

# Justification by Faith and Protestant Christianity in China: With Special Reference to the Finnish Interpretation of Luther

Lai Pan-chiu

(Dean of Faculty of Arts & Professor of Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

**Abstract:** The doctrine of justification by faith is believed to be a core belief in Protestantism as well as the leitmotif of the Pauline Letters. However, this assumption has been queried in various ways in the western theological circle recently. In contemporary China, the doctrine has also been challenged but in quite different ways. This study attempts to address the challenges derived from the cultural and socio-political contexts of China through references to recent studies of the Reformation, including, particularly, the Finnish interpretation of Luther. It aims to argue that the doctrine, if properly interpreted, can be a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling-block to the future development of Protestant Christianity in China.

**Key Words:** Justification; Faith; China; Luther; Mannermaa

**Author:** Pan-chiu LAI, Dean of Faculty of Arts & Professor of Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Postal Address: Room 317, Leung Kau Kui Building, Department of Cultural & Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin Hong Kong. Telephone number: 852-39436465. E-mail: pelai@cuhk.edu.hk

## Introduction

It is widely believed among the Protestant Christians that the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” is solidly based on the Bible, particularly the Pauline Letters. Furthermore, it is also assumed that the doctrine signposts the fundamental doctrinal difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and displays the rationale for the Protestant separation or independence from the Roman Catholic Church. However, these assumptions have been questioned and criticized recently.

Regarding its Biblical basis, “Justification by Faith” has been regarded as the centre of Paul’s theology as well as the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of Pauline Letters, especially the Romans.<sup>[1]</sup> In recent years, some Biblical scholars advocate for a “New Perspective on Paul”, which queries whether the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” should play such a prominent role in the interpretation of Paul’s writings and theology. The question at issue is not whether the doctrine is part of Paul’s theology; rather, it concerns with its importance for the interpretation of Paul. In other

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[1] For a brief introduction, see: 卢龙光 Lu Longguang (Lung-kwong Lo), 《保罗新观——罗马书的主题与目的》*Baoluo xin guan-luoma shu de zhuti yu mudi* [New Perspective on Paul: Main Theme and Aim of Romans] (台北 Taipei: 东海大学校牧室 Dong hai da xue xiao mu shi [Tunghai University Chaplain’s Office], 2007). For a more critical discussion, see: 曾思瀚 Zeng Sihan (Sam Tsang), 《谁的保罗, 哪个福音? 保罗诠释现象的反思》*Shei de baoluo nage fuyin? Baoluo quanshi xianxiang de fansi* [Renewed Perspectives on Paul?], translated by 曾景恒 Zeng Jingheng (香港 Hong Kong: 基道出版社 Jidao chubanshe [Logos Publishers], 2012).

words, the major critique raised by the “New Perspective on Paul” is about the centrality of “Justification by Faith” in Paul’s theology or writings. This “New perspective on Paul” provoked a small yet controversial debate among the Biblical scholars in the Chinese speaking world.〔2〕

Regarding its significance for the Protestant identity, after years of dialogue, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation announced the “Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification” in 1999. The signing of this Joint Declaration indicates that despite disagreements between the two parties concerned, certain consensus on the doctrine were formed.〔3〕This seems to put into question the conventional claim that the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” constitutes the distinctive identity of Protestantism and the dividing line between Catholicism and Protestantism. It is thus understandable that the announcement of the Joint Declaration sparked heated debate in Germany, with some heavy criticisms from Protestant pastors and theology professors.〔4〕In Chinese theological circle, there is not much discussion with regard to this issue, but still some Chinese scholars recently suggest that the most crucial difference between the Protestant and Catholic theologies concerns the doctrine of love rather than that of justification by faith, and the difference can be solved by referencing to certain ideas in Buddhism.〔5〕Some Chinese scholars even further suggest that perhaps the difference between the Catholic and Protestant positions on love is also inconclusive and the seeming tensions can be resolved with the resources internal to Christianity, including the Eastern Orthodoxy.〔6〕If this is the case, the role of “Justification by Faith” in the identity of Protestantism vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism would probably be further marginalized.

For Protestantism in China, the challenges to the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” are probably far more complicated and difficult to deal with. Some church leaders in Mainland China even suggest to “dilute” (淡化 dan hua), meaning “soft-tone” or “downplay”, this doctrine in response to these challenges.〔7〕In contemporary China, the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” seems to face

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〔2〕《山道期刊》*Shan dao qi kan* [Hill Road] published a special issue, which includes 6 articles, on “New perspective on Paul” in its volume 25 (2010), pp. 3-166. In this special issue, there is a relevant article analyzing the Chinese interpretations of the Book of Romans and making brief references to “New Perspective on Paul.” See: 曾庆豹 Zeng qingbao [Ken Pa Chin], 《汉语教会释经现象的反思性分析——以罗马书为例》*Hanyu jiaohui shijing xianxiang di fan si xing fenxi - yi Luomashu wei li* [An Analysis of Chinese Hermeneutics: The Book of Romans], *Hill Road* 25 (2010), pp. 169-183.

