

# SUFFERING, PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM AS A MARK OF THE CHURCH: HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION? A PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM AFRICA

by Joseph Omolo

## Introduction

**I**N THIS WRITING, I wish to emphasize that I am not going to just repeat the biblical witness on suffering and martyrdom, nor am I going to just spit out the Lutheran Confessional understanding of Luther's "Seven Marks of the Church." Rather, I hope to reveal that the witness born in the Holy Scriptures and in the Lutheran Confessions — especially in the seventh mark of the Church as pointed out by Dr. Martin Luther — were present in his day, and such signs remain present today, helping us to understand how such marks shape the life of the Church, not only in Africa, but also in other parts of the world.

Although no one willingly welcomes suffering and persecution, it is necessary to note here that suffering is part of the life of the Church of Christ and that Christians should see this as both a challenge and encouragement.

## Biblical Witness on Suffering and Martyrdom

When our Lord Jesus Christ came upon the city of Jerusalem late in His earthly ministry, He spoke of her in less than glowing terms, saying: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matt. 23:37).

Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah are but three of the Old Testament prophets who supply evidence in support of the spoken Word of the incarnate God noted above. These prophets were persecuted for their faithfulness to God and His Word. Rather than being honored and revered

for faithful proclamation, they were instead ridiculed and, in Elijah's case, hunted down like a criminal to be killed.

The persecution of the voice of the living God finds its climax, when the Son of God is despised and rejected, just as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 53). After the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Himself, the Early Church experienced severe persecution at the hands of both the Jews and the Roman government. The arrest of the apostles (Peter and John in Acts 3) is the very first example to be mentioned in the Early Church. As opposition and persecution intensified, the apostles/disciples fled out of Jerusalem, and wherever they went, they carried with them the message of the Gospel. The open stoning of Steven in Acts 7 evidenced the greatest persecution. Worse still, the apostle Paul gives a complete listing of his own persecution when he records, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the following: "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty

lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:24–28).

In the light of the marks of the church presented by Luther, and grounded in the teaching and life of Jesus, it is evident that the true church will always experience suffering in different ways.

Bishop Omolo explains the relationship between suffering, persecution and martyrdom and Lutheran theology and its impact on international theological education.

Such biblically-attested marks of persecution and martyrdom are not the only ones that could be named. The history of the Church Fathers also attest to this; some were burned alive, others skinned alive and still others given to lions to be torn into pieces, as they bore witness by their blood (*martyria*). As all these were happening, the Church continued to be strong in faith.

Now, you need not wonder what happens to faithful pastoral servants of Christ when the world ridicules and persecutes them. All those who witnessed by their blood generally received the treatment that was imposed upon them just as the crucified Lord God Himself and His apostles, prophets and evangelists did. In the baptismal call, the child of God is to deny oneself; take up the cross, which is the denial of self; and follow Jesus. But to follow Jesus often leads to one's personal cross of suffering, persecution and perhaps even martyrdom.

### Lutheran Confessions on Suffering and Martyrdom

To speak of suffering and persecution as a mark of the Church needs some clarification. First, it is necessary to briefly explain what the word “church” means in the Lutheran definition.

The Lutheran Confessions speak of the Church and her marks in this manner: “Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever.” What is the Church? The word “church” (Greek *ekklesia*) means “to call out.” This term was used by the Jews for a “remnant community,” such as the Qumran community who created the Dead Sea Scrolls and who founded this term, rather than the name for a synagogue or gathering (Matt. 18:17) used by the Jews. The Greeks used this term to refer to people assembling in the cities for clubs or organizations. Later in the New Testament, this term jumps to its full meaning as “ones who are called out” (Acts 7:38). In its context, Jesus is using this term to expand His claim of Messiahship (Matt. 16:21–23; 26:28). The Church is the body of Christ. It is the place where two or more gather in the name of Christ. Our confessions further describe the Church as the “Communion of Saints among whom the Gospel is *purely* preached and the Sacraments *rightly* administered” (*Augsburg Confession VII*). For Luther, the Church is a group of holy saints and the sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (*Smalcald Articles XII 2*). This is where the keys of the kingdom of heaven are given: the “Keys of Heaven” that only Jesus holds (Rev. 1:18).

