

FINNISH LUTHER STUDIES: A STORY AND A PROGRAM

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Martin Luther is a figure of world historical dimensions, but today Luther and Lutheranism are often considered as parochial phenomena in world Christianity. Luther's thought and impact are closely connected with the emergence of German language and cultural practices; this connection has not enhanced the global popularity of Lutheranism. Theological Luther studies have remained predominantly German ventures, although prominent exceptions, like Roland Bainton and Heiko Oberman, can be named.

If we look at today's theological schools and fashionable discussion topics in the English-speaking world, Luther is either absent or his views are regarded as problematic. Communitarians, following Alasdair MacIntyre, tend to regard the Reformation as the beginning of problematic modernity.¹ The negative attitude towards Luther and the Reformation is even stronger in radical orthodoxy since, for John Milbank, Luther exemplifies the kind of nominalism which follows Duns Scotus and William Ockham and thus deviates from true Augustinianism.² Benedict XVI has recently stated that Luther preferred a subjective understanding of faith which differs from the Catholic concept.³

Luther is rejected by the adherents of patristic nostalgia, but he does not fare better among liberal postmoderns. Luther was a white male university professor who had anti-Semitic leanings, rejected Copernicus's astronomy and showed complicity with the worldly rulers. Some Luther scholars have argued that the Wittenberg reformer at least had Kierkegaardian or existential-philosophical ideas, but Kierkegaard himself denied this and stated that Luther was not capable of existential dialectics.⁴

Although Luther's thought still can play a positive role in some prominent social philosophies, these have not inspired much theological reflection. Charles Taylor's political philosophy is a good example of this kind. In his *Sources of the Self* Taylor considers that the Reformers initiated "the entire modern development of the affirmation of ordinary life."⁵

¹ MacIntyre, *After virtue*, 165-167.

² Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 110, 223.

³ Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 7.

⁴ Helmer, *The Global Luther*; Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*; Bornkamm, *Luther im Spiegel*, 95-100 (Kierkegaard) and 114-117, 156 (Kierkegaardian Luther scholars).

⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 218.

This is in many ways true and valuable, but at the same time the statement seems to confirm a certain dullness of the Reformation: it legitimized the middle-class lifestyle with its orientation towards family and consumerism. In *A Secular Age* Taylor links the Reformation with the “disenchantment” that took place in early modernity; the Reformation led to the “new 'police state' which undertakes to organize the lives of its citizens in rational ways.”⁶ In this manner the Reformation was not so much an exciting theological project as a forerunner of modern secularization.

In view of all these dismissals of Luther and the Lutheran Reformation one needs certain boldness for claiming that Luther's theology is intellectually fascinating and contains exceptional resources. This is precisely what the present volume claims. The studies collected in this volume aim at showing in which sense Luther remains a fully Catholic and genuinely Augustinian theologian who is not so much a forerunner of problematic modernity as a representative of classical Christianity. At the same time, Luther's theology contains ideas which can be made fruitful in dialogue with currents like communitarianism or radical orthodoxy. Luther certainly has his faults and dark sides, but many of the accusations connected with his name are more due to the distorted picture given by biased research history.

In order to understand the claims which unite the contributors of this volume, one first needs to outline the “story” behind the new wave of Finnish Luther research. Obviously, the following narrative cannot as such legitimize the claims made in individual contributions, but it can make visible why and in what sense we want to liberate ourselves from much of the earlier research and why we want to connect Luther and the Reformation so closely with the patristic and medieval periods. The story also serves as a background to the theological “program” outlined in the second part of my essay. Although we have not developed our theological program in detail, our critics have repeatedly pointed out that a certain program is implied behind our historical studies. I believe that the critics are right on this point: we do have a program but we also have to work it out in more detail. The second part is my own attempt to outline such a theological program.

The Story

The study of the Reformation has seldom been a theologically neutral venture for the

⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 86.

Protestant churches. Confessionally committed scholars of Luther have traditionally regarded that a merely historical understanding of the Reformation is not sufficient. In addition to this, one should provide a theological legitimation of the constitutive ideas of the period. In European theology, this has traditionally meant that the Lutheran or the broader Protestant identity needs to be normatively defined so that it remains sufficiently distinctive from the Roman Catholic Church. If Catholicism is perceived as “medieval,” Protestantism is seen as “modern”; if Catholicism is defined by its “hierarchy,” Protestantism defends “democracy.”

The confessional writings of the Reformation period, as well as the decisions of the Council of Trent, paved this way of doing theology already in the 16th century. The Lutheran Confessions outline not only the valid doctrine, but also the wrong opinions and practices of the opponents. The doctrinal condemnations of the Council of Trent proceed in a similar manner. Over the centuries, these texts became the normative source of information regarding the other part of conflict. For this reason, it does not always help if group B states: “this is not how we teach,” when the normative text of group A states that this is indeed the way B teaches. One hermeneutical problem of both Protestant confessions and the decisions of the Council of Trent is, therefore, that they define the doctrines of both insiders and outsiders, irrespectively of whether the outsiders approve of this definition.⁷

Some cracks in the confessional walls of the Reformation can be found in Anglicanism, which appreciates its Catholic heritage in ways which deviate from Continental European Protestantism. The Nordic Lutheranism of Sweden and Finland also exemplifies an ecclesiastical tradition which understands itself in terms of “Evangelical Catholicity.”⁸ In the Reformation, Sweden and Finland took over the Lutheran Confessions but preserved historical episcopacy and medieval dioceses. For centuries, they nurtured a Lutheran monoculture in the traditional dioceses.

While the Church of Sweden has, during the 20th century, moved towards an ecumenical understanding of the ecclesial communion, the Finns have often focused on the theological resources of Lutheranism. A new and important period in this regard was initiated when the ecumenically-minded Roman Catholic scholars started to study Luther in the 1960s. In the writings of Erwin Iserloh, Peter Manns, and Otto Hermann Pesch, Luther appears for the first time as a figure who in many respects continued the Catholic teachings of the Church and opposed a late medieval Catholicism which was no longer itself fully Catholic because it was

⁷ For this phenomenon, see Lehmann and Pannenberg, *The Condemnations*.

