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**Luther’s Theology of the Cross as  
Foundation for Sanctification**

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**Introduction**

When I think of sanctification, concepts like connection, relationship, vocation, life in communion and in community come to me, because they inform and form part of the spiritual life. But that life is lived and exercised with and from the cross. In the Lutheran context, the cross becomes one of the major topics to develop the

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notion of justification and also of sanctification. This article will follow the intrinsic connection between them.

### **A. Sanctification as Being Simultaneous Just and Sinner**

The Lutheran perspective on sanctification is based on the tension of being reconciled by the action of Jesus Christ in the cross. But reconciliation does not erase the human condition, because humans continue living in the tension between being free and sinner at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*). Sanctification happens exactly in that tension by virtue of faith granted by God's grace on the cross. Only through faith, i.e. by the gracious action of God justifying all humanity, justification takes place not because of human merits but because of God's will. The principle of justification, rooted in the message of the Gospels where incarnation, cross and resurrection shapes the approach to sanctification and to the constant salvific action of God in favor of the entire creation.

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight, Rom. 3 and 4.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on justification for sanctification is central and focuses on the action of God. There is a relationship built up through the entire ministry of Jesus Christ. The incarnated and resurrected God restores the image of God in the entire creation and maintains it by the action of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is central to the continuing process of restoration. The broken relationship between God and God's creatures can only be done by God self. There is no need for merits that can justify or restore relations.

In this relationship, God originates faith by the power of the scriptures preached and lived out through the sacraments, the means of grace, and the active presence of the Holy Spirit. It is only by faith that access to grace takes place, and in that grace sanctification by the action of God is real. The human reality is never canceled nor divided; God acts completely in the human reality. The Lutheran theology does not remain in the sphere of sanctification in the soul-

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<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Concord, The Confession of the Lutheran Church*, Articles 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.

body dualism; rather, God's action considers the entire humanity, and justification takes place exactly in that reality of struggle. In this human reality, sin and justification occur simultaneously. Therefore, the continuous struggles to maintain the relationship with God drives humans to depend on the gracious action of the cross, which is renewed constantly. Grace becomes relevant when living in such tension.

Sanctification according to the Lutheran perspective considers that tension. The fact that human beings are "simultaneously" free by God's grace and remain sinners is a reality seriously considered. The tension is encompassed by the fact that human beings, despite the grace of God and the benefit of faith alone, they continue to be sinners. Conscious of this human condition, the Lutheran theology of sanctification brings the tension into the concrete sphere of the reality. In this atmosphere, sanctification becomes a process that happens again and again during life. This notion also reshapes the identity of the body of Christ (*ekklesia*) because it is reformed by a relationship mediated by compassion and mercy. The church lives the benefits of the gracious God offered through salvation. Believers who form the communion of saints (communion sanctorum) are, at the same time, members of the church formed by sinners (*ekklesia peccatorum*). The balance in this tension does not come from any action by the church but by the invitation to live in reconciliation. It is the understanding that sanctification is translated in faithful actions that continue moving relationships while acknowledging the human condition and the action of God on them.

In the context of the First Testament, sanctification implied belonging to God (Exodus 13:2) and being part of God's people; they were called to obey and keep God's commands (Exodus 19:4). In the notion that the whole earth and people pertained to God the creator, the relationship became holy by actions of purification and worship that motivated a holy relationship between humans and God. The second Testament affirms the continued presence of God among God's followers, and it is emphasized by God's work on the cross. God justifies and promotes relationships. There is no need for rituals of purification that mediate that relationship. God touches the human vulnerabilities through grace.

