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God in the Crucified People Theologia Crucis in Martin Luther and Kosuke Koyama

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Joas Adiprasetya Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia jadiprasetya@gmail.com Abstract This article examines Martin

Luther's theology of the cross (theologia crucis) **and its implications**

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for the Asian struggle for humanity. It is argued that, although Luther's influence on many Asian theologians is significant, his inconsistent position with regard to sociopolitical issues requires Asian theologians to reinterpret their own theologies of the cross beyond Luther's initial position. Moreover, the article explores Kosuke Koyama's appropriation of Luther's theologia crucis in the Asian context by imaginatively constructing his own theology of the cross that critically addresses Asian sociopolitical realities. Keywords Martin Luther – Kosuke Koyama – theology of the cross – theologia crucis – Asia 1 Introduction: Luther and Asia Most of the books on Martin Luther written by theologians or historians from the West define his political thought with reference to direct political issues, such as the theory of the two kingdoms, the peasant rebellion, and the war against the Turk.¹ Certainly, there is nothing wrong with this selection, since those issues indeed reflect the political context of Luther's own time. He is no doubt a son of his age. Nevertheless, it will be inappropriate to apply such issues ¹ See, e.g.,

W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, The Political Thought of Martin Luther (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984).

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15697312-01203002 directly to the Asian context, given the fact that there is a wide disparity, in both time and place, between those two contexts. As Paul S. Chung argues, "It would be a perilous project to transplant Luther out of his context for a cross-cultural reading."² Unless this gap is recognized, a directly forced application would not only result in a sterilization of the theological engagement within a concrete sociopolitical situation, but also open a possibility to misuse the theology for the interest of those who are in power. What is the

characteristic of the living texts of Asian people? A Sri Lankan theologian of liberation, Aloysius Pieris, sees that Asian reality is characterized by two facts: “overwhelming poverty” and “multifaceted religiosity.”³ While the first constitutes a commonality shared with the rest of the developing world, the second points out the unique character of Asia. It is indispensable, therefore, to take an indirect way in order to ‘inscribe’ this first Reformer in the living texts of Asian people; and

I would suggest that the indirect way to arrive at the

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very center of Asian “suffering and religiosity” is to be found in

Luther’s theology of the cross (theologia crucis). The

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rationale beneath this decision is based on the human condition in both Luther’s writings and the Asian context. Thus, the main idea that I maintain throughout this article is that Asian theologians who deal with both Luther’s theology and the Asian context find Luther’s political account to be less relevant to their struggle for humanization than his theologia crucis. To prove it, I will begin with the description of Luther’s theologia crucis. Then, I will analyze some theological aspects of Luther’s theologia crucis and the reason why the suffering God is to be found in the suffering people. Afterward, I will examine an Asian Reformed theologian of the cross, Kosuke Koyama, especially in the way he employs Luther’s theologia crucis. In the last part, I will provide my own reflections on this theme. 2 Theologia crucis and Divine Suffering On October 31,

1517, Luther nailed to the castle church door

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in Wittenberg his Ninety-Five Theses.

In Rome, cardinals saw Luther’s theses as an attack on papal authority

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and the church’s theology generally. Therefore,

less than a year later, in April 1518, he wrote the

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Heidelberg Disputation in order to answer the invitation to account for his new theology to the Augustinian 2

Paul S. Chung, “The Future of Martin Luther in an Asian Context,” **Dialog 42,**

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no. 1 (2003): 62. 3 Aloysius Pieris, “Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines,”

239. Order. This text consists of forty theses, divided into two major parts: theses 1–28 (theological theses) and 29–40 (philosophical theses).⁴ Luther's account of theologia crucis exists clearly in theses 19–21. Nevertheless, before writing this disputation, Luther used the term theologia crucis in his lectures on the Epistle to the

Hebrews (1517–1518). In **commenting on Hebrews 12:11, Luther**

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writes: Here we find the Theology of the Cross, or, as the Apostle expresses it: "The word of the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles" ... because it is utterly hidden from their eyes and is taught in hiddenness. This means that it is not manifest, but is hidden, as in the midst of a tempest.⁵ The most famous notion of theologia crucis, however, appears

in **theses 19–21 of the Heidelberg Disputation: 19.**

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He is not worthy calling a theologian who seeks to interpret "the invisible things of God" on the basis of the things which have been created. 20.