⁸ For the theological program of Evangelical Catholicity, see, e.g., Tjorhom, *Visible*

tainted by questionable practices and such new currents as Ockhamism.⁹

When Tuomo Mannermaa, Professor at the Faculty of Theology in Helsinki, initiated his study project on Luther in the early 1980s, he created close contacts with the Institute for European History in Mainz, Germany, of which Peter Manns was director. A generation of young Finnish theologians, many of whom are contributors in the present book, were supervised in Luther's Augustinian and Catholic background by Manns, while Mannermaa worked with them on Luther as an ecumenical theologian. Mannermaa also participated in the ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church. In this dialogue already in 1977 he presented his thesis that the Lutheran view of "Christ present in faith" offers a theological counterpoint and parallel to the Orthodox doctrine of theosis, deification.¹⁰

This thesis has become the most often discussed and contested point of Finnish Luther research. We shall return to it below, but need to state already here that the thesis belongs to a broader framework of which the dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy is only an aspect. Mannermaa's program, as it can be read from his other studies of contemporary theology¹¹ is critical of several features of modern Protestantism. In his view, the modern period has often replaced the content of doctrine, the sacramental presence of God and the personal encounter with the core (*res*) of theology with an existential experience regarding the phenomenal – or even epiphenomenal – traces of God. This is because the post-Kantian epistemological spectacles of modernity do not allow an encounter with the "ontology" of Christianity.¹²

In some respects Mannermaa follows Karl Barth's criticism of cultural and liberal Protestantism. He does not, however, share the Reformed and Barthian axiom according to which the finite cannot contain the infinite. He wants to affirm the Lutheran principle *finitum capax infiniti*, "the finite is capable of receiving the infinite," and thus claims that a genuine theological ontology, a study of divine being, is possible. The biggest obstacle for this ontology lies in the preconditions of modernity which have pushed theology and religion into the realms of value and phenomenal experience, thus denying the possibility of theological real presence. Because Eastern Orthodox theology has not embraced modernity as strongly as

Church, 21-37.

⁹ See Pesch, "Twenty Years" and Manns, *Vater im Glauben*.

¹⁰ See Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness*, 38-54; Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ*, vii-ix, 1-17.

¹¹ Mannermaa, *Von Preussen; Kontrapunkteja; Paralleleja*.

¹² Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther," 4-9; see also his *Von Preussen*.

Protestantism, it has preserved a healthier view of theological ontology.¹³

Although Mannermaa hardly ever quotes George Lindbeck, it may be proper to label his theological approach in terms of a Lutheran “postliberalism.” Lindbeck¹⁴ and Mannermaa are critical of the theological value of experience and consider language to relate to specified life-forms. In ecumenical and systematic-theological contexts, Mannermaa's students have often adhered to postliberal views. In Finland, Mannermaa is well-known for his moderately non-liberal stances in church politics: he opposed the Lutheran-Reformed *Leuenberg Agreement*, but supported the Anglican-Lutheran *Porvoo Agreement* and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. He supported women's ordination in the 1980s, but opposed the new Finnish Bible translation, claiming that a more literal translation technique is needed to preserve the doctrinal core of the Bible.¹⁵

This broader context shows that Mannermaa's Luther studies have not been driven by patristic nostalgia or ecumenical opportunism, but by an original variant of Lutheran postliberalism. The influence of Roman Catholic Luther scholars, in particular Peter Manns, has been considerable. Mannermaa wrote his doctoral thesis on Karl Rahner¹⁶ and was helped in this process by Karl Lehmann. Lehmann's subsequent activity as the Catholic bishop of Mainz and leading ecumenist has also left traces on Mannermaa's thinking. These reasons have contributed to the ecumenical interest of Mannermaa's younger colleagues and students, in particular Eero Huovinen and Simo Peura, who have focused on the Lutheran – Roman Catholic relationships.

As the present volume introduces Finnish Luther studies to readers beyond Scandinavia and Continental Europe, they should keep the historical context of Finnish Lutheranism in mind. Mannermaa's approach stems from a monoculture in which about 85 % of all Finns belong to the Lutheran church. For this reason, a more relaxed attitude towards Roman Catholicism can be assumed than is the rule in German Protestantism. The Lutheran bishops can still look at their dioceses as carriers of the entire Christianity in that region. Theology is nowhere made in a historical or sociological vacuum, but in Finland the monocultural context of Lutheranism is particularly influential. In earlier times this monoculture promoted confessionalism, but today it expresses a mixture of ecumenical generosity and, for better or worse, remaining self-confidence.

¹³ Cf. Mannermaa, “Justification and Theosis.”

¹⁴ See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

¹⁵ See Mannermaa, *Von Preussen* and his *Paralleleeleja*.

¹⁶ Mannermaa, *Lumen fidei*.

The postliberal attitude of Finnish Luther studies is thus in its own peculiar way a product of late modernity. It aims at being historically reliable and academically solid research within the context of a state university. In this context, confessional claims cannot be based on unquestioned authority, but rather they need to follow certain argumentative rules. The academic guise of the studies may sometimes confuse the theological expectations of a committed reader. At the same time it would be illusory to state that the historical claims would be theologically neutral because they appear in this academic environment. Mannermaa's realist approach is indebted to the German tradition of systematic theology which, while being strictly academic, also seeks to influence the doctrinal reflection of the church through making informed arguments concerning the nature and content of ecclesial teaching. In this sense it continues the tradition of theological Reformation study which does not remain in the refuge of historical neutrality.

In his seminal study, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus (Christ Present in Faith)* Mannermaa interprets Luther's doctrine of justification so that it contains the effective holiness present in Christians. This effective side is not, however, a meritorius property of human beings but the presence of Christ in faith. For this reason,

justification is not merely a new ethical or juridical relation between God and a human being. When a human being believes in Christ, Christ is present, in the very fullness of his divine and human nature, in that faith itself.¹⁷

While later Protestant theology tended to differentiate between justification and sanctification, Mannermaa claims that this union with Christ contains for Luther both terms and that they are, as a result, not really different from one another:

In faith, human beings are really united with Christ. Christ, in turn, is both the forgiveness of sins and the effective producer of everything that is good in them. Therefore “sanctification” – that is, the sanctity or holiness of the Christian – is, in fact, only another name for the same phenomenon of which Luther speaks when discussing the communication of attributes, the happy exchange, and the union between the person of Christ and that of the believer.¹⁸

Because salvation is in this way constituted by the real indwelling of Christ, human and divine, in the faith of the Christian, Mannermaa can state that Luther's

¹⁷ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 87.

