the mediation of priests or saints or the sacraments of the Church.

People throughout history have been uncomfortable with the doctrine of *Solus Christus*. We all want to add something to what Christ has already done – a good work, a religious observance. This makes us feel better because then we are in control. Ancient Jewish Christians insisted that a person had to become a Jew to be saved. Medieval Catholics insisted that the intervention of saints, the mediation of priests, and the cooperation of Christians with the work of Christ were necessary for salvation. Modern people tend to be content to say that a good moral life is all that God really wants from us. For God, they say, is *Love*, and therefore he will not turn anyone away. The title of Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, tells it all. In the end, no one will be rejected because God's love will not allow it. Hence we will all be saved.

The teachings of the Scriptures, of course, run counter to all of these ideas. The Bible insists on something that is unfashionable today, which can be summed up in one word: exclusivity.

In the classic teachings of the Reformers, *Solus Christus* was a doctrine that spoke this essential truth: Salvation was entirely

accomplished for us by Jesus, who paid the debt for our sins on the cross. Just before he died on the cross he said, "It is finished." We do not, therefore, need to add anything to this. We cannot add anything to this. Our job is simply to receive the free gift of grace, which is salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "This is the work that God requires of you – to believe in the one whom he has sent" (John 6:29).

John Calvin taught that this is a wonderfully liberating doctrine. Once we have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and received the free gift of salvation through grace, we no longer need to worry about our salvation. We don't have to worry about losing it. We don't have to worry about doing one more good deed in order to secure it. We can simply rest in Christ and let his Spirit work in us to live into those good deeds that he has set before us. As Paul said in Ephesians, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Eph. 2:10).

Issue of Relativism

A key issue at the time of the Reformation was whether the work of Christ on the cross entirely accomplished our salvation. The doctrine of *Solus Christus* answers that question for Protestant Christians. But another issue has arisen in our time for which the doctrine of *Solus Christus* is also relevant: that is the common belief today in religious relativism.

I said earlier, "If you asked the typical American what she had to do to be saved, the response would be, 'Lead a good moral life and God will accept you in heaven when you die." In recent years, many would add: "And it doesn't matter if you are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu."

We live in a world in which human reason trumps everything else: the Bible, tradition, and theological authorities. Human reason can be functionally defined as "what intuitively makes

sense to a person." For us to say that we are saved by Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) is simply not credible to many people today because it runs counter to what we intuitively think is true. We live in a pluralistic world — one where many different religions hold sway. In such a world, it is difficult (or at least uncomfortable) to insist on the exclusive claims of Christ.

The insistence that human reason is the final arbiter of truth comes to us from the era of the Enlightenment. The claim that all religions are beautiful and true goes back to William Blake, who in 1795 wrote the book, *All Religions Are One*. Stephen Prothero points out in his book *God is not One* (2010) that this is a very odd claim. Prothero, a professor of religion at Boston University, writes:

No one argues that different economic systems or political regimes are one and the same. Capitalism and socialism are so obviously at odds that their differences hardly bear mentioning. The same goes for democracy and monarchy. Yet scholars continue to claim that religious rivals such as Hinduism and Islam, Judaism and Christianity are, by some miracle of the imagination, essentially the same 1

The religious philosopher Huston Smith in *The World's Religions* (1958) gives us a popular metaphor that illustrates how the world's religions lead to the same destination. He compares them to different paths up the same mountain. There are many paths that one may take, but in the end they all lead to the summit of the mountain. Smith writes,

At the base [of the mountain], in the foothills of theology, ritual, and organizational structure, the religions are distinct. Differences in culture, history, geography, and collective temperament all make for diverse starting

¹ Prothrero, All Religions are One, (New York: Harper One, 2010), 1

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points....But beyond these differences, the same goal beckons²

Prothero writes that this view, a product of Enlightenment skepticism, was meant to lead to religious tolerance, "and we are doubtless better for it." Those who argue that all gods are one, that all religions are essentially the same, are well motivated. They want to put an end to religious strife, to religion-inspired conflict, violence, and war. Nevertheless, it is wishful thinking. It is disrespectful of the world's religions because it doesn't take their distinctive ideas seriously. And it is dangerous because ideas do have consequences – both in this world and the world to come.

Let's look at the issues more carefully. What do people say is wrong with *Solus Christus*? I will summarize this in three common statements made today.

(1) It is arrogant to say that one religion has an exclusive claim on truth. Groups tend to stereotype one another, which makes dialogue impossible. This is what leads to religious violence and wars. This is what was behind the Crusades and the Inquisition; and it is what is behind religious terrorism today. When a suicide bomber blowers herself and others up in an office building or night club, we can be sure that the bomber was inspired by some exclusivist religious truth. It is this kind of thinking that leads to the "clash of civilizations," which results in endless conflict and may someday produce a world war. The world, therefore, says: "Let's reject the exclusive truths of religion. They are dangerous. They cause divisions. They lead to strife."

It is the exclusive claims of religion that in recent years have led to the rise of the New Atheists – or some would say *Brights* because of the stigma attached to the word *Atheists*. These

² Ibid.

authors include Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and others. It is said that their ideas have gained traction today for three reasons: (1) the rise of Muslim immigrants in Europe, and the threat they pose to civil life in the West; (2) the rise of the Christian right in the U.S., with its focus on divisive issues such as abortion; and (3) the rise of Islam-inspired violence in the world, especially the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001.³

Because of these three ideas, religious exclusivism is seen as a supreme danger to our world today. Yet there is irony in the case of those who claim that religious exclusivism leads to intolerance and ultimately to strife and war. In the twentieth century those countries that sought to repress religion became among the most intolerant and repressive regimes in history. Alister McGrath points to Communist Russia, Communist China, Khmer-Rouge dominated Cambodia, and Nazi Germany as examples of nations that explicitly rejected God and sought to "transcendalize" something else with the result being the murder of millions of their own people.⁴

Moreover, it has been said that the twentieth century produced more Christian martyrs than all the pervious centuries combined. Yet these crimes against humanity were not committed by religious people showing intolerance to others; rather they were perpetrated by atheists who wanted to destroy religion in order to impose their own secular visions on the world.

Despite the wishful thinking of relativists, it is simply not true that all religions are equally valid paths to God and basically teach the same thing. A person who says this probably considers himself to be enlightened and those who deny this truth to be

³ Ibid., 320.

⁴ Alister McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, II: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 81 cited in Timothy Keller *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 53.

religious bigots who are dangerous in our pluralist, evershrinking world. But this position will not bear close scrutiny. We can't say that all religions are equally valid paths to God when some religions, such as Buddhism, do not even believe in a personal god. We can't say that all religions take us to the same destination when Buddhists and Christians have very different understandings of what that destination is. A Buddhist believes that her destination is to fall as a drop into the great ocean of soul and be absorbed and disappear as a unique individual. This is very different from a Christian who believes that her unique identity will be affirmed and perfected in a new age in which she will have a resurrected body. We simply can't say that both views are correct or partially true. If one is true, the other is false. The evidence and simple logic will lead to no other conclusion.