How do the confessions speak of the Church and her marks? Our churches teach that one holy Church is to

remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints (Ps. 149:1) in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions — that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men — should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, “One Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:5–6).<sup>1</sup> In the Apology, this concept is further developed and clarified when the confessors say: He (Jesus) teaches that the Church has been covered by a lot of evils, so that this stumbling block may not offend the pious, and so that we may know that the Word and Sacraments are powerful even when administered by the wicked.

Then, the Apology adds how the Church may be recognized in such a situation. Lutherans have come to call these signs of recognition of the Church the “Marks of the Church.” The Apology states: “We add the marks: the pure teaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments. This Church is properly the pillar of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). For it keeps the pure Gospel as Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:11. The ‘foundation’ is the true knowledge of Christ and faith.”<sup>2</sup>

Earlier, the Apology clarified that the Church is not merely an outward association, but that it is primarily one of faith and confession. Here I quote again: “But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but at its core, it is a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Spirit in hearts. Yet this fellowship has outward marks so that it can be recognized. These marks are the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. This Church alone is called Christ’s body, which Christ renews, sanctifies and governs, by His Spirit. Paul testifies about this when he says, “And gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22–23). He adds the outward marks, the Word and Sacraments. Paul continues to speak: “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27)

<sup>1</sup> *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. P. T. McCain, ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

In the Confession, we have presented this sentence almost word for word. The Church is defined by the Third Article of the Creed, which teaches us to believe that there is a holy catholic Church. The wicked indeed are not a holy church. The words that follow, namely, “the communion of saints,” seem to be added in order to explain what the Church signifies: “the congregation of saints, who have with each other the fellowship of the same Gospel or doctrine and the same Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

### Luther in Context: The Marks of the Church

In his writing, *On the Councils and the Church(es)*, Dr. Martin Luther lists seven marks of identifying the Church. First, the holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the holy Word of God. To be sure, not all have it in equal measure, as St. Paul says (I Cor. 3:12–14). Some possess the Word in its complete purity; others do not.<sup>4</sup> Second, God’s people are recognized by the holy Sacrament of Baptism wherever it is taught, believed and administered correctly according to Christ’s ordinance. That, too, is a public sign.<sup>5</sup>

Third, God’s people are recognized by the holy sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed and received, according to Christ’s institution. This, too, is a public sign.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, God’s people are recognized by the Office of the Keys exercised publicly.<sup>7</sup>

Fifth, the Church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers or has offices that it is to administer. There must be bishops, pastors or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions on behalf of and in the name of the Church.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 41: Luther’s works, Vol. 41: Church and Ministry III*, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 154.

Sixth, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by prayer, public praise and thanksgiving to God. Where you see and hear the Lord’s Prayer prayed and taught, Psalms or other spiritual songs sung in accordance with the Word of God and the true faith, as well as the use of the creeds, the Ten Commandments and the catechism in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God are present.<sup>9</sup>

Seventh, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world and the flesh (as the Lord’s Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness and weakness, in

order to become like their head, who is Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God’s Word, enduring this for the sake of Christ: “Blessed are you when men persecute you on My account” (Matt. 5:11). They must be pious, quiet, obedient, and prepared to serve the government and everybody with life and goods, doing no one any harm.<sup>10</sup>

It is relatively easy to see how and what Luther was getting at when he called these the seven marks of the Church. They are

for strengthening the faith of those called by the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

If one reads the entire document, one may note that all of these signs are under attack by the devil, the world and even one’s own flesh. This is so because, properly understood, they support or proclaim the Gospel itself. All these marks are centered in and on Christ, who is the head of His Church.