〔3〕See further: Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

〔4〕Among those theologians who had participated in the debate, the most influential one would be Eberhard Jüngel. See: Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*, translated by Jeffrey F. Cayzer, with an introduction by John Webster (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001).

〔5〕高喆 Gao Zhe, 《以「自他不二」与 agape 的比较为例论比较神学作为普世对话的方法》*Yi “zi ta bu er” yu agape di bijiao wei li lun bijiao shenxue zuo wei pushi duihua di fang fa* [Doing Christian Intra-religious Dialogue Interreligiously: Taking a Mahayana Theology of Agape as an Example], 《道风》*Dao Feng* [Logos & Pneuma], 45 (Autumn 2016), pp. 364-395.

〔6〕赖品超 Lai Pinchao [Pan-chiu Lai], 《神爱与人人爱: 路德与多玛斯之间》*Shenai yu renai; Lude yu Duomasi zhi jian* [Divine Love and Human Love: Between Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas], 《国学与西学国际学刊》*Guoxue yu xixue guoji xuekan* [International Journal of Sino-Western Studies], No. 12 (June 2017), pp. 109-119.

〔7〕See: Philip Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), especially pp. 349-350.

many challenges related to the cultural and socio-political contexts of the country.<sup>[8]</sup> Culturally speaking, the doctrine appears to claim that sinners can be justified in whatever situation. With its emphasis on salvation based on the “other-power” to be received from God rather than the “self-power” in human nature, this doctrine seems to contradict the Confucian teachings concerning self-cultivation or sanctification, and may even lead to the denial of good deeds. In order to avoid the ideas of “uselessness of morality” (道德无用 *dao de wu yong*) and “abolition of good deeds by faith” (因信废行 *yin xin fei xing*) associated with the doctrine, the Chinese Protestant churches might have thought hard to incorporate a proper understanding of “justification by grace through faith” in its theological construction.<sup>[9]</sup> Besides, in the contemporary Chinese socio-political situation, the most important problem remains that the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” may reinforce the segregation between believers and non-believers, and thus contradict the political slogan of “harmonious society” advocated by the government. In this circumstance, “diluting” the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” may serve the socio-political aims of uniting people more effectively, especially uniting the non-Christians in a better way.<sup>[10]</sup> Given the cultural and socio-political contexts of contemporary China, a crucial theological question is: whether to “dilute” the doctrine and avoid mentioning it as far as possible? If the answer is no, the remaining question is whether and/or how the doctrine can be reinterpreted positively in order to address the challenges in contemporary China.

This study will not discuss the doctrine from the perspective of Biblical studies or systematic theology.<sup>[11]</sup> Instead, this study attempts to reconsider this doctrine and the challenges it faces in China through reviewing some recent studies of the Reformation, including particularly the emphasis on the diversity of Reformation and the Finnish interpretation of Luther.

## The Diversity of Reformation

Probably due to the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation, a huge amount of books and research papers on the Reformation were published in the last few years. It is thus almost impossible to summarize or recapitulate these researches here. For the present study, there are two aspects of the studies of Reformation particularly worthy of mentioning—the diversity and the political

[8] In the Chinese academic circle, some scholars suggest to reevaluate and interpret the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” from the perspective of environmental protection. See 赖品超 Lai Pinchao [Pan-chiu Lai], 《多元、分歧与认同：神学与文化的探索》*Duo yuan, fenqi yu rentong: shenxue yu wenhua di tansuo* [Plurality, Diversity and Identity: Explanations of Theology and Culture] (新北市 Xinbei shi [New Taipei City]: 中原大学宗教研究所 Zhongyuan daxue zongjiao yanjiusuo [Chung Yuan Christian University Graduate School of Religion] and 台湾基督教文艺出版社 Taiwan Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe [Taiwan Chinese Christian Literature Council], 2011), pp. 277-298, especially pp. 278-282.

[9] Wang Aiming, “Understanding Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church: A Hermeneutical Approach,” *Chinese Theological Review* 16 (2002), pp. 145-146. On-line version: [http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdf/CTR\\_16.pdf](http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/CTR_16.pdf) (logon 2017-07-19).

[10] Deng Fucun, “The Basis for the Reconstruction of Chinese Theological Thinking,” in: *Christianity and Chinese Culture*, edited by Miika Ruokanen and Paulos Huang (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., November 2010), pp. 297-308.