It is not fashionable in our day, I know, to say that any religion is false. I feel the force of this position. We would rather say that God has gone before us into all cultures and religions; and hence we can find at least some light of truth in them, some bridge of understanding over which we can meet. I believe this, and it informs my thinking as a Christian as I encounter those of other faiths. The day of totally demonizing other religions is long past. But this does not mean that we have eliminated the distinction between truth and falsehood. The practice of child sacrifice in the worship of Moloch is not only religiously mistaken and false, it is evil – it is demonic. If we can't say this then we have thrown away our moral compass, and we are in danger of saying that good is evil, and evil is good. This we cannot do and be faithful to ourselves, let alone to the gospel.

(2) Religious relativists often assert that all religions are partially true and none is completely true because we all see only part of the whole. According to this view, all religions are essentially the same – that is, they all teach the same essential truths, which if we follow them, will make for a good world and lead us to heaven. The truths they have in mind are really ethical

truths. All religions, it is said, teach different forms of the "Golden Rule"; they all teach us to respect our neighbors; they all teach us not to lie, cheat, steal, or kill.

Moreover, the theological differences between religions are basically superficial and ultimately unimportant (what Huston Smith would call the foothills). What alone matters is leading a good life (what Smith would call the summit). This point is often illustrated with a story that comes from India from many centuries ago. It is the story of blind men examining an elephant. One blind man feels the elephant's trunk and says, "This creature is long and flexible like a snake." Another blind man feels one of the legs of the elephant and says, "No, this creature is thick and round like a tree trunk." A third blind man feels the elephant's side and says, "You're both wrong. This creature is large and flat"

The point of the story is that each blind man is like one of the world's religions. Each accurately comprehends part of the truth, but none of them is able to comprehend the whole truth. The story teller, therefore, is posing as a humble person who is saying that religious truth is greater than any person or any religion can fully comprehend.

The fallacy of this story is that it is told from the perspective of someone who is not blind – someone who can see the entire elephant. After all, how could the storyteller know that none of the blind men has comprehended the whole elephant unless he is able to see the entire elephant. The storyteller, therefore, only appears to be humble. Actually he is arrogantly claiming to have a religious knowledge that is superior to all the world's religions. He is claiming to have a vantage point to comprehend the elephant that relativizes all the claims of the world's religions. Yet no human being has such a vantage point. We are all limited to the same tools. We must all rely on experience, testimony, history, argument, and personal insight. The storyteller is claiming that no religion has a superior knowledge of the truth

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while claiming that he has such knowledge. He is either a hypocrite or is self-deceived.

(3) To hold that one religion is true and all the rest are false is to condemn the bulk of the world's population and to make God a merciless tyrant. A young woman from Rwanda wrote to me a few years ago to ask about this question. She said, if Christ is the only way to heaven, then what will happen to all my ancestors who lived in the centuries before Christian missionaries came to tell us about Christ? It's a good question. It's a difficult question.

Before his ascension, Jesus inaugurated the Church and gave it the task of discipling the nations (Matt. 28:19); and in a liturgy of the early church, which the apostle Paul records in 1 Cor. 11:23-26, it is clear that the Church is to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" – that is, the Church is to continue teaching, preaching, and witnessing to the truth until Christ returns. This truth includes the message that salvation is in Christ alone.

In our pluralistic, post-modern world, the exclusive claims of Christ have been difficult to square with the universality of God. Yet, as Lesslie Newbigin argues in *The Open Secret*, the doctrine of election maintains that God chose to work through one people (Israel), to be supremely represented in one person (Jesus), and to have one religion that is the bearer of God's truth (Christianity). This should not be a matter of pride or presumption for Christians as election does not give its bearers a privileged status, a point the prophets made repeatedly.⁵

Christians should reject a universalism that argues from the love of God to the conclusion that all will be saved. This

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, [1978]1995), 66-91.

position is inconsistent with Scripture, which gives room for free choice, allowing human beings to have freedom even to reject God. As for those who have embraced other religions, Christians need to be careful to avoid two extremes, either demonizing them as wholly false or seeing all religious distinctions as relative. Demonization is inconsistent with the Scriptures, which affirm that God made the nations, allotting their times and boundaries (Act 17:26) and not leaving them "without a witness" (Acts 14:17).

As Newbigin puts it, the light shines in the darkness, from which he argued that there is a clear difference between darkness and light but also that no part of the darkness is without at least some light. In effect, this is an argument for "respectful witness."

Jesus strongly implies that it is not for Christians to speculate on the fate of those of other religions. When Jesus was asked, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" he answered, "Strive to enter by the narrow gate" (Luke 13: 23-34). In other words, Jesus does not want us to speculate about other people's fate; rather, salvation is a question that is addressed to each of us individually.

Christians' lack of knowledge about the fate of unbelievers should not be an excuse to deny the exclusive claims of Christ or to embrace universalism; rather, it should energize us for greater evangelistic efforts.

The Bible and Religious Relativism

What does the Bible have to say on the subject of religious relativism or pluralism? Many Christians have come to accept religious relativism in recent years in part, I believe, because they are simply reflecting a trend in the general culture. But many have clearly accepted it because they believe that the biblical God is radically inclusive. Did Jesus not embrace the religious outcasts of his day? Did he not embrace notorious sinners – prostitutes and tax collectors?

Yet to say that God is radically inclusive is not sufficient to justify relativism. Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery (John 8), but he didn't say, "Now go and do whatever you want." He said, "Go and sin no more." He told his potential followers to first count the cost, because there is a cost. To quote Dietrich Bonoeffer, grace is free but it is not cheap. It requires repentance, and it requires taking up a cross. It requires not simply calling on Jesus as "Lord, Lord" (Matt. 7:21), but it requires actually following him.

Some Christians say, rather blithely, that the Bible teaches that we are all God's children – hence an argument for relativism. This however is simply not biblical. As John's Gospel put it, Jesus came into the world so that those who follow him <u>might have the right</u> to become the children of God (John 1:12). We are not inherently the children of God; rather, Christians are God's adopted children.

Jesus made a number of key exclusive claims during his earthly ministry that are recorded in the Gospels: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me" (John 14:16); and "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus' teaching on this subject is also reflected in other passages of the New Testament. For example, Luke reiterates this in Acts 4:12: "There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved; and Paul tells us in 1Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* makes an important point about the New Testament passages in which Jesus asserts his divinity:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher; he'd either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he's a

poached egg – or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁶

This is Lewis's famous "trilemma" argument: Jesus was either a lunatic, an evil demagogue, or exactly who he said he was – our Lord and God. Lewis, too, accepted the absolutist and exclusivist claim of Jesus.

When I was in graduate school, Harold Bloom had just published *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). He argued that Americans had embraced relativism because they see it as a way of being tolerant towards others and because, more importantly, they see it as being opened-minded – that is, being open to the truths of other faith traditions. Yet, ironically, Bloom pointed out that relativists are the least open-minded people of all. They have closed their minds to the possibility of there being any absolute truth. For them, all truth is relative, and all religions have only a part of the truth. Hence, no religion has any absolute claim on them.

Bloom was writing of the closing of the American mind, but he might as well have said he was speaking of the closing of the Christian mind – at least those Christians who have mistakenly rejected the doctrine of *Solus Christus* and embraced the modern heresy of relativism or religious pluralism.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins ebooks, [1952] 2009), 52.