But he is the **worth calling a theologian who understands the visible and hidden parts of God to mean the passion and the cross.**

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21. The theologian of glory says bad is **good and good** is bad. **The** theologian **of the cross says what is** in fact **the**

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truth (i.e., calls them by their proper name). Luther makes a contrast between what he calls

'theology of glory' (theologia gloriae) and 'theology of the cross' (theologia crucis).

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He rejects the theologians who speculate about the knowledge of God as if it can be perceived "on the basis of the things which have been created" (ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit). The targets of Luther's criticism are doubtless the Thomistic theologians. ⁴ In the philosophical part, Luther attacks Aristotle. He himself taught about Aristotle's Ethics in 1508 at Wittenberg. Dennis Ngien argues that his general rejection of Aristotelianism becomes the background of his understanding of the 'passibility' of God, since the philosopher believes that the self-sufficient God experiences neither passion nor feeling. Dennis Ngien, The

Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis, American University Studies 181 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 5

7–8. For a general description of Luther's critique of Aristotle, see

Alister E. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1985), 13

136–141. 5

Martin Luther, Luther: Early Theological Works, ed. James Atkinson 35

(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 233–234. gians with their analogy of being (analogia entis). As a matter of fact, Luther concedes that humanity could have natural knowledge about God, but this knowledge cannot be grasped independently of divine revelation. In proving thesis 21a, “The theologian of glory says bad is good and good is bad,” Luther writes, “And thus they say that the good of the cross is evil, and call the evil of works good.” What Luther denies, therefore, is a theology that teaches salvation through human good works. In contrast, true theologians are those who rely on divine revelation to know God (thesis 20).

God's revelation is found in the passion and the 8

cross (passiones et crucem) of Christ, wherein God is being revealed and hidden—Deus revelatus et absconditus—at the same time. In and

through the suffering of Jesus on the cross, God 15

turns toward humanity. Moreover, Luther explains this thesis by saying:

God determined on the contrary to be known from sufferings. He sought to condemn that sort of knowledge of the things invisible which was based on a wisdom from things visible. So that in this way those who did not worship God as made known in his works, might worship him hidden behind his sufferings. Proof of 1

thesis 20 He also quotes the idea of the “foolishness of God” (1 Cor 1:21, 25) to emphasize that one can only know God if one “knows [God] at the same time in the humility and shame of the cross” (Proof of thesis 20). From this perspective, we understand that Luther

regards theologia crucis not simply as one part of theology but as “theology in its totality, that is, the- ology in so far as it is at all capable of understanding the unity underlying the antitheses in the divine works.”⁶ It is not “a chapter in theology but a specific kind of theology.”⁷ However, we have still to analyze whether he constructs his entire

theology in the light of theologia crucis.

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Regin Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971),

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Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J.A. Rouman (Min- neapolis: Augsburg, 1976),

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18.3 Building a Bridge between Luther and Asian Soil Luther's theologia crucis undoubtedly opens many possibilities for us to the- ologize. David Tracy, for instance, maintains the relation between theologia crucis and apophatic mystical traditions.⁸ It is also interesting to discuss the- ologia crucis in terms of philosophical and systematic theology. Nevertheless, our concern is with the possibility of 'implanting' theologia crucis into Asian soil, whether it can serve the Asian struggle for human liberation in its plu- ralist context. Aloysius Pieris has told us that the “overwhelming poverty” is a shared reality of the developing countries. This is why we can find many theolo- gians in these countries employing Luther's theologia crucis in their theological reflections, such as Jon Sobrino⁹ and Walter Altmann¹⁰ from Latin America, and Claudia M. Nolte¹¹ from South Africa. In the next section, I will focus on Kosuke Koyama as an Asian theologian who employs Luther's theologia crucis, not only as a theological source of lib- eration, but also as a Christian symbol in its encounter with other religious symbols of suffering. Before discussing Koyama, however, it is important to pro- vide two notes. First, in order for us to relate theologia crucis and the suffering of Asian people, we should analyze the relationship between Christ's suffering and human suffering, between the crucified Christ and the crucified people. Paul Althaus, a famous interpreter of Luther, is of the opinion that “we cannot view the cross as an objective reality in Christ without at once knowing our- selves as crucified with Christ.”¹² Walther von Loewenich also maintains, “The cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian belong together.”¹³ He continues: That is to say, the cross of the Christian corresponds to the cross of Christ. To know God “through suffering and cross” means that the knowledge of God comes into being at the cross of Christ, the significance of which becomes evident only to one who himself [sic] stands in cross and suf- fering.¹⁴ ⁸ David W. Tracy, “Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God,” in The

Concept of God in Global Dialogue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005). 9

