

Luther between Theology and Cultural Studies

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»Christian Dogmatics«, »Systematic Theology«, »Christian Thoughts« or »Christian Philosophy« – they are named differently, however the contents and subject matters are almost identical. There is no doubt that they are near-synonymous in seminary curriculum. In contrast to the USA and most Asian countries where »Systematic Theology« is widely used, the term »Christian Dogmatics« is commonly used in Germany and many other European countries, whereas universities in China are exclusively using the terms »Christian Thoughts« or »Christian Philosophy«. Which one might be considered the most proper theological expression does not really matter for the subject discussed in this paper. We do, however, have to note that the difference in the usage of those terms is related to theological concepts which are so much affected by culture and its context.

In the Prolegomena, or introductory session of a course, we would discuss with students the tension or conflict between »Christian Dogmatics« and »Contextual Theology«. Such conflict is rooted in their different emphases, in short, »Christian Dogmatics« primarily stresses the clear, authoritative teachings and the proper hermeneutics of the Church, whereas »Contextual Theology« puts the emphasis first and foremost on cultural, environmental, historical factors in theological development as well as the effect of theology on the context. The topic we are going to discuss today is »Luther between Theology and Cultural Studies«. The reason I consider this a valid topic for discussion is that over the past 400 years, ordinary people as well as those in the academic circles have considered Luther not merely a theologian but also a reformer. He is not an ordinary theologian, but a pioneer of the Protestant Church, the founder

of the Lutheran teachings¹; he is not an ordinary reformer, but a reformer who renewed the Church and brought the Western civilization to a new era. All these trigger our interests in studying how Luther's teachings impact the subtle connection between theology and culture.

I Theology and Cultural Studies

Moltmann has articulated a common opinion of many theologians. He said, »Theologie ist auch eine Kulturwissenschaft, aber sie geht darin nicht auf, denn ihr Gegenstand ›Gott‹ ist Gott und kann nicht ›als‹ etwas anderes gedacht werden.«²

For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to reiterate that the word »theology« discussed here is the theology of Christian faith. This consensus in definition is decisive in Luther study. We may rephrase Moltmann's statement »Theologie ist auch eine Religionswissenschaft, aber sie geht darin nicht auf, denn ihr Gegenstand ›Gott‹ ist der uns in Christus geoffenbarte Gott.«

Hence, theology is different from cultural studies and religious studies which adopt a primarily humanistic orientation. Even though there is no question for us that Luther's reformation has brought remarkable impact to Western culture, yet he is not a scholar in cultural studies. His ultimate concern is the faith of the Christian Church. Therefore, the attempt to analyse Luther's impact on cultures purely through his cultural idea and concept is not the most appropriate approach for today's scholars in cultural study.

- 1 There are three documents by Luther recognised as Lutheran Confessions included in *The Book of Concord*. Moreover, according to the Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation all members are required to accept its Doctrinal Basis which states »The Lutheran World Federation confesses [...] the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.«
- 2 J. MOLTSMANN, *Theologie als Kulturwissenschaft oder Theologie des Reiches Gottes? Zur Diskussion über die Funktion der Theologie heute* (in: *Denkraum Katechismus. Festgabe für Oswald Bayer zum 70. Geburtstag*, hg. v. J. VON LÜPKE/E. THAIDIGSMANN, 2009, 527–539), 527.

In view of cultural studies, culture originates from humans. Thus there is only one kind of culture – human culture. Be it created consciously or not, it is uncertain. However, culture is surely a developed form of human existence, but not unchangeable. It keeps on changing and reforming over time as long as human history continues. A tribe, a nation or a society each has its unique culture. Yet, it is not easy to give each a definitive description, for they consist of various subcultures in themselves. Cultural studies do not neglect the impact of religion on human culture. Therefore, Luther has been perceived a man of the age in most cultural scholars' mind for what he has done during the Reformation is actually a counterculture movement which has successfully constructed a new culture.

