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Justification and the Office of the Holy Ministry

The first five articles in this issue were originally papers presented at the 35th Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions held in Fort Wayne on January 18–20, 2012 under the theme “Justification in a Contemporary Context.” The final two articles, by Joel Elowsky and Roland Ziegler, were first delivered as the plenary papers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Theology Professors Conference that met at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, on May 29 to June 1, 2012, under the theme “To Obtain Such Faith . . . The Ministry of Teaching the Gospel” (AC V). It has been the practice of the two seminary journals to alternate in publishing plenary papers from this bi-annual conference in order that these studies may be shared with the wider church.

The Editors

The Finnish School of Luther Interpretation: Responses and Trajectories

Gordon L. Isaac

Since the 1970s, a new approach to Luther studies has been undertaken that has its roots in the Scandinavian tradition of Luther research. Tuomo Mannermaa, professor emeritus at the University of Helsinki, and his students have charted a new course in Luther research that has shown promise in ecumenical discussions and has challenged certain long-held convictions regarding the Wittenberg reformer. The surprising starting point for the Finnish School of Luther interpretation is the idea that Luther's formulation of justification and the Eastern church's doctrine of *theosis* constitute a theological intersection of the two traditions. The testing of this proposal came about during the dialogue between the Finnish Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches in Kiev in 1977. At those talks, *theosis* served as the point of departure. Never before had *theosis* been a common theme between the Orthodox and the Lutherans.

In the aftermath of those important first talks, a great deal of research has emerged. Going back to the sources to verify Luther's assertions regarding justification, participation, presence, and union with Christ has been the occupation of the Finnish school. As a result, there is an emerging new paradigm for Luther research. In his article, "Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research," Tuomo Mannermaa sets forward *theosis* as a problem of Luther research in three senses.¹

First, *theosis* as a problem of Luther research leads to something of a ground-clearing operation. Mannermaa and his school are convinced that the ontological assumptions of Luther research have been held captive by a neo-Kantian body of thought, particularly as it is represented by the German philosopher Herman Lotze (1817–1881). Lotze rejected the idea

¹ Tuomo Mannermaa, "Theosis als Thema der Finnischen Luther Forschung," in *Luther und Theosis*, Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg, vol. 16 (Erlangen: Martin-Luther Verlag, 1990), 11–26. An English translation by Norman W. Watt is available as "Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (Winter 1995): 37–48. References are to this translation.

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that things must exist in themselves before they could participate in relationships. Rather, being is always a matter of relationship. Being is thus what happens in reciprocal actions. As a result, Luther's interpretation of the real presence of Christ has been read in terms of actualism and has had an anti-ontological aspect to it. Renewing of the human being has, in this view, been a matter of renewing the will.

The influential Protestant theologian Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) takes up this point of view of Lotze. "In theology, we cannot assume the isolated existence of things. Right theological knowledge is . . . transcendental, in the sense that only God's action in the world, not his being in itself, is accessible to us."² The endeavor of interpreting Luther with this set of presuppositions, according to the Finnish School, makes it quite impossible for the traditional approaches in Luther research to see things clearly.

Especially when one comes to the utterances of Luther regarding the presence of Christ, transcendental categories are inadequate. To interpret Luther's ontological doctrine of the presence of Christ ethically or in terms of an effect assumes that the being of God remains *extra nos*. The "presence of Christ" in Karl Holl, for example, is in its essence neither a mystical nor a substantial union, but a union of wills. According to Mannermaa, the attempt to solve the question of how Christ is present through a transcendental approach renders certain passages in Luther's works absolutely meaningless.³

Second, and foundational, is the fact that Luther employs the language of *theosis*. In harmony with the ancient church, Luther uses terms such as "*deificare*," "*vergotten*," and "*durchgotten*." Mannermaa cites the following passage, stating that it elucidates the core of Luther's doctrine of justification:

Just as the word of God became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become word. For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words, God becomes man so that man may become God. Thus power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful. The logos puts on our form and manner, our image and likeness, so that it may clothe us with its image, its manner, and its likeness. Thus wisdom becomes foolish so that foolishness may become wisdom, and so it is in all other things

² Mannermaa, "Theosis," 41.