¹⁸ *Christ Present in Faith*, 49.

doctrine of justification involves a way of thinking that can be described by using the technical term “divinization” or “deification.” The idea of divinization is present in Luther's theology not only as a term but also in content. Luther's idea of divinization finds succinct expression in his well-known sentence: *in ipsa fide Christus adest* [Christ is present in faith].¹⁹

In addition to this outline of justification, the German volume *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus* contains a thematic study titled *Zwei Arten der Liebe* (“two kinds of love”). This study reinterprets, in the light of Luther's theology, Anders Nygren's classic book *Agape and Eros*. While Nygren considered that the mystical union between Christ and Christian exemplifies a peculiar aspect of eros, Mannermaa claims that union with Christ exemplifies the divine love of agape. He is not, however, happy with Nygren's basic distinction but prefers to speak, in Luther's terms, of the distinction between human love and divine love. While human love is directed to pleasant and lovable objects, divine love creates the lovability of its object.²⁰

Although the initial difference between human and divine love is radical, the union of divine love with the Christian in faith can have a united concept of love as its final result. Given this, the Christian cannot only love his or her neighbor but also God:

When the person – in faith and through the word – unites with God who is love, then he or she unites in faith with divine love. Where Christ dwells within the Christian, this love is alive in him or her ... the love received in faith is not merely directed towards other people, but it also has God as its object.²¹

In this union of human and divine love, human love is transformed so that it receives the properties of divine love:

When the Christian participates in faith in God's love which prompts her to love both God and neighbor, this love which is active in her also displays features of divine love. It is an altruistic love which does not seek its own good. The Christian loves both God and other people with an altruistic, pure love ... For Luther, this love of God is pure when the person loves and praises God only for the sake of divine goodness, without any regard for the benefits which she receives from God.²²

Zwei Arten der Liebe shows, first, that Luther is not only a theologian of faith but also a

¹⁹ *Christ Present in Faith*, 49.

²⁰ *Der im Glauben*, 108-115.

²¹ *Der im Glauben*, 174 (my translation).

theologian of love who can formulate his insights in terms of a reorientation of love. Although this reorientation is critical towards some medieval understandings of the so-called order of love (*ordo caritatis*),²³ it also remains deeply Augustinian in its emphasis on the transforming power of divine love. Second, Mannermaa shows in this study that the dichotomies between human and divine love are not unbridgeable, pure “motifs,” as Nygren claimed, but aspects which belong to the broader transformative process. Third, this study connects the theology of justification with the dynamics of love, showing how the divine presence transforms human attitudes and conduct.

One particularly strong background reason for Mannermaa is the conviction that both modern German Protestantism and the confessional traditionalism have remained defective in their understandings of justification.²⁴ This key doctrine of Lutheranism has either been understood in purely forensic and externalist terms, or it was seen in the context of existential experience. Both of these alternatives fail to pay sufficient attitude to the realistic, or, in Mannermaa's terms, “real-ontic” character of salvation. In his characterisation of salvation as real-ontic presence of Christ in faith Mannermaa wants to affirm the continuation of classical sacramental soteriology in the Lutheran Reformation. At the same time he adopts Barth's criticism of modernity insofar as the concept of experience was concerned. The categories of “ontic” and “ontological” may echo his early study of Rahner, although Mannermaa remains critical of all modernist-existential interpretations of reality.

The further development of this approach was undertaken by Mannermaa's numerous students. My own book *Gottes Wirken auf uns* aims at consolidating the view that the earlier Protestant studies on “Christ present in faith” are highly problematic in their interpretation of this presence as a *Wirkung* (*a posteriori* consequence) of God's self-revelation. This interpretation does not allow for sacramental or ontological view of effective justification but, staying faithful to the anti-Catholic leanings of Protestant theology, regards Luther as a forerunner of the post-Kantian rejection of metaphysics.

My own research history in *Gottes Wirken auf uns* is limited to the period between 1880 and 1950, but the subsequent books of my colleagues apply, in their chapters of research history, my views to cover more recent relevant studies. More importantly, they investigate a great variety of significant topics to consolidate Mannermaa's approach. In his *Mehr als ein*

²² *Der im Glauben*, 175 (my translation).

²³ This has been worked out in Raunio, *Summe des christlichen Lebens*.

²⁴ Cf. Stjerna, “Editor's Introduction,” xiv-xv; Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ*, viii.

Mensch? Simo Peura tackles the difficult issue of deification in Luther. Although the Wittenberg professor employs the term only rarely, his theology of participation, transformation, conformity with Christ and Christian progress employs the idea of deification abundantly. Peura also argues that Luther's views in this respect did not undergo sharp changes after the beginning of the Reformation.²⁵

Antti Raunio's *Summe des christlichen Lebens* analyses Luther's interpretation of the Golden Rule (Matt.7:12, Luke 6:31) by using Mannermaa's insights concerning the twofold character of love. Raunio argues that the Golden Rule primarily expresses the dynamics of divine love in which God is seen as the giver of everything good. Although one can, to an extent, set oneself in the place of the other by means of natural reason, the loving application of the Golden Rule is only possible for Christians because Christ has first fulfilled its demand and does so continually as present in the heart of the believer through faith. Thus the Golden Rule is, fundamentally, a theological principle of ethics. Earlier studies that have either made the rule autonomous or denied its significance have failed to pay attention to the complex interaction of theological principles and natural dynamics.²⁶

The Finnish approach was further consolidated in three German collections, *Thesaurus Lutheri*, *Luther und Theosis* and *Luther und Ontologie*, in which also European scholars comment on Mannermaa's views. The Mannermaa Festschrift, *Caritas Dei*, as well the first American collection, *Union with Christ*, broadened the discussion to the English-speaking world. The dissertations of Sammeli Juntunen and Pekka Kärkkäinen apply the Finnish theses to new theological realms. Olli-Pekka Vainio's study, our first monograph written in English, shows that the paradigm of "participation in Christ" is relevant not only for Luther but also for the broader development of the doctrine of justification in the 16th century.²⁷

The further continuation of the story can be told by referring to the European and American reception of Finnish studies. For some German Luther scholars, the Finnish approach is not Protestant enough and can therefore be dismissed; other voices demand a more historical grounding of the theses.²⁸ The most thorough German criticism has been

²⁵ In addition to *Mehr als ein Mensch?*, see also Peura, "What God gives."