Though theologians would not object to the notion »Culture is Human Culture«, yet they cannot agree that »human is the creator of culture«. This is essential to Luther for he thinks highly of the first Commandment – God is the Creator of all, and we should mark our minds to trust Him alone, to look to Him alone.³ His submission to God's Word is the key to how he develops his theology and shapes the ministry of his reformation.⁴ Thus, for Luther, it surely is heretical to say »human is the creator of culture«. However, the human is a crucial factor in forming culture, for he is a co-creator⁵ – a part-taker in God's creation according to God's perfect will. In this frame of reference, Luther's theology has cultural significance, and reversely, Luther gave human culture itself a theological meaning.

II Review of the Significance of Martin Luther

The attention of cultural studies on Luther focuses on his impact on culture, whereas theology is more interested in his contribution to Christian faith. Although the two approaches differ, they do not contradict, they

3 M. LUTHER, The Large Catechism (in: The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. by R. KOLB/T.J. WENGERT, 2000), 389.

4 LW 32, 112 (WA 7; 838, 7).

5 G. MÜLLER, Luther und die moderne Welt (in: DERS., Zwischen Reformation und Gegenwart II – Vorträge und Aufsätze, 1988, 77–79).

even complement one another. Luther, the venerable dead of five hundred years ago, still speaks to us today with his great work in theology and culture.⁶

Bernd Moeller observed that there is no one in the world like Luther who has been commemorated in numerous anniversaries year after year.⁷ Though his saying is somewhat exaggerated, it still speaks out the minds of many Luther scholars. Furthermore, history shows how people over centuries continue to hold high esteem for Luther. Prior to being a subject for academic study, he has been commemorated publicly.⁸ Since the beginning of last century with the emergence of a Luther-Renaissance, Luther studies have not only increased in scope and variety, but also triggered scholars' interest in the history of Luther research itself – the changes of Luther's image throughout history,⁹ and differing interpretations of Luther's value and impact in different ages.¹⁰ Some even suggest Luther a uniquely significant resource for postmodern theology.¹¹ All these proposals on Luther studies benefit us greatly with a better calibrated scale for today's research work.

For Lutheran churches, Luther's teaching is deemed to be authoritative.¹² His teachings on the doctrine of God, on preaching, on justification, on the doctrine of the church and on the means of grace constitute the

6 Martin Luther – Witness to Jesus Christ: A joint Statement of »Lutheran – Catholic Commission on Unity« of the Lutheran World Federation and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1983, paragraph 1.

7 »Nichts und niemand auf der Welt hat bereits so viele Jubiläen erlebt wie Luther.« B. MOELLER, *Luthers Erfolge* (in: *Luther-Rezeption. Kirchenhistorische Aufsätze zur Reformationsgeschichte*, hg. v. J. SCHILLING, 2001, 270–284), 279.

8 H. MEDICK/P. SCHMIDT, *Einleitung. Von der Lutherverehrung zur konfessionellen Lutherforschung und darüber hinaus* (in: *Luther zwischen den Kulturen. Zeitgenossenschaft – Weltwirkung*, hg. v. DERS., 2004, 11–30), 16.

9 B. LOHSE, *Wandlungen des Lutherbildes im Spiegel der Lutherjubiläen* (in: *Zugänge zu Luther*, hg. v. H. FOERSTER, 1984, 96–108).

10 See n. 6, paragraph 2.

11 Such as K.A. KLEINHANS, *Why Now? The Relevance of Luther in a Postmodern Age* (*Currents in Theology and Mission* 24,6, 1997, 488–495), 488.

12 B. LOHSE, *Luthers Bedeutung für die evangelische Kirche und Theologie* (in: *Luthers Sendung für Katholiken und Protestanten*, hg. v. K. LEHMANN, 1982, 31–47), 32–36.