The Power of the Gospel

I suspect that some Christians are uncomfortable with *Solus Christus* because, caught up in the concerns of pluralism, they have forgotten how powerful and liberating the gospel can be – especially for those who have never heard or understood the message.

Miriam Adeney tells a wonderful story of the gospel's power in one woman's life. Dr. Adeney is a storyteller, who wrote, Kingdom without Boarders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity. She tells the story of an Asian woman who was a Muslim and became curious about the gospel message, but there was no church or minister or Christian friend that could explain the message to her. One day she happened upon a Bible and decided to read the Gospel of John on her own. She was awed by the majesty of the prologue that declared Jesus to be the Word of God that became flesh. She marveled at the story of Nicodemus, the learned man who came at night to discover that he must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. She delighted to read of the Samaritan woman at the well, whom Jesus taught to seek for that water that will never run out, that will rise like a spring of living water from within. But then she came to the story of the woman taken in adultery who was brought as a test before Jesus to see what he would do. And she couldn't read on because she knew – or at least she thought she knew – what was coming: Jesus would impose the age-old double standard, ignoring the sin of the man and condemning the woman. She put the Bible away for a long time, but eventually out of curiosity – and perhaps a prompting of the Spirit – she returned to it and finished the story. Tears came to her eyes when she read that Jesus did not condemn the woman. Rather, he said, let he who is without sin cast the first stone – thus challenging these hypocritical men.

We have to conclude that every human being needs to hear the gospel message because every human being has need of the Savior. Not a savior, but the Savior – the unique son of God who

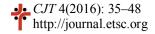
came into the world, full of grace and truth, the one in whom there is life, the "life that is the light of men" (John 1:4).

Conclusion

Solus Christus is a culturally unfashionable message because it holds that there is an absolute truth, and Jesus is that truth. Moreover, since Christians have an exclusive claim to truth in Christ, other belief systems must be or incomplete or at least partially false. Such exclusive truths have always been difficult to maintain Ancient Jewish-Christians wanted to add to the doctrine of Solus Christus that becoming a Jew was necessary for salvation. They were wrong, and the Early Church rejected this position (Acts 15). The Medieval Church wanted to add to the doctrine of Solus Christus to say that human beings cooperate in their salvation by doing good works, participating in the sacraments of the church, and seeking the mediation of priests and saints. The great Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century rejected this view, returning to the pure biblical view that salvation was won by Christ alone. Today, many Christians would set aside the doctrine of Solus Christus because it seems intolerant and arrogant in our religiously pluralistic world. But if we do this, we will deny a fundamental truth of the gospel.

The apostle Peter, standing before the Sanhedrin and in danger of imprisonment, torture, and death, said it as clearly as it has ever been said: "There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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Soli Deo Gloria

Tharwat Waheeb

Glory to God alone, *soli deo gloria*, is the crown on the other Reformation principles: the Bible alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone. We might consider the principle of glory to God alone to be the glue that holds the rest of the principles together, maintaining their cohesion and interdependence. It is the center of the circle that brings together other principles in order to unite them and make them consistent. Christ is the center, glory to God alone the goal.

The principles that salvation is through Christ alone, by grace alone, and through faith alone, without any human additions, affirm that glory is to God alone and not in any way to be shared by human beings. Also, the fact that the Bible alone is the source of ultimate authority without any mediating role played by church traditions or clergy, who might add to the word or interpret it according to their own ideas, is a further confirmation that glory is due to God alone. If human beings through the church or the person of the pope were to play an intervening role in man's salvation, this would undermine the principle that God alone is owed glory. God is the creator, preserver, savior, goal, and purpose of life, which is why God declares, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 42: 8). These words are not a divine exercise in self-love; rather, they are a declaration of the nature of the universe, whose origin and purpose are found only in God. God is "all in all."

The Reformers' Interpretation of God's Glory

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Catholic Church never denied the importance of the Bible, faith, grace, or Christ for human salvation. The theologians of this era agreed that these

were crucial to salvation, but they did not argue that they alone made salvation possible. In effect, they did not use the Latin word *sola* to describe them, a point upon which the Reformers would later insist.

While the Reformers professed that the Bible alone has authority for understanding spiritual truth, Catholic theologians added other authorities to the authority of the Bible – namely, church traditions and the pope. These authorities stood on an equal footing with the Bible in that they interpreted the Bible and, in effect, added to its teachings. In the end, the Bible no longer stood *alone* as the Church's authority.

And while the Reformers professed that justification is through faith alone, Catholic theologians taught that justification is through both faith and works. Hence they fundamentally changed the Church's understanding of Christ and divine grace.

They did not speak of God's glory alone. While the Reformers would profess that glory is to be given to God alone, the Catholic Church professed in effect that glory is due not only to God but also to other things or people. Still, it did not deny glory to God.

At the Second Council of Nicaea (787), the church defined different levels of giving honor – in effect, glory – in worship:

- (1) Latria is the worship that is due to God alone
- (2) *Hyperdulia* is the veneration that is due to the Virgin Mary
- (3) *Dulia* is the veneration that is due all saints other than Mary

Faced with these teachings, the Reformers presented an exclusive understanding of the glory that is alone due to God. For example, Martin Luther says, "Glory is to God alone, and it is impossible that God would share his glory with anyone as if it

were to be held in public ownership."

In his commentary on John 6: 65, Luther says that we give glory to our Lord in Christ and that He alone has glory and honor. He adds, "This is the reason why faith is glorified: it recalls the divine works, how great they are. These divine works are represented in the Lord Jesus' work – his life, passion, and death. By comparison, our human works are nothing, so we owe to God alone glory and honor, for He is everything and we are nothing.

Moreover, John Calvin spoke of several different aspects of glory. One of them is the glory of God revealed in creation, which Calvin describes as "the theatre of divine glory." In every part of the world we see glimpses of the divine glory. He adds, "Wherever you turn in this world there is nothing, not even a single moment, that doesn't provide at least a glimpse of the divine beauty, and because we cannot comprehend the magnificence of the created things that surround us, we are awed by the greatness and enormity of the glory of the Lord our God."

Also, Calvin sees the glory of God in the creation of man in the image of God, and he sees it in the revelation of Jesus Christ, and in His passion, death and resurrection.

The English reformer Edward Lee (1602- 1671) defines God's glory as "the infinite greatness of the Divine Self. It is the real greatness of God. It is God's nature." This concept focuses on the inner or self-glory of God, which calls for praise, worship, honor, and love from everyone. Thus, God is glorious in Himself because He is omniscient, omnipotent, and all loving. Lee also explains that God's glory appears on the outside. This exterior glory appears in the His creation of heaven and earth, including all the living things on the earth. God's glory also appears when human beings and angels start to know God, loving, obeying and praising him forever.

Calvin and Lee agree that, when the creation, and human

beings within creation, give glory to God, this doesn't add new greatness to Him; rather, creation and humanity can only observe God's glory in its wholeness and greatness and respond to it with praise. In this regard, Calvin warns believers to glorify God through our worship, behavior, testimony, family life, or political attitudes. We should approach all of these in such as way as to give glory to God alone. This warning was given lest these practices might put limitations on the glory we owe to God by shifting the focus to man in how glory is offered. Giving glory to God alone must be based upon God in Himself and His works, not on man's response to what God has already done.

