1. The Lutheran Paul vs. the New Perspective

In his recent study *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The 'Lutheran' Paul and His Critics*, Stephen Westerholm surveys a topic that is, as he puts it, 'warmly debated in the saunas of Finland'. Since the topic in question concerns the apostle Paul's teaching of law, grace and justification, it is debated elsewhere as well. Continuing and rewriting his earlier work, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, Westerholm outlines an extensive research history which in the last decades has oscillated between two basic views. There is (1) the 'Lutheran' Paul who teaches that human beings are sinners, but justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works they do. According to this classical view of justification, the law does not contribute to salvation but crushes human self-righteousness and drives human beings to seek mercy from God. Even as justified the Christians remain sinners who fail to do good with their own will. Thus we all continue to ponder the existential problems of Paul expressed in Rom. 7.14-25.

In conscious opposition to this received view, many 20th-century biblical scholars have outlined (2) a 'new perspective', according to which Paul teaches that Christians can in fact live according to the Spirit. This new interpretation of Paul further holds that the struggle with law and sin essentially belongs to the pre-Christian existence of humans. According to the new perspective, Paul's conscience was not burdened by his own sins, but the Christian Paul is only critical of the shortcomings and wrong judgments of non-Christians, in particular the Jews.

The new perspective emerged when the biblical scholars realized, or assumed to have realized, that they have read Paul through the lenses of Augustine and Martin Luther. In these two later Western theologians, however, we are confronted with a notion of introspective conscience that is not found in Paul. Whereas Augustine and Luther display an introspective awareness of sin and individual guilt, Paul in fact possesses a robust conscience and does not practise self-analysis. Already as a Jew Paul thought that he could lead a rather blameless life, and as a Christian he expected to be able to live his life according to the Spirit.

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When Paul, from his particularly Christian perspective, criticizes the Jewish and Gentile ways of life, he is therefore not reporting his own personal and existential problems, but rather makes a theological point. A Christian can see that salvation does not come from the works of the law. However, it is only the viewpoint reached 'in Christ' that reveals the basic problem of our former striving after perfection. And since the Christian can achieve and has achieved the spiritual fulfilment, he or she does not need to be worried of the existential problem of failing to do good. In sum, both Jew and Christian may have a robust conscience and both in fact believe that they can do good works. The Christian knows that Jews and pagans are wrong in believing this, but the Christian also thinks that in the Spirit he is no longer under sin's power and can thus fulfill the law.6

A prominent argument in favor of the new perspective concerns the interpretation of the word 'I' in Romans 7. The 'Lutheran' view of Paul has interpreted this word to refer to Paul's own inner struggles with the law. Given this, one is almost compelled to understand justification as a theocentric event in which humans remain 'justified and sinners at the same time'. Humans cannot do the works of the law; they can only believe in God's promise in Jesus Christ. Paul's self-description in Romans 7 thus becomes a paradigmatic description of that individual introspection which is presupposed in the Lutheran doctrine of justification.7

Exegetes of the 20th century, in particular W.G. Kümmel and Krister Stendahl, have argued, however, that the 'I' to which Paul refers does not represent his own personal experience. It is rather a rhetorical or an exemplary I which is employed in order to demonstrate a general state of affairs. Paul uses an exemplary I in several places, e.g. in Rom. 3.7, 1 Cor. 6.12, 15, 13.1 and Gal. 2.18, but in Romans 7 this is not self-evident. Without going into the exegetical discussion in detail, it may be said that the presupposition of an exemplary I helps us to understand why the law is criticized but not abrogated by Paul in Romans 6-8.8

According to the 'new perspective' it is neither the general Christian experience nor Paul's personal experience that is portrayed in Rom. 7.14-25. Instead, Paul here describes the general condition of humanity under the law. The exemplary I refers to a human condition which is not particularly Christian nor particularly Jewish, but shows the general relationship between sin and the law. In doing this the passage 'demonstrates the utter moral impotence of humanity under the law, a gloomy contrast to the glorious picture of redemption in Romans 6 and 8'.9

Why is this new perspective on Romans 7 antagonistic to the 'Lutheran' Paul? Not because of this demonstration, but since Paul's own situation as a Christian is no longer represented under the universal human condition of sinfulness. For those who are in Christ Jesus, this condition is no longer valid (Rom 8.1). Christians, including Paul himself, are rescued from 'this body of death' by Jesus Christ (Rom. 7.24-25). Thus the exemplary I of Rom. 7.14-25 describes the pre-Christian situation of human sinner. The justified Christian is

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6 Westerholm, Perspectives, 144.
7 Westerholm, Perspectives, 144-149.
8 Westerholm, Perspectives, 140-144.
10 Westerholm, Perspectives, 144.
no longer subject to this condition. And this is contrary to Lutheranism which teaches that our struggle with sin, lack of good will and life under the cross continue throughout Christian existence.

We may also note that the exemplary I does not depict a Jewish dilemma, but a universal human dilemma which, however, only appears as such a dilemma when it is looked at from the specific viewpoint provided by Christianity. In a somewhat paradoxical manner, the new perspective thus presents the situation described in Rom. 7.14-25 as a universal human dilemma which nevertheless only appears as such, once the human being has been set free of this dilemma by Jesus Christ and the Spirit of life (Rom. 8.2). 10

This argument was outlined by Kümmel and Stendahl already many decades ago, but it gained new support in E.P. Sanders's work Paul and Palestinian Judaism. 11 Sanders showed that the Jews of Paul's time did not boast of human achievement but believed in the grace of God which was in keeping with the observance of the law. Luther's contrast between righteousness of works and justification by faith and grace alone does not meet the historical situation of Paul since, for the first-century Judaism, 'salvation is always by the grace of God'. 12 On the other hand, Paul according to Sanders observed a 'work-ethic' himself: already as a Jew he believed to be leading a rather blameless life, and as a Christian he was set free in the effort to do good because, as mentioned above, the Spirit enables Christians to do what the law requires. 13

So, although the human condition, expressed in Romans 7, in a way remains a universal dilemma, it is relativized in three different ways: 1. the dilemma is not relevant with regard to Judaism in particular, 2. Christians have actually surpassed this dilemma because the Spirit enables them to fulfill the law, and 3. the whole dilemma only appears to be a universal dilemma from the specifically Christian viewpoint.

All three points seem to go radically against Luther and Lutheranism, since in Lutheran theology (i) the insufficiency of the law in overcoming sin has been seen as the problem of a Jewish righteousness of works, (ii) Christians are justified but they nevertheless remain sinners at the same time and thus remain faced with the dilemmas of Romans 7, and (iii) the experience of the Pauline 'I' in Romans 7 is seen as a universal problem: all humans wonder why 'I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate' (Rom. 7.15).

