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Theology of Giving as Comprehensive Lutheran Theology

Risto Saarinen

The Lutheran Reformation was born from controversies around the problematic practices of the Western church in Luther’s times. Lutheran confessional writings reflect the outcome of these controversies. This well-known state of affairs means that Lutherans do not possess a comprehensive body of theological doctrine, as the normative Book of Concord remains eclectic. The Lutheran doctrines of justification, the Word of God and the sacraments clearly belong to the core of normative doctrine, but many other theological teachings are only very rudimentarily treated in the Book of Concord. Over the centuries, Lutheran theologians have developed strategies to overcome this deficit. These strategies can be understood as a continuous quest for the missing parts of doctrine. My own roadmap in this quest can be labeled as “theology of giving,” a strategy which aims at reaching a comprehensive picture of doctrinal theology from the perspective of one prominent and pluriform theological concept.¹

In the following, I will first outline some strategies of constructing systematic doctrine, connecting them with the current theological discussion on giving and the gift. Then I proceed to the so-called “giver-oriented perspective” and the broader semantics and epistemology of “give” and “receive”. After this I can provide a model of comprehensive doctrine, formulated in terms of giving. Finally, I will discuss the ultimate conceptual horizon, the so-called “transcendentals”, of this comprehensive Lutheran theology.

I. Strategies of Doctrine and Theology of Giving

One popular strategy is to maintain that the doctrine of justification, properly understood, contains everything; it constitutes the criterion of all other doctrines and everything else can be derived from this doctrine. The problems of this approach are obvious: it would be strange to claim, for instance, that the Nicean doctrine of the Trinity could be derived from the Lutheran doctrine of justification.²

Another and in many ways more promising strategy consists in claiming that Lutherans should only take their distinctive doctrines from the Lutheran confessions; in all other doctrinal matters they should follow the biblical, patristic and medieval Christian teaching. While this strategy is often applied in the ecumenical dialogues of the Lutheran churches, it also contains some problems. Dogmatic ecclesiology, for instance, was not developed before the Reformation. In order to compare Lutheran and Roman Catholic ecclesiologies, one needs to turn to the post-Reformation developments.

A third strategy would complement the second one through paying attention to early modern, Enlightenment and late modern doctrinal developments, claiming that Lutherans need to relate their doctrine to modern developments. The problems of this strategy are found in the growing plurality of doctrines and their relative lack of normativity. There are

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² For an extensive treatment of this paradigm, see BIRGITTA KLEINSCHWÄRZER-MEISTER, In allem auf Christus hin: Zur theologischen Funktion der Rechtfertigungslehre, Freiburg 2007.
simply too many opinions and teachings available in order to establish one coherent body of normative doctrine.

A fourth strategy maintains that the missing parts are nevertheless inherently present in the historical body of doctrine, even when the explicit doctrine remains rudimentary. Although the Lutheran confessions do not contain an elaborate doctrine of God or the Trinity, we can nevertheless extract this doctrine through a close reading of relevant texts. The themes available in the text can be amplified so that a comprehensive body of doctrine emerges. In this manner, some central ideas or motifs available in the normative texts are like the stem cells in human body: they are pluripotent, that is, they can become different kinds of organs and members of the comprehensive body.

The fourth strategy is common in 20th-century theology. In reading the standard monographs of Luther’s theology by Paul Althaus or Gerhard Ebeling, for instance, we can detect the influence of this strategy. Its problem is that many different comprehensive theologies can emerge from the same body of historical texts. The historical texts underdetermine the doctrine; in other words, some extra-textual, additional systematic principles are needed to complement the historical picture.

My own way of formulating a comprehensive Lutheran theology consists of a mixture of the second and the fourth strategy. There are some thematic cores in the historical sources which allow us to draw a great number of doctrinal conclusions. In order to do this, the thematic cores should be amplified partly by referring to earlier history, partly through employing systematic tools of analysis. In an ideal case, these two auxiliaries come together so that the systematic tool can be claimed to have been available in the sixteenth century. Its historical availability makes its use more plausible: the tool is not merely a modern invention, but something that was already present in the world of the text.

