



Reformed theology from Luther's era engages digital-age challenges in twenty-first-century theological discourse within global contexts

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Abstract: This research aims to build a dialogue between 16th-century Reformed theology and the challenges of 21st-century theology, especially in the context of the metaverse Church. The primary concern highlighted is the emergence of metaverse churches, which undermine the principle of physical communion within the Church. Consequently, how can principles of the Reformation, particularly the five *Solas*, offer a theological foundation for the Church to address digitalization in the context of metaverse churches, a significant theological challenge of the 21st century? Through historical-theological studies employing a qualitative approach and the serialization method. The concept of the metaverse Church presents opportunities to reach broader audiences, especially younger generations, yet it also risks diluting the sense of sacredness and physical community. The principle of *sola Scriptura* can serve as a basis for evaluating the use of technology in worship, while *sola Fide* and *sola Gratia* reaffirm the grace of salvation. *Solus Christus* emphasizes the centrality of Christ in the Christian faith, and *soli Deo gloria* directs faith life and counters moral relativism in the digital age. Thus, the spirit of the Reformation can provide a theological foundation for the Church to navigate modern challenges while preserving its faith identity.

Keywords: Martin Luther, Reformed theology, *solas*, the metaverse Church

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1. Introduction

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, spearheaded by Martin Luther, stands as one of the most significant theological events in the history of the Christian Church. Through this Movement, the concept of theology was more focused on the authority of the Bible as the highest center of Christian teaching, faith, and grace. It also changed the structure of Church life at that time.¹ Nowadays, the Church is faced with new challenges that the reformers of their time never encountered. The advent of digitalization, which has reshaped patterns of communication and social interaction,

¹ *Doktrin : 5 Sola Reformasi*, directed by Nafiri Kasih Channel, 2020, Streamed live, 01:15:35, <https://www.youtube.com/live/46UdVbft87c>.

demands that the Church reinterpret the legacy of the Reformation within the context of 21st-century theology.

From the 16th century to the 21st century, the dynamics of Christian theology have been dynamic, with the Church present amid changes without losing the existence of its faith. Hans Kung gives an opinion in his book about the Church in the development of the image of the Church in Church history that in history, the Church belongs to the world in which the essence and life of the Church are formed.² The Reformation movement in the history of the Church not only changed the face of the Church but also formed a theological foundation that continues to be relevant today. According to Alister E. McGrath in his book, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, reform theology has always been able to adapt to development.³ However, if the 16th century was marked by upheavals against Church authorities who abused teachings and the invention of the printing press that enabled the widespread spread of the Bible, the 21st century presents new challenges that are no less complex: the digital revolution and the emergence of virtual reality, including the concept of "the metaverse Church".

In the digital era, the presence of a metaverse Church makes it easier for congregants to worship and interact to build a spiritual community. This reality not only changed the way people worshipped but also re-questioned the classical theological concepts of Christian worship.⁴ How can the principles of Reformation, such as *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*, be applied in a fluid and seamless virtual space? How can the principles of Reformation, such as *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*, be applied in a fluid and limitless virtual space?

The challenge of 21st-century theology is no longer simply about how the Church responds to modernity but, furthermore, how it can remain true to its mission in an increasingly digitized world. Jesus once prayed for the disciples, who were the next generation, to bring people to the light because of the dark world, so that the Father would protect the disciples from evil (John 17:11-18). This basis is the calling and demand of the Church to stay true to its mission. The metaverse churches offer the opportunity to reach more people, especially the younger generation living in a digital culture, but they also carry the risk of obscuring the meaning of sacredness and physical community that have been hallmarks of churches. David J. Bosch acknowledged that one of the challenges that the Church needs to overcome is the impact of the rapid and limitless development of science and technology.⁵ This is where

² Hans Küng, *The Church*, 7th ed. (New York: Burns and Oates, 2018), 12–14.

³ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 3–4.

⁴ Yusnoveri Chung et al., "Gereja Metaverse: Sejalankah Dengan Semangat Reformasi Gereja?," *Prosiding International Reformation Conference* 1, no. 1 (February 2023): 1–8, <https://ojs.stakrri.ac.id/index.php/prosidingirc/article/view/39>.

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transformasi Misi Kristen*, 8th ed. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2011), 797–98.

the 16th-century Reformed Theology, with its five *Solas* as the doctrine of reform, can be a critical lens for evaluating and guiding religious practices in the digital age.

Although many studies have been conducted on the Reformation and its theology, most research still focuses on its impact in the past or on more traditional ecclesiastical contexts. For example, the article "Reformasi Protestan: Pengaruh Martin Luther Terhadap Gereja dan Dunia" emphasizes the historical concept of the Reformation movement. In addition, it discusses the concept of triggering major social, political, and cultural changes, including the idea of religious freedom.⁶ Then, the article titled "Virtual Reality Church as a New Mission Frontier in the Metaverse: Exploring Theological Controversies and Missional Potential of Virtual Reality Church" is more oriented towards the theological possibility of addressing controversial issues from an ecclesiological perspective while justifying the mission and ministry of the Church in virtual reality.⁷ In the writing offered by Carolina, it is more about the dynamics and phenomena in the virtual era and their implications for the existence, role, and function of the Church in the context of contemporary ministry and mission. The difference offered in this article is directed at a dialogue between the spirit of reform in facing the challenges of 21st-century theology, which is more directed at the concept of digitalization in the context of the metaverse Church.