Such signs as Luther proclaimed in the seventh mark are present not merely in the African context, but virtually wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the Sacraments administered rightly as the Lord bids His Church. And they have been so in every time and in various places from time immemorial and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 164–165.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, 164–165.

will continue to be until the Lord comes back to take His bride, the Church.

## **Contextual Analysis of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom as a Mark of the Church**

### ***Bearing the Cross Contextually: The Seventh Sign in the African Context***

Luther says that Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. How can this affect the life of a pastor in his pastoral work? This concept must be somewhat clarified. I want to mention two types of suffering that a Christian may endure, namely, suffering on an individual or at a corporate level.

On the one hand, sometimes a pastor may find himself in difficulties with a congregation or a parish due to his own sinful/selfish behaviors. In such a situation, rather than seeing God calling him to repentance, he may adopt a suffering complex which in reality is merely the baggage of a misguided or misinterpreted “theology of Glory” or selfish theology — or of greed and selfishness. A pastor may be rejected not for faithfulness to Christ and His gospel, but because he has acted unilaterally, as God Himself, not merely His servant. If “the mark of the Sacred Cross” is present in this instance, it is upon the congregation and not a pastor.

On the corporate level, some congregations and parishes may refuse to support or put up with their pastors’ physical needs because the congregation has an underdeveloped sense of stewardship. Or the pastor may deny following misinformed teachings, rejecting wrong doctrines or improper ethics the congregation may want to adopt. The congregation may impose such frustrations to force the pastor to adhere to their needs. In such a circumstance, I believe, bearing the cross falls in the category of “the mark of the Sacred Cross,” on the part of the pastor — and most times upon his family as well. A very clear example is now prevalent in connection with congregations (church bodies — the Swedish Lutheran Church, etc.) which want to adopt and enforce the ordination of women in the name of *human rights*; or a situation whereby a parish denies a pastor on nepotism ground (we want a pastor or a church leader from our clan, tribe and the like). In such a situation, the persecution (bearing of the Holy Cross, in Luther’s language) is imposed on the innocent pastor.

There also may be another form of persecution we may call corporate persecution. Let me give an exam-

ple. A young and developing church like The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya may have some wealthy but corrupt donors who may attempt to influence or enforce some kind of ill policies to the leadership of the church. Such donors may work to influence or give support only under certain conditions. Unless the receiving institution abides by their conditions, business will not be as usual. Such donors may even work to build their separate “kingdoms” alongside the normal duly-elected leadership of the young church to create more problems and cause persecutions to such a young church. Knowing very well the financial ability of such young institution/church, such corrupt donor(s) may work to create and finance a parallel team whose duties will be influenced to cause problems, even to falsely accuse the leadership of the church, even in a court of law, with the view to frustrate and even shame the church leadership of the young church. If such things happen, it is the cross of Christ being imposed to those who carry it.

Luther continues to clarify such signs of the Christians’ sufferings, encouraging that such are marks of the true church. In Luther’s time, persecution came to him and sometimes to his followers in different ways. As the devil continuously attacked Luther from different corners, he became strengthened and more sharpened in his theology of the cross.<sup>12</sup> Again, Luther continued to emphasize that, “They (Christians) must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world and the flesh (as the Lord’s Prayer indicates) by

<sup>12</sup> Among Luther’s most faithful followers were members of his own order. As early as 1519, Jakob Spreng, the prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp, defended Luther’s teachings. In 1521, the Diet of Worms put Luther under the ban, called him a devil in human form, and branded his teaching heretical. In the parts of Germany where Lutheranism was strongest, the terms of this edict were never carried out. Luther’s own prince, Frederick the Wise, refused to set his name to it, and, instead of prosecuting Luther, he had him taken into protective custody.