Lutheran confessions or the guideline for faith.¹³ Scholars might hold differing views on some of Luther's theological issues, yet, none could deny the profound impact of Luther's teaching on the development of theology – especially the Word-centred Protestant theology and hermeneutics. Gerhard Müller further points out that the draft of the *Barmen Theological Declaration* is also influenced by Luther's theological thought, in particular the first and the fifth articles.¹⁴

After the Reformation, Roman Catholics not only regarded Luther as the black sheep that caused the division of the Church, but also decreed his teachings to be heretical.¹⁵ Their study and position on Luther finally changed after four hundred years or so. The work *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (1939) by Joseph Lortz puts forth a view that differs from the previous Catholic tradition. He suggests Luther's reformation theology is still part of the Catholic, even though in the process of Reformation Luther had criticized or even rejected some of the official Catholic teachings of the time.¹⁶ It is worth our attention that in the speech made by Cardinal Johannes Gerardus Maria Willebrands, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in 1970 at the 5th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, he expressed a new attitude on Luther held by the Vatican:

Who [...] would still deny that Martin Luther was a deeply religious person who with honesty and dedication sought for the message of the gospel? Who would deny that in spite of the fact that he fought against the Roman Catholic Church and the Apostolic See – and for the sake of truth one must not remain silent about this – he retained a considerable part of the old Catholic faith? Indeed, is it not true that the Second Vatican Council has even implemented requests that were first expressed by Martin Luther, among others, and as a result of which many aspects of Christian faith and life now find better expression than they did before? To be able to say this in spite of all the differences is a reason for great joy and much hope.¹⁷

13 G. MÜLLER, Martin Luther als Autorität für die lutherische Kirche (in: *Luthers Sendung für Katholiken und Protestanten*, [see n. 12], 48–70), 51–65.

14 G. MÜLLER, Lutherische Theologie und die Barmer Theologische Erklärung (in: *Zwischen Reformation und Gegenwart*, [see n. 5], 127–131).

15 See n. 6, paragraph 2.

16 J. LORTZ, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, Bd. 1, 1982, 176.

17 See n. 6, paragraph 6.

Later, Joseph Lortz's student and successor Peter Manns even calls Luther ›Vater im Glauben‹ in his publications.¹⁸

In the area of cultural studies, Luther has been highly respected by many, especially in Germany. Prior to the Luther-Renaissance, apart from his great influence on pietism and early enlightenment, he was also a national hero in the heart of most German people.¹⁹ His reformation works are grounded in various contextual factors, e.g. *The Freedom of a Christian* and *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* have become the theological foundation of German nationalism. A good example of this foundational status is the Wartburgfest in 1817. It was a festival to commemorate the Battle of Leipzig (Völkerschlacht bei Leipzig) where the German army defeated Napoléon Bonaparte. The Jenaer Burschenschaft invited 13 universities to hold the 4th anniversary in Wartburg and also concurrently to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Reformation. The achievement of Luther's translation of the New Testament into German (in Wartburg) had made him the icon of counter-foreign culture;²⁰ likewise, he was lauded as a national hero at the Wartburgfest for opposing the Pope during the Reformation. In 1883, his 400th anniversary, Luther was given the name ›Gründungsvater des deutschen Reichs‹. Yet, it is beyond fairness to portray Luther as a national hero. Hartmut Lehmann's comment deserves our attention. He said all those past celebrations have politicized Luther thus making Luther a tool for political agendas.²¹

Undoubtedly, Luther, born and living in Germany, was a German! He cared not only for the Church, but also had a specific concern for those around him, – his neighbours, his fellow citizens, his countryfolk. That's the dynamic of his reformation which extends to the whole fabric of the life and culture of the German people. For this reason, Luther wrote German hymns, designed a German Mass, and translated the Bible into Ger-

18 The remarkable publications by J. LORTZ are *Martin Luther. Ketzer oder Vater im Glauben?*, 1980 and *Vater im Glauben. Studien zur Theologie Martin Luthers*, 1988.

19 H. v. TREITSCHKE, *Deutsche Lebensbilder*, 1927, 10.11.28f.

20 H. MÜNKLER, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen*, 2008, 318.

21 H. LEHMANN, *Die Deutschen und ihr Luther* (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16. Aug. 2008, Nr. 199, 7).

man. According to Bernhard Lohse, »Die Sprache unzähliger deutscher Dichter ist ohne Luthers Bibelübersetzung nicht vorstellbar«. ²² Thus the transformation of Latin culture to German culture could be said to be an integral part of Luther's reformation work.