The gap in contemporary theological studies is evident from the lack of research discussing the relevance of the five *Solas* in the challenges of the digital era. Meanwhile, studies on digitalization and its influence on theology have more often dwelled on changes in communication patterns and worship practices without linking them to the fundamentals of reform. Thus, a study is needed that connects the spirit of reform with the challenges of today's churches, especially in facing the concept of the metaverse Church. The novelty of this study lies in the dialogue between the concept of Reformation theology and modern challenges that many other writers have not studied. The Reformation is not only understood as a historical event but as a theological movement that continues to live and can provide answers to contemporary problems. This research is based on the questions: (1) How can the principles of Reformed Theology be a theological foundation for churches in responding to the reality of the metaverse Church? and (2) How can the Church take advantage of digital technology without sacrificing the essence of the faith inherited by the reformers?

Thus, this research provides a new perspective on the relevance of reform in the increasingly complex digital era. The primary purpose of this research is to build a

⁶ Marlince Diana Lende, Junidar Gulo, and Malik Bambangan, "Reformasi Protestan: Pengaruh Martin Luther Terhadap Gereja Dan Dunia," *Anugerah: Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen Dan Kateketik Katolik* 2, no. 1 (December 2024): 48, <https://doi.org/10.61132/anugerah.v2i1.473>.

⁷ Guichun Jun, "Virtual Reality Church as a New Mission Frontier in the Metaverse: Exploring Theological Controversies and Missional Potential of Virtual Reality Church," *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020): 297–305, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820963155>.

dialogue between 16th-century Reformed Theology and the challenges of 21st-century theology, especially in the context of the metaverse Church. In addition, it shows that the legacy of the Reformation is not only relevant in the past but can also continue to be the basis in the face of changing times. With a historical-theological approach, this study traces how the principles of the Reformation can be applied in a modern context without losing their theological essence. Academically, the legacy of historical theology can remain relevant in the face of changing times. In practical terms, this article provides a basis for the Church to navigate the challenges of the 21st century by adhering to the principles of faith that are firm in the doctrine of the five *Solas* that have been stated by Church Reformers. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to the Church in responding to the challenges of the digital age while maintaining fidelity to the theological legacy inherited by Martin Luther and other reformers.

2. Research Methods

In this research, the method to be used is a historical-theological approach called the serialization method. The principles built into the serialization method need to be paid attention to or generalized by using the laws of causality and paying attention to the chronology of interpretive events or interpretations. In the serialization method, the selection of events is guided by their relevance. The serialization method performs selection and editing, and holds the principle that all knowledge is a series.⁸ Therefore, in history, a theologian or scholar narrates an event by relating it to another event.

The stages in the implementation of the serialization method start from: (1) heuristic, which is to collect traces of the past; (2) criticism (history), which is to investigate whether the traces are true; (3) interpretation, which is to determine the meaning and interconnection of facts obtained in history; and (4) presentation, which is to convey the synthesis obtained in the form of a story.⁹ The source of the heuristic stage is the collection of writings. Sources of writing in the history approach are primary and necessary because, in the sources of writing, theologians and historians can find facts.¹⁰ It should be noted that the 100 percent objective is not easy to find, but at least many facts are non-referential. Sources of writing that provide hard facts and contextual facts are all collected for criticism. Utilizing sources of writing derived from documentary materials allows theologians and scholars to find data that can be used to uncover social phenomena in the past.

⁸ Intan Demsi Kamar, *Potret Pendidikan Indonesia Dalam Deretan Masa* (Makassar: Yabuindo Press, 2010), 7–8.

⁹ Nugroho Notosusanto, *Norma-Norma Dasar Penelitian Dan Penulisan Sejarah* (Jakarta: Departemen Pertahanan-Keamanan Pusat Sejarah ABRI, 1971), 25–27.

¹⁰ Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial Dalam Metodologi Sejarah* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2014), 54.

3. Results and Discussion

History of Reform to the Digital Age: Dialogue on the Spirit of Reform from Reformation and Reaction 1500-1800

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 had an impact on the Eastern churches that had long been central to Christianity. So, in 1500, even the power of the pope over Christians seemed inviolable. Shortly afterwards, the papal power was shaken by the Protestant Reformation. The figures of the Church reform essentially demanded a return to the Church's teachings according to the contents of the Bible. A medieval theologian, John Wyclif, strongly admonished Church leaders for the arbitrariness and corruption that occurred, based on an investigation of Catholic doctrines. In 1378, he wrote *De Veritate Sacrae Scripture* (biblical truth). The Bible contains the concept of salvation without being supplemented by tradition, and all Christians need to read it. The biblical authority for the salvation of the people became Wyclif's grip, which ultimately deposed the pope. Wyclif, as Tony Lane explains, also proved that attacks on abuse of authority can lead to criticism of Church doctrine.¹¹ The same is true of Desiderius Erasmus, a Christian humanist who also issued a criticism of the practices carried out by the Catholic Church. Erasmus says that restoring the teachings is by the Bible.¹²

Various regions have risen to be reformers, criticizing the practices and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther, in the Church of Rome, also stood up to and criticized the teachings, practices, and power of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's teachings quickly spread to Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Luther's teaching on justification by faith (*sola fide*) is not contained in the 95 postulates but appears after the 95 postulates are proclaimed by Luther.¹³ Not only *sola fide*, but four other *Solas* appeared after the proclamation of the 95 postulates was affixed. During these five *Solas*, it is characteristic of Protestant doctrine. According to Luther, personal faith is the main indicator of being justified before God.¹⁴ With justification, it means that man has received the grace of salvation (*sola gratia*), where this *sola gratia* is only found in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (*solus Christus*), so that the people give thanks for the salvation they have received (*soli Deo gloria*).¹⁵ Indeed, the five *Solas* are interrelated and rooted in the doctrine of salvation.