Faith is God's work in us ... is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that I would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you ... serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such graces.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. The Cross, Place of Revelation of the Hidden God

Redemption happens on the cross. The cross is the visible space where the revelation of God addresses its high point. The cross is the place of action and space where God is known. The crucified reveals the hidden God,<sup>4</sup> “the one living God who is manifest as he is concealed in the cross of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> In the cross, God becomes visible and becomes a gift for humans. The revelation of God happening on the cross already confirms how God acts continuously. Through the cross, God preaches and reveals other attributes than that of being omnipresent, omniscient. God is the closest, most compassionate and merciful presence. The cross speaks of the incarnated Word revealing the meaningfulness of worship and communion. In that context, the sacramental offering of God regains sense.

God confronts us first of all in his word. In his word he is ‘known to us’ and ‘has dealing with us.’ In it he has offered to us. We are directed to God's revelation in the word ... God grasps himself in his word. He becomes the ‘clothed’ God ... the revealed God is nothing else than the word of God.<sup>6</sup>

The cross reveals the unconditional will of God for salvation. In the cross, God works in order to heal people's wounds. Healing takes place because it restores relationships, it is a faithful process of healing that happens simultaneously among the communion and at the personal level. Coming back to the relationship between the hidden God and the revealed one, it is important to assert that Luther uses it to explain that it is the same God. Methodologically, the use of this

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's German Bible of 1622*, trans. Robert E. Smith from Dr. Martin Luther's *Vermischte Deutsche Schriften*, vol. 63 (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1854), 124.

<sup>4</sup> Luther does not use the concept of hidden God in a speculative-metaphysical sense although it is open to such an interpretation ... Luther warns against this idea, while at the same time it remains a basic perspective of his theological thought. In order to safeguard the true concern of the idea, he warns against the speculative misunderstood hidden God.” Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

distinction helps to express how God is acting through the Word, since the creation, now on the cross. The word acting in salvation is a word that speaks out of God's mystery that creates and recreates life. But the word is only accessed by faith. "The faith character of the knowledge of God is preserved by uniting revelation and concealment as two inseparable aspects in one and the same act."<sup>7</sup> It is in faith that the hidden God is known. Faith is the access promoted by God, access to know, "in the Word, and in the sacraments God is revealed and seen."<sup>8</sup> God becomes visible in a perseverant relationship through faithful prayer, constant reading and sharing of the good news, and faithful practice of that faith in concrete actions of love and diakonia. Faith is the element that helps to hold the tension between the hidden God and the God revealed on the cross.

The relationship built up through faith is established "under the paradoxical synthesis between the transcendence of God's salvific will and the subjective experience of the incalculable double will on the one hand, and the transcendence of the absolute double will and the subjective experience of the unconditional salvific will on the other hand."<sup>9</sup> It is in the reality of the work of salvation that God continues to create; the movement of life is possible without the need to speculate about the notion of the hidden God but as a source to confirm that on the cross God was revealed.

## **2. Grace Revealed to Benefit Human Beings Integrally**

The Lutheran theology of the cross affirms that whatever is taught and preached addressing the work of God on the cross (the gospel, the sacraments, the word) is deeply connected to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God acts in the human reality by sanctifying and consecrating. Life lived in consecration does not expect harmonious and heavenly experiences. Peace is a reality offered by God and in God. In this manner, God contributes to peace because God is the source of it. The relationship that God builds on the cross is done following the principle of peace and justice. The constant struggle of humans in life to build up peace needs to consider that peace is a principle of life. Because we humans are part of a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 45 and 46.

church composed of both sinners and saints, we need to be open to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Justification is constant in the process of sanctification. It considers the totality of human beings. In that consideration, we humans embrace our nature of being simultaneously just and sinners. It is in this acknowledgment that change takes place. It is in this process of caring that the message of the gospel can challenge realities of suffering and that caring and merciful action of the Holy Spirit take place. It is also in this reality that the notion of the dualistic battle between the dimensions of the spiritual and the material are overcome. The recovery of the precious and fallen humanity in us and the consideration of us as integral is a gift that allows restarting again and again the process of sanctification. Sanctification never ends; rather, it is an invitation to come to God, to the cross, to the baptism, and to the communion to restore relationships.

