

The hidden God and the promise of unity

The analysis of honour and glory serves as foundation for entering into contemporary systematic theological debates on the human relation to God. The study counters contemporary postmodern or weak theology, which dismisses any notion of a metaphysical, hidden God and supports an anti-metaphysical notion of 'god', who renounces his omnipotence at the cross to become truly solidary with suffering human beings. Although Luther focuses on God pro nobis and refuses to scrutinize into God's withdrawn glory, he never doubts the reality of God per se but simply acknowledges the limits to human cognition caused by sin. If Christ crucified is merely a powerless human being expressing his compassion for suffering humanity, the hope for unity with God remains unfounded and human beings are left with their despairing experiences of existential estrangement from God.

About Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa

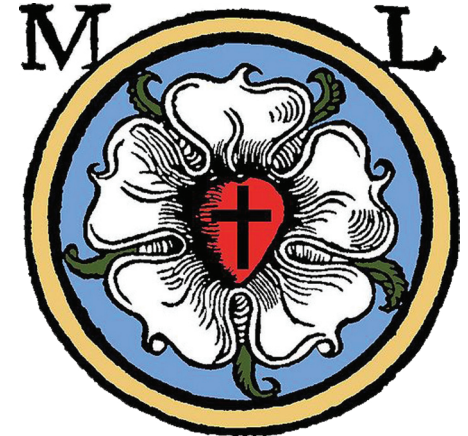
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'SOLI DEO
HONOR ET
GLORIA'



A STUDY OF HONOUR AND
GLORY IN THE THEOLOGY
OF MARTIN LUTHER

PhD Dissertation by Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa

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A STUDY OF HONOUR AND GLORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER

“Soli Deo honor et gloria” – A Study of Honour and Glory in the Theology of Martin Luther by Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa, Department of Theology, Aarhus University. The dissertation unfolds the decisive influence of honour and glory on Martin Luther’s innovative interpretation of the human relation to God in justification and on his perception of the relations between human beings inhabiting the hierarchies of the earthly realm.

The pursuit of honour and glory defines postlapsarian existence

The dissertation argues that honour and glory constitute fundamental phenomena of postlapsarian existence interpreted within Lutheran theology. They capture the human being in between personal identity and social role and encompass inner notions of moral virtue, conscience, and self-respect and outer notions of esteem, social recognition, and reputation. Together with their antitheses shame and humiliation, honour and glory concern the ability of individuals to reflect upon themselves and others and to know themselves reflected upon by others and by God. At the Fall, humans lose the original honour of being created in the image of God and are thrown into a state of perpetual self-reflection. This leap into consciousness causes them to feel ashamed and to pursue their lost honour from their social world or from God in an attempt to cover shame. Luther denounces this endeavour of self-centred individuals to become glorified by means of their own efforts and stresses that humans are to receive their glory from God sola fide.

Justification concerns the glorification of God and of human beings

The dissertation establishes that Luther’s understanding of the human relation to God is driven by a soteriological concern for the re-establishment of human glory lost in the Fall and by a doxological concern for God’s glory, which humans steal through sin. These two perspectives of doxology and soteriology are intimately interwoven in Luther’s doctrine of justification. According to Luther, human beings are unable to attain God’s glory through good works. Instead, justification relies solely on God’s revelation of his glory in Christ, which unfolds as a narrative of humiliation and glorification (cf. Phil 2:5-11). Through Christ, God gives his divine attributes such as glory and righteousness to humans, who give their sin, death, and suffering to Christ in return (communicatio idiomatum). By mediating his abundant glory, God establishes a mutual, but radically asymmetrical relation to humans, who become able to spontaneously honour God through praise and neighbourly love on the basis of a surplus of faith. Luther’s seemingly ambivalent statements on faith as both a divine gift and a human work are explained by this understanding of God’s glory as an abundant revelatory presence that establishes a social-hierarchical relation to humans defined by both one-sided giving and mutual exchange; by human passivity and giving receptivity. This abundant faith secures the sine qua non of Luther’s theology: “Soli Deo honor et gloria” (WA 2, 130,19).

Honour in the earthly realm

The dissertation unfolds how Luther employs the human relation to God as a pattern for comprehending interpersonal relations in the earthly hierarchies. Based on the fourth commandment to honour parents, Luther maintains that humans are obliged to honour every kind of earthly authority, who acts as God’s representative. Luther interprets the command to honour parents as an expression of the first commandment, which he rephrases: “Du solt eynen gott ehren” (WA 7, 26,13-16). By distinguishing between the office and the person holding it, Luther asserts the equality of all human beings coram deo while acknowledging the necessity of earthly hierarchies which sustain God’s order of creation.

Conclusion

The dissertation reveals honour and glory and their antitheses shame and humiliation as fundamental phenomena of postlapsarian existence, which decisively determine Luther’s understanding of the human being in her relation to God and neighbour and, thus, seem indispensable for both Luther research and contemporary Lutheran theology.