²⁶ In addition to *Summe des christlichen Lebens*, see also Raunio, "Natural Law."

²⁷ Juntunen, *Der Begriff des Nichts*; Kärkkäinen, *Luthers trinitarische Theologie*; Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ*.

²⁸ On the early German reception, see Saarinen, "Die Teilhabe an Gott." Among later German criticisms, Wenz, "Unio" and Mahlmann, "Unio cum Christo" are particularly valuable.

presented by Reinhard Flogaus; he echoes many other German voices in saying that the concept of substance is employed by the Finns in a sense which brings a problematical “ontological added value” to the concept of divine gift in justification.²⁹ At the same time Flogaus affirms the need for ontology in theology. He thinks that Protestant theology can basically relate positively to theosis, provided that it is understood in terms of “participation in the love revealed in Jesus Christ.”³⁰ Although Flogaus in this way reduces the ontological concept of Mannermaa, he also remains in constructive discussion regarding the possibility of theological ontology and theosis.

Among other constructive European Protestant voices, Karsten Lehmkuhler has investigated the history of the doctrine of divine inhabitation in great detail. He shows that inhabitation is not merely a Roman Catholic and Orthodox doctrine, but also plays a role in the Lutheran Orthodoxy as well as in Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Bonhoeffer.³¹ Bo Holm has developed many Finnish views in a highly original manner, claiming that Luther's theology can be understood as a theology of giving in which a relationship between the divine and human agent can be conceived in terms of reciprocity.³²

Several European Catholic theologians have commented on Finnish research. Reinhard Messner states that Mannermaa's approach is ecumenically fruitful. In his textbook on the Reformation, Angelo Maffei regards the Finnish studies as helpful corrective to the prevailing Protestant views, although he also warns of making Luther a completely systematic thinker. Pedro Urbano connects the Finnish research with the late medieval context of Augustinian mysticism. At the same time he states that Luther's strong dualism of flesh and spirit remains difficult for many Catholics. In this manner the Catholic reception has been constructive while also presenting critical theological issues.³³

A rich diversity of positions can be found in the American reception of Finnish studies. Some strictly Protestant authors, like Mark C. Mattes, have taken over the critical doubts of German scholars. Conservative Lutherans, like Kurt E. Marquart, have been positive to Mannermaa since his approach contains a criticism of liberal modernity and emphasizes the

²⁹ Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther*, 328-335.

³⁰ Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther*, 439.

³¹ Lehmkuhler, *Inhabitatio*.

³² Holm, *Gabe und Geben bei Luther*. Holm, “Nordic Luther Research” is a concise and insightful overview of recent Northern European scholarship.

³³ Messner, “Rechtfertigung und Vergöttlichung”; Maffei, *Teologia della Riforma*, 29-60; Urbano, “Christus in fide adest.”

salvific realism in manners which come close to the Lutheran Orthodoxy. In a thematic issue of *Westminster Theological Journal*, four American scholars present the Finnish studies to the Reformed readers. While they appreciate the connections made with the Pauline theology of participation, they also demand a more historical picture of the different shades of the Reformation.³⁴

Among other Reformed theologians, Carl Mosser states that not only Luther but also Calvin presents a theology of deification. This observation leads J. Todd Billings to a certain criticism of John Milbank's view of the Reformation. While Milbank claims that Luther was a typical nominalist and the Finnish Luther scholars cannot therefore make their point convincingly, Billings remarks that the doctrine of deification in Calvin provides possibilities for a genuinely Western language of participation. Allen Jorgenson defends Luther against Milbank's criticism. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, a Pentecostal scholar and pupil of Mannermaa, argues extensively that the doctrine of deification is also present in Pentecostal and Methodist soteriology and can thus provide opportunities for an inner-Western ecumenism.³⁵

The most positive reception process of Finnish studies has occurred in the Evangelical Catholic wing of American theology. This reception was initiated by Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten who edited the volume *Union with Christ*. Among their colleagues, Bruce Marshall develops the theology of transformation in Luther, using Finnish studies. David Yeago outlines a sacramental and ontological reading of Luther's theology. Jonathan Linman considers that the Finnish scholars have adequately met the contemporary need for Lutheran mysticism. Reinhard Hütter follows the Finnish criticism of German Protestant research and attempts to see Luther in the light of Patristic and Catholic theology.³⁶

One clear but also in many ways ambivalent background reason for the increased interest in Mannermaa's approach has been the ongoing debate on the nature of deification in Christian theology.³⁷ For many Protestants who follow the line from Ludwig Feuerbach to

³⁴ Mattes, *The Role of Justification*; Mattes, "A Future"; Marquardt, "Luther and Theosis"; Metzger, "Mystical Union"; Seifried, "Paul, Luther"; Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line"; Jenson, "Response."

³⁵ Mosser, "The Greatest," Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 110, 223; Billings, "John Milbank's Theology"; Billings, "John Calvin"; Jorgenson, "Luther on Ubiquity"; Kärkkäinen, *One with God*.

³⁶ Marshall, "Justification as Declaration and Deification," Yeago, "Luther on Grace," Yeago, "Ecclesia sancta"; Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*; Linman, "Little Christs"; Hütter, *Bound to Be Free*.

³⁷ See Finlan and Kharimov, *Theosis*; Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the*

Karl Barth, this doctrine is fundamentally problematic since it may lead to a non-Christian apotheosis in which the fundamental distinction between human and divine is blurred.³⁸ This has of course never been the intention of the Finnish scholars, but it remains to be debated whether the problematic side of theosis can be successfully avoided.

On the other hand, some defenders of theosis see the Finnish claims as threatening. Some Orthodox theologians want to show that the Lutheran approach cannot adequately grasp the depth of the Orthodox doctrine.³⁹ John Milbank likewise considers theosis to be an important doctrine. At the same time Milbank thinks that theosis cannot be adequately expressed in an early modern context.⁴⁰ Among Catholic theologians, Gösta Hallonsten argues that the Western theology cannot contain the Orthodox view of theosis in its totality but only some fragments of it.⁴¹ In spite of all this vivid discussion on deification, it should be emphasized that the story of new Finnish Luther studies should not be reduced to the debate on this one topic.⁴² Theosis is but the tip of the iceberg which moves in a new direction under the Northern waters.