Heinrich Heine highly commends the contribution Luther made for the German nation. He said,

wie wir durch ihn (Luther) zur größten Denkfreiheit gelangt. Aber dieser Martin Luther gab uns nicht bloß die Freiheit der Bewegung, sondern auch das Mittel der Bewegung, dem Geist gab er nämlich einen Leib. Er gab dem Gedanken auch das Wort. Er schuf die deutsche Sprache. Dieses geschah, indem er die Bibel übersetzte. ²³

Did Luther create the German language? This is still very controversial. Martin Heidegger reminded us that »Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch«. ²⁴ We cannot ignore the fact that Luther made a tremendous contribution in making German language popular, standardized and even nationalized. Language has a prominent effect on a nation's culture; therefore, we may conclude that from the linguistic aspect, Luther's work continues to provide immeasurable value for German society and culture.

III Luther and foreign Culture

There is a Chinese adage »Shēng yú sī, Zháng yú sī« ²⁵ which is similar to English »Born and bred«. Some scholars credit Luther for his theological influence on liberating conscience and mind as a direct precursor to the Enlightenment. ²⁶ His idea of Dreiständelehre or Berufskonzeption is the

22 LOHSE, Luthers Bedeutung (see n. 12), 35.

23 H. HEINE, Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland (in: Werke und Briefe, Bd. 5, hg. v. H. KAUFMANN, 1961, 164–308), 207.

24 M. HEIDEGGER, Über den Humanismus, 1949, 5.

25 Literal translation: People who were born and grew up in a place have the typical character of the people who are living there.

26 K.-H. ZUR MÜHLEN, Wirkung und Rezeption (in: Luther Handbuch, hg. v. A. BEUTEL, 2005, 461–488), 475–477; E. SCHULIN, Die Luther-Auffassungen in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung (in: Luthers Sendung, [see n. 13], 94–115), 98; KLEINHANS (see n. 11), 488; MÜLLER, Luther (see n. 5), 70.

foundation of modern capitalism.²⁷ Woven together, both the Enlightenment and capitalism have had a momentous impact on human culture across nations and countries, especially in Europe and in North America. Significantly, however, Luther is much more tightly bound to German culture than to others. He is not only part of German history, he belongs to its culture. Seen in this way, Luther's thought and reformation work are the crucial element that forms German culture. Because he was born and raised in Germany, he reformed the Church within the German context, and his reformation thus directly changed the trajectory of his people and their lives. It is unthinkable that a great man from another culture, such as from China or from Japan could have had the same effect in Germany.

The Goethe-Institute employed Alexander Grintsevich, a teacher in Russia to conduct research in Europe involving 13,000 participants. The study concluded on 2 May 2011 with results highlighted as below:²⁸

The 1st question asks: Wer ist für Sie der/die bedeutendste Deutsche?
The Answer: Martin Luther is ranked 4th.

and the 7th question is: Welches ist das bedeutendste historische Ereignis, das Sie mit Deutschland verbinden?

The Answer ranked 3rd is: Reformation by Martin Luther.

When the New Millennium was about to start, similar research findings were reported in the USA:

1. Times Magazine 15 Oct 1992 listing Martin Luther among the list of the top ten figure of the age;
2. Both Life Magazine (1997 Autumn) and The History Channel today (June 2007) indicated that among the 100 most influential characters of the last Millennium, Martin Luther ranked the 3rd.

²⁷ M. WEBER, Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, ³2010, Kap. 3.

²⁸ <http://alexandergrintsevich.wordpress.com/category/uber-die-deutsche-sprache-und-kultur/>, 06.07.2012.