[11] For a study that integrate Biblical studies and Doctrinal Theology, see 赖品超 Lai Pinchao [Pan-chiu Lai], 《犹太人的不信：〈罗马书〉中的处境神学反省》*Youtairen de buxin; Luomashu zhong de chujing shexue fanxing* [Unbelief of the Jews; Contextual Theological Reflection in the Romans], 《基督教学术·第4辑》*Jidujiao xueshu, Di 4 ji* [Christian Scholarship, vol. 4], edited by 徐以骅 Xu yihua & 张庆熊 Zhang qingxiong (上海 Shanghai: 上海古籍出版社 Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), pp. 39-57.

dimension of Reformation.<sup>[12]</sup> These two aspects are closely related to each other, especially when considering their relevance to the Chinese context. It is noticeable that the Chinese Protestant approaches to the religion-state relations were shaped by the various approaches advocated by the respective reformers. Furthermore, as we are going to see, the Chinese challenges to the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” are partially shaped by the political context of China, and the possible ways of addressing these challenges require a proper understanding of the diversity of the Reformation.

A rather conventional understanding of Reformation tends to assume a unitary and linear interpretation of the development of Reformation and to consider the Reformation initiated by Luther at Wittenberg as “a stone stirs up thousands layers of waves.”<sup>[13]</sup> However, the most recent studies of the Reformation tend to support the contrary view that the Reformation should be considered as a series of parallel and diversified movements rather than a single movement.<sup>[14]</sup> Carter Lindberg, in his *The European Reformations*, intendedly employs the plural form “Reformations” in order to emphasize that the Reformation(s) should be considered as a diversified phenomenon with many different models or patterns.<sup>[15]</sup> Indeed, some other scholars also highlight the diversity of the Reformation(s) by employing different classifications or typologies in their interpretations. For example, Gordon Rupp suggests that apart from Luther, there are also the following patterns of Reformation: Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) as “The Reformer as Scholar,” Andreas B. von Karlstadt (c. 1480–1541) as “The Reformer as Puritan,” Thomas Müntzer (c. 1490–1525) as “The Reformer as Rebel,” and Vadianus and Johannes Kessler of St. Gall as “The Reformer as Layman.”<sup>[16]</sup> Besides, Heiko A. Oberman suggests a view of “One Epoch—Three Reformations”, which are: (1) Conciliar Movement: The Roman Catholicism attempted to replace the Pope’s jurisdiction with the Ecumenical Councils; (2) The City Evolution: The Reformation in Zurich initiated by Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) was used as an example to illustrate that Reformation could be triggered by the rise of urban bourgeois, the small group of elites who controlled the internal and external affairs of the city, including religious affairs; and (3) The Reformation of the Refugees: As Calvin’s Reformation in Geneva illustrates, the refugees penetrated into the city council, controlled its policy, and make the council a tool for the promulgation of the evangelical faith.<sup>[17]</sup> These studies are examples of endeavors to categorize and interpret the different patterns or forms of Reformation(s). This tendency of highlighting the diversity can be seen also in the studies of the theological dimension of the Reformation. Among the introductory and general surveys, some

[12] See further, 赖品超 Lai Pincho (Pan-chiu Lai)、高莘 Gao Xin, 《谁的宗教? 何种改革? ——十六世纪宗教改革的多元性与政治性》*Shei de zongjiao? He zhong gaige? —— Shiliu shiji zongjiao gaige de duoyuan xing yu zhengzhi xing* [Whose Religion? Which Reform? Pluralistic and Political Characters of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century] (香港 Hong Kong: 明风出版 Ming feng chuban, 2017), pp. 19-23.

[13] 李广生 Li Guangsheng [Peter Kwong Sang Li], 《一石激起千重浪: 改革运动教会历史简介》*Yi shi ji qi qian zhong lang: gaige yundong jiaohui lishi jianjie* [Reformation Church History: An Introduction] (香港 Hong Kong: 道声出版社 Dao Sheng chubanshe [Taosheng Publishing House], 2009).

[14] Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 1.

[15] Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2010), pp. xii-xv.

[16] For details, refer to Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (London: Epworth, 1969), esp. xiii-xiv.

[17] Heiko A. Oberman, “One Epoch-Three Reformations,” in *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. Andrew Colin Gow (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), pp. 201-220, esp. p. 218.

deal with the Reformation theology thematically,<sup>[18]</sup> whereas some others arrange it according to different theologians or schools of thought.<sup>[19]</sup> Comparatively speaking, the former is more able to cover the differences and similarities among different reformers on the same theological topic, while the latter is more capable of demonstrating the individual characteristics of the reformers. Notwithstanding their differences, both approaches might have to assume the theological diversity among the Reformers.