The Program

Given this story, how can the actual theological program of Finnish Luther studies be outlined in more detail? Let us start from Pope Benedict XVI whom we mentioned above as one of Luther's contemporary critics. In his encyclical letter *Spe salvi*⁴³ Benedict lays out the correct understanding of Hebr. 11:1: "Faith is the substance [*hypostasis*] of things hoped for; the proof [*elenchos, argumentum*] of things not seen." It is important for Benedict that faith already brings the proof of things hoped for. Thus these things are not merely in the future:

Precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this "thing" which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not "appear"), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic

Divine Nature.

³⁸ See the discussion in my *Gottes Wirken auf uns*.

³⁹ Tselengides, *He Soteriologia* (German summary in Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther*, 416-420); Briskina, "An Orthodox View."

⁴⁰ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 64-74.

⁴¹ Hallonsten, "Theosis in Recent Research."

⁴² For my own account, see Saarinen, "Theosis."

⁴³ The following quotations are all from *Spe salvi*, 7.

reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence.

Benedict comes close to Mannermaa's understanding of Christ present in faith: salvation is not merely subjective or eschatological, but it carries an ontological significance here and now. Benedict further underlines the importance of *hypostasis* or substance as an initial and dynamic reality. Faith is, therefore, not subjective conviction but an objective "proof." Benedict, however, regards Luther's view as diametrically opposed to the Catholic reading of Hebr. 11:1:

To Luther, who was not particularly fond of the Letter to the Hebrews, the concept of "substance," in the context of his view of faith, meant nothing. For this reason he understood the term *hypostasis*/substance not in the objective sense (of a reality present within us), but in the subjective sense, as an expression of an interior attitude, and so, naturally, he also had to understand the term *argumentum* as a disposition of the subject.

This is the standard Protestant interpretation put forward by Gerhard Ebeling. He interprets Luther's early Augustinian dialectics between "in hope" (*in spe*) and "in reality" (*in re*) so that there is no present holiness but everything lies in the future. Erwin Iserloh expresses a Catholic view, pointing out that Luther's Augustinian phrase does not deny the initial reality of salvation.⁴⁴ Benedict reads Hebr. 11:1 in this manner. Unlike Iserloh, however, the pope believes that the subjective reading of Hebr. 11:1 stems from Luther. Benedict emphatically refutes Luther's alleged view:

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a "proof" of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a "not yet." The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.

⁴⁴ Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, 24-25, 33-35. Iserloh, "Existential Interpretation." They discuss in particular Luther's interpretation of Hebr. 11:1 in WA 3, 279, 30-32 (*First Lectures on the Psalms*).

The pope's reading of Luther is backed not only by Protestant scholars like Ebeling, but also by those conservative Catholics who think that Luther adheres to problematic subjectivism.⁴⁵

The Finnish scholarship, however, sets out to prove that, first, Luther's theology is ontologically richer and contains an effective view of justification as the presence of things hoped for, and, second, that the subjectivist picture of Luther to a great extent stems from the anti-Catholic prejudices of modern Protestantism. In his *Mehr als ein Mensch?* Simo Peura investigates in detail the theological background of *in spe* - *in re* dialectics. On the basis of Luther's *First Lectures on the Psalms* – the very text discussed by Ebeling and Iserloh – Peura concludes that

For Luther, the person who is *pars Christi* or *sors Christi* is already in this life partially “divine.” This partial, ontological understanding of deification takes place in a real fashion, because God himself ... becomes “a part” of the person, when the person participates in Christ. But this participation is not yet fulfilment. ... The definition that the Christian is now healed *in spe* and in the future life *in re* does not deny the reality of that effective becoming righteous which has already been initiated.⁴⁶

In Luther's own words, the dialectics of presence and hiddenness can be expressed as follows:

That in the holy of holies there was no light, signifies God to be present in the Church via the faith of Christ in their hearts, that does not comprehend and is not comprehended, does not see and is not seen, but still sees all things. It is a powerful “proof” [*argumentum*] of present, but “not visible things” [Hebr. 11:1]. Likewise the Ark of Covenant was present in the holy of holies, but was not visible, because the Tabernacle was around – in the middle of which at the holy of holies the very seat of God was – as is said in Ps. 46 “God is present in the middle of the congregation,” so that they cannot be shaken, as this and similar prophecies state.⁴⁷

This ontological understanding of hidden presence comes very close to the pope's own teaching in *Spe salvi*. While Benedict thinks that Luther is opposed to this understanding, the Finns rely on the Catholic nature of Luther's theology and maintain that only the modern Protestant interpretations need to be refuted. In this sense, the program of Finnish Luther

⁴⁵ Especially Hacker, *Das Ich im Glauben*, plays here a role. For the relevance of this study in papal thought, see Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 277.

⁴⁶ Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch*, 81. My translation.

⁴⁷ WA 5, 506, 12-20. (*Second Lectures on the Psalms*)

research advocates a Reformer who is “Evangelical and Catholic.”

The burden of proof in this program is for a great part historical; therefore many studies in this volume proceed historically. Given the enormous quantity and pluriform character of Luther's texts the historical issue is complex: one can find prooftexts for different positions, and one needs to interpret a great amount of sources. This is precisely what Peura, Raunio, Juntunen, Kärkkäinen and Vainio have done in their monographic treatises. Our short introduction must, however, limit the discussion of the “program” to a brief and condensed outline.

We have already seen that the Finnish program revolves around the issues of justification, faith and love. Sacramental theology and fundamental ecclesiology are also considered as important.⁴⁸ The questions of ordained ministry, church order, canon law, and liturgy do not, however, play much role. In this sense the Finnish approach is not distinctively “high church,” although it advocates a return to many Patristic topics and sees Luther as a continuation of the ancient and medieval Church. The core of the program concerns salvation and life in Christ. Ontological and other philosophical issues are sometimes discussed in detail, but they are not treated for their own sake; rather, they are treated as related to this core. For this reason, the program is predominantly theological.

Is there an inner development or unfolding of the Finnish program? My conviction is that a fruitful paradigm cannot afford to remain stagnated, but rather that it undergoes a certain development. As far as I can see, no ruptures are found in Mannermaa's own texts. They are short and even laconic treatises which are impressive but remain in need of more elaboration. The monographic studies mentioned above perform much of this elaboration, explaining, for instance, in which sense the concept of substance is a theological concept, or how the Christian figure of the Golden Rule transcends a merely rationalist view of natural law.