These results came as no surprise. The research was conducted in the context of Germany, Europe and the USA, which all hold a common element in their history, namely the legacy of the Reformation and the role of Christianity in their respective cultures. However, if the same study were done in Africa and Asia, the result could vary significantly. The reason is obvious. There is a huge gap of time and space between Martin Luther, a German of the 16th century, and people of Africa and Asia today, because we all understand that time and space are crucial in the formation of culture. To conclude in brief, while Luther stands as a prominent figure in the eyes of Europeans and Americans, he gains no echo from people of Africa and Asia. Therefore, the study on Luther in Africa and Asia is a subject which has not yet been well developed. For instance, if the International Congress for Luther Research is regarded as the most representative conference of Luther study, can we figure out how many participants are from Africa or Asia? Likewise, we can ask how many non-European or non-American are on the member list of the Luther Gesellschaft? In view of this, it is a big question: How significant is Luther's influence on the formation of culture in countries other than Europe and North America, diverse cultures in the continents of Africa and Asia, for example?

I have no objection to most scholars' comment that Luther is a Bible scholar, not a systematic theologian. However, with regards to the subject of discussion today, I am in agreement with Eric Gritsch that Luther is a contextual theologian.²⁹ We have to admit that Luther's theological teachings constitute the foundation of Lutheran doctrine; many of his works have become a core of study in systematic theology. We also notice that the construction of his theology, while deeply rooted in his biblical understanding, is continually influenced by an awareness of, and feedback from his context. Luther is not a pedant despite he buried himself in the library for theological study. Instead, he is a theologian in the midst of actual circumstances such as the plague and the peasant war. Because Luther is able to contextualize his theology in answering the questions of his time, his theology is, therefore, a contextual theology. Furthermore, through inter-

29 E. GRITSCH, *The Cultural Context of Luther's Interpretation* (Interpretation 37, 3, 1983, 266–276), 266.

action with and feedback from his context, Luther obtained public acceptance and support, thus, he was able to bring influence to the culture. Consider a different setting, if I were to put China forward as a subject of study for Luther, I am pretty sure that he would not have much interest. This is because China is not a Christian country nor does she have the issue of indulgences. Furthermore, Luther is a figure of the 16th century in Europe, his theology is not intended for China of the 21st century. In a parallel manner, neither does such a wide cultural distance provide much footing for Chinese to regard Luther and his work.

China is a multi-ethnic country shaped by more than five thousand years of cross cultural development. Despite the challenges of Imperialism and Colonialism over the past hundred years, China basically is still open to foreign cultures. China allowed universities established by missionaries to replace the imperial examination system³⁰ that had been exercised for more than a thousand years. In the early 20th century, foreign ideas exposed the weakness of the China Government. These new »alien« ideas fostered intellectuals and youngsters to reconsider Chinese tradition and culture, which led to the emergence of the New Culture Movement that advocated Western ideology – Mr. Dé (democracy) and Mr. Sàì (science).³¹ Since the set up of People's Republic of China, communism took hold of the whole of China at a speedy pace. From 1966 to 1976, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution replaced most Chinese tradition and culture with its own cultural forms. Under the influence of political ideology, China perceived Luther from the eyes of Marx and Lenin. On the one hand Luther is seen as a hero who liberated his people from slavery and as a pioneer of anti-capitalist revolution in Europe;³² on the other hand, Luther is seen as a traitor to peasantry.³³

30 The imperial examination was an examination system in Imperial China established during the Sui Dynasty in 605 which was designed to select the best administrative officials for the state's bureaucracy. In the Qing Dynasty the throne endorsed a memorial on 2 September 1905 which ordered that the imperial examination be discontinued.

31 The New Culture Movement of the mid 1910s and 1920s in China was led by Chén Dúxiù, Hú Shìh and Lǚ Xùn etc. who were disappointed with traditional Chinese culture and called for a new Chinese culture, advocated for democracy and science.

32 Lǐ PÍNGYÈ, *Human Discovery* (in Chinese), 1983, 201.205; LÓNG WÉNwǔ/ZHÓU RÓNG,

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution Chinese started to rebuild their values. More and more intellectuals came to have a better understanding and new perspectives of Christian reformation. When Dēng Xiǎopíng advocated his economic reform in the 80s, Max Weber's work *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* gained its popularity as the best-selling book in China. His work greatly inspired numerous intellectuals in considering the relationship between Christianity and Capitalism in economic development. Weber's analysis shows that Luther and Calvin's theology provides moral value to »diligent hard-working« hence affirming that »reasonable pursuit of money« constitutes theological meaning.³⁴ Such a conclusion has been widely accepted by the Chinese intellectuals, giving rise to the »cultural Christian«³⁵ phenomenon, and stimulating more and more interest in Luther.