## The Diversified Interpretation of “Justification by Faith”

The theological diversity among the Reformers can be seen in their interpretations of the doctrine of “Justification by Faith”, and this is well documented in Alister E. McGrath’s historical study of the doctrine of justification. McGrath’s study consists of two volumes; the first volume deals with the beginnings of Christianity to the pioneers of Reformation; the second volume covers the period from year 1500 to the present day. In the last chapter of the first volume, McGrath points out that the religious reformers have come to certain consensus on justification. And this consensus, though having certain affinity with some thoughts in the late Medieval, poses a fundamental difference from the prevalent mainstream theology.<sup>[20]</sup> McGrath succinctly summaries this kind of consensus into the following three points, which deserve to be quoted:

(1) Justification is understood to be the forensic declaration that the Christian is righteous, rather than the process by which he is made righteous, involving a change in his status before God, rather than his nature.

(2) A deliberate and systematic distinction is made between the concept of justification itself (understood as the extrinsic divine pronouncement of man’s new status) and the concept of sanctification or regeneration (understood as the intrinsic process by which God renews the justified sinner).

(3) The formal, or immediate, cause of justification is understood to be the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to man in justification, so that justification involves a synthetic rather than an analytic judgement on the part of God.<sup>[21]</sup>

It is important to note that these three points give prominence to an extrinsic justification. Such an emphasis on the extrinsic aspect of justification not only formulates a criterion to distinguish Protestantism from Catholicism, but also differentiates the standpoint between the magisterial

[18] For examples: Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300 – 1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2012).

[19] For examples: David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tennessee: Boardman Press, 1988); Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London: Longman, 1981).

[20] The late Medieval thoughts mentioned here are the *via moderna* with the character of nominalism and *schola Augustiniana moderna* which emphasizes the grace of God. See: Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: The Beginnings to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, paperback 1989), p. 183.

[21] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: The Beginnings to the Reformation*, p. 182. (italic original)

Reformation and radical Reformation.<sup>[22]</sup>

In light of these three hypothesis, we may have a better understanding of why the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” is under dispute from different aspects and various angles in China. However, it is also quite interesting to note that according to McGrath, although the doctrine of forensic justification is originated from Luther’s explanation of *iustitia Christia aliena*, Luther himself tended to regard it as a unitary process. Its major difference from the mainstream viewpoint of medieval theology is that the latter regards the status and nature of human being would alter in front of God, while Luther insists that “man is intrinsically sinful yet extrinsically righteous.”<sup>[23]</sup> In other words, this most prominent and representative Protestant understanding of justification represents neither Luther’s own standpoint nor that of Zwingli because it was actually formulated under the influence and coordination of Philip Melanchthon (1407 – 1560).<sup>[24]</sup> The difference is that, comparatively speaking, Luther prefers to use the concepts and images of personal relationship to explain the union between Christ and the believer, whereas Melanchthon’s explanation inclines to employ forensic terms, especially concepts and images of the Roman law, in his explanation.<sup>[25]</sup> This also implicitly indicates that there are different positions or interpretations on “Justification by faith” among the reformers. Furthermore, an individual reformer’s own position might be too complicated to be articulated in a simple formula. It is thus quite understandable that these stereotyped doctrinal formulas cannot fully reflect the diversity and complexity of the Reformers’ understanding of justification.

More interestingly, the first sentence in McGrath’s second volume is: “The leading principle of the Reformation is generally considered to be its doctrine of justification. This is not, in fact, correct.”<sup>[26]</sup> McGrath further points out that in regard to Luther’s theology, this doctrine is undoubtedly very important, nevertheless, Luther’s insight of justification is not so significant in the formation process of the Reformed Church.<sup>[27]</sup> Furthermore, Karlstadt, being Luther’s early partner but parting company later on, has a different understanding of righteousness from that of Luther. Karlstadt employs the antithesis between law and grace instead of using Luther’s antithesis of the law and Gospel. More importantly, Karlstadt considers that it is the inherent justifying righteousness in human being rather than *iustitia aliena* that makes him or her righteous. To Karlstadt, the meaning of “justified sinner” is to be understood as “man is partly righteous and partly sinful,” and therefore, this interpretation is different from Luther’s assertion that Christian is at the same time a sinner and a righteous person.<sup>[28]</sup> In fact, even among Luther’s followers, there arise many debates on the problem of justification, which are related to some very fundamental problems, such as the role of

[22] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: From 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, paperback 1993), pp. 2-3.

[23] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: The Beginnings to the Reformation*, 182-183.

[24] *Ibid.*, 182.

[25] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: From 1500 to the Present Day*, pp. 24-25, 31-32.