The concept of giving exemplifies the above-mentioned ideal case: on the one hand, a contemporary analysis of these concepts allows to see a number of systematic connections between different theological themes of the Reformation. On the other hand, it is often also possible to argue that the philosophy of gift, generosity and giving was available for the Reformers through various ancient sources, most notably through Seneca and Augustine. The systematic connections thus have a historical plausibility, although the connections are here and now outlined in a systematic fashion. Through a systematic amplification of the notions of gift and giving, a comprehensive outline of Lutheran theology is attempted.

This project belongs to a greater current of new thinking about the gift. At least since the 1980s, we can observe two distinct, although nowadays interrelated academic discussions on the theological significance of the gift. The central figure of the first discussion is the French Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. In many books he has outlined a phenomenological view of reality which appears to us in terms of givenness and, finally, donation. In his discussion with philosophers like Jacques Derrida and theologians like John Milbank Marion has claimed that it is possible to solve the old paradoxes related to »free gifts« when we meditate the phenomenon of giving something anonymously to an enemy. In Marion's paradigm of gift-giving the economic interests of the giver and the

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3 PAUL ALTHAUS, Die Theologie Martin Luthers, Gütersloh1962; GERHARD EBELING, Luther: Einführung in sein Denken, Tübingen 1964
recipient can be counteracted so that an idea of disinterested giving emerges. As this paradigm is obviously relevant to the ideals of giving expressed by Jesus in the New Testament, Marion's phenomenological analysis of giving has prompted much recent discussion especially in Catholic theology.  

In addition to Marion's approach, there exists a significant new discussion on the gift in Lutheran theology. It was initiated in the 1980s by three Luther scholars, namely, Martin Seils, Oswald Bayer and Tuomo Mannermaa. In his keynote address in the World Congress for Luther Research in Erfurt 1983, Martin Seils interpreted »Luther's Cause« in terms of a consistent theology of giving. For Seils, this interpretation is primarily a historical observation which gives Luther's theology its distinctive systematic structure. Already in 1981, Oswald Bayer elaborated the topic of of »categorical gift« as a basic theme of Lutheran theology. According to Bayer, Lutheran ethics should not proceed from categorical imperative but from God's unconditional gift which contains the plenitude and excess which forms the basis of the freedom of the Christian. Bayer's numerous elaborations on the categorical gift and the freedom it constitutes can in many ways be regarded as a Protestant counterpart to Marion's wrestling with givenness and donation.

Tuomo Mannermaa pays attention to the presence of Christ in the faith of a Christian. Luther often expresses this presence in terms of a gift, donum. For Mannermaa, this presence of the personal gift means that Luther's theology is »realistic« or »real-ontic« in its basic character. While in Marion's phenomenology the understanding of reality as donation means that God is not »being« in any metaphysical sense, Mannermaa wants to bring about an ontological reinterpretation of Protestant theology. Without denying the different approaches of the two authors, the final difference between Mannermaa and Marion may nevertheless be nominal rather than real. They both aim at making room for a meaningful concept of God so that the discussion between philosophy and theology can proceed in new and fruitful ways. In this sense both Mannermaa and Marion aim at liberating the theological concept of God's gift from the inner-religious ghetto of modernity. Although Mannermaa, like Seils, understands his study of Luther as historical interpretation, he finally aims at reaching a broader systematic concept of theological ontology.

In contemporary Scandinavian theology, the elaboration of the gift has on the one hand taken place among Mannermaa's Finnish students, including myself, on the other hand in the extensive work of Bo Kristian Holm and Jan-Olav Henriksen. Bo Holm has connected the two above-mentioned discussions, claiming that the Lutheran discussion can

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7 MARTIN SEILS, Die Sache Luthers, Lutherjahrbuch 1985, 64-80.


also learn about the broader sociological and anthropological elaborations of the gift. Jan-Olav Henriksen has linked the two discussions with Christology and postmodernity, arguing that the experiential reality can be understood as a certain type of givenness in which »everything is gift«.