The resolution on »Strengthening Theological Reconstruction« was voted through in churches of China in 1998. The objective of this resolution is to construct a theological system that is much more relevant to China's society and her culture. In other words, the aim is to eliminate the elements of »Western Religion« in order that Christianity may find its place in China and her culture, and gain proper understanding and acceptance by the nation, so that the Chinese church may have her own theological system. For the past decade, the effort made was mainly driven by Bishop K. H. Ting's idea. He stressed that »God is love« is the central message of the Bible.« As a Chinese Christian, one should know about this »God is love« [...] He further said that,

Effects and Significances of Reformation in Europe: A cultural perspective (in Chinese) (Public Literature, 2009, No. 03, 98).

33 SŪN LÌXĪN, Luther Research in the Contemporary theological Study of German Church History (in Chinese) (Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy, 1994, No. 01, 90).

34 YÁNG YÀNMÍNG, Factors determining the Rise of Capitalism of West Europe – interpreting Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit* (in Chinese) (Journal of Héxī University, 2006, No. 03, 40f).

35 Cultural Christians in China are mostly intellectuals who are usually devoted to the study of great thinkers of Christian theology and refer to basic Christian ideas in their social criticisms, however they are not baptized and do not attend churches.

our church today has attached too much importance on Paul's letters [...] ›How Jesus Christ loves all men‹ as the message of the Gospel tells us ›how God loves all men‹. Therefore, I advocate reading the four gospels [...] The ideal Chinese church in my mind is [...] able to help believers to love our country and our church [...] The theological thinking of our church needs to be constructed and enhanced in order to make our church more human, rational and moral, to become the loved church of God and the God loving church.³⁶

While certainly a pragmatic approach, what Bishop Ting advocates is of close concern to those who hold to Martin Luther's proposition of Justification by Faith. Ting criticises that the doctrine of justification by faith has no relevance to Chinese culture; it is even harmful for the future of Chinese church.³⁷ Therefore, the teaching must be tempered for the following reasons³⁸:

1. It distorted the correct concept of God by teaching that God's love is given to believers only.
2. It abrogated the value of moral behavior by maintaining that the Gospel contains no morals, which is to say that the doctrine of justification by faith separates itself from good works.
3. It caused a rift between believers and unbelievers by claiming that the majority of humankind is bound for the eternal flames of hell regardless of their good morality, just because they are unbelievers. However all Christians are good in God's eyes, merely because they believe in Him.

36 Bishop K.H. TING, *Theological Construction Entering a New Phase* (in Chinese) (Tien-fen 9, 2003, 6f).

37 Loc. cit., 7.

38 OUYÁNG WÉN FÈNG, *My Theological Reflections on Dilute ›Justification by Faith‹* (in Chinese) (Nanjing Theological Review 1, 2003, 130); K.H. TING, *Tempering Justification by Faith* (in: *Heavenly Wind and Sweet Rain: K.H. Ting, the Leader of the Chinese Church* [in Chinese], ed. by LIU HUAJUN, 2001), 289. See also P.W.K. LO, *From Justification by Faith to Justification by Love? A Reflection on Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church* (in: *Glaube und Denken. Die Bedeutung der Theologie für die Gesellschaft, Festschrift für Hans Schwarz zum 65. Geburtstag, Sonderband 2004*, hg. v. A.M. MADSEN, 2004, 277–287), 279f.

4. It caused serious political problems by asserting that believers like Hitler go to heaven, while unbelievers like Chairman Mao should go to hell because of his unbelief.