[26] *Ibid.*, 1.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, 21-22.

good work in salvation. What is worthy of further discussion is the final position attained in the Formula of Concord. Surprisingly it includes rejection of or thorough revision on some positions of Luther; the strong emphasis on the presence of Christ within the believer in his concept of justification, double predestination, *servum arbitrium*, etc.<sup>[29]</sup> For the Reformed Church, John Calvin (1509–1564) on the one hand, affirms an extrinsic forensic justification but on the other hand, he also maintains a similar kind of Luther’s realist conception of justification, emphasizing the personal encounter between God and the believer in Christ. Moreover, Calvin further claims that justification can only be attained through Christ, and faith is “the vessel which receives Christ,” and “may thus be said to be the instrumental cause of justification.”<sup>[30]</sup> These ideas seem to be similar to Luther’s position. However, on the other hand, to Calvin, the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) includes a trilogy from election to *unio mystica* and then to the attainment of glorification; as for justification and sanctification, they belong to *unio mystica* in that they cannot be given to the believer in a separate way. Accordingly, justification is only one dimension of the relationship between God and human being, and not supposed to be separate from sanctification. In fact, Calvin did not discuss the problem of justification until his publication of the third volume of the 1559 edition of his *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and the discussion was arranged after the section on sanctification.<sup>[31]</sup> This shows that the status of the concept of justification in Calvin’s theology is completely different from that in Lutheran theology.

From the above brief recapitulation, we can see that the Chinese challenges to the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” are actually targeted at the consensus version summarized by McGrath. To a certain extent, this version might cover the common ground shared by some reformers. This kind of consensus represents neither the position of Catholicism, nor the position of the Anabaptist or Baptist. Indeed, even in the Reformed Church, its importance and significance are far from clear. Above all, how far this consensus version can properly reflect Luther’s theology is questionable.

The aim of making these remarks of the inadequacy of this consensus version is not giving support to the proposal of “soft-toning” or “diluting” the doctrine; on the contrary, it aims to show that as the Chinese challenges are targeted at this simplified or already “diluted” formula of the doctrine, more viable way of addressing these challenges is to carry on much more in-depth and extensive research on the Reformers’ interpretations of this doctrine as well as its role in the life of the believers. Only after this thorough review of the Reformers’ interpretations, one will be in a more proper position to decide whether it is necessary to “soft-tone” this doctrine.

## **Good Work by Faith—An Interpretation of Luther**

In view of the above discussion, we should not take Luther’s position on “Justification by Faith” as the sole authority and disregard the interpretation offered by other Reformers. In similar vein, we should not naively assume that Luther’s interpretation of “Justification by Faith” is identical with

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[29] *Ibid.*, 20–32.

[30] *Ibid.*, 36–38.

[31] *Ibid.*, 37–39.

the “orthodox” position of Protestantism. In what follows, we will employ Luther’s interpretation as one of the examples, to briefly examine his elaboration of “Justification by Faith” in an attempt to explore its richness as well as its significance for Protestantism in contemporary China.

To Luther, the work that can fully reflect his theological thought may probably be his *Commentary on Galatians*.<sup>[32]</sup> Apart from his constant emphasis on the view that the law cannot make human being righteous in his commentary, Luther also explains in his “Preface” that “the righteousness of faith” is a kind of “passive righteousness” which human being cannot produce. However human beings can receive because it rests only upon the righteousness of Christ and is given to use freely by God the Father through Jesus Christ.<sup>[33]</sup> However, aside from this special emphasis on the passive aspect of “faith,” Luther also tends to describe “faith” in a more active way in the commentary. He explains that “faith” is to consider Christ as the goal: “We say, faith apprehends Jesus Christ... If it is true faith it will surely take Christ for its object.”<sup>[34]</sup> And it is with this kind of faith that one can be called righteous. He further explains that “faith, Christ, and imputation of righteousness, are to be joined together. Faith takes hold of Christ, God accounts this faith for righteousness.”<sup>[35]</sup> Nevertheless, “Justification by Faith” in fact means “justified by Christ,” because strictly speaking, faith is the path to be made righteous, and the true foundation or cause of justification is the salvation accomplished by Christ. Therefore, “justification by grace through faith” may be a more accurate description. However, the relationship between believers and Christ is not purely an extrinsic justification but it also includes a kind of union in life, just as Luther says, “Faith connects you so intimately with Christ, that heard you become as it were one person.” For the problem of good work, Luther clarifies that “Good works are not the cause, but the fruit of righteousness. When we have become righteous, then first are we able and willing to do good.”<sup>[36]</sup> He even further declares that “[t]he real doers of the Law are the true believers. The Holy Spirit enables them to love God and their neighbor. But because we have only the first- fruits of the Spirit and not the tenth-fruits, we do not observe the Law perfectly.”<sup>[37]</sup> In light of the Scripture, “to keep the law” is basically meant “to love your neighbors as yourself” (Galatians 5: 14), and the explanation of “love your neighbors as yourself” offered by Luther is that “[i]f you want to know how you ought to love your neighbor, ask yourself how much you love yourself.” Besides, he also makes this comment: “My neighbor is every person, especially those who need my help, as Christ explained in the tenth chapter of Luke. Even if a person has done me some wrong, or has hurt me in