The first questioned asked in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) is "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." The Westminster Catechism focuses on the reason for man's existence. The reason is not found in man himself but rather in God, who created man in his image and likeness. When God created man, he was a true image of the Divine. The purpose, goal, and pleasure of man were to worship God and enjoy a relationship with Him. But falling in sin, man's focus shifted from God to himself. Following the fall, human beings considered how they might become great and how they might gain happiness apart from God. In effect, they wanted to become like God

God is glorious in Himself, and it is impossible that anything He created, not even man, could become more glorious than God or add to His glory. Glorifying God means that we reflect God's Glory. The creation proclaims the glory of God, which is the purpose of its existence. It has no other choice but to glorify God.

In the case of man, God granted to human beings the great privilege of glorifying Him because they wish to do so just as Christ. In the same way, Christ, who is God's glory on earth, glorified the Father while He was on earth because He wanted to do so. This privilege is related directly to the *solas*. Every human

being, whethher a believer or non-believer, is an instrument giving glory to God. For those who are saved, God's glory is manifest through His mercy and salvation, while for those who are perishing, God's glory is also manifest in them when He fulfills His justice through their condemnation and thereby establishes his justice. Hence God's glory is manifest both in the salvation and the condemnation of human beings. Admittedly, these are difficult and complex ideas.

Biblical Theology and God's Glory

The Reformation's focus on the glory of God led to a careful study of the Bible that sought to trace the glory of God as it was developed in the Old and New Testaments. Studies in biblical theology shed light on the meanings of the concept of glory in the Bible especially as it relates to God's presence, worship, mission, and – the zenith of this glory – Christ Jesus.

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament that we translate as *glory* is *cabod*, which literally means "heaviness or weight." It is used to describe the material prosperity or good reputation or good background of a person. The word is also used metaphorically to describe the troubles of a nation or a person. But the use of the word in the Old Testament, when referring to God, has the meaning of dignity, nobility, honor, high status, virtue, prestige, greatness, and perfection.

The Greek word in the New Testament that we translate as *glory* is the word *doxa*. Like the Hebrew word *cabod*, it refers to high glory. But it is often used in the New Testament to describe the nature of God by grace through His great works, primarily in the proclamation and presence of the person of God in Jesus Christ: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). The word *doxa* carries all the meanings of the word *cabod* and adds to it the meaning of manifesting beautiful perfection and resplendent power. It also bears the meanings of brightness, brilliance, and

greatness.

The Bible uses the term glory in two ways: the first, as a necessary attribute of God; the second, as a visible revelation of the presence of God among His people.

As a necessary attribute of God, the concept of glory carries an ethical significance that includes holiness. Hence the biblical writers lament that man "falls short of the glory of God" (Romans 2:10). Furthermore, the Bible describes God as the "Father of glory" (Ephesians 1: 17), source of all glory, king of glory (Psalms 2), and God of glory (Acts 7: 2). Also, He does everything for "the glory of His name" (Psalms 79: 6; Isaiah 18: 11), and He is jealous for His glory and will not give it to another (Isaiah 42: 8). The greatness of this glory is manifest in nature, and it is the theme of man's praise and exaltation of God.

The use of the word glory can also refer to the presence of God on historical occasions in the Old Testament. This presence is sometimes accompanied by lightning, thunder, and fire. When this occurs, God's glory is expressed by the Hebrew word *shekhina* (see Exodus 40: 27, 34; and Numbers 9: 15, 16). The signs of His presence were seen by Abraham in a smoking oven and burning torch (Genesis 15: 17), and by Moses in "lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of a trumpet" (Exodus 19: 9, 16- 18; 24: 15- 18, Deuteronomy 5: 5) and in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13: 21, 22).

After building the tabernacle, God's glory appeared over the ark, which became a symbol of God's glory. When the Tabernacle was taken away in the time of the priest Eli, his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, names Eli's grandson Ichabod, which means "the glory has departed from Israel" (1 Samuel 4: 19- 22). The glory did not reappear until the temple was built, and after the prayer of Solomon, the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (2Chronicles 5: 13, 14).

Later the glory of the Lord left the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the nation. Through the prophet Ezekiel, however, God promised to return the glory once more. In fact, the glory returned in Jesus Christ who "dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1: 14). The New Testament is full of the signs of Christ's glory, which can be seen in His life, miracles, the transfiguration, and glorification of the father. But this glory was never more marvelous than it was at Calvary, where God's full revelation of Himself appeared. The cross was the greatest manifestation ever of God's glory as it demonstrated His grace, love, holiness, beauty, strength, and power.

Christ's glory is also seen through His passion, wherein God revealed His love for humanity through the suffering of his son. And through this glorious presence, God provides man with healing, support, salvation, and mercy. The passion shows that He is able to identify with man in his suffering.

But the cross wasn't the end. Eventually, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14), and the heavenly city will be filled "with the glory of God" (Revelation 21: 10- 11). Consequently, the glory of God in the Bible reaches its apex in Jesus Christ

Applying the Concept of the Glory of God

The Christian understanding of the glory of God can be seen in worship, conduct, mission, discipleship, the work of the Church, and more. But we will limit this study to three applications: human conduct, worship, and missions

(1) God's Glory and Human Conduct

The Reformers related the concept of God's glory to an honest Christian's conduct. Since God dwells in the midst of His people through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Glory, He ensures the

glorious inheritance of the saints. Believers are invited to show God's glory through their conduct, so the world will see this conduct and glorify God. Hence Christ called his disciples and all believers to glorify God by how they live, and the apostle Paul repeated this call, urging the Church to live for the glory of God. For example, Paul writes, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10: 31) (see too Ephesians 1: 5- 14).

If, on the one hand, sin is falling short of the glory God and idolatry is misdirecting the glory that belongs to God alone, (Romans 3:23 and 1: 23), then on the other hand, faith, repentance, obedience, and steadfastness in the midst of suffering glorifies God in the life of the believer.

Luther taught that human beings should give glory to God alone and that they should humble themselves and never attribute anything to themselves. For we are not worthy to take credit for anything. Luther criticized man's pride, saying, "No one wants to be nothing or in a state of doing nothing, but everybody is satisfied and content with oneself. This is where all troubles and disturbances on earth come from."

Luther believed that the key to establishing peace on earth is man's denial of himself and his giving all glory to God. Luther says,

Peace on earth will diminish if glory to God isn't given. As Solomon says, "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Proverbs 13: 10). Peace on earth is inevitable when God's glory is perceptible. Why do people get upset if they are told that nothing comes from them and that all they are, all that they have, and all that they can produce comes from God? They should simply rejoice and be happy because they have a generous God.

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The Westminster Confession of Faith urges us to glorify God in everything. Glorifying God doesn't just happen through practices we call spiritual, such as singing hymns, serving others, and preaching the gospel; rather, it occurs when each Christian strives to glorify God through daily works; in the factory, company, school, or a profession. Human beings who desire to glorify God should try to perform every activity in a way that is pleasing in the eyes of God. Doing work properly and even enjoying appropriate entertainment glorifies God in the same way that worshipping him on the Sabbath or witnessing to non-believers pleases Him. Therefore, Christians should strive to live as disciples in all that they do so that in every aspect of their lives God will be seen and glorified. Everything in a Christian's life should be done to honor God and glorify His name. And all should be done in Christ

The Church has been grievously mistaken in the past when it has stooped to glorify man rather than God. When we deprive God of His seat at the center of the life of the Church and put ourselves in this center, we steal God's glory.