II. The Giver-Oriented Perspective and Its Epistemology

The so-called »giver-oriented perspective« allows us a new insight to the complex nature or human freedom, as it has been discussed in doctrinal theology. Western theology has traditionally formulated its doctrines concerning the human reception of God's gifts from the perspective of the recipient, discussing extensively the limits of human freedom in appropriating this gift. In this discussion it has often been considered more adequate and more valuable to minimize human freedom, so that Augustine is considered more orthodox than Pelagius, Luther more orthodox than Erasmus and Calvin more orthodox than Arminius. But if in this discussion the recipient's activity is always minimized, he or she is no longer regarded as personal subject, but only as an addressee which can receive in an inanimate fashion, like the mailbox receives a letter. The anti-Pelagian strive of Western theology thus constantly threatens to downgrade the recipient so that he or she is nothing more than an inanimate container into which the »gift« is put.

But if we use the view of God as giver and call the »thing« God gives a gift, then it follows that the recipient needs to be animate. For the linguistic constructions of which »give« is a constituent depict a transfer between two persons: I give this book to you, but I put the book into a bookshelf. A giver-oriented perspective pays attention to this basic linguistic fact, arguing that the minimizing of the activity of the recipient has a certain limit beyond which we cannot proceed without losing completely the vocabulary of giving and the gift.

The meaning of »receive« thus needs to be understood from the perspective of »give«. We may compare this requirement with the practise of taking photos of timid objects: if we point at them directly, they do no appear natural; but if we point the camera to a mirror which indirectly shows the timid object, we may achieve a better result. This argument is to some extent puzzling, since it actually claims that we can understand the meaning of the verb »receive« better when we look at it from the perspective of another verb, namely, »give«. How can this be? Isn't it strange and counterintuitive to claim that a word can be properly understood only by looking at it from the angle of another word?

In his extensive linguistic study of the verb »give«, John Newman explains this phenomenon as follows: »... we can assume an identical base for both receive and give. With receive, however, only part of that base is profiled: the one involving the interaction

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14 Cf. SAARINEN, God and the Gift, 8-14.
15 Cf. SAARINEN, Im Überschuss, 77-79.
of the 'recipient' and the 'thing'. For Newman, the complete semantical base of these two verbs involves the giver, the thing and the recipient and their interaction in the process in which the thing is transferred from the giver to the recipient. Although the initiating part of this base is not profiled in the verb receive, Newman concludes that it is still the case that the 'giver' initiates the whole process, of course.\(^\text{17}\)

If we believe Newman's linguistic explanation, we can argue that the analysis which employs the verb »give« as its starting-point is likely to achieve better results than the analysis proceeding from »receive«. »Receive« only illuminates a part of the semantical base which is at stake when the above-mentioned process of transfer is concerned. While both »give« and »receive« depict the same process, »receive« only captures a part of that process. Therefore, a giver-oriented perspective is more adequate to grasp the whole process. Some idiomatic usages support this conclusion. In English, for instance, »receive« can be used so that the »receiver« need not be person but it can be something inanimate, like a radio or a mailbox.\(^\text{18}\) Such inanimate uses of »receive« may contribute to the downgrading of the activity of the animate recipient.

Newman's explanation can, therefore, indirectly support a theological view in which the phenomenon of »giving« has a perspectival priority over the phenomenon of »receiving«. This is important, since so many modern discussions on theological epistemology are concerned with the conflict between »Kantian« and »Barthian« modes of doing theology. According to »Kantianism«, we need to focus on the anthropological preconditions of receiving knowledge, while in »Barthianism« we give God's self-revelation a priority over all anthropological considerations. The linguistic priority of »giving« over »receiving« lends at least some support to the view of »Barthianism«.\(^\text{19}\)

Without connecting the »giver-oriented perspective« with the entire programme of Barthianism, we need to look at the problem of human reception from the perspective of giving rather than receiving. This decision does not solve all difficult problems of theological epistemology, but it pays attention to the fact that the vocabulary of giving has a broader semantic and epistemic profile than the vocabulary of receiving. This linguistic fact thus serves as epistemic justification of the giver-oriented perspective in theology.