¹¹ Tony Lane, *Runtut Pijar: Sejarah Pemikiran Kristiani* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016), 117.

¹² Lane, *Runtut Pijar*, 126.

¹³ Robert Kolb, "The 'Heidelberg Theses' of 1518: A Milestone in Luther's Theological Maturation," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 4 (2017): 16, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt21-4-03>.

¹⁴ Natalie Watson, "Justified Before God: A Contemporary Theology," *Ecclesiology* 4, no. 3 (2008): 384-86, <https://doi.org/10.1163/174553108X341404>.

¹⁵ Stevri P. N. Indra Lumintang, *Theologia Reformasi Para Reformator Abad Ke-16 Dan Gereja Abad Ke-21*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Geneva Insani Indonesia, 2025), 7-9.

The Modern World After 1800

The concept of the metaverse is a phenomenon in the development of technology, which is not uncommon in human history. The world has undergone many changes, especially in the field of technology, throughout history. When compared to the past, the speed of technological change today has increased significantly, and it can even be said to be growing exponentially.¹⁶ A man named Tom Wheeler revealed an interesting fact: the time gap between major discoveries in history is accelerating. Wheeler notes that the distance between the emergence of Christianity and the invention of the Gutenberg printing press was about a millennium and a half. Meanwhile, the distance between the invention of the Gutenberg printing press and the invention of railroads and the telegraph is only about 400 years. Furthermore, the distance between the era of railways and the telegraph to the era of the digital revolution is less than 200 years.¹⁷ These developments not only affect the speed of technological innovation but also have a major impact on changes in the economic and social spheres.

The changes brought about by technology also have a significant influence on the life of the Church, whether they are realized or not. Billy Graham, a well-known revival figure, took advantage of technological advances such as radio and television to spread the gospel message. It is estimated that in 2005, the number of listeners and viewers of Billy Graham's sermons through radio, television, and the internet reached more than two billion people, about a third of the world's population, by the time he retired from public service.¹⁸ The use of technology was also used by Church reformers such as Martin Luther in his time to spread theological ideas. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed 95 theological postulates to the door of the Wittenberg Church, which became an important milestone in the Reformation movement.¹⁹ Luther's use of the printing press allowed for the widespread dissemination of his thoughts, changing the face of the Church and the theology of the time.

The reform movement pioneered by Martin Luther was supported by the invention of the printing press at that time. Before Luther's era, the Catholic Church had complete control over the production of books, so the spread of new theological thought was limited to the local sphere only.²⁰ However, in Luther's time, after the

¹⁶ Salomo Sihombing and Gerald Moratua Siregar, "Teologi Marsiadapari: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Lokal Dalam Perspektif Robert J. Schreiter Atas Hermeneutika Galatia 6:2," *KAMASEAN: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 3, no. 1 (June 2022): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.34307/kamasean.v3i1.106>.

¹⁷ Tom Wheeler, *From Gutenberg to Google: The History of Our Future* (Massachusetts Avenue, WA: Brookings Institution Press, 2019), 21-22.

¹⁸ Darrell L. Bock and Jonathan J. Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church: Pitfalls and Possibilities (Or How to Think Biblically about Church in Your Pajamas, VR Baptisms, Jesus Avatars, and Whatever Else Is Coming Next)* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2021), 23, <https://www.logos.com/product/218897/virtual-reality-church-pitfalls-and-possibilities>.

¹⁹ Lane, *Runtut Pijar*, 133.

²⁰ Robin Vose, *The Index of Prohibited Books: Four Centuries of Struggle over Word and Image for the Greater Glory of God* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), 8-9.

invention of the printing press in 1450, the Catholic Church's monopoly on book production and printing began to weaken and eventually disappeared. A few years earlier, in 1508, a commercial printing house had been established inside the monastery where Luther lived. It became a center for the dissemination of information that transformed Luther, an initially unknown monk from Wittenberg, into a prominent reformer as the first preacher to make massive use of print media.²¹

Learning from these two historical figures demonstrates that the proper use of technology can significantly impact the Church and the spread of Christianity. From a historical theological perspective, the development of technology brings changes in how the Church communicates and serves, and it affects theological understanding and practice. Church history shows that every technological advancement, from the printing press to the internet, has brought new challenges and opportunities for the Church in carrying out its mission.²² Therefore, the Church is called to respond continually to technological developments with wisdom while remaining firmly rooted in the theological truths that have been passed down throughout history.