### **B. Tracks on the Emphasis Made in Latin America on Sanctification**

The Indigenous populations in Latin American experienced the notion of salvation and sanctification during the arrival of Christianity in the fifteenth century through a Christology that proclaimed a celestial and monarchical Christ. The heavenly Christ confused Indigenous populations because in the proclamation Christians called for obedience to follow and relate to God, but this was a different kind of relation than the Indigenous had with their gods. Religiously, the concept of the Christian God was completely different from the concept of the divinities the Indigenous populations had.

The cross, at the core of the Christian life, was more tangible since the crucifixion was a symbol used to emphasize suffering. Many Indigenous populations identified with the crucified one because they knew that Christ was suffering with them. They were not far from understanding the message of the good news, but it was used by the church to believe in spiritual suffering. The imposition of the crucified Christ is beautifully addressed in the novel *Taita Cristo (Father Christ)* by Eleodoro Vargas Vicuña.<sup>10</sup> The small narration of Good Friday captures a suffering contradicting the meaning of the

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<sup>10</sup> Eleodoro Vargas Vicuña, *Taita Cristo* (Lima: 1963).

death of God. It is known that Good Friday needs to be read together with the day of resurrection. Without this perspective, it loses its message.

*Tayta Cristo* uses irony to express how the indigenous life is impregnated by suffering and oppression. The notion of crucifixion does not end with Good Friday, but exactly because of the conditions that the conquest forced down, the indigenous understood that their lives was a punishment or the way towards the Golgotha. The cross was used to reinforce the acceptance of suffering. Vargas brilliantly describes the way the community relates to the narration of Jesus' death. To carry the cross has the connection to a vision of triumphalism. To carry the cross meant to overcome shameful experiences, including the fact that indigenous were not considered completely humans or that their heretical/sinner spiritual practices were given up. In the novel, one of the characters literally carries the cross. As incredible as it sounds, everyone in town sees his suffering and suffers with him. They are shocked with his death. But there is no recognition of their sufferings and struggles, because their neighbor's death has the aim to cover their sufferings.

In this irony, the author offers two perspectives before the crucified Christ. Being in the temple, Aurelia Ramos and Jacinto Navarro contemplate the figure of the crucified from two different perspectives. Jacinto praises the excellent artwork developed by the artist while Aurelia feels the suffering of the poor guy hanging on the cross. Aurelia suffers with Christ until the point to feel the pain and sadness. Capturing the irony, Vargas discloses the meaning of Good Friday and how stuck people are within it. Both attitudes of Aurelia and Jacinto invite readers to address the cross from different perspectives, but at the same time both do not raise the point. It is, of course, the great artwork that depicts the suffering that the cross expresses, but the cross also reveals the presence of God—God present among the suffering people. God is present among them, moving from suffering to active actions of faith and to concrete expressions of life that already speak of sanctification. The broader picture of the narration invites us to consider how merits are needed for consecration. But the tension remains; it is in suffering that the impossibility takes place. It is impossible to carry our personal crosses if we humans do not become followers of a gracious God. In this

incapacity, the acceptance of suffering moves to a passive and obedient attitude, and in these circumstances there is the need for mediators, others than Christ, to confess in order to maintain control. In this condition God becomes literally hidden and salvation is not mediated.

Confession (as acknowledgment of failure) and sanctification are two inseparable topics. They remain central for the Christian life, and these are mediated by the crucified and risen Christ. Until today, it is possible to identify daily sufferings as part of spirituality imprinted over people in order to defeat them, to maintain social control over them or to maintain inequalities. The image of the crucified is not an invitation to support suffering, but to understand that in the midst of human suffering, God's grace takes place and that God suffers with the sufferers. This gracious character of the cross must be always used to promote transformation and consciousness.