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Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

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Walter Altmann, Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective,

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rev. exp. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). 11

Claudia M. Nolte, "A Theology of the Cross for South Africa," Dialog 42,

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no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 50–61. 12

Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

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1996), 28. 13 Loewenich, Luther's Theology, 113. 14 Loewenich,

Luther's Theology, 20. This **is** clearly **the** meaning **of**

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discipleship of which

Jesus says in Mark 8:34,

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"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Luther himself describes this relationship in an interesting way: "Christ must be apprehended as Man, before he is apprehended as God; and the cross of his humanity must be sought after and known, before we know the glory of his divinity."¹⁵ Kazoh Kitamori, a Lutheran theologian of the cross from Japan, offers a different approach when he proposes a third model of analogy to replace the analogy of being (analogia entis) of the medieval theology and the analogy of faith (analogia fidei) of evangelical theology. The sole analogy

between God and human beings that can express **the** problem **of** suffering is **the** analogy **of**

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pain or suffering (analogia doloris).¹⁶ A second note is worth elaborating here as to why we need an Asian political theology of the cross. It is very useful to read Jürgen Moltmann's analysis of Luther's theologia crucis in his book *The Crucified God* (1993). A German Reformed theologian, Moltmann argues that theologia crucis is a "practical doctrine for battle."¹⁷ Its dialectic character gives this theology a critical function, since it "sets out to liberate men from their inhuman definitions and their idolized assertions, in which they

have become set, and in which society ensnared them.”¹⁸ Yet, I would add, it also gives theologia crucis a function of solidarity in the sense that it proclaims God’s solidarity in human suffering through God’s own suffering on the cross of Jesus of Nazareth. Without its solidarity dimension, a critical theologia crucis can only be an uprooted and noisy voice for both the victims and the perpetrators. On the contrary, without its critical function, the- ologia crucis is a theology without hope and resurrection, since it is in Christ’s resurrection that Christian theology has its power to criticize the culture of death. Despite the critical function of theologia crucis, Moltmann argues that

Luther’s theologia crucis has a **limit in**

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political terms. For theologia crucis is for- mulated in

“theoretical and practical terms against the medieval institutional

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15 Alberto L. García, “Signposts for Global Witness in Luther’s Theology of the Cross,” in

The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century: Signposts for a Multicultural Witness, ed. Alberto L. García and A.R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002),

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Kazoh Kitamori, Theology of the Pain of God (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005),

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55–56. 17

Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 72. 18 **Moltmann, Crucified God,**

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72. church” but not “as social criticism against feudal society in the Peasant Wars of 1524 and 1525.”¹⁹ Moltmann writes: What he wrote to the peasants did not express the critical and liberat- ing force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame, nor the polemic of the crucified God against pride and subjec- tion, domination and slavery, but instead a non-Protestant mysticism of suffering and humble submission.²⁰ In short, according to Moltmann, there is a broad gap between Luther’s the- ological and political positions. To some extent, this gap is caused by the dif- ference of Luther’s own positions in these two attitudes. While his theolo- gia crucis appears in the earlier time of his theological career as a ‘rebel,’ his political position toward the peasants emerges in his relatively stable posi- tion. In my opinion, Moltmann’s critique against Luther is too harsh. A careful reading of Luther’s letters on this matter, especially An Admonition to Peace and

indeed helps us see Luther's strong criticism against the rebellious peasants and his advice to the peasants to obey the authorities. At the same time, however, the Reformer blamed the princes for their injustice toward their subjects. My problem is rather with the lack of any direct correlation between his fundamental theologia crucis and his position on the peasants' insurrection. In the two letters mentioned above, Luther did not explicitly employ the language of theologia crucis in arguing against the princes and the peasants. Thus, it is very difficult for Christians from other contexts simply to apply

Luther's position on the issue of the peasants' rebellion to their

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own social-political issues. This is the reason why, in the article, I discuss Kosuke Koyama's reinterpretation of Luther's theologia crucis in the Asian context. 4 Theologia crucis in Asia: Kosuke Koyama

In this section, I will discuss the thought of

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Kosuke Koyama, an Asian theologian of the cross, who has tried to situate Luther's theologia crucis in his own Asian context. Certainly, there are many other Asian theologians who