At the same time we can perceive not only further elucidation but new developments. Recent collective volumes connect Luther's thinking with much broader currents of theology, philosophy, and the law.⁴⁹ Olli-Pekka Vainio's work modifies the view put forward in Mannermaa's early writings: while Mannermaa thinks that Luther remains in many ways distinct from Melancthon and later doctrinal developments, Vainio argues for a stronger

⁴⁸ See Huovinen, *Fides infantium*, Forsberg, “Die finnische Lutherforschung” and the contributions regarding the sacraments in the present volume.

⁴⁹ See Mäkinen, *Lutheran Reformation and the Law* and Kärkkäinen, *Trinitarian Theology in the Medieval West*.

continuation between Luther and the theologians behind the *Book of Concord*.⁵⁰

My own recent work likewise aims at moving in new directions. In *God and the Gift* I construct a systematic theology around the concept of the gift. This theology is employed in discussion with other contemporary approaches, for instance those of John Milbank. *God and the Gift* also aims at seeing some traditional issues of Reformation theology, for instance, freedom, reciprocity and forgiveness, in a new light. My own work on the concepts of forgiveness and gift has probably provided a basis for some differentiation between my own thinking and some earlier Finnish achievements. While Simo Peura strongly pleads for the unity of forensic and effective justification,⁵¹ I am more inclined to grant God's merciful favor a conceptual primacy over the *donum*, the effective fruit. I believe that a gift can only be identified as gift if we know the intention of the giver. Thus divine mercy and benevolence in a way precedes divine gifts.⁵² At the same time, however, I interpret forgiveness in more effective terms than has been customary in Finnish research.⁵³

In the following I will present a current version of the Finnish program as I see it. Although this version is based on Mannermaa's insights, it also represents a certain stage of systematic development. Five successive points are needed to characterize my version.⁵⁴ These points do not cover the ethical and political implications of Luther's theology. There are certainly such implications, and they deserve to be worked out in detail in other contexts. The five points only lay out the theological constitution of the gift which needs to be circulated.

1. Theology of the Gift: Basic Relations. The theological and sociological concepts of "gift" (*donum*) and "favor" (as act, *beneficium*, as benevolent attitude, *favor*) characterize divine action and interpersonal human activities in various ways. Although these concepts are frequently used in theological texts, they are seldom understood as *loci communes*, that is, as doctrinal points which would have their own entries in theological dictionaries or chapters in dogmatics. Gift and benevolence are normally understood as interpretative concepts which mediate between human experience and theological truth. As such they are often understood

⁵⁰ Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ*. For the same phenomenon, see also Mahlmann, "Unio cum Christo."

⁵¹ Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift," 56-60.

⁵² Saarinen, "Gunst und Gabe." See also below.

⁵³ Saarinen, "Forgiveness, the Gift, and Ecclesiology."

⁵⁴ Some, though not all, of the following topics are discussed in more detail in my *God and the Gift* as well as in "Gunst und Gabe" and "Forgiveness, the Gift, and Ecclesiology."

to be pedagogical concepts.

It would nevertheless be misleading to conceive “the gift” as a merely pedagogical or otherwise auxiliary notion. “The gift” belongs to a group of concepts and corresponding phenomena which constitute elementary theological concepts with the help of the idea of giving. Forgiveness and redemption, thanksgiving and some other forms of prayer, offerings and sacrifice, the processes of handing over and tradition, to name but a few, are among the phenomena which are conceptualized by means of giving. Caritative aid, hospitality, and generosity are also phenomena which relate to the concept of giving. The verbs denoting such action are called ditransitive verbs, because they take two objects, expressed through the relational places of gift and recipient.

Christian tradition has elaborated theological language which can adequately express the ditransitive and sometimes even tritransitive nature of giving. Ditransitive action presupposes the giver (A), the gift (B), and the recipient (C). At least since Augustine Christian theology has very consciously identified a fourth place in such relations, that of beneficiary (D). In the theological figures of sacrifice and redemption, for instance, A gives B to C in order that D may benefit from this act. A beneficiary is thus sometimes clearly distinct from the recipient, and we can say that the action, for instance sacrifice, is expressed by a tritransitive verb.⁵⁵

Augustine formalizes the logic of the gift⁵⁶ by employing the phenomenon of sacrifice. In sacrifice, A offers the gift (B) to the recipient (C) in order that the beneficiary (D) can profit from this act. The Christian theology of atonement and redemption is, obviously, highly dependant on the proper understanding of the distinction between the four relational places. The same protagonist can occupy two or even more relational places simultaneously. Augustine says in this context that Jesus Christ occupied all four relational places in the event of crucifixion: as God he was the giver and recipient of this sacrifice, as human being he belonged among the beneficiaries, as crucified he was the gift. Luther often employs the figure of Christ's self-giving: in the salvific act of self-giving, Jesus was both the giver and the gift.

⁵⁵ While “ditransitive” is commonly used in linguistics, “tritransitive” is a more tentative concept. Like Augustine, contemporary linguistics calls the third transitive position that of a beneficiary. See Kittilä, “A typology of tritransitives.”

⁵⁶ Augustine, *De trinitate* 4, 3, 19.

The understanding of the gift in terms of four-place relation is connected with another classical principle, formulated by Seneca, saying that an act of favor (*beneficium*) is identified through the intention of the giver and the awareness of the recipient rather than through any material circumstances of the act.⁵⁷ If you find my book laying on your table, you cannot know whether I have 1) given it as a gift, or 2) simply forgotten it there, or 3) paid back an old debt. Only your knowledge of my intention can reveal the true meaning of this act. This principle is also needed when the theological meaning of four-place relation is investigated. Normally, both the giver and the recipient should be favorable in order that the intended act of gift-giving can take place.

2. *Giver-Oriented Perspective.* This rudimentary understanding can be helpful in understanding various theological acts of giving. Because gift-giving presupposes an intention, both givers and recipients are normally portrayed as living persons. I give this book to you, but I put it on the bookshelf. The semantics of “giving” and “the gift” normally requires a living recipient, a feature which may be puzzling in some theological contexts. Lutheran theology in particular has been accustomed to think of the gift in terms of unilateral and non-meritorious act. Baptism, for instance, is understood as God's unilateral gift to the infant.