The fascinating theological consideration which the giver-oriented perspective offers is the following: can it be that so much of Western theological reflection has been misguided in its orientation towards receiving rather than giving, or anthropological preconditions rather than God's donative self-revelation? If Western theology had focused on the phenomenology of giving, it would have been able to employ the whole semantic profile of the transfer of a thing from a giver to the recipient. Eastern Christian theology has fared better in this respect. Its elaboration of human freedom has not proceeded from the free decision of the will, but rather from the distinction between the different capacities (exousia) of humans, animals and inanimate objects. At least since Origen the Eastern theology has considered humans (and, to a lesser extent, other animals) in terms of autexousion, self-control, and aph heauton, self-movement. These features have distinguished humans from lower animals and inanimate objects.\(^\text{20}\) The vocabulary of

\(^{17}\) Newman, Give, 51.


\(^{19}\) The Barthian theme of self-giving (Hingabe) has recently been highlighted by Werner G. Jeanrond, A Theology of Love, Edinburgh 2010, 120-134.

self-control and self-movement underlines the animate character of humans irrespectively of whether they appear as givers or recipients, as agents or patients. This vocabulary is, therefore, better compatible with the entire semantic basis of giving and receiving than the Latin anti-Pelagian vocabulary. In particular, the Eastern vocabulary allows humans to appear as animate persons in the position of recipient and patient. Therefore, the Eastern vocabulary can express the freedom of persons without the danger of Pelagianism.

III. Giving as the Seed of Comprehensive Doctrine

Let us now return to the strategy of developing doctrine through the method of growing them from the seeds, or, to use a contemporary picture, the pluripotent stem cells available in the theology of giving. Our point of departure, the principium, is the undifferentiated verb »give«. All particular and narrower meanings of giving proceed or emerge from this origin. The emergence of meanings stretches to two different directions. There is, first, the direction of »give and take«, or the »economic« wing of giving. These meanings involve strong reciprocity and the balancing of accounts; the »recipient« does not appear so much as patient as someone who in turn becomes an agent; conversely, the giver receives something in this reciprocity.

Second, there is the direction of »give and receive«, or the »donative« wing of giving. These meanings only involve a weak reciprocity; they underline the monergic nature of giving. The recipient appears as patient to whom one can say: »what do you have that you have not received« (1. Cor. 4:7), meaning that the process of reception is not active but the act of accipere takes place as a passive reception of the gift. In the act of donative giving, the giver does not appear as recipient; there is no economy of give and take, but a monergy of giving. This monery need not, however, downgrade the recipient into an inanimate addressee. The recipient can express gratitude and become empowered by the gift received.

The philosophical and sociological discussion on gift-giving has to a large extent focused on the theoretical possibility of »free« or »completely disinterested« practises of gift-giving. In terms of my model, such possibilities would exemplify extremely donative variants of giving. My suggestion is, however, that the so-called pure gift or, in Oswald Bayer's terms, the »categorical gift« is found in the middle ground between complete economy and extreme donation. Speaking in this manner, a »pure gift« need not be entirely donative or monergic, but it can be manifest both the unconditional attitude of the giver and the genuine freedom of the recipient. While this definition of pure gift clearly differs from the approaches of Derrida and Marion, it may be consonant with Bayer's elaboration of the categorical gift. It may also resemble some elaborations of Milbank and Holm.

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21 On accipere, see in more detail RISTO SAARINEN, The Language of Giving in Theology, Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 52, 2010, 268-301. One starting-point of the Western use of 1 Cor. 4:7 is Augustine's Ad Simplicianum 1 q 2; cf. EKKEHARD MÜHLENBERG, Augustine in: Religion Past and Present 1, 498-503, here: 501.

22 For the philosophical problems and solutions of this trend, see e.g. JACQUES DERRIDA, Given Time I: Counterfeit Money, Chicago 1992 and DERRIDA, The Gift of Death, Chicago1995; JEAN-LUC MARION, Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift, in: MEROLD WESTPHAL (ed.), Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought, Bloomington 1999, 122-143; CAPUTO, God, the Gift.
concerned with the so-called »purified gift-exchange«. At this point, however, my own concern is not so much the relationship to other models but the inner consistence of this outline of theological giving.