In the Netherlands, however, political conditions were different. These lands were directly under the emperor. Here the Edict of Worms was carried out to the letter. In Antwerp, Jakob Spreng and his successor Henry von Zütphen were arrested and threatened with execution. The remaining Augustinians were undeterred and continued to preach with great success, and so the whole monastery was laid to the ground and all the monks imprisoned. When the scholastics of the famous University of Louvain made it known that the friars would either have to recant or be burned at the stake, all but three renounced Lutheran teaching. The three confessors were convicted of heresy and condemned to death at the stake. The fate of one of them, Lambert Thorn, is not quite clear. He remained in prison and was not executed until 1528. Luther sent him a letter of comfort in 1524. But the other two, Heinrich Voes and Johann Esch, died martyrs’ deaths at the market place in Brussels, July 1, 1523 — the first blood witnesses of the Reformation.



inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's Word, enduring this for the sake of Christ, Matthew (5:11).<sup>13</sup>

### ***Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Some Practical Aspects from Africa: Ugandan Case***

Needless to say, Christians suffer not for them to gain any glory, rather it is a normal and ordinary life they as witnesses to Christ — their Lord. Sometimes such persecutions may come from the hands of the worldly kings working to suppress Christian religion, as in the case of Uganda martyrs. The Uganda Martyrs were Christian converts who were murdered for their faith in the historical kingdom of Buganda, now part of Uganda. The reasons for their murder are explained in connection to the personal selfishness of the king and also political ambition. It is said that the first group was murdered, because of their refusal to offer sacrifices to the traditional gods and due to their resistance to King Mwangwa's homosexual practices. The killings of some more faithful Christians continued in Buganda for some time, as several faithful members of the church experienced. One example to mention is Anglican Archbishop, Janani Luwum, murdered in 1977 by president Idi Amin Dada of Uganda.

### ***The Kenyan and Somalia Context***

Although Kenya is considered largely as a Christian country, with Muslim population of only about 10 percent and 78 percent Christian, there is evidence that Christians are persecuted in the country, though not as officially as the cases mentioned above in Uganda by some past regimes. As we can see, even if majority of Kenyans are Christians, the Kenyan constitution authorizes courts based on Islamic *Sharia* law to adjudicate personal issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance among Muslims. The al-Shabab terrorist group, which has been for sometime controlling much of the neighboring Somalia, has been causing various problems against the population of Kenya.

In bringing the message of the Gospel, the message of the Cross, one needs to seriously take into consideration the cultural beliefs and practices of that particular culture.

Kenyan refugee camps have been overflowing with Somali people who have been driven from their homes. These camps offer no protection, as refugee pastors and evangelists are sometimes threatened with assault or death by the terrorists. In Jan. 17, 2013, Pastor Juliun Mukonzi was killed and 11 other believers injured, when jihadists bombed a church in Kenya. On Sept. 30, a grenade was thrown into a Sunday school service in Kenya, killing one child and wounding eight others. In that bombing, one parent was reported dead. Though the leadership of that church thought to cancel Sunday school the Sunday that followed, most children insisted they wanted to meet as usual and continue with prayers!

### ***Somalia***

By Jan. 15, 2010, the Muslim Population in Somalia was 99.95 percent of the population, while Christians were less than .05 percent. Al-Shabab, a well-organized Muslim terrorist group, has been in control of much of Somalia. Based on the teachings of the Koran and the sayings of Muhammad, draconian brutalities — death by stoning for adultery, execution of converts from Islam to Christ, and chopping off hands and feet for stealing — are commonplace. A Christian man in Mogadishu was accused of trying to convert a Muslim boy and executed. Another believer refused to betray his teacher in the faith, and his young sons were beheaded. An evangelist bringing Bibles into the country was discovered and shot. Other Christians and converts have lost their families, jobs and homes. Christians are forced to hide their faith since even owning a Bible is punishable by death. Yet, despite all this, believers still gather, and there is a great desire for the Gospel.