Self-centeredness destroys communities and churches. The believer, servant, or leader who makes himself the center of attention and seeks to place the spotlight on himself, his talents or achievements, steals God's glory. In all vocations, the focus should be on what one can offer as a servant to live out the call that God has given. It should not be on what a person can gain in privileges, status, finances, or other benefits. If a person's service is directed to his own accomplishments, if he attempts to attract all the attention to himself, if all goals point to him, and if all the glory is to advance his name, God will not be pleased. God is jealous for His glory, and every time a biblical figure (such as, Nebuchadnezzar or Herod) tried to deprive God of His glory, divine punishment was issued. As faithful Christians, let's not deprive God of His glory because He alone should be given glory: *soli deo gloria*.

(2) God's Glory and Worship

Both Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederic Handel wrote compositions entitled "The Glory of God Alone." understood that worship that glorifies God alone is the ultimate goal of the Church, and it is what God longs for in His people. During worship, the Church is humbled before its master as a community and as individuals. In worship the Church gives God His rightful reverence, honor, and glory. In worship, the focus is completely on God, who He is, and what He provides us through his Son Jesus Christ. In worship, the Church celebrates the glory of God by praising Him. In worship, the Church remembers the words of God in the Bible and declares its submission to Him and His word. In worship, the Church testifies to the world about the truth of its God. Every opportunity to worship should carry an evangelistic content, telling those from the outside about the God who is being worshipped. Worship shows His glory, love, grace, and salvation in Christ Jesus. In worship, God's presence is shown in a spiritual way so that His people rejoice and His works are shown in them. Properly done, worship a service the church offers – a sacrifice of praise, almsgiving, and practical assistance to others

In our day, there is much confusion about God-focused and man-focused worship. Worship focused on God holds God's glory as its single purpose (1 Corinthians 10: 31), while worship focused on man evokes man in the worship of God. The latter can be noble in purpose, but it should never be the goal or center of worship.

Worship focused on God will please God, not man. God-centered worship can be detected in its content and orientation. For example, God-centered worship will include evangelism as part of the worship service. It will not be the goal of worship, but it will be an observable part of the service.

The gospel presented in worship should focus on the message of the cross and passion of the Lamb of God. On the other hand,

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worship focused on man presents an easy gospel, one that doesn't speak of man's corruption, sin, and the cross. Yet the gospel that does not address the issue of sin is a gospel that is trying to please man.

Worship focused on God is characterized by the unity of attendants around God. He is the One to whom all hearts are turned so that they may please Him, while worship focused on man has for its goal a time of entertainment, which seeks to make the worshipers feel good.

In worship focused on God, the worshipers express their need of God alone, while in worship focused on man the worldly needs and desires of people come first and often there is little or no mention of man's real need of God. Since man was made in the image of God, he draws his ultimate value from this divine imprint. But worship that focuses on the value of man apart from God is misguided; it attempts to raise up man, when it is God who should be elevated.

Therefore the invitation to worship presented in the service is a call to glorify God alone. This can include celebration, testimony, and service, but it should always witness to the glorified God who dwells in the midst of His people.

(3) God's Glory and Mission

After the Reformation, the theology of mission (missiology) developed considerably, and one of the most important elements of the new mission theology was a focus on the relationship between mission and the glory of God. We can find a strong relationship between the concepts of God's glory (as previously mentioned in this study in creation, salvation, worship, and glorification) and God's mission to the nations. Mission theology affirms that the glorification of God is the ultimate goal of mission.

The concept of mission as a glorification of God has been

known since Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), who described a triple goal for mission: the renewal of sinners, the planting of churches, and the proclamation and glorification of divine grace. However, the contemporary Dutch theologian Jan Jongeneel considers this triple goal as a modification of the main goal of mission, which he defines as renewal, church planting, the reunion of persecuted believers, the re-establishment of weak churches, and the unifying of the divided ones (including material consolidation).

The concept of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, has become popular in the modern church. In this view, mission is God's nature and He is its source. Christians are called to work together with God in pursuit of His mission, which includes the objective of glorifying God alone. This teaching focuses on the concept that God's glory is the ultimate goal. It is an expression of God's will for man. The primary reason for the Church and for mission organizations is to achieve the intention of God.

In the early 19th century, the emphasis on the glory of God and mission seemed to drop from many sermons, and it was replaced by a gospel of individual personal renewal. Yet seminal theologians before and since have emphatically affirmed the centrality of mission. The theologian Herman Bavnick says, "God is the purpose of the mission which establishes His glory and Kingdom." John Calvin observes that the glory of God is the essence of mission. And Lamin Sanneh says, "The church's participation in salvation is the Church's glorious work. By this participation the glory returns to God."

In the second article of the Frankfurt Declaration on mission states, the "Glory of God is the first and ultimate goal of missions in the whole world, and the declaration of the sovereignty of His son, Lord Jesus Christ." Peter Beyerhaus, the main writer of the Frankfurt declaration, points out that the primary goal of the Bible's promises isn't to meet human spiritual and material needs; it is God, the great creator and the greatest savior. In the same

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way, the purpose of sending the church into the world is, first and foremost, to glorify the triune God. If we want mission theology to be in harmony with the Bible, then glorifying God should be at the forefront of our theology and practice. The study of mission was developed not just as a response to God's call to His people in the Great Commission or as a desire to share the gospel of personal salvation; rather, it was focused on the relationship that exists among mission, worship, and the glory of God.

In this regard, John Piper affirms that "mission isn't the Church's objective. Worship is the objective. Worship is the fuel and the objective of the mission." He adds, "all of history moves towards a supreme goal, which is the warm worship of the Father and the Son among all the nation's of earth. Mission isn't the goal but the means to accomplish it. Therefore, mission is the second greatest human activity in the world."

One of the watchwords of mission is "Glorify God and make Him glorious. Worship God and make Him worshiped." The meaning here isn't simply to sing hymns or to perform other practices common to worship. Rather, worship is a spiritual experience characterized by fellowship, harmony, and communication with God. Christopher Wright adds, "mission exists because of worship, and the church's worship is active and distinct through mission. Worship is a continuous reminder of the necessity and inevitability of mission as a response and extension of God's prior mission, just as our worship and praise are a response to God's prior work."

Mission emerges from the principle of God's glory and the return of this glory to Him. For mission and all of its activities and features, glorifying God is the main and supreme goal. Michael Green says, "Church growth, the salvation of souls, and humanizing society aren't the real objectives of mission; rather, it is glorifying God on earth as in heaven."

Conclusion

In order to succeed in glorifying God as a church, both in our country and in the world, we must be true to the principle of *soli deo gloria*. We must apply it to our personal lives as disciples of Christ and see that it is realized in the life of the Church. Above all, the Church must put this principle in practice by its devotion to the *missio dei*, for the work of mission is indispensible to the Church if it is to accomplish the purpose for which God intended it. The apostle Paul stated that purpose as clearly as anyone ever has: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*" (emphasis mine, Philippians 2:10-11).