I am presupposing that »give« is a basic verb in many languages, including the biblical languages and that in these languages many other meanings are derived from the undifferentiated and pluripotent »give«. Concerning the New Testament Greek in particular, I assume that when the verb didômi receives meanings like paradidômi »hand out«, it grows towards economical reciprocity. The verb »send« accompanies »give« in its donative wing of extended meanings. Thus verbs like the Greek aphiêmi and the Latin remitto, »send away, forgive« can be understood as donative extensions of giving. A particularly complex chain of meanings is attached to verbs which describe teaching. On the one hand, the handing out of tradition (Greek: paradosis, Latin: traditio) is clearly reciprocal and in some sense economic: the gift is also a task which is to be handed out by means of new teaching of the same tradition. On the other hand, the teaching involved in proclamation and witness need to be understood in terms of donation: the listeners receive a gift which is not meant to impose immediate duties and tasks on them. Witness and proclamation thus exemplify donative modes of teaching.

To make visible the parallels between the economic and donative modes of same kinds of gift-events, such as teaching, I use the level of differentiation from undifferentiated »give« to the pure event of »categorical giving«. This methods yields a two-dimensional matrix of giving: while the poles of economy and donation define the horizontal dimension, the differentiation from basic »give« towards »categorical giving« constitutes the vertical dimension. The matrix thus appears as follows:

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give-and-take«                                                                 give-and-receive«
give (didomi)                 giving to    send (away)

witness

hand over (paradidomi)

tradition (paradosis)

bribe, payment

release

forgive
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24 For the linguistic grounding of this, see NEWMAN, Give.

25 See in more detail SAARINEN, God and the Gift.
The matrix allows us to distinguish between economic and donative variants of theological giving. The different variants are not, as a rule, »pure« but they contain both donative and economic aspects. Atonement and redemption, for instance, only make sense if we understand them in terms of some kind of reciprocity and even as »payments«. This is also true of justice and righteousness: justice needs pay attention to some kind of balancing the accounts between the agent and the addressee, the giver and the recipient of harms and benefits. At the same time Christian theology emphatically teaches that atonement, redemption and justice should not be understood as completely separated from grace and forgiveness. In order to be Christian notions, these theological concepts need to contain the reality of that gift which God gives in the merciful turning towards humans. Although atonement and redemption belong to the »economic« variants of theological giving, they also point towards the donative aspects of divine mystery.

The matrix attempts to illuminate how two different concepts, donation and economy, can nevertheless be »twins« in the sense that they in many cases manifest the same vertical depth of giving. The act of handing over the tradition, for instance, presupposes a complex economic network of reciprocity. The proclamation of the word in witness and teaching, on the other hand, exemplifies a relatively »pure« act of donation: I can teach many people.
without losing myself the knowledge I am transferring to them. In this sense, teaching can be a donative horn of plenty which is multiplied beyond measure. And yet, both the economic handing over of tradition and the donative, unilateral proclamation manifest the phenomenon of teaching. The same or at least similar phenomenon can proceed in both economic and donative variants.

When the vertical depth increases, the matrix proceeds towards that pure gift or categorical giving which contains both economic and donative purposes. While the undifferentiated »give« first exemplifies the concrete act of »giving to«, the deeper variants of giving are interpreted as instances of »giving for«, that is, acts which highlight the intention and the purpose of the act performed. Thus pure gift and categorical giving are not exemplary in their economical or donative nature, but their purity is found in the clarity and depth of their intention and purpose. »The gift« appears in the middle of vertical depth, as it contains both the concrete act of giving to and the intention. In order to be a gift, the thing given needs an intention of the giver, otherwise the recipient cannot distinguish it from other, externally similar transactions. But the concrete handing out of the thing is also important: we do not say, for instance, to our children in Christmas that you only receive my goodwill. The essence of the gift is to be situated in the middle of the matrix, representing both economy and donation, both the concrete act and its deeper purpose.

Among the deeper teleological variants of »giving for«, one can identify the phenomenon of sacrifice. Sacrifices belong typically to the so-called »tritransitive« acts in which the agent exercises an influence upon three objects: the thing or gift given, the recipient and the beneficiary. Because of this tritransitive structure, the purposes of »giving for« are particularly important in sacrificial acts. At the same time, sacrifices presuppose some kind of economy: by giving something to a recipient, the agent wants to obtain a reward for the beneficiaries concerned. But sacrifices are also donative, since the agent gives a gift without necessarily obtaining a reward for himself or herself. Sacrifices thus appear fairly close to the end point of the matrix, the pure gift. They do not, however, represent pure gift or categorical giving as such, since the clarity of the agent's intention may not reach the ideal. It can be asked, though, whether divine sacrificial act, such as the Father's giving of the Son for our salvation, reach this clarity, thus becoming an instance of categorical giving.