Continuing Westerholm's argument, we may note that the allegedly Lutheran reading of Rom. 7.15-20 contains still another problem. The exegetes have questioned the subject of this doing, but also the doing itself remains far from clear. What does the speaker not do? According to the 'Lutheran' interpretation, the justified Christian, or Paul himself, continues to sin. But does the speaker (A.) do always and everything wrong, and contrary to his will? It would be very odd to think that the paradigmatic Christian Paul, apostle and saint, would always do everything wrong and contrary to his will. There must be some qualifications in this non-willed doing. But how are we to read these qualifications into the text?

10 Cf. Westerholm, Perspectives, 144-149.


12 Westerholm, Perspectives, 342 quoting Sanders, Palestinian Judaism, 297.

13 Westerholm, Perspectives, xiv, 163. - For the sake of brevity, I leave out here many different versions of non-Lutheran Paul in recent discussion, for instance N.T. Wright's discussion of T as referring to Israel. See Westerholm, Perspectives, 179-183 and Wright, The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology, Minneapolis: Fortress 1991.
The 'new perspective' seems to offer an elegant solution, since the Christian speaker only refers to the doings of the exemplary I (B.) in some earlier period, during which the extent of wrongdoing may have varied and need not bother the present speaker. A third logical possibility would be that the speaker is, as Rom. 7.14 explicitly says, the old and carnal person who is describing (C.) his current powerlessness. But this possibility must face the contradiction that, on the one hand, the speaker claims to understand his carnal situation while, on the other, he claims not to understand (Rom. 7.15) his own action. Assuming that there is a temporal difference between the present speaker and the exemplary I of the past, such contradictions can be solved.

Is the traditional Lutheran position thus declared to be exegetically invalid? No, since the exegetical case is not yet closed. In his extensive survey Westerholm actually believes that the new perspective of Sanders, Stendahl and others has not solved all the problems. He consoles Lutherans by saying that they have nevertheless 'rightly captured Paul's rationale and basic point', namely that salvation is by faith and through grace in Jesus Christ.

In fact, Westerholm himself moderately argues in favor of the 'Lutheran' Paul. According to Westerholm, many slogans of the 'new perspective' are exaggerations which need to be tested and qualified. He is critical of Sanders's results, because the Jewish harmony of obedience to the law, on the one hand, and trust in the gratuity of God's covenantal election, on the other, finally differs from the understanding of grace in Lutheran and Protestant Christianity. In its interplay of grace and works, first-century Judaism, as portrayed by Sanders, in fact resembles Pelagianism as refuted by Augustine and Martin Luther. In spite of these qualifications, it is nevertheless clear that the new perspective has presented powerful and plausible alternatives to the traditional Lutheran reading of Pauline theology of justification and the law. Therefore Westerholm attempts to take seriously both the 'old' and the 'new' perspectives.

In the following, my interest will not be exegetical. I will highlight some points which are relevant for our understanding of Luther and Lutheranism. For exegetes like Westerholm, Stendahl, Sanders and many others, the problem has been that the earlier New Testament scholars have read the texts through the lenses of Martin Luther and Lutheranism. Given this point of departure, they aim at liberating exegesis from the myopia caused by maladjusted lenses. They have not considered, however, what kind of Lutheranism has caused this myopia.

Is Martin Luther really saying all that the exegetical paradigm of the 'Lutheran Paul' has said? Or can it be that both Luther and Paul have been distorted or at least rigidly systematized by some later interpreters? Could it be that also in Luther studies we have, since the times of W.G. Kümmel, developed new perspectives? Could one even discover a more 'Pauline' Luther with the help of contemporary historical, theological and also exegetical insights? Such questions will be the focus of my attention.

14 Westerholm, Perspectives, 445.

15 Westerholm, Perspectives, 346-351.

16 Although my interest is similar to Timothy George, 'Modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective', in Justification and Variegated II, 437-463, my claims will be different. I share, however, his opinion (442) that 'the strength of the new perspective does not rest on the accuracy of its depiction of Luther'.
2. Participation in Christ: Biblical Scholarship, Ecumenism and Luther Studies

Before turning to Luther, some general comments on the recent history of New Testament scholarship, ecumenical theology and Luther studies ought to be made.

Participation in Christ in Pauline theology. Stephen Westerholm's presentation of 'Lutheran Paul' vs. the 'new perspective' is related to another and broader exegetical issue dealing with the relative importance of the doctrine of justification in Paul's theology. It is clear that justification is important for Paul, but many biblical scholars have claimed that it need not be seen as the most important and central doctrine or as a concept which would be operative as the overall criterion of all other theological themes in Paul.

Already Albert Schweitzer paid attention to the theme of 'being in Christ' as an extremely important issue of Pauline theology. In the 20th-century exegetics, this view of the 'new life in Christ' or 'participation in Christ' has not seldom been regarded as a topic which is more important for the apostle than the doctrine of justification. One way to make this argument is to say that Paul's language of justification is prominent in Romans and Galatians because of the particular disputes and circumstances relevant for those letters. But in many other letters justification is not treated, whereas the language of participation in Christ and being in Christ is prominent everywhere in the Pauline letters irrespective of the particular disputes at hand. 17

Moreover, many exegtes claim that even in Romans and Galatians the problems of justification are in fact solved with the theology of 'being in Christ' and participation. Without entering this exegetical argument in detail, it can be said that the 'being in Christ' can be regarded as the actual center and argumentative foundation of Paul's soteriology, whereas justification remains a more circumstantial topic, mostly relevant for Paul's disputes with Judaism. 18

Generally speaking, many advocates of the above-mentioned 'new perspective' with regard to the law often also adopt the priority of participatory language in their interpretations of Pauline soteriology. This preference often strengthens their criticism of the 'Lutheran' Paul who was, in their opinion, forged to teach forensic justification by faith. Given this, the best exegetical option left to the 'Lutheran' Paulinists, for instance Ernst Käsemann and his students, was to broaden the idea of justification to include various aspects of sanctification, liberation and life in Christ. While this option is helpful for systematic theologians and has received some support in the exegetical study of Paul, it can be criticized by both strict Lutherans and the advocates of the 'new perspective' for making the language of justification unclear. 19

One may nevertheless mention in passing that some exegtes have meanwhile learned to see Luther's view of justification not only as imputation but also and perhaps primarily in terms of 'Christ present in faith'. Mark A. Seifrid notes that Luther highlights this Pauline idea in his Commentary on Galatians, but does not speak of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Seifrid remarks that the more narrowly forensic language stems from


18 So Brinkman, Justification, 59-63, explaining e.g. the 'participationist eschatology' of Sanders, Palestinian Judaism.