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Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Defenders of Icons, John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite

Iakovos Menelaou

In Orthodoxy an icon is the image of a person who has been characterized by holiness, possessed of the Holy Spirit, and the reci-

pient of the total restoration of God's image through baptism. 1 In the fourth century, when Christianity was established as the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, the creation of the first great works of Christian art took place.² Although the use of icons can be confirmed in that century, the earliest surviving icons only go back to the sixth century.³ It is interesting to note that the origins of icons are associated with paganism, since pagan images were the model for Christian iconography and the same verbal terms



Agios Iakovos (Saint Jacob), by Ilias Nearchou, a contemporary artist. The icon, paint on wood with some gold, shows that iconography is a live tradition.

¹ Nicolas Ozoline, 'The Theology of The Icon', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38.1/4 (1993), p. 288.

² Ναυσικά Πανσέληνου, Βυζαντινή Ζωγραφική: Η Βυζαντινή Κοινωνία και οι Εικόνες της (Athens, 2000), p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

were employed for both.⁴ However, the meaning of Christian icons is completely different from that of pagan images. Christian iconography made use of its own environment's forms, giving icons a totally new meaning,⁵ which it obtained from the Scriptures, *martyrologia*, and the lives of the saints. These sources infused Christian art with a new and unique character.⁶

From its earliest beginnings, iconography has always played an important role in the Eastern Orthodox Church. There is no Eastern Orthodox Church or household without icons. Through icons, the Orthodox communicate with departed saints, who serve as intercessors between the ones praying and the triune God. Nonetheless, there was a period in Byzantine history when icons were banned and people who venerated them were persecuted. This is the era of Iconoclasm, which lasted more than a century.

The Icon controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries

The first emperor to oppose icons was Leo III (r.717-741). In 726 and 730 he promulgated two decrees against the veneration of icons, which ignited the persecution of iconodules. His decision to remove the icon of the Savior, which had been placed above the gate of the imperial palace many years before his reign, was the beginning of a great battle against icons. In place of the image of the Savior, Leo III erected a cross, which according to the iconoclasts was Christianity's most powerful symbol. While it may be said that Leo was the leader of the iconoclastic movement, his son, Constantine V (741-775), was certainly the most

⁴ Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London, 2007), pp. 99-100.

⁵ Andre Grabar, *Christian Iconography: a Study of its Origins* (London, 1980), pp. 34-35.

⁶ Blagoy Tschiflianov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-A Theological Perspective', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38.1/4 (1993), p. 234.

⁷ Herrin, *Byzantium*, p. 101.

⁸ Metropolitan Joseph Bossakov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-Historical Perspectives', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38.1/4 (1993), p. 217. ⁹ Herrin, *Byzantium*, p. 109.

violent persecutor of iconodules and the leader of the iconoclastic theology. Constantine wrote a treatise that summarized iconoclastic doctrine and convoked a church council at Hieria in 754. ¹⁰ He was succeeded by his son, Leo IV (r775-780). Upon his death, Leo IV's wife, Irene of Athens, ruled as a dowager and regent from 780 to 797, and from 797 to 802 as empress. She called the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which was held in Nicaea in 787. It was this council that achieved the restoration of icons. ¹¹

However, the battle against icons did not end since a series of iconoclastic emperors followed Irene's reign. Leo V the Armenian (813-820), Michael II (821), and Theophilos (822-848) disrupted the life of the church over the use of icons until Theodora, who succeeded Theophilos in 842, permanently restored the veneration of icons. The Sunday on which images were reinstated became known as the Feast of Orthodoxy. Theodora commissioned Methodios to write a new liturgy. His *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* was a landmark in the return of traditional belief. In March 878 Theodora reaffirmed the decision of the Council of 787, which had originally restored the use of icons. Consequently, over a century of conflict came to an end with complete victory for those who favored the veneration of icons. The series of icons.

Iconoclasts versus Iconodules: The debate

It is not clear why Leo III initiated the attack on icons or why his successors followed his policy. However, some historians observe that the veneration of icons was seen as a form of idolatry for which Christians were mocked by Jews and Muslims. ¹⁵ Some

¹⁰ Metropolitan Bossakov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-Historical Perspectives', p. 218.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹³ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1996), 148.

Herrin, *Byzantium*, p. 112.

 $^{^{15}}$ Κωνσταντίνος Παπαρρηγόπουλος, Το έπος της Εικονομαχίας (Athens, 2005), pp. 40-41, 42-43.

misunderstood the role of icons, failing to distinguish between the object and the person it depicted. Others rejected the notion that veneration could under any circumstances be given either to the icon or the person it represented. Curiously, one reason Leo decided to destroy icons was the eruption of a great volcano that his counselors had advised was a divine warning against idolatry. ¹⁶

The crux of the controversy was whether Christ can be depicted. Iconoclasts maintained that he could not while iconodules asserted that he could. ¹⁷ Iconoclasm called into question the veneration of icons that had been formally accepted at least since the Council of Nicaea in 325. The resulting conflict caused the greatest rift in the history of the Church in the East. ¹⁸

Iconoclasts accused iconodules of idolatry and of breaking the Second Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." (Exodus 20:4-5, NIV). This passage from Holy Scripture, which prohibits the making of idols, is the cornerstone of their views. Iconoclasts also focus on the tradition of the Holy Fathers in order to demonstrate that the veneration of icons has no patristic validity. They refer especially to the writings of Saint Epiphanios of Cyprus (an apocryphal writing), Theodotos of Ankyra (an interpolated text), and also isolated sentences of others like Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint Basil the Great ²⁰

¹⁶ Herrin, Byzantium, p. 108.

¹⁷ Theodor Nikolaou, 'The Place of the Icon in the Liturgical Life of the Orthodox Church', *The Greek Orhodox Theological Review* 35/4 (1990), p. 317.

¹⁸ Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2007), p. 52.

¹⁹ Herrin, *Byzantium*, p. 105.

²⁰ Tschiflianov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-A Theological Perspective', pp. 238, 243.

According to iconoclasts, the use of icons is reminiscent of older representations of pagan gods, since Christian icons were adored in a way that could easily be characterized as neo-pagan behavior.²¹ In this view, those who venerate icons are heretics who are aping pagan customs.²² For them the representation of Christ in an image is not appropriate because it goes against a fundamental dogma of Christianity that God - even God in the incarnate Christ – cannot be depicted.²³ Iconoclasts believe in the Church as an invisible body.²⁴

Constantine V, the emperor who attacked icons more strenuously than any other before or after him, claimed that the justification for the use of icons revolved around the icon of Christ. If Christ cannot be depicted, then there is no other icon with theological validity. For Constantine an icon that depicted Christ was not really an icon of Christ since Christ has two natures. Thus, an icon of Christ separates the human from the divine nature or even confuses them as one. 25 This is the main argument that shook the Church to its roots ²⁶

In the sixth and seventh centuries, icons and their worship were widespread.²⁷ Icons were displayed in the Hippodrome and appeared in battles at the head of armies; Heraclius carried the acheiropoetic image on his expeditions, and the freeing of Thessalonicans from the Slavs was seen as a result of the intervention of Saint Demetrius. Icons could be found in a wide range of plac-

²¹ Herrin, *Byzantium*, p. 116.

Tschiflianov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-A Theological Perspective', p. 247.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²⁴ Metropolitan Bossakov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-Historical Perspectives', p. 216.