The Digital Era of the 20th Century: Challenges of the 21st Century in the Digital Age

The digital era requires proficiency in communication and critical thinking to master three key literacies: technological literacy, data literacy, and human literacy. The vast array of literacies available today exists in the virtual world, as limitless as the stars scattered across the sky, accessible to anyone. However, this boundless information is a mixture of truth and imitation. Therefore, the ability and expertise to analyze and utilize it for the good and advancement of human knowledge are essential.²³ The impact of technological advancements is widely felt by children, teenagers, and young adults both positively and negatively. Edy Wagino recognizes that many young people today prefer virtual worship over in-person gatherings.²⁴ This shift occurs because the convenience of technology and its features have significantly narrowed physical engagement, reducing interactions to mere fingertip movements.

Mark Zuckerberg introduced an innovative communication medium that integrates three advanced technologies: Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI), giving birth to the concept of the metaverse. This

²¹ Jessica Elizabeth Abraham and Junifrius Gultom, "Gereja Metaverse: Memetakan Tantangan Dan Peluang Gereja Di Era Post-Digital," *KURIOS* 9, no. 1 (April 2023): 158–68, <https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v9i1.488>.

²² Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa, "Misi Dan Pandemi: Historiografi Dan Spiritualitas Misi Di Masa Krisis," in *Berteologi Dalam Sejarah: Masa Lalu Memanusiakan, Masa Depan Yang Purnakala*, ed. Asteria Aritonang and Sylvana Apituley (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2023), 120–29.

²³ Lakawa, "Misi Dan Pandemi," 122.

²⁴ RedaksiSpektrum, "Kata Pdt. Edy Wagino Soal Gereja Metaverse dan Ibadah Online," *Majalah Spektrum*, March 20, 2022, <https://majalahspektrum.com/2022/03/20/kata-pdt-edy-wagino-soal-gereja-metaverse-dan-ibadah-online>.

technology is predicted to bring significant changes in how humans interact and connect in the future. Metaverse is a simulation of an artificial world that provides experiences like the real world, but in digital form. This technology allows users to engage in various activities just like in the physical world, such as communicating, conducting transactions, attending events, and building communities. The existence of the metaverse offers immersive experiences that enrich the way people socialize and participate in social life digitally.²⁵ Furthermore, the metaverse has the potential to revolutionize various industries, including entertainment, healthcare, and real estate. For instance, virtual concerts and digital tourism experiences allow users to explore new places without leaving their homes. In healthcare, VR-based therapy and training simulations for medical professionals are becoming more advanced. Meanwhile, the real estate sector is leveraging the metaverse for virtual property tours, enabling buyers to explore homes before making a purchase decision. The presence of the metaverse offers an innovative and transformative shift in how people socialize, conduct business, and engage in everyday activities. As technology continues to evolve, it will be crucial to address ethical, privacy, and security challenges to ensure that the metaverse remains a safe and inclusive digital space for all.

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The development of digital technology has brought significant changes in the way communities interact and carry out spiritual activities. One growing phenomenon is the online church, where faith communities gather, pray, and communicate through digital platforms. According to Christopher Helland, online churches not only provide live streams of worship services but also create interactive spaces that enable congregants to engage in discussions, pray together, and serve virtually.²⁸ The

²⁵ Shafa Dynastia El Amirurrahmah, Faiha Zakha, and Nushrotina Bayani, "Metaverse Integration in Higher Education Curriculum: A Systematic Literature Review," *Hipkin Journal of Educational Research* 1, no. 2 (August 2024): 177–88, <https://doi.org/10.64014/hipkin-jer.v1i2.20>.

²⁶ Abraham and Gultom, "Gereja Metaverse," 160–62.

²⁷ Amirurrahmah, Zakha, and Bayani, "Metaverse Integration in Higher Education Curriculum," 178–80.

²⁸ Christopher Helland, "Digital Religion," in *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research* (London: New Media Worlds, 2016), 164–66, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31395-5_10.

presence of online churches challenges the traditional concept of faith community, which has relied heavily on physical gatherings in one location. Online Church offers new opportunities for individuals unable to attend in-person services, such as those living in remote areas, the elderly, or those with physical disabilities. However, this phenomenon also raises questions about whether virtual relationships can completely replace physical gatherings in building spiritual community. Helland asserts that online Church can be an important tool for expanding the reach of Church ministry, but it still requires an approach that considers aspects of engagement, intimacy, and emotional support between congregants.²⁹ Thus, online Church is not just about technology, but also about building authentic and meaningful relationships within the faith community.

Nadja Miczek's article in the book *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, in chapter 19, discusses faith and even conducts worship virtually.³⁰ This opens opportunities for everyone to deepen their understanding of faith in a more personal and flexible way, without the constraints of time and space. The internet becomes a space where individuals can discuss theological issues, share spiritual experiences, and engage in religious teaching. In this context, negotiation occurs when users actively choose, modify, or implement practices they also encounter online. This also fosters the potential for greater individualism.³¹ Therefore, the internet has become a space where faith can be strengthened but also tested through continuous interaction and negotiation between tradition and personal experience.

The Spirit of the Reformation with the Five Solas

The Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther and other reformers, built a solid foundation for Christian theology through five main principles known as the five *solas*: *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*. These interrelated principles form the main foundation for understanding the Christian faith that is centered on God and the salvation He provides.³² As time goes by, especially with the emergence of the metaverse Church, which relies on digital technology and the virtual world for worship and congregational interaction, the teachings of the Five *Solas* remain relevant for addressing various theological challenges and practices of faith that are developing in the digital realm.