Melanchthon and comes 'into widespread usage only after the Osiandrian controversy (1551). In their ecumenical agreements, contemporary Lutherans normally defend a view of justification that is both forensic and effective. In so doing they follow the above-mentioned exegetical option of broadening the language of justification in order to embrace the Pauline view of 'being in Christ'. Another strategic reason for doing this is that the ecumenical partners may not regard the forensic justification by faith as the highest criterion of true Christianity. But all churches speak of 'being in Christ' in the Pauline sense and connect this language with other aspects of Pauline soteriology, thus offering points of ecumenical convergence.

According to the ecumenical strategy of many recent Lutheran agreements, justification is not merely a matter of God's favor or 'counting', but the divine favour is accompanied by a sacramental grace which effects and transforms the life or even the very person of the justified Christian. While the Christian, to a certain extent, remains a sinner, he or she is nevertheless 'in Christ' and thus participates in the new creation. This effective grace may be called sanctification or life in the Spirit, but is often understood as an aspect of justification. Justification thus does not only comprise juridical relationships, but it also endows the believer with the gift of sacramental and christocentric reality.

A typical example of this strategy is the British-Nordic Porvoo agreement between Lutherans and Anglicans. Although the Anglicans participated in the European Reformation, they did not adopt the forensic justification or the distinction between law and gospel in a strictly Lutheran manner. In order to meet broader Anglican soteriology in a manner compatible with Lutheranism, the Porvoo agreement formulates this as follows: 'Both our traditions affirm that justification leads and must lead to 'good works'; authentic faith issues in love. We receive the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to good works. As justification and sanctification are aspects of the same divine act, so also living faith and love are inseparable in the believer'. This description comes rather close to those adherents of the 'new perspective' who teach that Christians have the Spirit and are able to do some good.

'Being in Christ' in Luther Studies. If one were to judge the state of Luther studies on the basis of Westerholm's exegetical research history, one could but wonder how one-sided it has remained. But it is very clear that modern interpreters of Luther have paid a lot of attention to the non-forensic and Christ-centered language in the Reformers' writings. In part this may have been a reaction to the challenge set by the exegetes since the days of Albert Schweitzer, but a more obvious reason has been that the language of participation and 'being in Christ' is as prominent in Luther as it is in Paul.


As I have shown in detail elsewhere, the prominence of this language was observed already by Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann, but it became a major issue for many scholars of the German Luther Renaissance, for instance Karl Holl, Erich Vogelsang, Reinhold Seeberg and Erich Seeberg. Also dialectic theologians like Karl Barth and Ernst Wolf wrestled with the fact that Luther so often speaks of the presence of Christ in faith. A variety of different interpretations emerged in order to show that this seemingly mystical and ontological language in Luther was in fact meant to be eschatological, moral/forensic or existential. Later scholars like Gerhard Ebeling, Marc Lienhardt, Albrecht Peters and Otto Hermann Pesch have built on this research trend. Contemporary Lutheran dogmatics of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Robert Jenson interpret Luther's view of justification in more ontological terms as 'presence of Christ in faith'.

In the present paper I am not, however, concerned with these interpretations as such. What needs to be pointed out is only that the 'Pauline Luther' of the 20th-century Luther scholars has been found to speak in the manner of Paul. Moreover, this observation has challenged a one-sided forensic interpretation of justification by faith. As a result of this history, the effective-sacramental description of justification as gift and as participation in Christ has been widely discussed in academic Luther research. Throughout the 20th century, Luther research has emphasized that Luther characterizes salvation in terms of 'fides Christi' or as 'presence of Christ in faith'.

This effective or 'union with Christ' view of justification has been outlined, defended and further developed by contemporary Finnish Luther research, begun by Tuomo Mannermaa's book *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus* (1989). This Finnish school has not followed exegetical developments, but it has proceeded from the Scandinavian variety of Lutheranism, emphasizing the sacramental dimension of Christian faith and lacking the various antagonisms with Catholicism, characteristic of German Protestant theology. Although the new Finnish school is critical of the theological underpinnings of older German research, it also continues that research tradition of the German Luther Renaissance which has given more weight to the Pauline idea of communion with Christ.

Thus, the last one hundred years of Luther scholarship display a clear parallel between the exegetical discovery of the 'participation in Christ' language in Paul and the historical research.

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23 Risto Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf uns: die transzendentale Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung*. Wiesbaden: Frans Steiner 1989. With regard to the present article, this book can be read so that the 'transcendental' interpretation of German Protestants was an attempt to cope with the 'being in Christ' language while preserving the almost non-sacramental, forensic view of justification. I disagree with this interpretation as such, but already its elaborated appearance shows that the importance of 'being in Christ' language for Luther was already for a long time ago observed by Luther scholars.


rediscovery of ‘fides Christi’ or ‘presence of Christ in faith’ paradigm in Luther. Because of this parallel it may further be said that Lutheran ecumenical theology has with good conscience adopted this broader understanding of justification and/or soteriology. I do not think that this needs to be debated much further since, in order to criticize successfully Lutheran ecumenism, one should also criticize the results of Luther studies and exegetical scholarship as well. In this sense the ‘broader’ understanding of justification, although perhaps not a very elegant construct within a strictly historical Pauline exegesis, serves well in ecumenism and systematic theology.

What remains a challenge for Lutheranism, however, are the issues which Stephen Westerholm has investigated in such great detail. These issues concern our permanent sinfulness and they can be expressed in terms of the three contradictions defined above: (1/i) whether Paul's proclamation of the insufficiency of the law is particularly meant to be a radical alternative to Jewish self-righteousness, (2/ii) whether Christians remain permanently unable to fulfill the law, and (3/iii) whether the 'I' of Romans 7 expresses both Paul's own permanent struggle and a universal problem of non-Christians and Christians alike. A positive answer to all these questions would imply that Luther does not embrace the new perspective with respect to the theology of law and sinfulness. But a negative answer to any of these questions would at least mean that Luther is more complicated on these issues than the exegetes have assumed him to be. It may also mean that subsequent Lutherans have misread Luther to an extent.