Hospitality and long-term aid also exemplify such acts of »giving for« in which the clarity of intention and purpose are highlighted. They are primarily donative acts of giving, but some economical reciprocity also belongs to the picture. While in aid programs the aid is given unilaterally, the manifold and complex considerations of the recipients are also important: it is not only the need of the recipients, but their human dignity and their responsibility as partners which are being discussed in the planning of aid programs. Acts of hospitality are likewise primarily donative and secondarily economic: the giver needs to act generously, but also with due consideration, and the recipient is at least tacitly called to return the favors in some way. Human acts of help and hospitality thus approach the end point of pure gift, but they cannot reach the utmost clarity of intention and purpose needed in it. It can be asked, though, whether donative divine acts, such as the forgiveness of sins or the self-giving of the Son in the eucharist, reach this clarity, thus becoming instances of categorical giving.

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26 This focus on the purpose of giving is my own addition to the discussion on the philosophy of the gift. Linguistically, it is related to the so-called »domain of human interest« which shapes some of the literal meanings of »give«, as NEWMAN, Give, e.g. 51-52, points out. For an extensive theoretical discussion, see SAARINEN, The Language.
It is difficult to discuss the nature of pure gift and categorical giving much closer. I use the concept of love to depict this nature: love is both economic and donative, love is meant to manifest the depths of both »give-and-take« and »give-and-receive«. The matrix primarily illuminates the emergence of different kinds of doctrines from the undifferentiated act of giving. We can see how different themes or loci of Christian doctrine grow organically from this act. There need not be anything particularly Lutheran in this process, but since many authors claim that Lutheran theology is fundamentally concerned with the issues of giving and the gift, Lutheran doctrine can at least be regarded as compatible with this matrix. While Lutheran theology may feel more at home in the donative wing of the matrix, it is also essential to claim that the gift contains the possibility of both economic and donative extensions.

If there is anything non-standard or innovative in the matrix, it is the position of the pure gift in the end point of »giving for«. While philosophical and theological discussion on the pure gift have tended to establish this ideal as the extreme end of donative reality, my matrix situates it in that far end of the conceptual realm in which the utmost clarity of intention and purpose elevates the gift beyond economic and donative considerations. The ideal of categorical giving is thus characterised by the excess and depth of purpose rather than by the excess of economic wealth or donative generosity. »Love« is a category which manifests this clarity, depth and excess of purpose beyond the economic and donative relationships which accompany it.

IV. Truth and Love as the »Transcendentals« of Doctrine

In some more speculative branches of Catholic theology, the so-called »transcendentals« are extensively discussed. In their pre-Kantian metaphysical guise, the transcendentals refer to those most common notions which are found beyond the categorical organisation of language. Being, oneness, truth, goodness and beauty are the most prominent transcendentals discussed in this manner. As being, truth and goodness/love also correspond to the biblical definitions of God, these transcendentals have high relevance for the interpretation of the world in terms of theological metaphysics or ontology. If theological doctrines are interpreted in ontological terms, the transcendentals offer a possibility to construct a metaphysical framework for the doctrinal development.

I am not proposing that a comprehensive understanding of doctrine inevitably needs the old view of transcendentals. Linguistic understandings of doctrine may be fully sufficient and provide fruitful ways of grasping the content of Christianity. While some Lutheran theologians, most notably Wolfhart Pannenberg and Paul Tillich, have attempted a metaphysical grounding of doctrine, others have consciously avoided this task. I will argue, however, that the transcendentals of truth and goodness/love offer a possibility to connect the theology of giving with metaphysical considerations. As these two transcendentals are also prominent biblical attributes of the trinitarian God (John 14:6 and 15:26; 1 John 4:6-8 and 5:6), we may employ them as theological coordinates of talk about God the Giver.