It is noteworthy that »Justification by Faith« is Luther's core belief as well as his theological ground, and it now faces great difficulty in the context of Chinese culture. When we review the history of Christianity in China, similar theological struggles have taken place, as we may recall the tremendous difficulties of cultural conflicts faced by the Protestant missions when they entered into China in the 19th century.³⁹ Now, when we talk about »Luther between Theology and Cultural Studies«, it is essential for us to take into consideration the consequences that may occur when two different cultures meet. To be more specific, when Luther's culture meets with China's, will they integrate with one another and form a new culture? Or will they exclude each other? Or will they counteract and exist as sub-culture? Or will one become dominant over the other? I believe the decisive factor lies in the inclusiveness and exclusiveness between the two cultures, that is to say: are they in contradiction or can they complement each other? Let's take China as an example again.

The Chinese Church considers itself to have stepped into the Post-denominational Era⁴⁰ – there are no denominations any more. This is also China's political position. The cause could be traced back to a hundred years ago when imperialism intruded China and the Protestant mission was regarded as its means. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Lutheran church would be viewed as the restoration of denominationalism and even imperialism, hence cultural intrusion – a taboo in China. Every denominational church or seminary is considered as portal of colonialism. That is the reason why seminaries and ministries in China are required to work under the three-self-principles – self-governance, self-support and self-propagation, as well as to conform to the socialism of the modern Chinese culture.

39 ZUǒ FÚRÓNG, Conflict and Integration of Cultures (in Chinese) (Study of Christianity 9, 2006, 346–349).

40 For more details of discussion on this topic see P.W.K. LO, Luther and the Post-denominational Era of China (Theology and Life 25, 2004).

Meanwhile, Chinese traditional culture puts much weight on livelihood and pragmatism. An idea has a much easier time gaining acceptance in China if it is practical in problem solving. A good example is the notion made by Deng Xiaoping during the economic reform: Regardless of its colour (black or white), the cat that can catch mice is a good cat. Therefore, we may say that the quick development of the Chinese church in the economic reform period is the effect of ridding herself of the historical burden, namely colonialism, and on the positive and practical side, the affirmation of her social contribution.⁴¹

IV A forward-looking Consideration

Was there once a phenomenon of »culture of Luther«? I wonder. If there truly existed one, it surely did not originate from Luther himself for he had not the slightest intent to create a »culture of Luther« or anything like it. He would not allow himself to be the focus for later generations, rather, what concerns him most is that Christ and His Gospel be fully and rightly preached and known. Luther considered his own teaching and theology as nothing compared to Christ. He wanted no Luther followers or so called Lutherans.⁴² Furthermore, culture is collective. Thus »individual or personal culture« is impossible. However, for fostering the above discussion, a presupposition of a culture closely tied to Luther is made. Nevertheless, we still cannot call it »culture of Luther« but perhaps »Lutheran culture« instead. It is clear that the Lutheran church is not set up by Luther, but grounded in the Holy Scripture and bolstered by Luther's teachings and belief. Likewise, a »Lutheran culture« may originate from Luther but was not created by him. It is difficult to give full details of what Lutheran culture is. Nevertheless, if we are to propose a Lutheran culture, three elements are considered crucial:

41 P. W. K. LO, *Theology is Not Mere Sociology: A Theological Reflection on the Reception of Christian Religion in Mainland China* (Dialog 43, 3, 2004, 159f. 162–164).

42 The Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of his German writings (1539). LW 34, 283–288 (WA 50; 654–661).

1. It must be in the spirit of Luther, i.e. its nature should be rooted in Luther's faith and theology, which is always firmly founded on the Word.
2. It must be a culture of Christian faith, i.e. it should be centred in Christ's salvation and revelation for the unity with other Christian circles.
3. There must be a successor for this culture for the continuity of Luther's spirit and to manifest the uniqueness of the group.

A temporally flourishing culture is not our concern. If a culture is to continue, it must possess a deep vitality, and this vitality must be organically intertwined with the essence of humanity. German thinkers of the 19th century »drew a sharp distinction between civilization, which involved mechanics, technology, and material factors, and culture, which involved values, ideals, and the higher intellectual artistic, moral qualities of a society«. ⁴³ Such a distinction is not able to convince Samuel Huntington, yet he agrees that culture involves »values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance«. ⁴⁴

Should the study of theology make certain adaptations in the interest of making theology culturally effectual? My answer is yes! However, I could not agree to utterly subsume theology under the rubric of »cultural study«, hence losing its very nature or essence. ⁴⁵ Therefore, when using the tools of cultural and social science research for understanding theology, one must consider the value of theology given to humanity, its unique method of thinking as well as its influence on human lives and social system. In other words the focus should be: How does theology influence people's values, thinking, lives and their social systems?