³ Mannermaa, "Theosis," 42.

that are in God and in us, to the extent that in all these things he takes what is ours to himself in order to impart what is his to us.⁴

To take this passage seriously and to understand that it reflects a structure found throughout Luther's writings from early to late is Mannermaa's point. The conception of God and man represented here is completely different from the one taught in the tradition of the Luther Renaissance and of dialectical theology.

For Mannermaa and his students, the leading idea is that Christ is present in faith. In other words, Christ, in both his person and work, is present in and through the faith of the Christian as an initial down payment on what will be complete at the Last Day. The concept of the *inhabitatio Dei* is taken by Mannermaa to be analogous to the doctrine of *theosis*. The divine life of Christ, who is really present, is considered to be much more central to Luther's thought than previously imagined. This leading thought is found in the Galatians commentary in a passage where Luther, speaking about true faith, writes, "It [faith] takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. . . . Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ."⁵

Justification and deification mean the participation of the believer in Christ in whom the very image of God is conveyed. Participation is not based on human love but on the agape love of God who seeks and saves the lost. In this way, the Finnish interpreters speak of a "real-ontic" unity between Christ and the believer. Mannermaa is careful to say that the union does not indicate a change of substance. "God does not stop being God and man does not stop being man. Both retain their substances, i.e. they are at all times in the union realities existing in themselves (*ens in se*), i.e., precisely substances."⁶ In any event, the idea of the presence of Christ in a "real-ontic" manner is not just a subjective experience or God's effect on the believer in the manner of German liberalism.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 1:28,25–32.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton S. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 26:139; WA 40 I:228–29.

⁶ Mannermaa, "Theosis," 43.

Third, *theosis* as a problem of Luther research touches on the matter of the implications of Christ's presence in the believer and what this means for transformation. As Mannermaa puts it, "through faith, in which Christ is a real presence, man begins in accordance with the Golden Rule to love both God and his neighbor. In faith, he considers all that is good, including what he himself has received, as God's property and quality."⁷ Through faith the relationship to God is no longer based on an upward striving through human love. Rather, it is based on the reception of God's love indwelling the believer through the Spirit. As Luther himself would say, "works contribute nothing to justification. Therefore man knows that works which he does by such faith are not his but God's."⁸

"Luther's main thesis is daring: As a result of the presence of Christ, the Christian becomes a 'work of Christ,' and even more a 'Christ' to the neighbor."⁹ In a very real sense, the Christian becomes "Christ's action and instrument." The presence of Christ is not simply a "spiritual" presence that is outside of us but a real presence that is internal to the believer. As Luther says it, "for through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us." And again, "Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which he does are the fulfillment of the commands of God given us through faith."¹⁰

Mannermaa points out that faith means participation in the being or qualities of God, one of which is love. Because Christ in his essence is God and God is love, so too the believer who exists in communion with God through faith is also moved to love the neighbor for God's sake and begins to love God from the heart. Christ is thus the form of faith. Of tantamount importance in all of this is to see that Mannermaa and the Finnish School see the *telos* of *theosis* not as a process by which one ascends to God, but a

⁷ Mannermaa, "Theosis," 44.

⁸ "Explanations to the Heidelberg Disputation," AE 31:56.

⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification*, Unitas Books Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 58. Kärkkäinen, although not a Lutheran theologian, did his doctoral work under Mannermaa and has become something of an interpreter for the movement, if not an evangelist for its views. In his article, "The Holy Spirit and Justification: The Ecumenical Significance of Luther's Doctrine of Salvation," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24 (Spring 2002): 26-39, Kärkkäinen emphasizes the new horizons opened up by the Finnish School, especially in the area of pneumatology, while highlighting some of the recent Finnish theologians and their writings. See also his contribution to *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James Bielby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011).

¹⁰ AE 31:56-57.

(Christ-like) transformation that causes the believer to step out for the sake of love into the position of his neighbor and become "like the poorest of the poor." In this way, the theology of Luther, which is the purest theology of faith (alone), is seen to be a thoroughgoing theology of (God's) love.