27 For the history of transcendentals, see JAN AERTSEN et al., Transzendentals, in: Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie 10, 1358-1436.
28 This line is developed in SAARINEN, The Language.
29 For their theology as part of this tradition, see e.g. W. SCHÜSSLER & B. HERBECK-PINGEL, Transzendenz, in: Theologische Realenzyklopädie 33, 768-775.
To illustrate the transcendentals of truth and love, I will use another figure with two dimensions, the horizontal proceeding towards truth and the vertical towards goodness or love. On the horizontal level, the opposite of truth is »indifference of truth«. One needs to add that the notion of »indifference« does not mean »lying« or »falsehood«, but simply that the transcendental value of truth grows from zero (indifference) towards the maximal value (truth). The two poles are also described with the acts of remembering (truth) and forgetting (indifference). In the vertical axis, the upper end is goodness or love, while the lower end denotes indifference to goodness and love. I will also use the vertical scale for the understanding of giving. While positive giving and donating are connected with goodness and love, the indifference to goodness or love is characterized as renunciation, deletion and sending away. Such phenomena of »negative giving« need not be bad or sinful; it is only meant that the acts of taking away and renouncing do not depict positive goodness or love in the same manner as the positive acts of giving and donation. While an act of renunciation may indirectly promote some goodness, its basic content does not connotate love and goodness in the same way as the acts of positive giving. In this sense we may speak of a relative indifference to goodness and love as the lower end of the vertical scale.

The connection between goodness/love and positive giving needs some elaboration in order to be properly understood. In his semantic study of »give« John Newman argues that the literal meaning of »give« very often involves and connotates some beneficial effect on the recipient. If I give something to you, you are normally thought to benefit from this act of giving. Although there are counterexamples, the normal and literal meaning of »give« makes the recipient in some sense also a beneficiary. If this linguistic and semantic observation is elevated on the metaphysical level, one can argue that the act of giving normally moves on the transcendental scale of benefiting the recipient. The act of love is similar in this respect: if somebody is loved, the recipient of love is normally supposed to enjoy and benefit from this act of love. Phenomenologists argue that the question: does anyone out there love me?, forms the starting-point of the reflection on love. Christian love is often conceptualized in terms of gift-love: agape is supposed to bestow a divine gift upon the recipient. Although these connections by no means establish a full-fledged synonymy between the phenomena of love, giving and goodness, there is a family resemblance which allows to draw the vertical line of goodness, love and giving.

Thus we obtain a two-dimensional matrix in which the horizontal line, depicting the transcendental of truth, stretches from forgetting towards remembering. The vertical line proceeds from the lower end of indifference and renunciation towards the upper end of positive giving, love and goodness. While the point of departure, the origo, characterizes an undifferentiated existence in half-truth and half-goodness, the upper right corner of the matrix depicts the positive existence in truth and love. When we describe Christian existence in light of these transcendentals, we may begin with an observation which is characteristically Lutheran: the way towards existence in love and truth starts with proceeding in the opposite direction, towards the lower left corner of renunciation and forgetting. This is because the forgiveness of sins is biblically characterized as »sending away« the sins, or as release and liberation, or, sometimes, as cleansing. In all these acts,
forgiveness starts with some kind of negative giving or sending away and with a relative forgetting or non-recognition of the existing sins.

The quest for love and truth thus starts with turning one’s back to these transcendentalis. Conversion, repentance and recognition that the secret of life is hidden under the opposite are needed. The quest for truth and love needs to start with a recognition of the paradox of our existence. At the same time it needs to be stated, however, that the real quest only starts from the lower left end of the matrix. The journey of repentance and conversion, leading to the point of forgiveness, only sets the initial coordinates of the real quest.

forgiveness as manifestation of these characterizations see HUBERT FRANKEMÖLLE (ed.), Sünde und Erlösung im Neuen Testament, Freiburg 1996.
goodness, love
goodness, love
positive giving, donating

flourishing
flourishing
charisms
charisms
existence in love
existence in love

sincere neighbourly love
sincere neighbourly love
justice and mercy
justice and mercy

forgetting
forgetting
remembering
remembering

indifference to truth
indifference to truth
truth
truth
Fig. 2: the transcendentals of truth and goodness

The moment of forgiveness and conversion leads the person towards truth or love. Although these two transcendentals are no opposites, they have an initial tendency to counteract and even reject one another, so that a person starts his or her quest either on the path of truth or on the path of goodness. The path of goodness and love leads towards the philosophical ideal of flourishing and the theological ideal of charismatic sanctification. In this ideal the person can affirm and enjoy his own existence and become an active subject. The sensitivity to objective truth may, however, remain underdeveloped; this lack may prevent the person from seeking justice and practising neighbourly love.