19 Moltmann, Crucified God, 72. 20 Moltmann, Crucified God,

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72. have done the same: Kazoh Kitamori²¹ from Japan, C.S. Song²² from Taiwan, and S.J. Samartha²³ from India.²⁴ Kosuke Koyama is one of the Asian theologians who popularize the Asian way of doing theology to Western continents. Typical in his contextual theology is a creative mixture of social analysis and theological reflection, along with crosscultural and interreligious richness. His familiarity with Luther's theology is shown in his dissertation on Luther's interpretation of the Psalms. The starting point for his own theologia crucis is very personal. He told his story in his "Reformation in the Global Context" in 2003: My own version of a theology of the cross began emotionally, without any definite form or understanding, when I was 15 years old. In the morning following the midnight carpet bombing of March 10, 1945, in Japan, I saw the sun rise as usual, as though nothing had happened in the human world. The light and warmth of the sun embraced both the dead and the living. The sun quietly erased the distinction between enemy and friend. I became aware that a strange quietness had descended on me. I heard, or felt, the words of Jesus, that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). Those words have come back to me from time to time for nearly sixty years since that morning. When I was baptized during the war, the minister told me that God loves everyone, Americans as well as Japanese. I was baptized not into the religion of the enemy country but into the God of all nations.²⁵ Besides the personal story, there is one part of the Bible that touches Koyama's heart deeply, that is, the mind of the loving God that Hosea proclaims, "My 21 Kitamori, Theology of the Pain of God. 22

1996). 23

Stanley J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1974). 12

24 Andreas A. Yewangoe has surveyed more than twenty Asian theologians of the cross in Japan, India, Korea, and Indonesia. However, I do not discuss Yewangoe's own theologia crucis along with Koyama's, because Yewangoe contains no direct reference to Luther's theologia crucis. Perhaps, it is because in Indonesia Luther is less influential than Calvin is. See A.A. Yewangoe,

Theologia Crucis in Asia: Asian Christian Views on Suffering in the Face of Overwhelming Poverty and Multifaceted Religiosity in Asia, *Amsterdam Studies in Theology* 6 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987). 3

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Kosuke Koyama, "Reformation in the Global Context: The Disturbing Spaciousness of Jesus Christ," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 2 (April 2003): 119– 26

120. mind is turning over in me. My emotions are agitated all together" (Hos 11:8). About this verse he writes: I have no precise theological formulation by which I would connect the words of Hosea about God and "the word of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18). But I find that the image of the agitated mind of God, given by Hosea, illuminates the "word of the cross" for me "from inside God," if we are allowed to say such a thing in all our theology. The word of the cross points to God's agitated emotions because of God's love towards us. The word of the cross heals our history by giving it hope and life.²⁶ The agitated mind of God also agitates our theology, until we have a 'crucified mind.' By the crucified mind he means "the mind which has decided to live by the power of the crucified Lord."²⁷ The crucified mind, moreover, is in contrast with the 'crusading mind' that refers to "all kind of 'crusading for ...' and 'crusading against.'"²⁸ While the former is trained under the weight of the handle-less cross, the later puts a 'handle' to the cross in order to control God. For Koyama, a handle-minded theology is no longer a theology but a demonic theological ideology.²⁹ Against this kind of theological ideology, theologia crucis stands firmly. In his *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*, Koyama also characterizes theologia crucis as a critical theology, which becomes a "solution to the problem of idolatry in our world."³⁰ By idolatry or ideologized theology he means a theology "in which humanity, not God, is at the center, in which the freedom of God is ignored and God is programmed to do what we ask God to do."³¹ A theology is not idolatrous insofar as it teaches us "to flee to God against God"

Kosuke Koyama, Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985),

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241. 27

Kosuke Koyama, No Handle on the Cross: An Asian Meditation on the Crucified Mind (London: **SCM Press,** 1976), 8. 28 **Koyama,**

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No Handle, ix. Koyama also contrasts the crucified mind and the crusading mind in his short yet excellent article, "Christianity Suffers from 'Teacher Complex,'" in *Evangelization: Mission Trends* 2,

ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

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1975), 70–75. He argues that, while the former promotes a dialogical two-way-traffic theology, the latter demonstrates Christianity as a one-way-traffic religion that suffers from a "teacher complex." 29 Koyama, *No Handle*, 3. 30 Koyama, *Mount Fuji*, 241. 31 Koyama, *Mount Fuji*, 247. the Psalms.³² He argues, "Luther's theologia crucis tells us that it is not 'fleeing to God,' but 'fleeing to God against God' that we affirm our faith in God ... Those who 'flee to God against God' dethrone the idols."³³ Koyama certainly learns about theologia crucis from Luther. However, he is critical of the Reformer's avoidance of the sociopolitical implication of his own theology. Koyama raises very important questions to the Reformer: "Are not hungry people crucified people? Is not God hidden in the naked people? Is not Christian faith the most physical faith of the world religions because of the teaching on the incarnation of God?"³⁴ And he concludes, "The vehemence of Luther's essay 'Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants' did violence to his own theology of the cross."³⁵ Koyama's

theologia crucis as **a** critical **theology is**

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also clear when he employs the 'center-periphery' language. As mentioned before, an idolatry or ideologized theology puts humanity and not God 'at the center.' On the contrary, theologia crucis proclaims