Returning to the irony that Vargas raises, it links to another difficulty, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as celestial God. Even though the indigenous populations found it difficult to understand theological concepts contained in Christianity, as for example in the notion of the trinity, the two natures of Christ, etc., they accepted and believed in it. In some cases, Jesus Christ was welcomed as one more among the other gods, but that discussion needs more space elsewhere.

At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, independent movements, in some countries in Latin America, encouraged immigration with the aim to promote religious freedom and development. Protestants who migrated from Europe focused on serving their parishioners without engaging in mission in the traditional sense. Diaconal actions were developed through schools, daycare, and health centers with the goal to respond to their call to serve the needy. The European pietism of the 18th and 19th centuries that arrived in the USA also reached the southern countries of Latin America. Harold Wenkbeil noted that Pietism emphasized the awakening of spirituality in the "inner life and the subject experiences of the heart as an aid toward a living, vibrant commitment to Christ



that showed itself in action.”<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on the spiritual Christ, calling for moral changes and life regeneration, was a counter proposal to sinner practices that during the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This message was carried out by Pentecostal churches and movements that grew rapidly on the continent.

Sanctification, influenced by Pentecostalism, called on people to search for new life integrated with visible changes done and moved by the action of the Holy Spirit. God, through the Holy Spirit, sanctifies “hearts as assurance for salvation. Pietism in general and Methodism in particular stressed a brand of holiness that strove for moral perfection ... reached by post-conversion experience.”<sup>12</sup> Conversion, a necessary step in a consecrated life, bases its theology on the second coming of Christ to establish God’s kingdom. Conversion happens personally and is a foundational experience for sanctification that encompasses a whole lifestyle, i.e., a relationship on the earth demarcated by the exigencies of the heavenly world. The emphasis on the spiritual side and the struggle with the challenges of the earth and sin searching for celestial salvation also aims to reinforce sanctification on the personal and emotional side.

### **1. Sanctification as Active Reflection and Living in Liberation Theology**

The notion of sanctification offered in Liberation Theology is connected to a compromised Christian life with the suffering and oppression of people. The opportunity to make people’s lives better is addressed by the liberating action of God. Instead of continuing to stress the hope of heaven because of the notion that the kingdom of God that will become complete when the promise of return takes place, Liberation Theology affirms that it has already arrived with Jesus the Christ. Liberation Theology interprets the historical presence and action of God in Christ using hermeneutics as a tool to affirm that salvation also happens in the reality of the poor. The poor struggle faithfully, and it is in this space or in community where “Jesus of Nazareth arrived always already interpreted by people or groups

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<sup>11</sup> Harold L. Wenkbeil, *Sanctification. Christ in Action* (Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

interested in him.”<sup>13</sup> The need to return to Jesus of Nazareth was grounded in the affirmation that Christ is not other than Jesus. This first circularity confirms that justification methodologically begins when the presence of the incarnated God happens among the poor. Jesus’ presence affirmed in the indwelling of God is real in the context of misery and oppression in order to de-pacify these realities and to continue inspiring people toward actions of love.<sup>14</sup>

Liberation Theology in Latin America did question the way that the good news was proclaimed. Mary Solberg noted that the epistemology of liberation drives “to live knowing of such suffering and of [its] implications ... not to fix what was wrong [but to make humans aware of the personal] implications in it.”<sup>15</sup> The “epistemological conversion” is the “transformation of a way of knowing”<sup>16</sup> in order to become conscious of a faith that drives to concrete liberation based on the ministry of Jesus. Salvation is not only a spiritual and future event; it is an immediate reality happening in the world of the poor who are liberated from the political, social, and economic oppression.<sup>17</sup> The specific context in which Jesus reveals the Christ helps to better understand God’s relationship with the entire creation. The context of the poor is a theological sphere where the second circularity is expressed and where the reality of the poor illuminates the meaning of the scriptures, thereby refreshing them and making possible a contextual message. In this circularity the reading of the scriptures will always be new and will build continuity with the good news and discontinuity with what oppresses.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of suffering, it is possible to know Jesus through the poor. The poor is the reality where God incarnates and therefore