3. The Pauline Luther: Counter-evidence to Westerholm’s Luther

Stephen Westerholm provides a concise summary of his understanding of Luther. This summary represents the exegetes' theological assumptions in an exemplary manner. The summary consists of six theses:

1. In our relationship with God, faith in God's goodness rather than the good works we do is decisive.
2. The law, like a mighty hammer, is meant to crush human self-righteousness and to drive human beings, made aware of their sinfulness, to seek mercy from the Savior.
3. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works we do.
4. Though believers are righteous in God's eyes, they remain sinners throughout their earthly lives.
5. The law must be banished from the thinking of believers when their relationship with God is the issue. Yet it must continue its role of identifying and judging their sin.
6. God predestined believers to salvation.27

We will keep this summary in mind when we proceed to the three alleged contradictions between Luther and contemporary exegetes. I am not attempting to make a new study of Luther, but will only briefly present results of some new studies and complement them with a few quotes from the German Reformer. My argument will be that, in many respects, Luther is closer to the 'new perspective' than has been assumed.

3.1. How Radically Different is the Christian Alternative to the Mosaic Law?

27 Westerholm, Perspectives, 22-23. This view becomes somewhat more moderated and qualified in Westerholm's subsequent discussion. It should not be understood as a professional scholarly position, but rather as a report of the view common among exegetes.
Our first contradiction (1/i) is closely related to the fifth thesis of Westerholm. Since the role of the law is a vast topic both in Luther's own writings and in the secondary literature, I will restrict my discussion on some general features which I consider to be representative, though not sufficient to outline Luther's whole theology of the law. Since I will focus on the law, I will not speak much of the Christian's 'being in Christ'. It should be kept in mind, however, that I presuppose the importance of this language for Luther's theology of justification and the law.

Although Luther emphasizes the freedom of the Christian, he remains critical of the so-called antinomism. While the Antinomians downplay the significance of the Decalogue for Christians, Luther stresses in contradiction to this that 'the law will not be abolished in all eternity; rather, it will remain - with the condemned as one to be fulfilled, with the blessed as fulfilled one'. Luther also keeps the Ten Commandments as the starting-point of his Catechisms. In his *Von den Konzilliis und Kirchen* Luther says that moral quality is an 'external', that is, uncertain, mark of the church, and a total lack of moral quality and good works clearly signalises that something is lacking. Even though the church cannot be defined in terms of morals, Luther thus does not consider moral quality to be indifferent in the church.

In Luther's extensive collection of sermons on Matthew 5-7 (1530/32), the Sermon on the Mount is normally treated as an ethic of Christian individuals. Luther thinks that Jesus here clarifies and purifies the original will of God. However, the same will is basically expressed in the Decalogue. The ethics of Jesus is thus neither an abrogation of the Jewish law nor a higher and different ethic. It is rather a cleansing of the Decalogue, a law to be followed in the Christian community. Recent studies have emphasized the unity of the law in Luther's theology, and I think that this unity is also maintained in Luther's interpretation.

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29 WA 39/1, 350, 3-4. For this quote and the Antinomian controversy, see most recently Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics and Ecumenism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004, 136-140. We may note that Westerholm (*Perspectives*, 92-93) clearly sees the presence of this feature in 'Lutheran' Paulinists also.

30 WA 50, 649.


32 See e.g.WA 32, 299, 15-19.

33 Luther says often that Jesus in Matthew 5-7 cleanses the Decalogue, or the original will of God, from later confusing interpretations, e.g. WA 32, 362, 30-363, 25.

34 See in particular Antti Raunio, 'Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology', in *Union with Christ*, 96-124.
of Matthew 5-7 as an ethic for Christians. Although the law does not justify, it thus remains relevant for the believers in their relationship with God.

Luther's exposition of Matthew 5-7 has often been viewed critically since the Reformer writes against enthusiasts who want to rule the world with the Sermon on the Mount. The doctrine of two kingdoms means for Luther that the world must be ruled according to the civil use of the law, whereas the Sermon on the Mount is meant for individual Christians in order to describe the fruits of their faith.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, although Matthew 5-7 is not a higher ethic of perfection, it is neither a civil law. Interestingly, the Sermon on the Mount remains a Christian ethic.

Although one may criticize Luther for making Matthew 5-7 a merely interior and individualistic law, one is, for the same reason, also compelled to say that the Sermon on the Mount remains a description of the Christian individual's moral practise. As a Christian practise it cannot be 'banished from the thoughts'\textsuperscript{36} when the believer's relationship to God is at stake. On the contrary, the point of Christian ethics is found in the interior sense attached to moral action rather than in the external action. And this inner sense is related to the believer's relationship to God.\textsuperscript{37} Given this, one may ask whether Luther's view in fact comes closer to the 'new perspective' of Pauline exegesis, according to which the apostle observes a work ethic while believing that salvation is by grace.

Although these observations show that Luther was not indifferent to Christian behaviour, Lutheran theology has often left a gap between faith and works, or between law and grace. Many new studies proceed, however, from a more integrative vision. Antti Raunio outlines Luther's view of Christian neighbourly love, expressed by the so-called Golden Rule (Matt. 7.12) as an antagonistic alternative to the medieval view of 'order of love' (\textit{ordo caritatis}). While the medieval view presupposes a human being who evaluates the objects of the universe and then loves them according to this evaluation, the Golden Rule actually tells us to give to others what they need. It is thus not a law of desire or evaluation, but a law of gift-love, a law of giving to others what they lack.\textsuperscript{38}

For Luther, this Christian love emerges from the imitation of the love of God which 'does not find, but creates that which is pleasing to it'.\textsuperscript{39} God is able to love even emptiness

\textsuperscript{35} E.g. WA 32, 318,30-35; 370, 28-371, 25.
\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Westerholm's (\textit{Perspectives}, 22-23) thesis 5 above.
\textsuperscript{37} See e.g. Luther's explanation of 'clean heart' (Matt. 5.8), WA 32, 325, 33-366, 8, and also WA 50, 643, 27-31. - Of course, this evokes many additional questions pertaining to the ethical theory at hand. Cf. e.g. Oswald Bayer, \textit{Martin Luthers Theologie}, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003, e.g.110-139, 256-296 and Risto Saarinen, 'Ethics in Luther's Theology', in Jill Kraye - Risto Saarinen (eds.) \textit{Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity}, Dordrecht: Springer 2005, 195-215. As Geyer, 'Bergpredigt', 293, points out, the new ethics does not remain only interior.