[32] Theodore Graebner, “Preface”, in: Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (1535), trans. Theodore Graebner, pp. iii-v. Internet version of Modern History Source Book: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1535Luther-galat.asp#CHAPTER%202> (logon 2018-10-13)

[33] Martin Luther, “Martin Luther’s Preface to His Commentary on Galatians”, pp. 1-6; Internet version from the Crossway Classic Series: <http://fliphtml5.com/dvdp/jaoc/basic> (logon 2018-10-20)

[34] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Theodore Graebner, chap. II, verse 16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” Internet Modern History Source Book: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1535Luther-galat.asp#CHAPTER%202> (Logon 2018-10-13).

[35] Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, chap. II, verse 16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.”

[36] Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, chap. II, verse 20 “But Christ liveth in me.”

[37] Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, chap. III, verse 10 “For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

any way, he is still a human being with flesh and blood. As long as a person remains a human being, so long is he to be an object of our love.”<sup>[38]</sup> This shows that when Luther exalts “Justification by Faith,” he simultaneously affirms the good deed of “love your neighbors as yourself.”

On the surface, it seems that Luther’s explanation on “love your neighbors as yourself” offered here is not entirely related to “Justification by Faith” or the salvation of Christ, but only uses “self-love” as the starting point for further discussion. However, “Christ’s explanation in the tenth chapter of Luke” mentioned by Luther in *Commentary on Galatians*, seems to be referring to the story of the Good Samaritan in the Scripture (Luke 10: 25-37). Luther’s interpretation of this part of the Scripture makes possible the connection between “love your neighbors as yourself” and the salvation of Christ, even in a better way. In “A Sermon on the Law and Gospel, or the Two Greatest Commandments, and the Good Samaritan,”<sup>[39]</sup> Luther introduces this piece of scripture to firstly explain the relationship between the law and Gospel. In Luther’s view, this piece of scripture firstly explains the law in a way similar to the discussion of the issue between lawyers and Jesus, especially the dialogue about the commandment of “love your neighbors as yourself.” And then, it continues to bring out the parable of the story of the Good Samaritan, and lastly, the scripture turns to the discussion of the relationship between the law and Gospel, with particular attention to the problem of how the reception of the Gospel may fulfill the law. By using a kind of Christocentric interpretation, Luther asserts that Jesus Christ is the Good Samaritan,<sup>[40]</sup> and that the man who was beaten by the robber to half dead represents Adam and all mankind.<sup>[41]</sup> As to the priest and Levite, who passed by without giving a hand to the wounded, represents “the dear sainted fathers before Moses” and “the priesthood of the Old Testament respectively.”<sup>[42]</sup> According to this interpretation, the whole story is actually conveying a Gospel message, that is, the law cannot lead to the salvation of humankind, and on the matter of salvation, human being is helpless by oneself. One can only rely on the merciful deliverance of Jesus Christ, and this is precisely what the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” has assumed. For the relationship between law and Gospel, Luther summarizes it in this way: “It is the law that teaches what we are required to do; the Gospel teaches where we shall receive what the law demands.”<sup>[43]</sup> Here, Luther does not deny the law, instead, he emphasizes that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can fulfill the law. This is well reflected in Jesus’ words after the story of the Good Samaritan. He told the lawyer to practice the law in a way as is reflected in the commandment of “love your neighbors as yourself.”

There is another explanation in this sermon which deserves special attention. Luther explains that the situation of human being is similar to the wounded and rescued person whose body did not recover immediately. Although health has been poured into the body, and the man is turning better,

[38] Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, chap. V, verse 14 “For all the Law is fulfilled in one word.”

[39] Martin Luther, “A Sermon on the Law and Gospel, or the Two Greatest Commandments, and the Good Samaritan”, in *Sermons by Martin Luther*, vol. 5., edited by John Nicholas Lenker, translated John Nicholas Lenker et al, pp. 6-23; [http://www.martinluthersermons.com/Luther\\_Lenker\\_Vol\\_5.pdf](http://www.martinluthersermons.com/Luther_Lenker_Vol_5.pdf) (accessed on 2017. 06. 29); Hereafter the following abbreviation applies: “A Sermon on the Law and Gospel, or the Two Greatest Commandments, and the Good Samaritan”=Sermon.

[40] Sermon, par. 25, internet version, p. 17.

[41] Sermon, par. 28, internet version, p. 17.

[42] Sermon, par. 30, internet version, p. 18.