Jesus Christ who has gone

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"to the utter periphery."³⁶ In so doing, Jesus "established his centrality by going to the periphery."³⁷ Koyama's horizontal 'center-periphery' version of theologia crucis, therefore, enriches the vertical-existential dimension of Luther's theologia crucis. Thus, the possibility to put a critical dimension to theologia crucis is widely opened. He writes, "This [center-person who has gone to the periphery] will give us a new possibility in our encounter with the people of other faith and ideologies. We can be critical about them because we are

critical about ourselves.”³⁸ Periphery also symbolizes the life of the suffering people, “ill-clad and buffeted and homeless.”³⁹ In this sense, theologia crucis is at the same time a political or liberation theology. Koyama’s familiarity with other religious and cultural traditions is shown in the way he inscribes many symbols for other religions and cultures into his theologia crucis. For instance, Koyama describes his encounter with a Buddhist monk who shaves off his hair and eyebrows. “The face with eyebrows shaved off,” for Koyama, symbolizes Jesus’ self-denial, just as Buddhism teaches similarly about self-denial.⁴⁰ Koyama believes that religious symbolism is never

Kosuke Koyama, “Jesus Christ Who Has Gone to the Utter Periphery,” *The Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 1

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(January 1991): 100–106. ³⁷ Koyama, Mount Fuji, 243. ³⁸ Koyama, Mount Fuji, 244–245. ³⁹ Koyama, “Jesus Christ,” 102, 105. ⁴⁰ Koyama, No Handle, 28–29. neutral. Symbols can point to the true God or to idols. In this sense, the cross as Christian symbol is “the risk that the creator God took.”⁴¹ It can be either idolatrous or symbolically engaged. Nevertheless, a true symbol is to be a broken symbol. “Only the broken symbol [such as the cross], paradoxically, can have meaning to us without enslaving us. The broken symbol is neither fetish nor ideological.”⁴² Moreover, a true symbol has a critical power, “The symbol of the cross must confront the symbol of the swastika [from Stalin].”⁴³ It is also worth noting that in Koyama, theologia crucis has become an overriding tenet that prevails in many theological aspects, such as ecumenism,⁴⁴ missiology,⁴⁵ and education.⁴⁶ In other words, theologia crucis is Koyama’s omnium gatherum through which all other theological ideas are gathered and given new meanings. Luther and Koyama lived in two different periods and social locations. It is precisely such spatial and temporal differences that enable Koyama to bring Luther’s theologia crucis to the new context of Asia. To be sure, what Koyama suggests throughout his theological reinterpretation of the cross cannot easily be applied to his original context of Japan. Joas Adiprasetya argues that Pieris’s double identification of the Asian reality is no longer accurate or sufficient in describing the context for Asian theology. “First, it does not take into account the fact that some regions in Asia are significantly free from poverty, such as Singapore and Japan. Secondly, the characteristic of multifaceted religiousness can no longer be said to be truly Asian.”⁴⁷ Thus, it might be hard for readers to imagine how Koyama’s strong arguments could be applicable to some prosperous Asian countries such as Japan. We also need, however, to take into account the fact that Koyama speaks on behalf of many countries of Asia that fall into Pieris’s identification. Many of Koyama’s books were inspired by his missionary experience in the poor rural areas in Thailand. ⁴¹ Koyama, Mount Fuji, 44. ⁴² Koyama, Mount Fuji, 43. Here, Koyama seems to follow Paul Tillich’s idea of “broken myths.” See Robert C. Neville, *The Truth of*

Broken Symbols, *SUNY Series in Religious Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

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1996), x. ⁴³ Koyama, Mount Fuji, 44. ⁴⁴ Kosuke Koyama, “The Eucharist: Ecumenical and Ecological,” *The Ecumenical Review* 44, no. 1 (January 1992): 80–90. ⁴⁵

Kosuke Koyama, “Extend Hospitality to Strangers’: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis,” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (July

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