\textsuperscript{39} So Luther's famous thesis 28 of the \textit{Heidelberg Disputation} (1518), WA 1, 365, 2-3.
and the sinner - this is the capacity of agape to fulfill the imperfections and needs of the universe. When Christians try to live according to the Golden Rule, they should imitate this rule of divine love. Humans should meet their neighbour's needs, aiming to be Good Samaritans to them as Christ has been our Samaritan. This, however, would require an attitude which runs contrary to natural, egoistic, and desire-based human reasoning.\textsuperscript{40}

Raunio points out that Luther outlines a true Christian practice of a Christian community.\textsuperscript{41} The rule of divine love is not a new law which would be at variance with the Mosaic law. But it is nevertheless something that is not instinctively found in the natural intuitions of all humans. A truly Christian neighbourly love, though in consonance with the Decalogue and perhaps even with the natural moral law, requires a theological model, a rule of divine love to be imitated. In this sense the Christian following of the Golden Rule is a fruit of faith and presupposes grace. It would probably be misleading to call this behavior a 'work ethic', but we see that the relationship with God also qualifies the observance of the law in a new way.

Following Raunio, Reinhard Hütter remarks that the law's content can be 'restored to its original intent as the genuine expression of God's will: the law of love.' This law, received in Christ, is welcomed with delight, and, as Luther tells us, 'whenever there is this delight, it does what God commands. Then the law does not cause a guilty conscience, but causes joy, because one has become another person already'.\textsuperscript{42} Hütter's quote from Luther comes astonishingly close to the emphasis of the 'new perspective', claiming that the Pauline Christian can fulfill the law in Spirit, the person being already almost other person than the one described in Romans 7. The Christian alternative outlined here does not appear, however, as a radical alternative to Jewish law, but rather as its fulfilment or as its restoration to express the original will of God.

Many good Lutherans probably think that my presentation has twisted Luther's theology of the law. I have selected a number of features from the Reformer that run contrary to the traditional picture, as summarized by Westerholm. The positive meanings ascribed to the Christian observance to the law do not mean that sinners could be justified by works of law; this is not meant by the advocates of the 'new perspective' either. Although I have not told the whole story of both law and gospel in Lutheranism, I think that the evidence presented here has some weight. As in Paul, we find evidence in Luther for both the 'old' and 'new' perspectives, with regard to the issue of law.

3.2. Do Christians Remain Permanently Unable to Fulfill the Law?

In all their ecumenical dialogues, Lutherans have stressed that a Christian is and remains a sinner even when he or she is justified. There can be little doubt that both Martin Luther and the later Lutherans have always emphasized the being of a Christian as 'righteous and sinner at the same time' (\textit{simul iustus et peccator}) and that Lutherans have been the most ardent Christians combatants against self-righteousness.

But there must be a theological limit to this emphasis. If we go beyond this limit, we would simply claim that Christianity would do no good for you, since you will always remain

\textsuperscript{40} Cf. Raunio, \textit{Summe} and Kärkkäinen, 'Love'.

\textsuperscript{41} For the communal and diaconal dimension of the church as communion, see e.g. \textit{Union with Christ}, 116-120.

\textsuperscript{42} Hütter, \textit{Bound}, 11, quoting Luther, WA 16, 285, 9.
the same sinner. Most likely Lutherans do not claim this, but sometimes other churches think that Lutherans are in danger of emptying the grace of God in their claim of the permanent sinfulness of all Christians.\textsuperscript{43}

At least in systematic theology, one is therefore bound to admit that the Christian faith has some bearing upon Christians, even though all people remain sinners and cannot fulfill the law by their own powers. In Luther research, scholars traditionally discuss whether Luther allows for any progress (\textit{profectio}) in Christian life and whether Luther teaches the so-called 'partial' meaning of \textit{simul iustus et peccator}, according to which one would be 'to an extent' (\textit{partim}) sinful and, to an extent, righteous.\textsuperscript{44}

The new Finnish interpretation of Luther has argued that justification, as it becomes expressed in terms of participation with Christ, has an effective bearing upon the justified sinner. This interpretation, outlined in particular by Tuomo Mannermaa and Simo Peura, has met with criticism especially in Germany. But even positions critical to this view have often affirmed that there must be an ontological side in the theological understanding of justification.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, the Finnish interpretation, although critical of many earlier paradigms, in fact continues the long trend which considers the 'being in Christ' language to be of special importance for Luther.\textsuperscript{46}

Tuomo Mannermaa pays attention to Luther's \textit{Commentary on Galatians} in which Christ is said to become the subject of the good works of the Christian. Through Christ present in the faith of the believer, the believer can become 'a new person' that brings forth good fruit. Faith thus first 'makes' the person, and this Christian person can do good works.\textsuperscript{47} Although this event remains hidden and occurs under the cross, and although it is nevertheless Christ who remains the only meritorious subject in this process, one can understand how faith in deed has an effective bearing upon the person in question. Interestingly, Luther's view of bringing forth a new person, an allusion to Matt. 7.17, also here displays a parallel with the soteriology of the 'new perspective' in which the new person fulfills the law.

In spite of this parallel, there certainly remain differences between Luther and the new perspective. Whereas Paul as a Christian is assumed by the exegetes to be able to fulfill the law in a quasi-Pelagian manner, Luther's reading of Galatians only affirms that a new tree can bring forth good fruits. The tree or the believer, however, is no autonomous subject but is empowered to do this because of the union with Christ. The good work remains an 'opus theologicum', a theological action or deed, whose meritorious subject is Christ, not the Christian.\textsuperscript{48} Luther wants to preserve the anti-Pelagian view of human powers, whereas the

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\textsuperscript{43} One example would be the discussion on remaining concupiscence in the context of the Lutheran - Roman Catholic text \textit{Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification}. For a responsible theological assessment of this problem, see \textit{Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen}, eds. Theodor Schneider & Gunther Wenz, Freiburg: Herder 2001.

\textsuperscript{44} For literature and different views, see Lohse, \textit{Theologie}, 274-282; Bayer, \textit{Theologie}, 2003, 193-230 and \textit{Union with Christ} 1998.


\textsuperscript{46} Saarinen, \textit{Gottes Wirken}, documents this trend in Germany.

\textsuperscript{47} Mannermaa, \textit{Der im Glauben}, 56-62.
historical Paul, as interpreted by the new perspective, is probably not restricted by such considerations.

For our theological re-evaluation of Luther, however, it is important to see that Luther has a positive view of the fulfilment of the law by Christians in their union with Christ. The so-called 'third use of the law' as well as the sanctifying role of God's moral commands were much discussed by the older research.\(^{49}\) I do not want to identify the bringing forth of good fruits with the third use of the law. Nor do I find the old distinction between law and 'command' (\textit{Gebot}) very helpful. Recent studies, in particular Andreas Wöhle, have attempted to describe this feature in Luther in new and fresh ways. Reinhard Hütter speaks boldly of 'original unity of gospel and law'\(^{50}\) which, for Luther, existed in paradise.