In regard to his teaching Luther confessed by saying »*Haec mea doctrina est, quae sinit deum esse deum*«. ⁴⁶ We may see this clearly taught in

43 S. P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1996, 41.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Jürgen Moltmann wrote a critique of such mistake. MOLTMAN (see n. 2), 534–539.

46 WA 17,1; 232,9–10.

his Catechism that we must trust in God since He is the Creator of all and the Saviour of human kind, and He is still working in the world that He created.⁴⁷ Thus, the God of Luther is the God and the Lord of culture. The development of culture should follow the good will of God in His creation. Diligently studying the Word is a must for knowing God and His will, yet Luther is also concerned with the pragmatic aspect of theology. He said »*theologia est practica, non speculativa*«.⁴⁸ Luther was opposed to the theology inherited from Aristotle which divides »theory« from »practice« and »meditation« from »acts«. Real theology should link them up, and this even happens in »the word of God and our experience«. Therefore, he advocates *sola autem experientia facit theologum*, such experience is the experience of life.⁴⁹

The Lutherans are by nature the successors and agents who bridge between Luther of the 16th century and our modern world by living out the spirit of Luther. Today, Lutheran theologians should be cautious about the possible conflicts which can occur when Luther's theology enters certain specific cultural contexts. However, if we want to avoid those conflicts by discarding the essence of Luther's theology, we would fail to influence the world to turn to God. Luther will also be lost in the human culture. Michael Roth's comments are worth our attention. He said:

Lutherische Theologie sucht ein Forum, das so konfliktreich ist wie das Leben selbst, um den Ort des Glaubens im Leben allererst zu verstehen. Gerade in einem solchen Forum wird sich die Kraft auch der theologischen Tradition erweisen, freilich nicht in dem Sinne, dass sie das Leben durch eine Welterklärungsformel zu erschließen vermag, sondern in dem Sinne, dass sie das Leben zu erschließen vermag, weil sie von den Erfahrungen des Lebens immer tiefer erschlossen wird.⁵⁰

Martin Luther is not just a subject matter within theology and cultural studies, rather, through the Lutherans, Luther continues to stir up new ideas and new reforms in theology as well as in our many different cul-

47 The Creed in Luther's The Large Catechism and The Small Catechism.

48 WATR 2; 56,22.

49 WATR 1; 16,13.

50 M. ROTH, Was sucht lutherische Theologie bei den Kulturwissenschaften? Überlegungen zur Bedeutung des interdisziplinären Gesprächs für lutherische Theologie (in: Denkraum Katechismus [see n. 2], 507–526), 526.

tures and contexts. If Luther's theology rightly interprets the Gospel⁵¹ his theology is not only significant for Lutherans, it has equal significance for believers of other denominations. There is no denying that the outstanding contributions Luther made to 16th century German society is significant and substantial, yet scholars of cultural studies seem not to admit a similar possibility of Luther's significance for the 21st century's society. Likewise, if Luther's reformation was made according to God's good will towards humans and in accordance with His provision of right values, thinking, a good livelihood and strong social systems, then Luther should be an important subject in cultural studies.

Who finds Luther's theology interesting for study? Needless to say – theologians. While they (theologians) should take into consideration the relationship between Luther's theology and culture, scholars of cultural studies should also uphold same significance of Luther's theology in their study. To take an allegoric approach, one could say the tie between Luther's theology and his cultural influence is like the relationship between a soul and its body. Acting as the embodiment of Luther's spirit and thought, Lutherans should be dutiful in fostering the manifestation of unity of theology and culture in the Lutheran heritage.

51 Such as his teaching of Justification by Faith or his Theology of the Cross.