At the same time, however, all Christian theology teaches that baptism can only be administered to living persons. This is logical, since an act of gift-giving requires a living recipient. But it also means that some reciprocity is embedded in the very concept of the gift. A purely unilateral transfer cannot, for semantical reasons, qualify as giving. This paradox of gift and giving has received an extensive treatment in philosophical and sociological literature,⁵⁸ but its theological implications have remained poorly understood. We may call the awareness of this paradox and related phenomena a “giver-oriented perspective.”

In its discussion on freedom, Western theology has often preferred a recipient-oriented perspective in which the free will or some other capacity of the recipient is under scrutiny. Because of its focus on the recipient, this perspective has often favored a minimalist view of human freedom. Given this focus, Catholics prefer Augustine to Pelagius, while Protestants side with Luther and Calvin rather than Erasmus and Arminius. Examined from a recipient-oriented perspective, God's monergy and sovereignty tends to minimize human freedom.

⁵⁷ Seneca, “De beneficiis,” 1, 5, 1-2 and 1, 5, 5 as well as 1, 6, 1.

⁵⁸ See my *God and the Gift* and Kass, *Giving Well*.

We see the constraints of this framework in a comparison with Eastern Orthodoxy. The Orthodox churches affirm free will and synergy in salvation. But this Orthodox belief is not Pelagian. Basically, Orthodox anthropology claims that human beings have “self-determination” (*autexousion*), that is, humans are not machines and they are something more than animals.⁵⁹ The freedom implied by this view is one of responsiveness and responsibility, that is, an ability to react and initiate something as a response to the external world. At the same time, Orthodox theology is essentially God-centered and regards the human being from a theo-logical perspective. This is an essentially giver-oriented perspective, since it aims at understanding freedom not from an anthropocentric focus but from the theo-centric perspective of giving. In looking at human freedom in this sense indirectly, Orthodox theology manages to conceptualize freedom in ways which remain beyond the recipient-oriented scope of Western theology.

When the Finnish Luther studies focus on salvation as gift (*donum*), they have the possibility to focus on the gift-character of theological reality. This gift-character needs a proper perspective in order to be grasped adequately. The semantics of giving and the gift can lead towards this proper perspective. Freedom is but one example of a theological reinterpretation which can take place with the help of a giver-oriented perspective.

3. Recipients and Beneficiaries. Another many-sided feature in this regard concerns the distinction between recipients and beneficiaries. As we have seen, some tritransitive theological acts, most notably those of sacrifice and redemption, require this distinction. Its neglect can lead to a soteriology which does not understand the work of Christ properly. When the Finnish studies underline the importance of Christ present in faith, the most important issue to be discussed may not be mysticism or ontology, but the proper understanding of the work of Christ.

Some of the most vehement critics of Finnish studies are proponents of a strictly forensic theology of justification. By “strictly forensic” I mean a theology which basically denies the effective or ontological side of salvation, claiming that the justification of the sinner is a merely declarative act in God's mind, *in foro caeli*. In terms of Christology, Christ “for us” stands for this imputative declaration, whereas Christ “in us” approaches effective justification. If a theologian claims that Christ “for us” is the primary content of justification and that Christ “in us” can be reduced to that primary aspect, then he or she defends a strictly

⁵⁹ For this Greek concept, see Sorabji, *Emotion*, 320-325. Note the connection with the biblical concept of *exousia*.

forensic theology of justification.

Among the critics of the Finns, Mark C. Mattes is a good example of this kind. He claims that

Christ is so for us that he becomes one with us in this marriage of the conscience to Christ. Christ and the conscience are then “one body.” The reason that Christ lives in me is not to accentuate a mystical teleology of ascent into the triune life but to “abolish the law” ... Luther emphasizes Christ in us because it is the strongest scriptural affirmation to support the truth that Christ is for us. The efficacy of Christ in us is logically subordinate to the forensic declaration that Christ is for us.⁶⁰

Mattes in this manner states that “Christ for us” is the primary truth, while “Christ in us” is an affirmation which is designated to support that primary truth. The union with Christ takes place in the conscience, but the essence of this union is to highlight how intimately Christ is for us.

In terms of our four-place relation, we are beneficiaries of the work of Christ since “for us” signifies this relational place. But we do not receive Christ in any such sense which would put us into the position of the recipient: because the work of Christ in justification is, in Mattes's view, reduced to Christ “for us,” our union with Christ only highlights our role as beneficiaries. Such a strictly forensic understanding of justification clearly deviates from Mannermaa's concept and cannot be reconciled with it. It belongs to the central claims of the Finnish program that humans are both beneficiaries of Christ's work and recipients of salvation. The union with Christ has obvious connections with eucharistic and other sacramental theology in which the faithful receives the body and blood of Christ.

Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper and the Mass exemplifies particularly well the fact that the salvific self-giving of Christ comprises humans as both beneficiaries and recipients. The fundamental problem of Catholic Masses was that the laypeople could be interpreted as mere beneficiaries: they did not need to attend the Mass but could benefit by the performance without participation. Luther, however, emphasized that the eucharist needed to be personally received. Likewise, the theology of justification needs both Christ for us and Christ in us – one aspect cannot be reduced to another. Paradoxically, the strictly forensic concept of Mattes thus approaches the wrong theology of eucharistic sacrifice.

⁶⁰ Mattes, “A Future,” 446.

The Augustinian distinction between recipients and beneficiaries is used abundantly in Luther's theology of the eucharist and Christian life. Luther emphasizes that the believers perform a response to Christ's act of self-giving. In their response to the eucharist, the faithful give themselves to their neighbors in loving service; the neighbors thus benefit from the response. In this sense the common priesthood of all believers also contains a sense of becoming a living sacrifice. In order to grasp this secondary sacrifice, a response to Christ's primary self-giving, the interaction of different relational places has to be clearly defined.⁶¹

4. *Favor and Gift*. It was shown above that my development of the Finnish program is critical of a purely forensic understanding of justification. Such an understanding reduces the work of Christ so that humans remain mere beneficiaries without personal participation in the salvific reality. Salvation and Christ need to be received in Christian theology. The giver-oriented perspective contains, however, another angle from which the relationship between forensic and effective justification ascribes some primacy to the forensic aspect.