For many Lutherans, such a unity would be a confusion between law and gospel. I think that Antti Raunio's above-mentioned insistence on the unity of the law already establishes a permanent place for the law. I can side, however, with David Yeago's observation, according to which Luther in his interpretation of Genesis 2 recognises a divine law that presupposes the presence of grace and not sin. This reveals, so Yeago and Hütter, the original and fundamental significance of the law which is 'to give concrete, historical form to the 'divine life' of the human creature deified by God'.\(^{51}\)

In this sense there seems to be a 'fulfilment of the law' in committed Christian life as well. It is not a traditional 'third use',\(^{52}\) since the uses of the law presuppose a human subject. In this theological deed or action, Christ present in the faith, or the grace of God present in Adam, makes the believer a new person who 'brings forth' good works. In this 'bringing forth' the fundamental subject remains hidden, since we are dealing with a theological action that takes place in union with Christ. But we may, I think, nevertheless say that the goodness of the good work is related to the same moral standard, the law or the original will of God, which accuses humans of their sin and which is preached in the Sermon on the Mount. In this sense there is a unity of the law and a fulfilment of the one law, the moral standard of both Old and New Covenant.

Given this, we may say that the point of Lutheran axioms like 'theology of the cross' and 'righteous and sinner at the same time' is not to say that Christianity and faith would have no bearing upon human existence. Rather, these axioms emphasize that all renewal and all emerging righteousness remain hidden 'under the opposite': under weakness, suffering and imperfection. As far as the fulfilment of the law is concerned, the axioms are not meant to deny morality, but they are critical of the human ability for judging the progress of others and even of oneself. Therefore, even though the points 2. and 4. of Westerholm's summary are as

\(^{49}\) Cf. Reijo Työrinoja, 'Opus theologicum. Luther and Medieval Theories of Action', \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie} 44, 2002, 119-153. WA 40/1, 417, 23-26. As Työrinoja points out, the Christian might nevertheless keep his or her 'subjecheid' in some other sense.

\(^{50}\) See Lohse, \textit{Theologie}, 293-294.

\(^{51}\) Hütter, \textit{Bound}, 140; Wöhle, \textit{Freude}.

\(^{52}\) Lutheran theology traditionally distinguishes among three 'uses': 1. through the law external discipline may be maintained, 2. the law leads people to a recognition of their sins and 3. the law conducts the entire life of the reborn Christians. (\textit{The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church}, ed. R. Kolb and T. Wengert, Minneapolis: Fortress 2000, 502) Through the history of Lutheranism, the adequacy of the 'third use' has been controversial, since Christians are in some Pauline sense no more 'under the law'.

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such true, they do not sketch out the full picture of Luther's theology of law and good works. This observation may also have some bearing on theses 1 and 6.

Luther can employ the term 'law' in this positive sense, as 'love of law' (dilectio legis) in his exposition of many Old Testament texts.\(^{53}\) Also Luther's exposition of the Sermon on the Mount contains an interesting excursus dealing with the issue of 'doing good' as criterion for entering into the Kingdom and receiving the wages in heaven.\(^{54}\) Luther emphasizes that as Christians we are all equal. There are, however, external differences relating to the various gifts and callings of different Christians. Since the Sermon on the Mount speaks of the good works of those who are already forgiven and possess grace, one cannot say that the different fruits produced by different Christians would somehow merit this grace. All fruits, that is, good works, result from grace.\(^{55}\)

The remuneration by the Father and other such promises, so often repeated in Matt 5-7, are meant to console Christians in their daily struggle for the good. With the help of such promises you may carry on in spite of all adversities and injustices.\(^{56}\) But although we speak of wages, finally God gives everything and in Christ we are all equally participants of grace. It is the case, however, that some work more and some suffer more than others. They may need more consolation and remuneration. Interestingly, Luther admits that among Christians there are differences in their talents and in their industriousness. He says that this may result in differences in their future 'luminosity' or 'brightness' (Klarheit, Herrlichkeit). This does not pertain to the fundamental equality or to the merits of obtaining grace. And in heaven everyone rejoices at the brightness and glory of others.\(^{57}\)

Without stretching too much the interpretation of this passage we may say that Luther here struggles with the relative activity of different Christians in bringing forth the fruits of faith. He is very clear in his insistence on the fundamental equality of all humans and in the axiom that we cannot earn grace. At the same time he does not want to downplay the moral commitment of doing good, expressed so emphatically in the Sermon on the Mount. We must bear in mind that Matthew 5-7 is, for Luther, concerned with the life of the justified Christian who is already 'another person' in his or her unity with Christ. Therefore, doing good in this context does not mean earning grace, but it relates to the bringing forth of good fruit. These fruits are concerned with the observance of the law, but their motivational background is not the so-called 'third use of the law'. They are fruits which arise from different callings and talents, whereby referring to them serves the purpose of consolation, and the resulting differences in 'brightness' do not alter the fundamental equality of all in Christ. Thus we find in this text a similar view of 'divine life' and 'delight of law' as in the above-mentioned expositions of the Old Testament.

3.3. Who Is Speaking in Romans 7? And What Does the Speaker Not Do?

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53 See Wöhle, Freude, and Hütter, Bound, 269.
54 WA 32, 535, 29-544,7.
55 WA 32, 541, 14-25.
56 WA 32, 542, 22; 543, 3.
57 WA 32, 543, 30-544, 7.
Even in Luther’s exposition of Romans 7 we may observe a curious pattern which offers counter-evidence to Westerholm’s portrayal. First me must admit that the New Testament scholars are right in their basic point. It is evident that Luther, following Augustine, understands the ‘I’ to mean the apostle Paul as a spiritual person. This is emphatically stated in Lecture on Romans (1515/16) when Rom. 7.7 is exposed.\(^{58}\) We may note in passing that Luther repeatedly mentions the other alternative, the ‘I’ as a carnal person. But, when the ‘I’ in Rom. 7.14 claims to be carnal, Luther remarks that this claim only proves his point. For a spiritually wise man knows his own flesh and despises it, whereas a foolish carnal person would boast of his spirituality.\(^{59}\) We may note that these two alternatives correspond to models A. and C. in our Ch. 1 above.

In Rom. 7.17 the ‘I’ claims that it is not himself, but the ‘sin in me’ that is operative in the person. Luther tells that many, offended by this verse, interpret it to mean that the ‘I’ must be the carnal person. Since if the speaker were spiritual, he would have no sin. But this opinion of some real or imagined contemporaries of Luther\(^{60}\) is false and harmful. In reality, the verse proves that even the spiritual person remains sinful.\(^{61}\) In terms of our earlier discussion, the alternatives B. and C. are thus ruled out.