²⁵ Daniel J. Sahas, Icon and Logos: Sources in Eight-century Iconoclasm (Toronto, 1988), pp. 30-31.

²⁶ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 152.

²⁷ Alain Besancon, The Forbidden Image: an Intellectual History of Iconoclasm, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 2009), p. 113.

es, including bedrooms, shops, households, and books.²⁸ Some people believed that icons could speak and shed tears, suggesting that their convictions about icons exceeded those normally associated with mere veneration. Iconodules even believed that some icons had been made by divine, not human, hands.²⁹ It was within this context that the first iconoclastic emperors took measures against icons.³⁰ And it was certainly under these circumstances that Constantine Kopronymos saw iconodules as a threat to be treated violently.³¹

Iconoclasts saw themselves as reinstating the traditional beliefs of Christian Byzantium by eliminating idolatry. Their policy against icons was a purification of the corruption of the Church, a return to its roots and the earliest tradition. The insistence on the biblical prohibition on graven images was always the core of their bellicose intentions. Iconoclasts proclaim the immeasurable distance between the "abject, dead matter" of material things like paint and wood and the immaterial nature of the true Church. Constantine considered icons as a form of heresy and maintained that Christ's double nature is inseparable; therefore, it is impossible to depict Christ. He also claimed that iconodules fall into two heresies: Nestorianism when they represent only the human hypostasis of Christ, and Monophysitism when they represent only the divine nature of Christ.

Iconoclasts believe that the making of icons is an effort to confine and subscribe the divinity of Christ, which remains inaccessible. Iconodules, on the other hand, declare that the Word had revealed itself in an accessible and visible form to human eyes by

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁹ Πανσέληνου, Βυζαντινή Ζωγραφική, p. 101.

³⁰ Besancon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 114.

³¹ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, p. 34.

³² Besancon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 123.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

becoming flesh. An image is identical to the prototype (Christ), despite physical differences. The beauty of the image is the same as the beauty of the prototype. Also, the beauty of Christ is the same as that of the Father, with the difference that in Christ this beauty appears in a human form.³⁶ According to iconodules, God's image is fully restored in Christ's human nature, but it remains invisible and indescribable. What is describable in Christ is the nature He received from His mother; His human nature. But His divinity remains always invisible.³⁷ Thus, to the question of whether or not Christ is circumscribable, the answer from iconodules is that He can indeed be portraved, as He was born of Mary 38

The value of an icon does not derive from the icon itself, but its use. An icon is the manifestation of the mystery of the Christian salvation that brings the faithful close to the archetype.³⁹ Thus, although icons are made of the same material as idols, they are sacred, honorable, and glorious because their holiness comes from God's grace and not from the material they are made of. 40 An icon has a didactic aim⁴¹ and becomes the functional equivalent of a book for illiterate people. 42 Moreover, an icon holds the energy of the person who is depicted; hence an icon is like a sacrament. 43 It is an artificial image, an imitation of the prototype. 44

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-7.

³⁷ Ozoline, 'The Theology of The Icon', p. 290.

³⁸ Nikolaou, 'The Place of the Icon in the Liturgical Life of the Orthodox Church', p. 320.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴⁰ Tschiffianov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-A Theological Perspective', p. 252.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴² Nikolaou, 'The Place of the Icon in the Liturgical Life of the Orthodox Church', pp. 323-4.

⁴³ Besancon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 128.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

John of Damascus

John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite were the two major defenders of icons during the period of Iconoclasm; the former during the first iconoclastic period and the latter during the second iconoclastic period.

John maintained that an icon is like the light and rays of the sun, or the bloom and fragrance of a rose. He believed that human beings always need corporeal things to act as intermediaries and to bring them close to spiritual things. An image is hierarchized depending on its degree of participation in the prototype. Thus, an icon is at the very bottom of the hierarchy. There is no distinction between a natural image, which participates directly with the substance of a prototype, and an artificial image, which does no more than imitate the prototype. This is the framework that John used to justify icons. He also made a distinction between *latria*, which is the <u>worship</u> reserved for God, and *proskynesis*, which is the <u>veneration</u> appropriate for sacred things.

In John's teaching, real worship is addressed only to God. An icon, which stands between the one who prays and the depicted person, is the matter through which humans can communicate with God. It is a sacred thing because it provides the faithful with the opportunity to come closer to God. According to John, an icon directs people to abstract realities:

I do not venerate matter, but rather the creator of matter, who was made matter for me and who deigned to live in matter and bring about my salvation through matter. I will not cease to venerate the matter through which salvation came to me. ⁴⁶

There are three main points in John's doctrine of icons. The first one is that God made humankind in His image and likeness. Con-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

sequently, the first to make images was God, for God made humans as images of himself. The second point is the surmise that images constitute a prominent feature of reality, both the reality of God and the reality of the world that He has created. And finally, his third point is that images should be seen as a fundamental element of Orthodoxy since they are justified by the incarnation of God in a human form. In any case, the decision to ban icons is an error because this denies the meaning of creation in which God formed human beings in His image, and it eliminates the possibility for people to come closer to God through the material creation 47

John wrote On the Divine Images to protect icons. Although this work consists of three different texts, they are in fact three different versions of the same defense of the veneration of icons John attempts to show that the part of Old Testament that rejects idolatry has nothing to do with Christian icons. This prohibition relates to the veneration of objects of the creation (the very definition of idolatry) instead of the Creator. John also observed that, although the Old Testament clearly denounces the error of idolatry, its denunciations are mainly addressed to Jews, who were prone to it. While idolatry as depicted in the Old Testament was the work of the devil, Christian icons do not fall into the error of idolatry because the incarnation justifies their existence.⁴⁸

John clearly distinguishes between appropriate and idolatrous images:

> If we were to make images of human beings and regard them and venerate them as gods, we would be truly sacrilegious. But we do none of these things... For the image

Andrew Louth, St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in By-

zantine Theology (Oxford, 2002), pp. 198-201.

⁴⁷ Andrew Louth, "Beauty will save the World": the Formation of Byzantine Spirituality', Theology Today 61, 2004, pp. 73-75.

is a mirror and a puzzle, suitable to the destiny of our body.⁴⁹

Theodore the Studite

Theodore the Studite has been characterized as the great apologist of Orthodoxy. So As the main defender of icons during the second iconoclastic period, his name is associated with the permanent restoration of icons. Like John of Damascus, Theodore used Neoplatonic philosophy to justify his claims. According to him, the respect that the faithful show to icons is not addressed to the materials of which icons are made, but to the person depicted. So, icons become a means for people to communicate with Christ and the saints. St

In Theodore's view, what we see in icons is the very person; his *hypostasis*, not his nature. What an icon represents is the man with his various properties – those things that are specific to that individual. He also maintains that although Christ is one thing and His icon another, the icon has the "same *hypostasis*" as Christ since there is an undivided identity shared by the two. It should be concluded therefore that, although an icon of Christ consists of wood and paint, it should be addressed as Christ because of the identity it shares with its archetype. ⁵²

Theodore refers to the episode when Gabriel visited Mary, telling her: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus." This event illustrates that Christ is called by a common noun and proper name. Christ is separated by His *hypostatic* properties from the rest of men; thus He is circumscribable. Christ is an individual and one like us,

⁴⁹ St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2003), pp. 82.