Since the gift can only be a gift when the giver's intention is recognized, the intention has a certain non-temporal, conceptual primacy over the effective gift. When Melancthon stresses that God's merciful attitude, *gratia* or *favor*, must in some way precede the gift given,⁶² he affirms Seneca's classical principle. Luther scholars have often debated whether Luther also teaches the primacy of *gratia* over *donum*; the Finns have defended the view that Luther defends a unity of these two concepts so that neither of them has primacy over the other in the doctrine of justification.⁶³

My own development of the Finnish paradigm in terms of “giver-oriented perspective” modifies this view slightly. While it is true that God's benevolence and God's gift appear together, one also needs to say that God's gift needs to be preconditioned by benevolence in order that it can be a gift. As Luther himself remarks, God can generously give the very same material things to the pious and the impious; but this thing is a healing gift only for the pious, because God's merciful intention is limited to the pious.⁶⁴

⁶¹ This has been worked out in detail by Simon, *Luthers Messopfertheologie*. See also Simon, “Worship and the Eucharist.”

⁶² See Melancthon, *Loci communes 1521*, 5, 4-7.

⁶³ See Peura, “Christ as Favor and Gift.”

⁶⁴ For God's “gifts” to the impious, see Luther, StA 2, 491, 1-5 (*Against Latomus*).

As this example shows, the logic of favor and gift is complex. I do not say to my children at Christmas time: “I only give you my good intention, but not the present.” Similarly, there is little point in saying “cheers” when the glass is empty. In this sense the benevolence often needs the subsequent gift. But this observation concerns a factual, not conceptual unity of favor and gift. It is entirely possible to say that I only give my good will – and one often does, for instance, in saying “farewell.” The other way round, however, a conceptual link is required: my transaction to you can only be a gift if my intention is favourably gratuitous. In this very specific and limited sense, there is a conceptual priority of favor over the gift. I think that both Luther and Melancthon defend this specific view and that their conceptualizations of justification are, therefore, basically similar in this regard.⁶⁵

Let it be finally reiterated that the issue at stake in my third and fourth point is fairly complex. Various debates related to the Lutheran doctrine of justification fail because they do not differentiate the matter adequately. Adherents to forensic justification readily affirm the primacy of merciful favor, but they fail to see the dynamics of one's being both recipient and beneficiary. Adherents of effective justification grasp this dynamics, but they do not see the fine differences between the concepts of favor and gift. But when over-simplifications are adequately avoided, the third and fourth points are both historically valid and systematically clear

5. *Three Powers of Faith*. We saw above that Benedict refutes Luther's alleged concept of faith by saying that “faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something.”⁶⁶ Our reading of Luther has yielded a view in which the faithful is not merely reaching out towards absent things; divine benevolence is accompanied with the gift so that Christ is really present in faith. Luther's concept of faith can be aptly summarized with his view of the three powers of faith laid out in his *On the Freedom of the Christian*.⁶⁷ The three powers show how the faith comprises both the subjective element of *fides sola* and the more objective elements of forensic justification and the presence of Christ.

The first power of faith emerges from Luther's discussion of “faith alone.” It portrays the situation in which word and faith rule united in the soul. This union of faithful soul with the word is compared with the unity of fire and iron. This unity is predominantly an ascetic union

⁶⁵ See Saarinen, “Gunst und Gabe.”

⁶⁶ Benedict, *Spe salvi*, 7.

⁶⁷ The following is an analysis of StA 2, 270-278.

of promise and trust. Luther does describe it in terms of participation, union, and sanctification, but because of the centrality of “faith alone” this first power of faith is a personal reaching out. Its objective counterpart is word and promise.⁶⁸

The second power of faith is closely connected with forensic justification. When God sees that the faithful give God honor, righteousness, and truthfulness in their act of faith, then God also regards the faithful as righteous and truthful. Their faith is the basis of this divine consideration of righteousness. The second power thus exemplifies a coexistence of subjective and objective elements: while, on the one hand, “faith makes truth and righteousness,” the justifying act of God is, on the other hand, a monergic and objective divine decision.⁶⁹

The third power of faith is

that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage – it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own.⁷⁰

While the second power expresses God's benevolence or favor, the third power expresses God's gift. This gift is Christ himself present in faith. While the first power expresses an ascetic and subjective union between word and faith, promise and trust, the third power enriches this union so that it becomes, in Mannermaa's terms, “real-ontic,” and in that sense ontological and sacramental. The third power thus expresses the power of the gift which enriches the promise through becoming foretaste; the benevolence is transformed into an effective power and gift. Thus Luther's concept of faith alone does not lead to a subjective reduction of sacramental presence: through its third power, faith continues to meditate the hidden but present nature of the gift.

⁶⁸ StA 2, 270-272.

⁶⁹ StA 2, 272-274.

⁷⁰ StA 2, 274, 37 - 276, 1. Translation from LW 31, 351.

The third power is described with the language of donation: Christ gives (*donat*) the faithful his body and very self and takes the sins of the faithful, thus transforming the being of the Christians. The role of “faith alone” in this exchange and “blessed struggle” is not limited to its subjective nature; on the contrary, the presence of the promised good is abundantly given in the third power.⁷¹ “Faith alone” is not contrasted to real presence but to “works” (*opera*): since works are “inanimate things,⁷²” they cannot achieve what faith can. Through its three powers (*virtus*), faith emerges as an animated, living principle to which word and Christ can adhere. Peace and freedom are qualities of the Christian soul who lives in faith.⁷³

This description of faith reveals a final connection with our “giver-oriented perspective.” If human beings are investigated from the viewpoint of their own activity, their works come into focus so that they, paradoxically, become inanimate and thus incapable of bringing about the union with God. If, however, the perspective is shifted to God as giver, the human person ceases to appear as agent and becomes the recipient of the word and Christ. In this new, seemingly passive perspective he or she reappears, again paradoxically, as vivid and animated partner. The argumentative move from “works” to “faith alone” is, therefore, not a move from presence to absence, from activity to passivity, or from objectivity to subjectivity. It is a move which proceeds from assumed passivity to a living faith. In the light of this perspectival move, Christians are seen as animated beings in their union with Christ. In this manner Luther's faith draws the future into the present.

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⁷¹ StA 2, 276, 6-10.

⁷² “res insensatae,” StA 2, 278, 9.

⁷³ StA 2, 272, 17-20.

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