This does not mean for Luther, however, that the speaker in question would perform a morally bad action. How come? Given that Romans 7 has been understood as a proof-text of permanent sinfulness, this is a surprising turn, a turn which has been neglected in the allegedly ‘Lutheran’ reception history of this text. Luther admits that a human reader of Romans 7 is inclined to draw the conclusion that Paul simply commits a ‘morally and metaphysically’ bad action. But this is not the case. As a holy and spiritual person the apostle Paul would like to perform a good action in a totally pure and free fashion, but because of the flesh he cannot perform it in this perfect way, but rather he does good only with some repugnance and aversion.\(^{62}\) After saying this, Luther starts to build a massive qualification around what we called, above, alternative A.

The sin of the apostle consists of the inner aversion. Expressions, like ‘to will something other than what one does’ in Romans 7, mean that the apostle as a spiritual person wills to perform his action with such perfection that no aversion remains in the subject. Because of the flesh, this does not happen. But the good action is performed with some remaining carnal

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\(^{58}\) WA 56, 339, 4-8: ‘Quod Apostolus ab hoc textu usque ad finem loquatur in persona sua et spiritualis hominis et nequaquam in persona tantum Carnalis, primum b. Augustinus locupletissime et constanter asserit in libro contra Pelagianos.’

\(^{59}\) WA 56,340,24-29.

\(^{60}\) For useful background information, see Leif Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus*, Leiden: Brill 1975, 94-100. Although I agree with Grane in most of what he says (e.g. that Luther in fact deviates here from Augustine), the patristic and scholastic interpretation history remains more complex than Grane assumes. There may have been various ‘new perspectives’ around.

\(^{61}\) WA 56,349,22-350,8.

\(^{62}\) WA 56,341,27-33: ‘Non est putandum, Quod Apostolus velit intelligi se malum, quod odit, facere et bonum, quod vult, non facere, ut moraliter et metaphysice, quasi nullum bonum, Sed omne malum faciat; sic enim humano sensui verba eius sonant. Sed vult, quod non tot et tantum bonum nec tanta facilliitate faciat, quantum et quanta vult. Vult enim purissime, liberrissime et laetissime, sine molestiis repugnantis carnis agere, quod non potest, ...’ For the interpretation of ‘moraliter et metaphysice’, see Grane, *Modus*, 95.
repugnance. Therefore the apostle does not do what he wants to do, but he does what he does not want. In other words, doing the external good with an intensity of, say, eighty percent, would still be an instance of ‘non enim quod volo hoc ago’ (not doing what I want to do, Rom. 7.15), because the speaker wants to do good with an intensity of 100 percent, willing totally and without repugnance. And the remaining twenty percent, although a merely latent inner counter-movement, is counted as sin and is enough to qualify the externally good action as ‘quod nolo illud facio’ (doing what I do not want to do, Rom. 7.16), and in this sense as sin.

This sounds like sophistry and it is evident that through this interpretation Luther wants to rescue Paul from saying that the apostle sins morally in his external action. But it is remarkable for our study that Luther in fact thinks, actually in keeping with his famous simul justus et peccator, that the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 does pursue the good, although externally and with some inner aversion. The sin does not consist in a bad action, but in the fact that while he wills perfectly, he can actualize this will in his deed only imperfectly and in this qualified sense fails to do what he wants to do. Using scholastic terminology, Paul in Luther's interpretation does not display moral weakness (akrasia, incontinentia), but continence (enkratieia, continencia). In fact, Luther here continues the extensive medieval discussion on the so-called 'appetitus contrarii'.

The same argument appears in a condensed fashion in two later writings, namely in Luther's Resolutiones written after the Leipzig disputation of 1519, and in the preparatory part of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. In Leipzig, Luther defended the view that nobody does good without sinning. In Resolutiones, this view is explained with the help of Romans 7. A hasty reader of this condensed text may wonder how on earth Paul's argument could be employed for such a purpose. But, if the text is read together with Luther's Lecture on Romans, the point becomes clear: even the most holy apostle must admit that all his actions are contaminated by the repugnant flesh and therefore he fails to achieve the perfect and 'full' implementation of the law which he wants to achieve. Therefore, nobody does good without sinning.

In preparing the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther claims that the righteous person sins even 'between' his good works. This is proved with the help of Rom. 7.19 and 7.22. During all our life, Luther says, the good will and the resisting bad will struggle with one another. There is never a 'total' or whole will, but all will remains 'mixed' in this way. For this reason

63 WA 56, 342, 13-19: ‘Quia ‘vult aliud quam facit’, hoc est, habet beneplacitum et voluntatem per spiritum diffusa charitate promptam ad bonum et odium ad malum, et tamen resistente carne et adversa concupiscientia non potest hanc voluntatem implere et pericere. Si enim perferceret et implet, sine resistentia bonum operaretur et delectabiliter; hoc enim vult voluntas eius. Nunc autem non ita operatur; ideo quod vult, non facit. Sed quod non vult, facit.’

64 For this terminology, see more extensively Risto Saarinen, Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought, Leiden: Brill 1994 and especially Theodor Dieter, Der junge Luther und Aristoteles, Berlin: de Gruyter 2001, 130-136.

65 The decisive text is WA 2, 412, 13-20: ‘Primum hic idem unus homo Paulus, sanctus Apostolus, plenus graia, simul delectatur in lege dei, simul repugnat legi dei, simul vult bonum secundum spiritum, non tamen agit propter carnem, sed contrarium: ergo peccat, dum bene facit. Nam repugnare legi dei, quis aliud quam peccare audeat intelligere? Non agere bonum, nonne contra legem dei est? At dum ergo nunquam sit sine repugnantis, nunquam sine vito bene facit, nunquam ergo plene implet legem dei.’

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there is always some sin present even in and between our good works. When Luther here claims that a person 'wills the good according to the Spirit, but does not do it, but does the contrary', he does not mean that the person would externally follow the worse option. The 'contrary' mentioned here is 'some nill' (quaedam noluntas), which contaminates the good action so that it is not totally without sin.  

One should be careful not to read Luther so that the subject of Romans 7 would choose the wrong external option. The whole point of the two disputation texts is to claim that all, even the best, human actions remain sinful because the human being remains carnal. They are not claiming that the apostle Paul does not externally do what he wants to do. When the two texts are read together with the Lecture on Romans, the meaning becomes clear and supports Luther's point: even while doing good a Christian always sins. In fact, this is the well-known core of Luther's radicalization of simul iustus et peccator: the sin need not be manifest or external in order to be called sin. Already the repugnancy and the bad internal desire in itself is sinful.