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<sup>13</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *El Hombre de Hoy ante Jesús e Nazaret, II/1* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1982), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus trusted, thanked, and prayed the Father knowing the kindness which defined the ministry of love and service. Jon Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador, Lectura Histórico-Teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (Madrid: Trotta, 1991) 186–188.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge—A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), x–xi.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>17</sup> The poor leads to a better understanding of the scriptures and helps to develop theology. The poor helps in the capacity to be moved to think. Jon Sobrino, *Jesús en América Latina, su significado para la fe y la cristología* (Santander: Salterae, 1982), 52–56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–113.

becomes the scandalous presence of God.<sup>19</sup> The movement of God actualizes the promise of the kingdom of God. Jesus brings historic salvation to the poor and the poor become the place of salvation. A third circularity emphasizes the message of the kingdom of God. The connection between the message of the kingdom of God and the God of the kingdom is closely related, not only to the proclaimed event of God's presence in human history but also to the affirmation of who is God and what are these actions that deny God and promote idolatry. Here the intention is to know how humans relate to God and the gods that intensifies the demand to choose between the incarnated God or the idols that separate humans from God.

Liberation Theology took a position against the alienating images of Christ whose emphasis on sanctification was largely used to oppress. The recovery of Jesus of Nazareth and the reinterpretation of God's presence among the oppressed break the ideology of the celestial Christ and promote relationships mediated by God who suffers with the poor and who liberates them from oppression. Liberation and salvation become one, and therefore Christians are challenged to live out a sanctified life following and promoting liberation in the transformation of society. If transformation takes place, then believers are active agents who oppose oppression and exploitation based on their relationship with God.

## **2. The Way of Living Sanctification among Women and the Feminists' Perspective**

Sometimes out of the influence of Liberation Theology, other theologies made by women, those of African descent, and the indigenous emphasized liberation in their specific ways. The new theologies try to underline the specific needs and struggles by emphasizing what salvation means and to live it out today. It is remarkable the emphasis on daily life done by women and feminist theologians and scholars who developed reflection considering their ongoing struggles in life.

The re-reading of the scriptures<sup>20</sup> through women's eyes in daily life (*cotidiano*) and women's bodies were used as hermeneutical keys to make society conscious of women's condition, and oppression

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 80.

determined through roles socially and culturally constructed.<sup>21</sup> Women also considered the socio-political and economical inequalities within the social and religious structures. Feminization of poverty addressed the spirituality of embodiment, affirming that God's presence in the experiences of discrimination of women in their different context has a specific meaning for salvation, and called to promote relationships based on justice and equality.

Not only women, nature too was systematically exploited and abused. Ecofeminism, stressing the relationship of God with the entire creation, is a theology for life based on the just relationship between humans and the entire creation.

Women scholars addressed many topics, like reproductive rights, ordination of women, involvement of women in decision making at many levels in the church and society. They called for a Christian life characterized by relations developed out of consideration and respect. Sanctification, in this sense, was also understood as a continuous process. The strength built upon God's presence among women in struggle, suffering, and oppression lays a foundation for opportunities to develop strong relationships and to nourish them through everyday actions. This invitation moves followers toward faithful and compassionate service already expressed by God. In addressing God's attributes, which are not only male ones, women developed a relationship based in the affirmation that God interrupts what is not meaningful and encompasses a continuity in life. God is a close friend, is part of the community, and is present in the communion. God nourishes, relates as wisdom, is present, and promotes new beginnings.