The other path leads towards truth without goodness and love. This path can be characterized as typically Lutheran, since it emphasizes the existence of the person as righteous and sinner. The person has sensitivity for his own sufferings and wrongdoings as well as for the injustices prevailing in the world. Memory of past wrongs, renunciation of superficial comforts and clear recognition of today's suffering are described in terms of a theology of the cross. The quest for truth without love also makes the person an active subject who often cares for others and is sensitive to all kinds of injustice. But as the sensitivity towards goodness and love remains underdeveloped, the person has difficulties to enjoy his or her own life and transfer goodness to other people. In this sense the neighbourly love also remains hampered in this mode of existence.

The matrix shows that neither the ideal of flourishing nor the ideal of »righteous and sinner« can be taken as the final purpose of our existence. People who flourish still need to work out the objective truth and memory with all its hardships. People who practise a theology of the cross need to affirm the scale of goodness and love. Although the transcendentals of truth and love resist one another during the initial phases of the personal quest, they are, finally, mutually supportive in realizing the ideals of neighbourly love, justice and mercy. The matrix also illustrates the nature of forgiveness as the cornerstone of Christian existence. Forgiveness is not merely something which takes place in the realm of values and thoughts, but it can be connected with metaphysics and foundations of human existence. But forgiveness is not everything: it sets the default values of humanity through pointing out that a person can, paradoxically, be affirmed precisely when he or she remains indifferent to truth and goodness. Realizing this should lead the person to the quest for truth and goodness.

In this manner fig. 2 attempts to lay out a structure for the doctrinal narrative which shapes Christian theology. While this structure remains far from exhaustive, one can argue that the two figures, taken together, outline a fairly comprehensive picture of prominent doctrinal issues. While fig 1 uses the undifferentiated »give« as a starting-point and a seed from which a number of doctrines are cultivated, fig 2 elevates the theology of giving to a metaphysical level through using the concepts of truth and goodness as transcendentals of doctrine. At the same time, the metaphysical outline is a narrative outline in which the Christian existence proceeds through several biographical stations. These stations have a paradigmatic value: they are not meant to depict an order of salvation, but they illustrate different conceptual options available in the Christian narrative.

V. Road Maps and Comprehensive Theology

A certain remaining tension between the concepts of »Lutheran doctrine« and »comprehensive theology« can be observed. If Lutherans want to contribute to the broader discussion concerning Christian doctrine, they should not remain parochial or
particularistic, but show how a truly catholic and apostolic theology can be grown from a Lutheran seed or stem cell. The end result may reveal some inherited features of the original seed or cell, but it should above all be capable of integrating and including diverse features of the entire Christianity into its consistent and understandable body of doctrine. Although the road map of confessional Lutheranism only contains some highways, this road map should be so reliable that it can be used as a basis of extensive cartographic developments.

I have argued that the theology of giving is a genuinely Lutheran theological theme which can provide the extensions and developments needed for a comprehensive Christian theology. The end result need no longer be particularly Lutheran, although it contains some inherited features of the Lutheran seed which has been cultivated in the rich soil in Christianity. This view of doctrine has something in common with the strategies of doctrine outlined in the beginning of the paper, especially with the second and fourth strategy. The road maps drawn in figs. 1 and 2 lay out a doctrinal shape in which distinctively Lutheran seeds of doctrine are cultivated towards a universal theology which includes classical elements (second strategy) and new organic developments (fourth strategy).

The strategies described in the beginning of this paper fail, however, to grasp properly the inherent life of doctrinal theology. Doctrines do not grow by means of logical deduction, philosophical elaboration or legal promulgation of new sentences. The doctrinal development discussed in this paper rather resembles the biological reproduction of missing parts: many plants, for instance, can reproduce themselves from fragments. Tiny animal populations are often sufficient for the new beginning and future flourishing of the species. Fragmentary confessions may also be sufficient for the reproduction of the whole body of Christian doctrine.