In all these examples it is evident that, they (believers) must *endure every misfortune*. They must endure *persecution*. They must endure all *kinds of trials*. Yes, they must endure *evil from the devil, the world and the flesh*. They (believers) must endure *inward sadness*. They must endure *timidity, fear*. They must endure *outward poverty*. They must endure *contempt*. They must endure *illness*. They must endure *weakness*, writes Martin Luther.<sup>14</sup> How

<sup>14</sup> Luther, 165.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, 164–165.

do all these influence theological education, as we work to train and form pastors for our churches?

### **Toward Lutheran Seminaries' Response to Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom as a Mark of the Church**

In an African context where theological education is coupled with several contextual challenges (Enculturation theology of the Roman Catholic, Syncretistic theology, health and wealth theology, and the quest for African theology to mention just a some), the sound of biblical theology of the cross forms a point of departure in presenting the theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom as the mark of the true Church. This becomes a true challenge when forming seminary curriculum and working with pastors in the congregations. Let me briefly highlight few of these points to illustrate the contextual background:

#### **Enculturation Theology of the Roman Catholic Church**

It has been claimed that Roman Catholics have been very successful in many parts of Africa, due to their ritualistic type of worship and their teaching on the doctrine of saints. If this claim holds true, it can further be argued that ritualistic worship and the doctrine of saints have some affinities with the veneration of ancestors in the African traditional religious practices. How does theology properly counteract this belief and practice in the African context?

#### **Syncretism**

The move to revive the African Traditional Religious philosophy and practices, mingled with Christian worship and practice came about in the 20th century in Africa.<sup>15</sup> Many clergy from the mainline churches, who wanted to start their own churches, claimed that African religious beliefs were neglected in their contemporary Christianity — the mainline churches. After the Bible was translated into some native African languages, some Africans started to react seriously, and without proper hermeneutical principles, there developed various interpretations. As the African natives read the Bible in their own languages, several of them adopted the allegorical method of interpretation, while others looked for some passages which could help them answer some questions troubling them in their lives. The claim that the mission-

aries within the mainline churches did not answer their spiritual questions became so prevalent, as many Africans within the ministry in the churches felt that they were being mistreated by their missionaries. Consequently, the Christian religion in those areas became what John Taylor calls a “classroom religion.”<sup>16</sup> While in the church, the people worshiped and behaved as the missionaries taught and did, but when they went back to their villages, they practiced their African Traditional Religious faith, especially in times of crisis.

It is still evident that even at this time people (many African Christians) still revert to animistic belief and practices in times of difficulties, be it in times of death in the family, illness or any such calamity. How does this situation inform us when we prepare and form a pastor for a Lutheran congregation in Africa today?

#### **Health and Wealth Theology**

The health and wealth theological practice is very prevalent in African Initiated Churches and the new Pentecostal churches. These churches are booming and have very large followings, since they scratch where it itches in Africa today. Sundkler and Simojoki have pointed out some similarities in the African traditional healing system with the healing system practiced by many African Initiated Churches (AIC). In the (AIC)<sup>17</sup> the so-called “healing ministry” attracts many people, especially in the developing countries because of the economical difficulties and widespread health problems. In the AICs, fighting demonic spirits is a common phenomenon — the worship is not complete until the demon is exorcised. This type of “spiritual warfare worship” grounds its power around “the prophet” or the spiritual leader, the diviner, etc. In times of crisis, people go to such leaders seeking healing, etc. The influence of *health and wealth* theology (theology of glory) is still a problem to be reckoned with in Africa.<sup>18</sup> It is an evidential phenomenon that many so called “evangelical churches” in Africa are at this time swimming in a Pentecostal/charismatic ocean with the slogan: “come see a miracle and get healed.” The missionary methods of several evangelical churches are geared toward spiritual *warfare*. Going around several cities

<sup>16</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (Elva, Scotland: Robert Caningham & Sons Ltd., 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Bengt Sundkler, *Christian Ministry in Africa* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 14. Anssi Simojoki, “The Ministry of the Church and the Call of Mission: Africa Reflection,” in *The Office of the Ministry*, ed. John R. Fehrmann and Daniel Preus (Crestwood, MO: Luther Academy, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Simojoki, “The Ministry of the Church.”