²⁹ Helland, "Digital Religion," 164–69.

³⁰ Nadja Miczek, ""Go Online!" Said My Guardian Angel": The Internet as a Platform for Religious Negotiation," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, 1st ed., ed. Heidi Campbell (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 215–22.

³¹ Helland, "Digital Religion," 215–19.

³² Stevri P. N. Indra Lumintang, *Theologia Reformasi Gereja Abad XXI: Gereja Menjadi Serupa Dunia* (Jakarta: Geneva Insani Indonesia, 2017), 79–93.

Sola Scriptura

Sola scriptura affirms that the Bible is the only source of truth and the highest authority in Christian teaching. According to R.C. Sproul, the Bible is the only authority for the Christian faith and rejects the authority of Church traditions that are not based on Scripture.³³ The same thing was stated by Tim Chester in his writing about *Reforming Joy: A Conversation between Paul, the Reformers, and the Church Today*, which departs from the theology of Paul and the Reformers, where the Scriptures are used as the basis for teaching faith.³⁴ During the Reformation, Luther strongly rejected dependence on tradition or Church authority that had no basis in Scripture. In the context of the metaverse Church, this principle becomes very important considering the many interpretations of the Bible that can be freely disseminated in cyberspace. With high access to information, there is a risk of spreading teachings that are not the truth of the Bible. This is what Heidi A. Campbell criticizes in the introduction to a book titled *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, that every era has its challenges in maintaining the authority of the Scripture, especially today in the digital world and the metaverse Church.³⁵ Therefore, the metaverse Church must ensure that teaching remains based on Scripture, emphasizing a correct and authoritative understanding to prevent theological confusion among the congregation.

Sola Fide

The principle of *sola fide* teaches that salvation is obtained only through faith in Jesus Christ, not through good works or human effort. The same thing was expressed by Urbanus Sukri that faith is the primary means of receiving salvation as a pure gift of God, where humans cannot obtain it through their own efforts or deeds, but only through complete trust in the redemptive work of Christ.³⁶ The Bible itself defines faith as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). Faith becomes a solid foundation for every hope and becomes the certainty of the divine reality that has not been seen with the naked eye and becomes the only means to receive justification before God. Luther emphasized that faith is the key to receiving

³³ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, 7th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 26.

³⁴ Tim Chester, *Reforming Joy: A Conversation between Paul, the Reformers, and the Church Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 10–13.

³⁵ Heidi A. Campbell, “An Introduction to Digital Ecclesiology: What Does a Conversation on Digital Ecclesiology Look Like?,” in *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (Digital Religion Publications, 2020), 3–4, <https://ethosinstitute.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Free-E-book-DIGITAL-ECCLESIOLOGY.pdf>.

³⁶ Urbanus Sukri, “Sola Fide Sebagai Dasar Berpikir Teologis Orang Kristen,” *Excelsis Deo: Jurnal Teologi, Misiologi, Dan Pendidikan* 7, no. 1 (June 2023): 45–56, <https://doi.org/10.51730/ed.v7i3.138>.

the gift of salvation from God.³⁷ In a virtual environment where interactions often occur digitally, there is a challenge in building authentic and deep faith. Without strong physical interaction, there is a risk that spiritual experiences become shallow or merely formal. As expressed by Pargament, spirituality also does not lie in one belief, practice, or experience, nor does it lie only within the individual, because spirituality is more than just a person's quality; spirituality is a person's quality in interaction with broader situations and contexts.³⁸ Therefore, the metaverse Church must strive to create communities that are spaces for genuine faith growth, building meaningful relationships, and encouraging active participation in spiritual life.

Sola Gratia

In line with *sola fide*, *sola gratia* affirms that salvation is entirely a gift from God, not the result of human effort. Salvation is a gift from God alone, not the result of human effort or deeds. This concept is closely related to the teachings of the Reformation, pioneered by Martin Luther, who rejected the idea that salvation could be earned through good works or practices such as indulgences.³⁹ Sinful humans cannot save themselves, and it is only through God's grace that salvation can be received (Rom 5:1-2; Eph 2:8-9). In the context of the metaverse, where one's identity can easily be manipulated or hidden, it is important to emphasize sincerity in receiving God's grace. The Church must teach that grace is not just a virtual experience or a formality of online worship, but a real experience that involves hearts and lives being transformed by God's love.

Solus Christus

Solus Christus affirms that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity (1Tim 2:5-6). Salvation cannot be obtained through any other mediator, but only through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.⁴⁰ In a digital world that offers access to diverse philosophies and ideologies, the metaverse Church faces the challenge of keeping Christ at the center of its faith. Darlene Fozard Weaver emphasized that the pluralism that develops the virtual world can cause a shift in the focus from Christ to concepts that seek to equate Him with other ideas.⁴¹ Therefore, the metaverse Church

³⁷ Stephen Chester, "It Is No Longer I Who Live: Justification by Faith and Participation in Christ in Martin Luther's Exegesis of Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 55, no. 3 (July 2009): 315-37, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002868850900023X>.

³⁸ Kenneth I. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 384.

³⁹ Pintor Marihot Sitanggang, *Sola Gratia: Rekonsiliasi Sang Rekonsiliator*, 1st ed. (Bandung: Widina Bhakti Persada, 2021), 24-27.

