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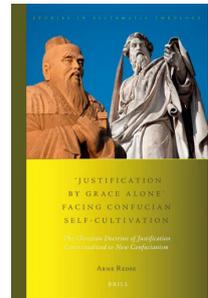
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# 'Justification by Grace Alone': Facing Confucian Self-Cultivation — The Christian Doctrine of Justification Contextualized to New Confucianism.

Arne Redse. xii + 498 p. Leiden et al.: Brill Publishers  
2016. ISBN 978-90-04-30257-0



I have had great pleasure in reading this book by Dr. Arne Redse with its long title *'Justification by Grace Alone: Facing Confucian Self-Cultivation — The Christian Doctrine of Justification Contextualized to New Confucianism'*. It is indeed a fascinating and challenging attempt to re-correlate Christianity and Chinese culture the way Dr. Redse attempted, and he has done it so well.

For the study of Christianity, Redse chose the Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of justification and he traced the development of Lutheran confessions from the Reformation period to its exposition in the *Augsbury Confession* and the *Apology*, and to the ecumenical dialogues among the Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council. (Chapter 3). For Confucianism, he has chosen the modern exposition of New Confucianism, based on four of its major scholars, namely: Liu Shu-hsien, Cheng Chung-ying, Tu Wei-ming, and Yao Xinzhong. (Chapter 4). As for his serious research, Redse applied a specific method of contextualization which corresponds rather well with basic epistemological and hermeneutical presuppositions in both Christianity and Confucianism. (Chapter 2) The reflections focused on (1) linguistic issues, (2) contact points and bridges, (3) hardly reconcilable barriers, and (4) a better explication of the Christian teaching on the doctrine of justification in the Chinese context. (Chapter 5).

As Redse expounded, Confucianism is characterized by the idea of becoming a sage through self-cultivation, whereas Christian theology emphasizes on human sinfulness and the grace of God. Especially regarding the doctrine of justification, the Lutherans believe in 'justification by grace alone and by faith alone' which con-

tradicts the Confucian concept of 'self-cultivation'. But in his research, Redse discovered that the Confucian conception of 'self-cultivation' does not exclude the idea of 'heavenly grace'. Confucianism believes that human person is a relational being. Besides the 'five relations' among human persons, there is a possible relation to Heaven (the 'human-heaven relationship') which is spelt out by the term, *Tianren heyi*, meaning 'heaven and humanity in harmony'. Though Confucianism does not believe in a personal God, there are many expressions and conceptions about ultimate reality such as *Shang-tian* (the Heaven Above), *Tian-ji* (the Emperor as the Son of Heaven), *Tiandao* (the Way of Heaven), *Tian-li* (the Principles or Laws of Heaven), *Tian-ming*

(the Mandate of Heaven), and *Tianren heyi* (Human and Heaven in Harmony).

Hence, the Heaven is related to human beings. (p. 264-268) Confucianism believes that *Tian-ming*, for example, provides human beings with the human nature (*xing*) which includes the seeds and power of the basic virtues (*De-xing*) by which human beings can become a sage. This, Redse remarks, 'resembles the Christian understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit given in regeneration'. (p. 460) While Christians believe that 'faith' (*xin*) is the gift of God given by the grace of God, Confucianism takes *xin* as originated in human nature and is endowed from Heaven to human beings from the beginning of one's life. If Christian theology is 'theology from above', Confucianism is the theology from below. And if Christianity is open wide enough, Redse affirms that there is a potential route of dialogue and possible contextualization to Chinese culture in the context of New Confucianism. (p. 479).

In short, despite of the great differences and contradictions found between Christianity and Chinese culture, Redse managed to find some contact points and bridges for communication between the two faiths. In this book, he has argued and demonstrated that his method of contextualization would help with working out some ways to overcome the 'hardly reconcilable barriers', hence to contextualize the doctrine of justification to the Chinese in the context of New Confucianism. Since both Christianity (at least Lutheranism) and Confucianism (especially the New Confucianism) are open to challenges and are ready to transcend themselves, crossing boundaries to global culture and other faiths, they are both translatable and can be 'contextualized' in different cultures.

The method of contextualization Redse has developed in this research is indeed a good one. It points not only to the possibility of contextualizing Christianity in

the Chinese, Confucian context, but also to the same regarding Confucianism in the Western and global contexts. In fact, the scholars Redse referred to in his book, especially Liu Shu-hsien, Cheng Chung-ying, Tu Wei-ming and Yao Xinzhong are all working to revive Confucianism as a living worldview and translating it into the non-Confucian, global cultures. And as Redse remarks, Confucianism is now reckoned by modern scholars as an 'ethico-religious philosophy', a 'religious humanism', and a 'philosophy of human self-transformation and self-transcendence' (p. 207; 254-262). Hence, the process of contextualization can work in both ways.

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