At this point it would be well for us to see the polemical side of Mannermaa's position. As he puts it, "Luther does not differentiate, as does subsequent Lutheranism, between the person and the work of Christ. Christ himself, both his person and his work, is the righteousness of man before God. Faith means justification precisely on the basis of Christ's person being present in it: *in ipsa fide Christus adest*; in faith itself Christ himself is present."¹¹ Mannermaa asserts that Luther's view of justification differs from the official position of the Lutheran Confessions. The confessional documents were drafted by other theologians and were crafted in the polemic against the Roman Catholic positions even more so than was Luther's teaching.

In addition, with the strong emphasis on the idea that Christ's person and his work constitute the righteousness of man before God causes the Finnish School to reject the distinction between justification and sanctification as being foreign to Luther's thought. Proceeding from Luther's statements regarding the presence of Christ in faith, the Finnish School insists that it is a much more productive stance to view Luther's understanding of salvation as in harmony with the early church.

This all too brief review of the basic outlines of the Finnish School gives some indication of the overall program of Mannermaa and his students.¹² It is a comprehensive and systematic proposal, including a critique of the methods of Luther study generated in the Luther Renaissance, most especially the neo-Kantian categories of transcendentalism that disallow any discussion of Luther's ontology.¹³ In addition, *theosis* or deification is

¹¹ Mannermaa, "Theosis," 46.

¹² Especially central to the large and growing literature in the field are the Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft and the Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg. Bibliographic information can be found at <http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin/luther.html>. See also the fine work of the *Luther Digest: An Annual Abridgment of Luther Studies*, which makes available some of the un-translated works by the Finnish School in English digest form. Especially important are Volume 3 (1995) and Volume 5 (1997), which contain digests from monographs as well as articles in the field.

¹³ In this regard, see Risto Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf uns: Die Transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989); Kari Kopperi et al., ed., *Luther und Ontologie*, (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1993).

posited as the structural content of Luther's theology.¹⁴ This expresses itself in the two kinds of love: the agape love of God, who seeks and saves sinners, and the resultant love generated in the heart of the believer that works its way out by serving the neighbor for Christ's sake.¹⁵ Further, the comprehensive program of the Finnish School seeks to highlight the way or manner in which Christ is present in and with the believer through faith.¹⁶ The perspective from the center is able to unite the concepts of justification and sanctification in a way that fairly represents the Luther corpus in its varied vocabulary.

If we fast-forward to 2010, the program of the Finnish School is set out once again in updated form by Risto Saarinen. In brisk manner, Saarinen points out the sad fact that Luther's thought is not highly regarded in academic circles today. "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."¹⁷ From John Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy movement, to the Communitarians following Alisdair MacIntyre, to Benedict XVI, opinions regarding Luther are as negative as they are misinformed. Saarinen understands that it requires a bold move to claim that Luther's thought is intellectually fascinating and holds promise, but that is precisely what the Finns have set out to do.

¹⁴ Among other works see, S. Peura and A. Raunio, ed., *Luther und Theosis* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1987); Simo Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch? Die Vergöttlichung als Thema der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1513 bis 1519*, Veröffentlichungen des Institut für Europäische Geschichte (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994), and Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung*, Zum ökumenischen Dialog (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989); English translation, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Anti Raunio, *Die Summe des christlichen Lebens: Die 'Goldene Regel' als Gesetz der Liebe in der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1510 bis 1527*, Systemaattisen teologian litoksen julkusen julkaisu 13 (Universität Helsinki, 1993); forthcoming publication by Veröffentlichungen des Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz. Tuomo Mannermaa, "Participation and Love in the Theology of Martin Luther," *Philosophical Studies in Religion, Metaphysics and Ethics. Essays in honor of Heikki Kirjavainen*. (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1997), 303–311. *Caritas Dei: Beiträge zum Verständnis Luthers und der gegenwärtigen Ökumene*. Festschrift für Tuomo Mannermaa, ed. O. Bayer, R. Jensen, S. Knuutila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1997).

¹⁶ Marku Antola, *The Experience of Christ's Real Presence in Faith: An Analysis of the Christ-Presence-Motif in the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft 43 (Helsinki: 1998).

¹⁷ Risto Saarinen, "Finnish Luther Studies: A Story and a Program," in Olli-Pekka Vainio, ed. *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 1.