⁴⁰ Lumintang, *Theologia Reformasi Gereja Abad XXI*, 90-91.

⁴¹ Darlene Fozard Weaver, "Christian Formation and Moral Pluralism: Challenges and Opportunities," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2020): 27-39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819884551>.

must reaffirm that salvation is only found in Christ, ensuring that every teaching and act of worship remains centered on Him.

Soli Deo Gloria

The teaching of *soli Deo gloria* instructs that everything done by believers must be aimed at the glory of God alone. Sproul emphasizes that the entire Christian life must be dedicated to the glory of God alone.⁴² Luther noted that every aspect of life, whether work, worship, or daily actions, must reflect the glory of God.⁴³ In the context of the metaverse, there is a risk that worship can turn into mere entertainment or an attractive visual experience, but lose spiritual depth. Therefore, the Church must ensure that all digital activities are genuinely aimed at glorifying God, not just attracting attention or meeting the expectations of the virtual world. Technology must be directed to strengthening faith and deepening relationships with God, not just creating spectacular virtual experiences.

The Five *Solas* are not stand-alone theological doctrines but form a complementary whole that provides a comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith. *Sola scriptura* is the foundation for all other principles, ensuring that all teachings are in harmony with biblical truth. *Sola fide* and *sola gratia* affirm that salvation is a gift of God received through faith, while *solus Christus* emphasizes that Christ is the only way to salvation. All of this is ultimately for the glory of God alone, as emphasized in *soli Deo gloria*. In facing the challenges of the metaverse Church, these principles must remain the primary guideline so that the Christian faith remains strong and unshaken by the changing times. With creativity, wisdom, and perseverance, the metaverse Church leaders can ensure that the five *Solas* remain relevant in the digital world, guiding their congregations toward the truth and a God-centered life.

Dialogue of 16th-Century Theology with Challenges of 21st-Century Theology

Sola Scriptura (only the Bible) vs. Digital Authority in the Metaverse Church

The metaverse Church, as a new phenomenon in the digital era, offers a virtual worship space that challenges traditional understandings of community, sacraments, and divine presence. *Sola scriptura* (only the Bible) vs. digital authority in the metaverse Church. Reformation theology, pioneered by Martin Luther in the 16th century, affirmed the principle of *sola scriptura* as the foundation of Christian faith. Luther argued that the Bible is the only supreme authority that guides doctrine, morality, and congregational life, rejecting the authoritative claims of Church tradition

⁴² Sproul, *Faith Alone*, 114–16.

⁴³ Scott Hendrix, "Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, 1st ed., ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–48.

that are not based on the word of God.⁴⁴ The Protestant Reformation, with its enthusiasm to restore the authority of the Bible to the people, encouraged the translation of the Scriptures into languages that could be understood by the laity. Thus, the principle of *sola scriptura* not only frees the people from hierarchical Church authority but also affirms that every individual has direct access to God's truth through His word.⁴⁵ In the context of the 21st century, technological advances have brought a new dimension to accessing and interpreting the Bible. Today, the Bible is no longer limited to print media but also comes in digital, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) forms. Churches in the metaverse create more interactive and immersive worship experiences, allowing people to read, hear, and even "experience" the Bible narrative in a virtual space. With this technology, God's word can reach more people globally, without physical and geographical boundaries.

However, this development also raises theological challenges that need to be examined, considering Reformation theology. One fundamental question is whether the digital Bible has the same authority as the printed Bible. The principle of *sola scriptura* asserts that the authority of the Bible does not lie in its format but in the content of God's word itself. However, in a dynamic digital world, texts can be changed, manipulated, or interpreted freely without clear theological control. How can the metaverse Church ensure the authority and integrity of the Bible in virtual space? *Sola scriptura* as the final authority in both printed and digital forms remains the only source of absolute truth. The metaverse Church must ensure that the word of God accessed in digital form remains faithful to the original text, without manipulation or interpretation that deviates from correct theological principles. The importance of correct biblical exposition, as was done by the reformers, through interpretations based on the original text. The metaverse Church needs to develop a hermeneutical system that can guide people in understanding the text of the Bible in virtual space, avoiding extreme subjectivity or distortion that can occur in the digital world. Luther not only encouraged personal reading of the Bible, but also in the context of a community that builds each other up and rebukes one another. The metaverse Church needs to create a theological accountability mechanism to ensure that biblical teaching and understanding remain on the right track, rather than being trapped in the growing digital relativism.

One of the spirits of the Reformation is to challenge authority that deviates from the word of God. In the digital era, the emergence of non-biblical teachings in the virtual Church must be closely monitored. The metaverse Church must examine and ensure that every use of technology remains subject to the authority of the Bible. Although

⁴⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 140.

⁴⁵ Roland Herbert Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon: Cokesbury Press, 2013), 60–61.

digital technology and the metaverse bring great opportunities to spread God's word, Reformation theology still demands that the authority and integrity of the Bible be strictly maintained. The principle of *sola scriptura* remains the mainstay in facing the digital era, ensuring that the word of God remains the center of the Christian faith, without being distorted by rapid technological developments. Therefore, the metaverse Church must commit to upholding Reformation values in the digital environment, maintaining the purity of God's word, and guiding the congregation to remain rooted in unchanging truth.