In the re-reading of the Bible, the new and fresh encounter with the divine wisdom promotes redemption and salvation to both men and women who became Jesus' followers and disciples. This active grace of God is reaffirmed daily so that the daily relationship with God means the renovation of that discipleship and resurrection, as metaphors to affirm that life continues to be possible, engaging also

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<sup>21</sup> Elsa Tamez, "Women Re-reading the Bible," in *With Passion and Compassion—Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Favella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 179.

the “*hermanas*”<sup>22</sup> in ministry and service. Women become friends of God and part of the body of Christ; they also work to promote relations of solidarity strengthened by the meaning of the cross and resurrection. The dimension of God incarnated among creation and the presence of God as consoler beautifully refreshes memories and moves God’s winds in order to make visible what is mystery in the familial dimension of the servant community that is strengthened in the communion. The relational and affectionate God moves people to follow and serve with tenderness and solidarity and in doing so worship God who builds up sanctification in their lives.

Women recover, in their relationship with God, the feminine principle of the divinity that “makes it possible to worship, to believe and love God not only as the strong Father who creates us and liberates us with his powerful arm, but also as a Mother, full of tenderness, grace, beauty and receptivity, who accepts the seed of life and feeds it in her womb, so it may become a full being in the light of day.”<sup>23</sup> Focusing on an embodied ministry of love—the salvation of Jesus—women search for alternatives that are in tension because life promised is also negated.

To enlighten realities of death, women pay attention to Jesus’ ministry based on inclusion, service, and mercy. Friend of the poor and outcasts, Jesus overcomes traditional depictions of structures and male-female relationships. In their contextual experience of the message, women transgress in the “*caminata*”<sup>24</sup> what patriarchal structures have promoted and rooted. Women promote sacred spaces through experiences of freedom to accept persons as they are, not only as women, but they also accept other minorities and marginalized people who embody the suffering of the cross.

God, acting through the gospel message, the life and ministry of Jesus, builds up sanctification in a relational and liberating manner. Even more, Jesus allows women to enter in dialogue and to engage in

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<sup>22</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Las Mujeres en el Movimiento de Jesús, El Cristo* (Quito: Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, 2004), 121.

<sup>23</sup> Bingemer, “La Trinidad desde la Perspectiva de la Mujer: Algunas Pautas para la Reflexión,” in *El Rostro Femenino de la Teología*, ed. María Pilar Aquino (San José: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1986), 67.

<sup>24</sup> The long walk where women became aware of themselves happened by being part of Jesus’ ministry of solidarity. See Elsa Tamez, “The Power of Nudity,” in *Faith Born in the Struggle for Life*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 188.

active faith. In relationship with Jesus, women felt courageous to make decisions, to “argue, to discuss theology, transgress, sit at Jesus’ feet, touch him, confess their faith and recognize him as the Messiah.”<sup>25</sup> Along with the examples of women in the gospels, their tenacity and courage demonstrates the valid struggle to be admitted into the presence of grace.<sup>26</sup> It is in the presence of grace that women are encouraged to live daily life in consecration to God and to their neighbor.

### C. On the Contextualization of the Lutheran Heritage

The theology of the cross cannot be read without considering God’s action in and through the incarnation. A merciful God who decides to indwell in a hostile world was possible and continues to be possible. The cross methodology for theology starts there, where God becomes human in the person of a very vulnerable and dependent being, on the baby Jesus. God speaking out to the world through the Son (Heb. 1:2) is the most powerful message of presence given to connect the being God and the lovely creation.

The incarnation is the way God has chosen to be close to the creation, attending to the specific needs of humanity. In this approach, the Word is the presence of God who becomes active. The divine activity promotes justice and accompaniment among followers from different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The caring divine wisdom builds bases toward a message that liberates: liberates from dualities preserved institutionally as the body/soul, purity/impurity, rich/poor, men/women, slave/free, sane/insane, earth/heaven, etc. From that liberation, God helps followers to recover their wholeness and integrity. It is in the process of restoration of humanity that restoration of the relationship with the self and among human beings, called communion, is possible.

The relationship is holy because the person is accepted in her/his totality. The relationship is built upon the life of a close God, not under the reign of one governing from a place of glory. The relationship is nourished by a God who comes close until the point of

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<sup>25</sup> Wanda Deifelt, “The Recovery of the Body: Jesus in a Feminist and Latin-American Perspective,” in *Discovering Jesus in our places—Contextual Christologies in a Globalized World*, ed. Sturla J. Stålsett (Dehli: ISPCK, 2003), 35.