[43] Sermon, par. 38, internet version, p. 20.

still, he has not yet recovered completely. In this period of time, Christ pours grace to purify human being so that human being can become purer day by day, and it is only until the time of death that human being can become entirely perfect. [44] Luther's explanation is not equivalent to some sort of reduction of salvation to a forensic declaration of "Justification by Faith," in that the believer does not have any internal change. Rather, it is to be understood as a salvation that will initiate an internal transformation of the believers in the union with Christ, not just a kind of extrinsic justification. This echoes the emphasis of the Finnish school's interpretation of Luther, and displays the similarity between Luther's soteriology and the concept of deification (theosis) in Eastern Orthodoxy. [45]

According to the analysis of the major advocate of the Finnish school, Tuomo Mannermaa (1937—2015), the reason for Luther to contrast divine love with human love is due to his strong intention to counter the teaching of Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274) and to offer an alternative approach to the relation between divine love and human love. For Luther, Aquinas has followed Aristotle's philosophy in considering self-love as the source of other forms of love, and even understanding God's self-love analogically. This approach is to understand the divine love as well as the commandment of "love your neighbors as yourself" in terms of human love, especially human self-love. [46] Mannermaa points out that for Aquinas, *caritas* is a grace freely given by God, and at this point there is no difference between Luther and Thomas on this point. But Luther prefers to use faith (*fidem*), an acceptance of the love of God, instead of the kind of "appetitive desiring or self-realizing love", to interpret the relationship between God and human beings. [47] Mannermaa further clarifies that in faith, Christians "participate in God's own love, which, in turn, effects in human beings love for God and their neighbor, this effective love also has the attributes of God's Love: it is without self-interest and does not seek its own." [48] In other words, Luther takes the salvation of Jesus Christ as the model of God's love as well as the foundation for commandment of "love your neighbors as yourself." Since the believers have received the love of God, that is, the salvation from Christ, through faith, they should love God without self-interest and love their neighbors as Christ has done to them. Luther has repeatedly emphasized that treat your neighbor as Christ has done to you. [49] This also implies that since Christ represents the pure love of God which is a kind of love without self-interest, we should also love our neighbors without self-love or any intention to gain advantage from them. [50] It can also be said that Christians should become Christs to each another, and Christ is the same in all. [51] As Mannermaa points out, Luther's Christological interpretation of "love your neighbors as yourself" represents "a particular doctrine of divinization." [52]

[44] Sermon, par. 45, internet version, p. 22.

[45] For details, see Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, edited and introduced by Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

[46] Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*, translated, edited and introduced by Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 17-19.

[47] *Ibid.*, 22.

[48] *Ibid.*, 80.

[49] *Ibid.*, 67.

[50] *Ibid.*, 70.

[51] *Ibid.*, 64-65.

[52] *Ibid.*, 64.

Now we can see that Luther uses the faith in “Justification by Faith,” that is, the acceptance of Christ’s salvation, as the foundation and paradigm of the moral practice of “love your neighbors as yourself.” This kind of love to neighbors is not an ordinary kind of love based on the foundation and paradigm of self-love. To put it in a more absolute or radical way, the self-giving love exemplified through the redemption of Christ is the foundation and paradigm for loving one’s neighbor. Similarly, the subjective foundation of this kind of moral practice is not sort of universal and inborn human nature, rather it is a kind of divinized humanity attained through the union with the divinity of Christ. Of course, Luther’s interpretation of the story of the Good Samaritan and taking faith as the foundation of “love your neighbors as yourself” have their limitations at the ethical level.<sup>[53]</sup> Besides, it is debatable as to whether the love revealed in Christ’s redemption is a kind of pure self-giving, or it can be explained through the concept of “non-duality of self and other.”<sup>[54]</sup> Anyway, it is very obvious that in Luther’s thought that the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” is closely related to the ethical practice of “love your neighbors as yourself.” Without the doctrine of “Justification by Faith,” the ethical practice of “love your neighbors as yourself” will only become a law without any relationship with the Gospel.

## Concluding Remarks

Let us return to the problem of the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” in the Chinese context. Luther’s concept of justification is closely connected with his viewpoint of the law and Gospel in that he affirms that the Gospel can fulfill the law, especially to the commandment of “love your neighbors as yourself.” Therefore, Luther by no means advocates the view that “justification by Faith” would lead to the “abolition of good deeds by faith.” To him, although good deed is not the prerequisite of justification, it is an inevitable consequence of it. This is because the kind of soteriology upheld by Luther is not confined to an extrinsic, forensic justification; rather, it affirms that Christ’s salvation includes the union between Christ and the believers. And this union will bring along a substantive transformation in the believers’ life, so that they can love others as Christ does. Although Luther’s approach to the commandment of “love your neighbors as yourself” is based on a Christocentric view of salvation, his aim is not to reinforce the segregation or hostility between the believers and the non-believers. On the contrary, he emphasizes the love towards neighbors, including the love to those believing in other religions and those without religious belief. This is also somewhat like the major emphasis of the Good Samaritan, whose sympathetic and merciful compassion makes crossing the boundaries of religion and ethnicity possible. Put differently, Luther’s interpretation of “Justification by Faith” can serve as the foundation of “love your neighbors as yourself” and be favorable to the unity between Christians and those people of other religions or no religion at all.