<sup>15</sup> David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968).

in Africa — Kenya in particular — one sees deliverance and miracle churches conducting their spiritual meetings in open-air places.<sup>19</sup> As people would sing and dance to piercing amplified music, these churches conduct prayers for the sick and exorcise demons. Spiritual warfare worship reflects how people understand and want to deal with the existence of evil and suffering. What does the Bible teach about the existence of evil and suffering, and how can this message be communicated in this context relevantly? It is imperative to present clearly the theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom in our theological studies in the seminary to equip the pastoral students, not forgetting Christians with the truth of the Gospel.

### **African Theology**

African theology has taken root in many African universities, Bible colleges and many other schools. With the influence of the African theology, many theologians are seeking theological common ground by encouraging compromise of denominational theological convictions for a common contextual theology. John Mugambi, for example, one of the leading professor in Nairobi University, is of the opinion that private Bible colleges or universities should not teach their denominational theological convictions because it divides people on denominational lines.<sup>20</sup> Mbiti indicates that African Traditional Religion (ATR) has the same religious inspirational potentials as Islam and Judaism, and contains somewhat the same revelation.<sup>21</sup> For Mbiti, the God who revealed Himself in the Old Testament is the same one who revealed himself in ATR. The practice of Christians going back to consult the traditional religious healers (witch doctors, diviners, etc.) in times of problems is a crisis to be dealt with in African theological education.<sup>22</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Some of the great enemies of the Church in our time may be grouped as: Traditional Cultural Religiosities; political oppressors; Muslim jihadists (al-Qaida, al-Shabab,

Taliban and other Muslim terrorists); the Liberal wing of Christianity; the new Pentecostalism with their health and wealth theologies — theology of glory; and post-modern ideologies. The Church must be aware of her enemies to make her stand firm, ready with Word and Sacrament, and proper proclamation of the Gospel. For all these challenges, coming from within and without, the proper teaching of the Lutheran theology of the cross is the answer.

In bringing the message of the Gospel, the message of the Cross, one needs to seriously take into consideration the cultural beliefs and practices of that particular culture. However, in this process, the theological education has to carefully guard itself against what Gene Veith calls, “a merely cultural religion,” that which has been fueled by “accommodationists,” “synthesists,” and “separatists,” who tend to down-play the transcendental aspect of religion at the expense of divinizing culture.<sup>23</sup> Rather, a balance must be done in balancing the transcendental and immanent nature of the theological study. In the light of the marks of the church presented by Luther, and grounded in the teaching and life of Jesus, it is evident that the true church will always experience suffering in different ways.

It is imperative that a true genuine theology starts, reflects and is completed at the foot of Christ’s cross. With proper Lutheran Hermeneutical Principles of interpretation, proper teaching of the Theology of the Cross is the Key to understanding, doing and living true Christian life. As Christ told his disciple, “he who wants to follow Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. For he who loves his life will lose it, but he who readily loses his life for Me and for the Gospel will save it.” These words have encouraged many faithful believers throughout all ages, providing peace to those who truly follow Christ, knowing where they came from and where they are going.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*.

<sup>21</sup> John Mbiti, “Peace and Reconciliation in African Religion and Christianity,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 7 (Spring–Summer 1993): 17–32, and John Mbiti, “Hearts Cannot be Lent: In Search of Peace and Reconciliation in African Traditional Society,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 20, no. 1 (1999): 1–12.

<sup>22</sup> For more information on Christians reverting to Spiritism at times of crisis, see Nelson Unwene, “Some Annang Christians Revert to Spiritism in Crisis Situations” (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Theological Seminary, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> In Angus J. L. Menuge, ed. *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (St. Louis MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 18.