<sup>26</sup> Nelly Ritchie, “Mujer y Cristología,” in *El Rostro Femenino de la Teología*, ed. María Pilar Aquino (San José: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1986), 126.

revealing the extent of love and compassion on the cross. The cross is then a methodology based on the history of God walking on the paths of the people. In this sphere, the cross reveals not only the vulnerability of God but also the power of love. It is never a power to impose or to control others; it is a power to build up freedom and to liberate. As Senkbeil noted, “There God hid on lowly weakness to show himself to us, there God humiliated himself to give us glory, and there God died to give us life!”<sup>27</sup>

Recovering the meaning of the cross in a contextual manner means being conscious of the different discontinuities the cross places when we want to find, touch, or feel God, forgetting that God’s presence is revealed in each person we know or the ones we do not have the opportunity to meet. For a context where living in community is strong, then communion that overcomes familial barriers can help to strengthen the body of Christ. The unexpected places, such as the rivers of markets in Jesus time, are today places where people eagerly look for a good neighbor. The following of God in sanctification is the invitation to be in relationship and to develop a ministry based on relations. Though such can be seen as foolish or eccentric today, these relations are mediated by the message of the cross.

Wisdom is often expressed in notions the world sees as foolishness, and the revelation of the power of God happens in weakness. Sanctification speaks out of the spiritual growth each person experiences together in acting inspired by Christ. And we, as Christians, live and grow through up-and-down experiences exactly because we learn in life how to live in consecration. Out of our human experience we can also experience the absence of God in critical situations, as in the loss of beloved ones.

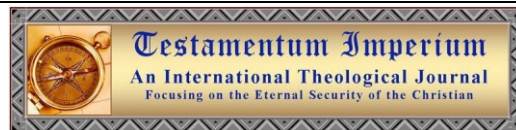
Losses are experienced in diverse ways in life. Mourning and healing are processes that help to find peace and to be nourished by the action and presence of God. In difficulties we continue to see God through the cross, and the same happens from the other side; God sees us from the angle of the cross too, and gives us meaning with compassion and love that covers our weakness and strengthens us.

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<sup>27</sup> Harold L. Senkbeil, *Sanctification—Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 126–127.

In sanctification, our lives are in Christ, and that relationship of identity affirms not only that God takes our sins but that God accompanies us to walk on the difficult and easy paths of life. God is present during distress and joys and celebrates with us in even small endings or beginnings. In reality, there is no evidence of progress in growing in faith or in growing in actions. Sanctification is not a race. It is an invitation to be moved by and to hear the wind of God. It is not only a personal listening to God, it is also the invitation to listen to God as community, because it is in that context that the bread and wine are shared and the water spread for new life. These elements are like a fountain for strengthening relationships in order to be guided to serve the neighbor. It is in sharing and receiving that each person grows humbly. There are many needs prayed for, and prayed from the different and small corners of our world. The prayers are present in our communities and families, and they are also our own prayers.

The cross of Christ does not hide human needs to God; rather, they are placed on the cross. The request for daily bread works because we ask faithfully. God answers the prayers that have been placed already in the offering made to us on the cross. The cross continues to be a source of strength for the church formed by saints and sinners. When our ecclesiology accepts this reality, the connection to the cross and the involvement in God's mission recovers sense. In that light sanctification is possible. In that light, the struggles of diverse minorities are our struggles and also the struggle of God. God continues to be on the side of the ones who struggle and faithfully waits for change. When we are able to see God acting in and through people, it is the best way to be affected by holy actions. Even simple actions that happen in daily and ordinary life can nourish our lives. It is in the simple that spirituality takes place. It is the simple that converts us and helps us to be closer to the message of the cross.



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