Saarinen insists that the Finnish quest for a new way of presenting Luther is not “driven by patristic nostalgia or ecumenical opportunism.”¹⁸ Rather, it comes out of the historical context of Finnish Lutheranism in which 80 percent of the population is registered in the Lutheran church, and in which there exists a relaxed attitude toward Roman Catholicism. Further, because the research is done in the context of a modern university, there is a more non-confessional approach.

While the Finnish school is open to a new formulation of Luther, it is critical of several features of modern Protestantism. Saarinen is clear in setting out his conviction that both Modern German Protestantism and confessional traditionalism have remained defective in their understandings of justification.¹⁹ The key doctrine of Lutheranism, when it is interpreted either in purely forensic terms or in terms of existential experience, fails to give a just accounting of the realistic—or, as the Finns like to say, the “real-ontic”—character of salvation. Mannermaa wants to affirm the continuation of the sacramental soteriology of the Reformation in its classic form.

Clearly, the Finnish School of Luther interpretation is much more than a proposal of justification by faith framed in ecumenical terms. It is, rather, a programmatic attempt to set forward the beautiful and fascinating core of Luther’s teaching in today’s context. This implies both the deconstructive work of pointing out what has been wrongly conceived in previous presentations of Luther and engaging in the positive work of setting out a new path for Luther studies in the future. Due to the fact that there are so many factors clustered together, the Finnish approach to Luther studies represents a paradigm shift both for those schooled in the Luther Renaissance approach or for more traditional, confessional approaches to Luther.

I. Reception of the Finnish Interpretation

There is a continuum with regard to the reception of Finnish studies from enthusiastic embrace to outright dismissal. Ulrich Asendorf of the Lutherakademie Ratzeburg is very positive in his assessment of the Finnish School of Luther interpretation. It is not an exaggeration to say that he is convinced that the Finnish line marks a new departure in Luther

¹⁸ Saarinen, “Finnish Luther Studies,” 6.

¹⁹ Saarinen, “Finnish Luther Studies,” 9.

studies.²⁰ But not all are convinced. Martin Hailer, for example, challenges the sharp distinction that the Finns make between the relational and the ontological language that Luther uses. Using the *theopoetic* aspect of Luther's teaching as the key for understanding Luther drives certain insights into the background in a manner that skews the final shape of Luther's theology.²¹ And yet again, according to Risto Saarinen, there are some Germans who will not even deign to make any comments because the Finnish approach is just "too catholic."²²

The responses to the Finnish School that follow below are but a few representative examples available. The first article by Kurt Marquart is a good introduction to some of the concepts in the discussion. The second article by Carl Trueman is a critique from the point of view of method. The third article by Anna Briskina is a critique from the vantage point of eastern orthodoxy.

The article, "Luther and Theosis," by Kurt Marquart represents a more or less positive reception of the Finnish approach. Ostensibly, the effort is meant as a broad and open-ended treatment of some of the subjects related to *theosis*, including a sketch of the concept of deification from biblical and patristic texts, a sampling of Luther texts that touch on the matter, especially from the great Galatians commentary, the Finnish critique of neo-Kantian preconceptions, and finally a brief comment on the distinction that Mannermaa makes between Luther's view of justification and that which one finds in the Formula of Concord. Only in this last section does Marquart give any evidence of disagreement. The article is not an attempt to set forward a particular thesis or assessment of the Finnish approach. "My chief purpose here is simply to let Luther himself speak to us in his own vivid way."²³

Carl Trueman, professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, has written a critical review article of the collection of essays on the Finnish perspective entitled *Union with*

²⁰ Ulrich Asendorf, "Die Einbettung der Theosis in die Theologie Martin Luthers," in *Luther und Theosis*, Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg, vol. 16 (Erlangen: Martin-Luther Verlag, 1990), 85-102.

²¹ Martin Hailer, "Rechtfertigung als Vergottung? Eine auseinandersetzung mit der finnischen Luther-Deutung und ihrer systematischen-theologischen Adaption," *Luther-jahrbuch* 77 (2010): 239-267.

²² Saarinen, "Finnish Luther Studies," 11.