With regard to Chinese culture, especially in terms of Confucianism, some scholars in the Sino-

[53] For details, see: Lai Pinchao, “Divine Love and Human Love: Between Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas.”

[54] For details, see: 赖品超 Lai Pinchao [Pan-chiu Lai], 《神爱、人爱与自他不二: 一个汉语基督宗教的观点》Shenai, renai yu zita-bu-er, yi ge hanyu Jidu zongjiao di guandian [Divine Love, Human Love, and Non-Duality of Self and Other: A Sino-Christian Perspective], 《道风》*Dao Feng* [Logos & Pneuma] 49 (Autumn 2018), pp. 197-222.

Christian theological academic field have noticed that there are certain common grounds for dialogue between the concepts of deification in Orthodox Christianity and the Confucian concept of “Heaven and Humanity in Unity.”<sup>[55]</sup> But still, there is not much discussion about the way to integrate the concepts of deification and justification. In contrast, in the Lutheran-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue, there are many discussions on the mutual integration of justification and deification, and some scholars even consider that these two concepts are mutually compatible instead of being mutually exclusive.<sup>[56]</sup> To the Sino-Christian theological academic field, how to integrate the doctrines of justification and deification is an important and promising research direction. It is expected that Luther’s interpretation of justification, with certain characteristics related to deification, will become a very important theological resource for further examination of the problem of “Justification” in the dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism.<sup>[57]</sup>

From the above discussion, it is apparent that if we do not stereotype the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” as a simple formula of an extrinsic, forensic justification, but take note of the various interpretations offered and their vivid expression in the preaching and practice of the Christian churches and individual believers, we can see that this doctrine may be helpful to the Protestant churches to face the challenges from the cultural and socio-political contexts of China. After all, the present study of Luther’s interpretation of “Justification by Faith” remains merely one of the possible ways of addressing these challenges. There may be some other possible or even better interpretations. Therefore, the doctrine of “Justification by Faith”, instead of to be “diluted”, should be further studied in a much more in-depth, extensive and systematic manner.<sup>[58]</sup>

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[55] See: Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Lai Panchiu, “Chinese Explorations of Orthodox Theology: A Critical Review,” *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 14 (June 2018), pp. 27-41; Pan-chiu Lai, “Shaping Humanity with Word and Spirit: Perspectives East, West and Neither-East-Nor-West,” in: *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World*, edited by Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 131-149.

[56] For further details, refer to: Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

[57] See: Arne Redse, ‘*Justification by Grace Alone*’ *Facing Confucian Self-Cultivation: The Christian Doctrine of Justification Contextualized to New Confucianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); also: Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation* (Helsinki: Department of Systematic Theology, University of Helsinki, 2006).

[58] This essay was first presented in Chinese at the “Religious Reform and Social Development-International Forum for the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation” (宗教革新与社会发展——宗教改革 500 周年国际论坛) held in Beijing on 4–6<sup>th</sup> September 2017, and then published as: 《因信称义与基督教中国化》*Yin-xin-cheng-yi yu Jidujiao Zhong-guo-hua* [Justification by Faith and Sinitification of Christianity], 《基督教中国化探究》*Jidujiao Zhong-guo-hua tanjiu* [Inquiry of Sinitification of Christianity], edited by 卓新平 Zhuo Xinping & 蔡葵 Cai Kui (北京 Beijing: 宗教文化出版社 Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe [Religious Culture Publishing House], 2018), pp. 21-35. This English translation was first prepared by Dr. Doris Hiu-tung Yuen 阮晓桐, honorary research associate of the Centre for Catholic Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and then revised by the author, with editorial assistance from Rev. Dr. Ambrose Mong.

**中文题目：**

**因信称义与基督新教在中国：兼论芬兰学派对路德的诠释**

**赖品超**，教授，通讯地址：香港，沙田，香港中文大学文化及宗教研究系，梁録琚楼 317 室。电话：852-39436465。电邮：  
pclai@cuhk.edu.hk

**提要：**因信称义的教义一直被假设为基督新教的核心信仰，也是保罗书信的主旋律；然而此一假设近年在西方神学受到多方面的质疑。在当代中国，这一教义也受到来自其他方面的挑战。本文尝试透过参考近年对宗教改革的研究、包括芬兰学派对路德的诠释，以回应那些来自中国的文化及社会政治处境的挑战。本文的目的在于提出，如能恰当地诠释，这一教义可以是基督新教在中国的未来发展的踏脚石，而不一定是绊脚石。

**关键词：**义；信；中国；路德；曼多马