Sola Fide (by Faith Alone) vs. Faith in Virtual Space

Sola fide (by faith alone) vs. faith in virtual space, 16th-century Reformation theology asserted that salvation comes only through faith in Christ, not through works or religious rituals. Martin Luther and other reformers rejected the idea that humans could earn salvation through their efforts or the sacraments administered by the Church.⁴⁶ Instead, the reformers emphasized that faith is a personal response to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This conviction is rooted in the principle of *sola fide* (by faith alone), which asserts that true faith arises from a personal relationship with God, not as a result of human intermediaries or Church institutions.⁴⁷ In the context of the 21st century, especially with the emergence of the metaverse Church, the way humans experience and express faith is undergoing a significant transformation. Worship and faith interactions now occur not only in physical gatherings but also in virtual spaces, where religious experiences can be interactive, immersive, and collective. The metaverse Church offers new opportunities to share the Gospel more widely and reach previously unreachable people. However, a profound theological question arises: Does faith expressed in virtual space have the same value as faith expressed in physical communion? In the Reformation, faith was not merely a rational confession or an emotional experience, but a genuine engagement of the heart and soul with Christ. In the metaverse Church, there is a risk that faith can become something more simulative than transformative, where interaction with God's word and the Christian community is more experiential than spiritually profound.

The metaverse Church also faces the challenge of facilitating personal faith growth in a fast-paced and distracting digital environment. The Reformation emphasizes the importance of personal spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading, prayer, and reflection on God's word. In the virtual space, it is necessary to ensure that the experience of faith does not rely solely on visual or interactive elements but is also rooted in the authentic word of God.⁴⁸ One of the strengths of Reformation theology is its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, meaning that each individual is

⁴⁶ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 227.

⁴⁷ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 154–63.

⁴⁸ Helland, "Digital Religion," 1–3.

responsible for living and developing his or her faith personally. The metaverse Church must ensure that technology is used as a tool to deepen people's relationship with Christ, not simply to create an attractive but superficial worship experience. This requires a wise pastoral approach that encourages people to not only experience worship virtually but also to live out their faith in real life. While the metaverse opens up new possibilities for the Church to reach more people, the principle of *sola fide* continues to remind us that faith is not just a digital or collective experience, but a genuine and personal relationship with God. The challenge for the Church in the digital age is to ensure that the faith expressed in virtual spaces retains the spiritual depth, engagement with God's word, and real-life transformation that the Reformation emphasized.

Sola Gratia vs. Grace in the Digital World

The theology of the 16th-century Reformation asserted that salvation is a gift from God alone and cannot be earned through human effort. The principle of *sola gratia* rejects any attempt by humans to "buy" salvation through good works, the law, or Church rituals. Reformers such as Martin Luther emphasized that humans are completely dependent on God's grace, freely given through the sacrifice of Christ.⁴⁹ This contrasts with the view that humans can participate in determining their own salvation through specific works or Church systems. In the context of the 21st century, with the rise of the metaverse Church, new challenges arise in understanding and living out God's grace. Digital technology often creates the illusion of control and independence, leading humans to believe they can control everything through innovation and creativity. The digital world provides unlimited access to information, including theological teachings, so that individuals can choose and customize their faith experiences according to personal preferences. In an era where autonomy and personalization are core values, the question arises: how can the metaverse Church teach about absolute dependence on God's grace? In digital culture, there is a tendency to see everything because of human innovation, including virtual worship, personalized spiritual experiences, and the increasing accessibility of God's word. However, *sola gratia* reminds us that salvation is not something that can be arranged, controlled, or adjusted by humans, but comes entirely from the will and grace of God. The metaverse Church needs to ensure that this message remains at the heart of its teaching, so that people do not fall into the trap of assuming that spiritual experiences "created" in virtual space are something that can replace God's free work of salvation.

In addition, another challenge in the digital world is the transaction mentality, where people are accustomed to thinking that everything can be obtained through effort, clicks, or subscriptions. The metaverse Church must affirm that God's grace is

⁴⁹ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 228.

not something that can be “accessed” or “bought” through engaging in digital activities but is an unconditional gift from God. Therefore, while technology provides incredible tools for spreading the Gospel, the Church must continue to remind us that salvation is not the result of digital interactions, but of Christ’s perfect work on the cross. In a world that increasingly emphasizes human independence and innovation, *sola gratia* remains a reminder that in all things, humans remain completely dependent on God’s grace. The metaverse Church has a responsibility not only to use technology as a means but also to guide people to live with the awareness that salvation does not come from efforts, achievements, or digital experiences, but only from God’s infinite grace.

Solus Christus vs. the Presence of Christ in Virtual Space

16th-century Reformation theology asserted that Christ is the only mediator between God and man. The principle of *solus Christus* rejects any additional mediators created by Church tradition, such as priests or sacramental systems that supposedly provide special access to God. Martin Luther and the reformers emphasized that salvation can only be obtained through Christ, not through the institution of the Church or any spiritual figure. Man’s relationship with God is direct, with Christ as the only way of salvation and eternal life.⁵⁰ In the digital age and the emergence of the metaverse Church, new challenges arise regarding how the presence of Christ is understood and experienced in virtual space. In the physical environment, the presence of Christ is often felt through congregational fellowship, sacraments, communal prayer, and the proclamation of the word of God. However, in the digital world, Christ is usually represented by avatars, symbols, or immersive visual elements. This raises a profound theological question: can the presence of Christ be authentically felt in virtual space? The digital world, however, has given rise to a tendency to replace reality with simulation, in which aspects of faith are expressed through digital representations.