²³ Kurt Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," *CTQ* 64 (July 2000): 186.

Christ.²⁴ At the outset, Trueman affirms the desire of the Helsinki circle to offer a Luther who has more potential for ecumenical discussions. And indeed, as he notes, the systematic construction of the Finnish School has achieved precisely that.

Furthermore, Trueman goes on to give praise to the Finns for their contributions to the wider work of Luther interpretation. In particular, he affirms the valid points made with regard to the critique they bring to bear on the methodology of the Luther Renaissance with its anti-ontological bias. As a historian, Trueman is happy to see that the views and approach of Ritschl and Holl and even Ebeling come under “timely and necessary criticism.” Trueman is keenly aware that Luther operated in an intellectual world shaped by late medieval thought forms. To impose Kantian presuppositions on the 16th-century Saxon and his wide ranging thought is a formula for skewed results. In the case of Ebeling and his more existentialist approach to Luther, there are abiding problems in appropriating the force of language and the historical and realist stance of Luther. In addressing these excesses, Trueman expresses his appreciation of the Finnish School of Luther interpretation by saying, “the Finnish School stands as a necessary corrective.”²⁵ After these kind and affirming opening remarks, Trueman turns his even-handed but incisive critique to bear on the Finnish School.

First, Trueman observes that the theses of the Finnish School are built on the use of a few select texts. The argument that is presented is purportedly a historical one; however, there is no use of the trajectories and methodologies of modern Luther scholarship. There is no use of the Luther scholarship such as that represented by Oberman, Hagen, or Steinmetz, scholars who are committed to reading the Luther texts against the backdrop of the theological and exegetical traditions to which they relate. This leaves the presentation of the Finns (at least in the volume in question) historiographically very weak. As Trueman puts it, “Ideas of righteousness, gift and favour do not originate in a vacuum, and understanding their historical, intellectual, and exegetical background must form

²⁴ Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²⁵ Carl Trueman, “Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning: A Critical Assessment of the Reading of the Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle.” This article was first published in *The Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231–44. It can now be found in *The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historical and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Fearn, Scotland: 2004), 129–148, cf. especially 130.

a necessary part of understanding how and why Luther is or is not using them."²⁶

Second, while the Finns raise very important questions about the viability of using the Kantian and post-Kantian methodologies of the Luther Renaissance, they do not ask themselves the equally important question of how to read the Luther corpus as a whole. Strangely missing from the Finnish School is the matter of the historical development of Luther's theology. That there is significant development and change on certain matters is not given enough attention in this presentation of Luther. Trueman complains that quotations from pre-reformation and Reformation texts are juxtaposed without ever asking the developmental questions, calling into question the methodology of the movement as a whole. A case in point is the Finnish School commitment to separating Luther from the confessional tradition. This highly questionable move is not argued on the basis of the relevant texts, but is merely asserted without the supporting grounds.

Third, following hard upon what has already been said, Trueman makes the assertion that there is a pattern of decontextual reading in Mannermaa's approach. The emphasis given to participation in Christ fails to take into account the significance of the two kinds of righteousness and the two kingdoms doctrine as basic elements of Luther's understanding of the Christian life. This leaves Trueman doubtful that justice has been done to the theological content of the primary texts.

Fourth, Trueman points out that the distancing of Luther from the Formula of Concord would also require a distancing from the Augsburg Confession as well. This is scarcely plausible, given Luther's comments on the *Augustana* and his later comments found in the Galatians commentary of 1535. In a bit of wry wit, Trueman suggests that, if the Finns are successful in their attempt to separate Luther from the Confessions, it may result in a Luther closer to Gregory of Palamas than the Lutheran Confessions!