This horizon is further presupposed in Luther's most exhaustive and most influential reading of Rom. 7.14-8.1 in his Against Latomus (1521). I will not go into the details of this very long interpretation but mention only that Luther here defends the view that the imperfections of the justified Christian must be called 'sin'. In Romans 7, the Christian apostle Paul wills the good and consents to the good, but because of his twofold, that is, carnal and spiritual, existence neither the good nor the bad will is whole. In this sense, the external deed remains 'contrary' to the perfect good, willed by the good will. This does not mean, however, that the flesh would overcome in action. The spirit dominates the action, but so that the flesh remains averted and repugnant and thus there is sin. Therefore, both the pious and the impious remain sinful in their thought in a similar way; Luther even says that the sinful attack is greater for the pious. But since the pious have the 'antidote' given by their being in grace and in Christ, they do not commit sin in the same manner as the impious.

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68 See WA 8, 99-126. Luther's own detailed reading is given in 120, 31-125, 31 but it is useful to pay attention to the whole context of this reading.

69 WA 8,120,33-36: ‘Mira compositio [Rom. 7.16]: consentit legi bonae, sed non totus, quia facit non totus, quod vult non totus, neque consentiens, neque faciens, neque nolens hic totus est, sed idem qui consentit bonae legi, facit quod non vult, id est, contrarium legi bonae, quam vult.’

70 WA 8, 122, 11-12, 17-18: ‘Alterum enim hic dicit per alterum impediri, sic tamen, ut spiritus praevaleat et illi tribuatur, quod non operetur, non velit malum. ... Nunc cum spiritus queruletur et accuset carnem, patet, quod non caro dominetur, sed dominanti spiritui molesta et rebellis sit.’

71 WA 8, 123,9-12.
Leaving aside many other aspects pertaining to this interpretation of Romans 7, we can say that Luther, on the one hand, expresses the view of the 'Lutheran' Paul: Romans 7 speaks of Paul as an exemplary Christian. He exemplifies the continuing struggle with sin, thus being a paradigm of Christian as simul iustus et peccator. On the other hand, however, this does not entail the view that a Christian is characterised by weak will and permanent failure to do good. On the contrary, Paul as subject of Romans 7 is characterised by a strong will and by an external ability to do good. He misses the mark only in the sense that he wants to be perfect and, being carnal, cannot reach the absolute perfection. Thus our alternative A. becomes so strongly qualified that it begins to resemble the 'new perspective' offered by B. Both in Luther and in B. the Christian is said to fulfill the law. In both, this takes place in the Spirit.

Although Luther's exposition of Romans 7 remains at variance with the 'new perspective' insofar as it presupposes that the speaker is Paul the Apostle, we may thus identify interesting and even surprising parallels with the new perspective. Both positions presuppose a work ethic in which the Christian can fulfill the law to a significant extent. Of course grace and forgiveness remain necessary, since there always remains some sin. The fact that the holy apostle Paul remains carnal and sinful does not entail that he would not lead a moral life. He is in Christ and thus he can to a great extent bring forth the fruits of Christian existence. Luther's point is only that the apostle nevertheless continues to participate in the carnal existence which is characterised by aversion and some non-will which qualify as sin. Thus the two different exegetical strategies lead to surprisingly similar conclusions, namely that the apostle in his union with Christ, in his life in the Spirit, as a spiritual person, can cope with the same law, the will of God, in a new and successful manner.

4. Conclusion

Our study has yielded the following picture: New Testament scholars claim that, because of the Lutheran axiom 'righteous and sinner at the same time', they have been misguided in their reading of Paul for centuries. Only recently have they liberated their understanding from this axiom. Therefore they can now see that, after his conversion, Paul thinks that he can fulfill the law in the Spirit and in Christ. The exemplary I of Romans 7 refers to the pre-Christian existence, as it is described from a specific Christian viewpoint. This new result is an essential element of the so-called 'new perspective', achieved in the study of Paul during the last twenty-five years.

In our reading of Luther we have observed, however, that Luther also sometimes adopts a positive view of the law in the life of Christians. He thinks that the justified person in his or her union with Christ can perform 'theological actions' in which good results are brought forth spontaneously, like a good tree produces good fruit. In this theological action the person has been renewed. Through Christ present in the faith, the Christian is in the process of becoming 'another person'. The new person fulfills the moral law, although he is not 'using' the law as an instrument of his own sanctification. Christ remains the only meritorious subject of the theological actions of the new person. Nevertheless the Christian individual now displays moral practises which are consonant with the idea of fulfilling the law.

Luther adheres to the basic unity of the law. Although Jesus purifies and clarifies the law, he teaches the same morals as the Old Testament, namely the original will of God concerning good and bad. In bringing forth good fruits the Christian is fulfilling the one moral law, although in a theological manner, that is, in the Spirit and in union with Christ.

Luther's interpretation of Romans 7 between 1515 and 1521 does not entail the view that the apostle Paul, or the paradigmatic Christian, would remain unable to produce good actions. The axiom 'righteous and sinner at the same time' only means that good actions are brought
forth in an imperfect manner and that the sin continues in this sense. Romans 7 is thus not a
description of a weak-willed (akratic) Christian, but it is a description of a continent or
strong-willed (enkratic) Christian. Although the internal will of the Christian may be perfectly
good, the resulting actions remain, at least theologically speaking, less than perfect. So, the
Christian in Romans 7 does not simply fail to do good, but in 'doing what he does not want to
do' he fails to be perfect and fails to get totally free of the sin brought about by carnal
existence. In that sense he sins even while doing good. On the other hand, he in fact does do
good.

All this brings Luther's theology significantly closer to the 'new perspective' than many
exegetes and Luther interpreters have assumed. Of course this need not mean anything with
regard to the historical study of Paul. Heuristic categories like 'Lutheran Paul' and 'new
perspective' continue to possess their heuristic value irrespective of their historical accuracy.
Given our results, however, we ought to ask at least who actually initiated the so-called
'Lutheran' reading of Romans 7. This question is left unanswered in the present study. My aim
has been to show that, after the liberation of New Testament studies from Lutheranism, we
may with some good reason initiate a counter-movement in which Lutheran theology aims at
re-engaging the study of Paul. My proposal is that this re-engagement should not primarily
consist of a criticism of the 'new perspective'. It may be more fruitful to show that Martin
Luther's theology is closer to the insights of the new perspective than has been previously
assumed.

Abbreviations:

WA = Martin Luthers Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe. Weimar: Böhlau 1883-. 