The challenge for the metaverse Church is to ensure that virtual experiences do not replace the actual reality of faith. Christ cannot be reduced to a mere avatar or digital element in a virtual world; his presence must still be understood in a spiritual context that transcends the boundaries of technology. The metaverse Church must be careful that technology does not take center stage, replacing Christ himself. The Reformation taught that Christian faith does not depend on external media or symbols but on the reality of Christ living and working in the heart of every believer. Therefore, while technology can help communicate the gospel in new and creative ways, the Church must ensure that its use remains subordinate to its primary purpose: to reveal Christ as the only true Savior and mediator.

⁵⁰ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 220.

The approach required is not simply to create engaging digital experiences, but also to ensure that the proclamation of the word, fellowship, and sacraments remain rooted in the true teaching of Christ. This means that while Christ's presence cannot be reduced to digital elements, people can still experience his presence in a real way through faith, prayer, the word of God, and a community faithful to the gospel. The metaverse Church has a responsibility to direct the congregation's focus to Christ, not to the sophistication of the technology used, so that the digital worship experience remains a means of bringing people closer to Him, not just a virtual experience that loses its true spiritual meaning.

Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone) vs. Glory in the Digital World

The theology of the 16th-century Reformation asserted that all things should be done for the glory of God alone, not for the glory of people, institutions, or ecclesiastical authorities. The principle of *soli Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone) reminds us that all aspects of life, whether in worship, work, or service, should be directed to God as the source and goal of all things. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin rejected all forms of self-glorification, whether in the form of excessive Church power or the seeking of human recognition for piety and good works. All honor and praise are due to God alone, not to individuals or ecclesiastical structures.⁵¹ In the digital age and with the rise of the metaverse Church, new challenges arise in upholding this principle. Technology and innovation often take center stage, replacing the primary focus on God. Churches in virtual space can easily get caught up in technological competition, trying to create the most engaging, most interactive, or most futuristic worship experience. There is a danger that the beauty of graphics, the sophistication of systems, and digital innovations outshine the real presence of God.

The tendency to self-promote, both individually and institutionally. The metaverse churches can be tempted to focus more on building their digital identity, following, and online interactions than on ensuring that everything is truly leading to the glory of God. Another challenge is how to maintain the authenticity of worship so that it does not turn into just another digital entertainment or human-centered virtual experience. To stay true to the principle of *soli Deo gloria*, the metaverse churches must ensure that technology serves as a means, not an end. The use of digital media should be directed toward proclaiming the gospel and bringing people into a deeper relationship with God, not to increase the popularity of a particular Church or leader. Every innovation must always be evaluated considering the question: Does this truly glorify God, or does it simply glorify humans and technology? The Church also needs to instill a strong theological awareness in its digital community, teaching that God's glory does not depend on how sophisticated or exciting a worship experience is, but on

⁵¹ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 229–30.

obedience and faithfulness to God's word. Worship in the metaverse churches must remain rooted in the truth of the gospel, not simply an impressive exploration of digital aesthetics. *Soli Deo gloria* remains a reminder that the church, whether physical or virtual, must always place God at the center and the goal. Technology must be managed humbly and wisely, used not to build human kingdoms but to bring glory to the living God who is sovereign over all.

4. Conclusion

The principles of 16th-century Reformation theology, especially the five *Solas*, remain relevant in facing the challenges of the metaverse Church in the 21st century. *Sola scriptura*, which affirms the authority of the Bible, is now transforming print to digital, requiring the metaverse Church to maintain its integrity and correct interpretation amidst the risk of distortion and extreme subjectivity in virtual space. The theological principles of the 16th-century Reformation, particularly the five *Solas*, remain relevant in facing the challenges of the metaverse Church in the 21st century. *Sola scriptura*, which affirms the authority of the Bible, has now undergone a transformation from print to digital, requiring the Church to maintain its integrity and correct interpretation amidst the metaverse risk of distortion and extreme subjectivity in the virtual space. *Sola fide*, in contrast, when faith, which should be a personal response to God's grace, is expressed virtually and collectively, it has the potential to become merely a simulation and not show holistic transformation in the lives of the congregation. The metaverse Church needs to develop a pastoral approach that ensures authentic faith growth in the digital world. *Sola gratia* is confronted with a digital culture that emphasizes independence and instant accessibility, with the risk that God's grace is perceived as something that can be "accessed" through digital interactions. The concept of the Church needs to emphasize that salvation remains entirely dependent on the metaverse God's grace, not on human experience or effort.

The concept of *solus Christus* is challenged when Christ's presence is represented through avatars or digital elements, requiring the metaverse Church to ensure that Christ remains the center of worship, not replaced by technology. *Soli Deo gloria* is challenged by the tendency to focus on digital innovation, which can potentially distract from the glory of God. The metaverse Church must use technology to glorify God, not as a tool for self-promotion or innovation competition. The principles of Reformation theology remain relevant in the digital age, but the metaverse Church must navigate new challenges wisely, ensuring that digital innovation does not displace core Reformation teachings. By remaining grounded in God's word, faith, grace, Christ, and the glory of God, the Church can utilize technology responsibly without losing its theological identity.

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