⁵⁰ Aristeidis Papadakis, 'Hagiography in Relation to Iconoclasm', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 14/2 (1969), p. 166.

⁵¹ Πανσέληνου, Βυζαντινή Ζωγραφική, p. 102.

⁵² Besancon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 131.

while also being God and one member of the Trinity.⁵³ Theodore asks: "If Christ is not circumscribable, how can He say that He gave His back to the smiters and His cheek to those who pulled out the beard; or how can He say that they have pierced His hands and feet?" Theodore uses Christ's passion as a means to show that Christ is indeed describable. Although He is God, Christ is one of us because He suffered and felt pain like any human being. An icon can portray His *hypostasis* because Christ is differentiated from all others of the same species by His own properties.⁵⁵

Theodore also observes that Christ is identical to His father in respect to divinity and identical to His mother in respect to humanity. By mixing the properties of each origin, iconoclasts fail to distinguish the human and divine natures of Christ. As a result, they cannot understand why Christ can be depicted.⁵⁶

In addition, Theodore says that an icon deserves the same kind of veneration as the prototype, in accordance with the identity of likeness. So, when we venerate an icon, we do not introduce a different kind of veneration from the veneration addressed to the prototype. ⁵⁷

In his *Refutations of the Iconoclasts*, Theodore responds to iconoclasts' preaching that Christ is not describable, as follows:

You should consider that He [Christ] remains indescribable, although He has been described; there are attributes of His divine nature which demonstrate that He is God. But His other attributes belong to His human nature which illustrate that He is man...

⁵³ St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1981), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Christ is describable, although He is not a simple man, because He is not a man among many others, but God who became human...⁵⁸

So, He is describable and indescribable; the first one in accordance with His human nature and the second one in accordance with His divine nature...59

In regard to the accusation of iconoclasts that icons are idols, Theodore affirms icons by observing that there is a great difference between icons and idols. On the one hand, icons are a source of light, part of the divine economy, and real. On the other hand, idols are a source of darkness and falsehood, and they introduce a multitude of Gods. ⁶⁰ According to Theodore:

The material of an icon is not venerated, because it is not venerable. It is the person who is depicted in accordance with the prototype that deserves veneration. We do not venerate material, but the prototype together with its shape, without any confusion of the material...⁶¹

The veneration of Christ through His icon concerns the divine economy, since Christ has human flesh, although He is God...⁶²

Thus, what we have in an icon of Christ is His human nature, which has specific properties like any human being. Although He is God, Christ is circumscribed because He took human flesh and suffered as a human. This is obvious through His passion. The veneration of icons is idolatry since it does not introduce a diversity of gods, as idolatry suggests.

⁵⁸ Θεοδώρου του Στουδίτου, Λόγοι Αντιρρητικοί Κατά Εικονομάχων, tr. Κωνσταντίνος Δάλκος (Athens, 2006), pp. 63-65. My translation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187. My translation.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241. My translation.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 253. My translation.

Icons as Sacred Art

The production of an icon presupposes some very basic and strict rules. ⁶³ It can only be produced in the manner prescribed by the immutable law and holy tradition of the Ecumenical Church. Hence, it could never be said that the creation of an icon is due to an artist's inspiration. ⁶⁴ Icon painters, who are above the laity in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, are supposed to strive for humility, purity, and piety. To this end they seek closeness with the Father above through the spiritual practices of fasting and prayer ⁶⁵ while eschewing envy, alcoholic beverages, and practices that might lead to sin. ⁶⁶

An icon should not be treated as a fossilized piece of art since artistry is only a secondary aspect of its nature. This is why a museum will never be a natural place for an icon. ⁶⁷In the Orthodox Church, iconography does not have a primarily decorative purpose but, rather, is intended for a liturgical and worshipful purpose. ⁶⁸ An icon fulfils its purpose only when it leads the worshipers' consciousnesses into the spiritual realm where they may behold "mysterious and supernatural visions." If an icon does not obtain this goal, it fails to be an icon. ⁶⁹ Thus, iconography is not similar to other types of art and should be characterized as sacred art ⁷⁰

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁴ Florensky, *Iconostasis*, p.78.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (New York, 2005), p.24.

⁶⁸ Constantine D. Kalokyris, 'The Essence of Orthodox Iconography', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 14.1(1969), p. 43.

Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1996), p. 66.
 Philip Sherrard, *The Sacred in Life and Art* (Golgonooza Press, 1990), p. 71.

An icon is narrative in shapes and forms, since it takes its themes from the Orthodox tradition. It is interesting to note that an icon is called *historesis*, iconography is called *historia*, and the iconographer is called *historiographos*. Icons are a reminder and commentary of the Holy Scriptures.⁷¹ Icons are not made as objects of aesthetic admiration or study. An icon is a living grace, which corresponds to a definite concrete reality and living experience always alive in the Church. 72 Also, an icon differs from art because of its role in the liturgy. An image celebrates, as does any Christological feast, the historical event, its inner meaning, and its eternal reenactment.⁷³ Consequently, an icon can only be understood in relation to the organic whole of the Orthodox tradition, which explains the role of icons in Christian life. If an icon is separated from this organic whole, it ceases to be an icon.⁷⁴ When viewed in its proper context, an icon conveys a structure of ideas, becoming a picture of the divine world order. 75

In iconography there are no limitations of the past, present, and future. In icons we glimpse eternity in divine events living now in the present. Icons continue to be made in the same way they were made many centuries ago, and their role is no different now than it was in the past. Icons are to be found in churches and private houses as a holy and powerful presence, a means of communion with and knowledge of God. Therefore, an icon is an expression of theological experience and faith in Christ. It can only be understood in combination with its theological and cultural context.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷² Metropolitan Bossakov, 'The Iconoclastic Controversy-Historical Perspectives', p. 229.

Nancy Patterson Sevcenko, 'Icons in the Liturgy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), p.48.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74-75.

⁷⁶ Kalokyris, 'The Essence of Orthodox Iconography', p.50.

⁷⁷ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.25.

⁷⁸ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

Conclusion

Heresy or not, Iconoclasm had immense credibility at the time because it had the support of a number of emperors and the full force of the state behind it. And it continues to be highly compelling today for much of the Christian world because of its clear biblical foundations and theological cogency. Unfortunately, what is known about the period of Iconoclasm mainly comes from iconodule literature, which tends to vilify the iconoclast emperors. Moreover, there are no iconoclastic texts, as they did not survive. Consequently what we know about the iconoclasts is derived from the writings of their opponents. Therefore, our knowledge is no doubt partial, skewed, and presented in the worst possible light. Consequently, continuing research needs to be made into this divisive but ever protean subject.

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⁸⁰ The author of Nicetas' life, Theosterictus, in Papadakis, 'Hagiography in relation to the Iconoclasm', p.173; although he strongly supports that Iconoclasm was a terrible heresy, he also admits that it was the unique which had royal authority.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.173.

⁸² Πανσέληνου, *Βυζαντινή Ζωγραφική*, p. 136.

⁸³ Sahas, Icon and Logos, p. x.

⁸⁴ Δάλκος in Στουδίτου, Λόγοι Αντιρρητικοί Κατά Εικονομάχων, p.42.

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