In sum, Trueman sees the Finnish School of Luther interpretation engaged in a process of setting forward a systematic vision of Luther that may have usefulness in extending ecumenical dialogue, although he wonders how far one can get in dialogue on a skewed view of Luther. In

²⁶ Trueman, "Finnish Line," 146.

the end, this trajectory runs afoul of the careful historical methods that need to be employed to give us an accurate picture of Luther. As he puts it:

To build a systematic case on a reading of Luther which flies in the face of the most basic canons of historical method (reading texts in context, not isolating quotations in a manner which effectively subverts their meaning) might appeal to the most postmodern of minds, but it should have no place at the table of reasoned ecumenism and honest, genuine, interconfessional dialogue.²⁷

Another critique worth mentioning comes from the Orthodox point of view. Anna Briskina has written an article entitled, "An Orthodox View of Finnish Luther Research," in which she raises several issues.²⁸ Among other things, Briskina focuses on the following: the "real-ontic" union, the later texts of the reformer that seem to be almost exclusively forensic in character, and what Finnish researchers seem to have overlooked in the Eastern Orthodox view of *theosis*.

Briskina points out that Finnish Luther research follows the Aristotelian principle that the knower becomes one and the same with the known. Or, in other words, when you know something or someone, your intellect is shaped by that experience. According to Mannermaa and his school, the union between Christ and the Christian is grounded in the fact that Christ comes to the Christian in faith and is present in the faith itself. Faith is in the form of Christ and in this way the Christian is formed in the image of Christ and is thus "*vergottet*." According to this logic, each object that one knows should become the form of the intellect. So, it might be possible to participate in God, or it might be possible to participate in one's horse, or in any number of other things.²⁹ The "real-ontic" union with Christ is trivialized greatly because it is merely one of any number of possible "real-ontic" unions.

In addition, but still on this topic, Briskina points out that it is disputed as to whether or not "union" and "participation" should be interpreted ontologically at all, for it has been understood as agreement. According to Melancthon, neither participation in the name of God nor in the divine nature has ontological surplus value over and against, or in addition to, participation in the gifts of Christ. So the problem of asserting the "real-

²⁷ Trueman, "Finnish Line," 148.

²⁸ Anna Briskina, "An Orthodox View of Finnish Luther Research," *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (2008): 16–39.

²⁹ Briskina, "An Orthodox View," 22.

ontic" union and the sanitive transformation of the Christian has led, according to the critics, to neglect of the cross and sin, something that seems out of place with Luther's theology.

It has been pointed out by Reinhard Flogaus, among others, that the "*froehliche wechsel*"—the happy exchange—is no longer the major theme in Luther's doctrine of justification after the year 1531. Instead, the leading principle is exclusively *sola fide*.³⁰ The emphasis of these texts is the forgiveness of sins as pure gift, not participation in Christ, and they are therefore forensically grounded. These texts, not surprisingly, are undervalued by the Finns. So, the critics would point out that the theme of Luther's theology is not that of participation or *theosis* but is simply *solus Christus crucifixus*.

Perhaps most interesting in Briskina's article is the comment made regarding the Eastern Orthodox view of *theosis*. As Briskina points out, the doctrine of the Eastern Church goes hand in hand with their doctrine of deificatory life that embraces church life and ascetics. In their attempt to forge a deep relationship between the Eastern Church and Lutheranism, the Finnish researchers seem to have overlooked this fact. A full-scale comparison of Luther and the Eastern Church in the areas of piety, sacraments, and worship would become necessary. In this regard, one also needs to reckon with Luther's doctrine of *simul justus et peccator*. From the Eastern perspective, the *simul* can in no way be affirmed. Briskina chides, "the impression almost arises of a new doctrine of two undissolvable [*sic*] natures. But does not the goal of redemption consist in human beings being healed from one of these 'natures' and the *simul* dissolved? It would be a rather strange idea to deny this to the process of salvation."³¹

II. Forensic Justification

Up to this point we have had a summary look at the Finnish School and its interpretive approach to Luther, and we have recorded a few of the critiques of this new way of viewing the reformer. We turn now to the Finns and their concerns regarding the matter of forensic justification. Risto Saarinen reports that some of the most vehement opposition to the

³⁰ Reinhard Flogaus, "Melanchthon versus Luther? Zur Frage der Einheit der Wittenberger Reformation in der Rechtfertigungslehre," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 91 (2000): 37–39. See also Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: Ein Beitrag zum Ökumenischen Gespräch*, Forschungen zur Systematischen und Ökumenischen Theologie 78 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1997).

³¹ Briskina, "An Orthodox View," 25

Finnish approach comes from those who are proponents of a strictly forensic view of justification. By "strictly forensic," he means a theology that denies the effective or ontological side of justification in favor of an exclusively forensic decree framed in the mind of God. Understood christologically, the Christ "for us" is associated with the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the Christ "in us" is the effective side of justification. A theologian who would affirm Christ "for us" as the primary aspect of justification with the Christ "in us" subordinated to that primary aspect would, in this definition, hold to a "strictly forensic" view of justification.

As a good example of one who represents this point of view, Risto Saarinen cites Mark C. Mattes:

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.³²

Saarinen reads Mattes as saying that the forensic declaration is the most important thing, and that the Christ "in us" serves the purpose of supporting the truth that Christ is "for us." As such, Mattes' position cannot be reconciled to Mannermaa's view.

The issue in dispute here is the relationship between effective and forensic justification. Perhaps one of the best ways of getting at this topic is to speak of the two classic concepts: "grace" (*gratia*, *favor*) and "gift" (*donum*). The former denotes the sinner's being declared righteous (the forensic concept) and the latter the person's being made righteous (the effective aspect). As early as Luther's *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516), this distinction appears. Following the terminology of Augustine and the medieval tradition, on the basis of Romans 5:15, "The grace of God the gift of God" (*gratia Dei et donum in gratia*), Luther expresses the opinion that

³² See Mark Mattes, "A Future for Lutheran Theology?" *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 439–457.

“the grace of God and the ‘gift’ are the same thing, namely the righteousness which is freely given to us through Christ.”³³

Saarinen and the Finnish school have always taken pains to say that *favor* and *donum* go together and cannot be sundered, any more than justification can be severed from sanctification. That is why this statement by Mattes is unacceptable from the Finnish point of view. Saarinen sees this as an attempt to place everything on the forensic side and, as a consequence, leave the believer in the position of having become a beneficiary of the benefits of Christ without becoming a full recipient of salvation.

Saarinen explains his complaint against Mattes more fully with the following:

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 theology of eucharistic sacrifice that Luther rejected.³⁴

What are we to make of this critique? It is certainly creative, but many might find it a bit over the top. Saarinen makes the distinction between being a beneficiary and being a participant; apparently, there is concern over the possibility of accommodating some form of cheap grace. I am sure, however, that it would come as a complete surprise to Mattes to think that his view of Luther’s theology has anything in common with Eucharistic sacrifice or the merit-sharing schemes of medieval brotherhoods. I would further doubt that Mattes would advocate a view of Luther’s theology that excluded transformation and renewal.

Mattes says, “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.’” Mattes says this to establish that the righteousness of faith is one which God imputes to us through Christ without works. It is not of the law; it is a

³³ AE 25:306

³⁴ Saarinen, “Finnish Luther Studies,” 22

passive righteousness. This is the position that Luther emphatically takes in the opening salvos of the *argumentum* to the Galatians commentary of 1535. Mattes' point comes through loud and clear. Here, the Finns have been a bit reticent to acquiesce. They are more likely to affirm that forgiveness and renewal go together. Indeed, some are convinced that the Finnish school tends to equate the *inhabitatio Dei* (which belongs to sanctification) with the *iustitia Dei* (which belongs to justification).³⁵ This tendency in the Finnish School seems to be borne out in the major work of Mannermaa, in which his description of the relation between the gift of righteousness and imputation quite clearly—and rather curiously—gives precedence to the “righteousness in the heart” over the “imputation of God.”³⁶

One might quibble with the way Mattes speaks of *theosis*. After all, the Finns have a Lutheran way of talking about *theosis*. “A mystical teleology of ascent into the triune life” is hardly an accurate expression of what the Finnish school would say. Deification as understood by the Finns is not an ascent, but a descent into the form of a servant.³⁷ Since God has become man, the form or image that is being renewed in the believer is the image of the incarnate one. The marred humanity of Adam as a self-vaunting god is set aside in the renewed humanity of Christ, the one who is a friend to sinners. Perhaps one can excuse Mattes in this small infelicity while striving for clarity on the important relationship of grace and gift (*favor, donum*), which was the focus of his article.

As we turn to Saarinen, it is clear that he wants to be able to say that the believer is both beneficiary and recipient. His emphasis is to hold together the unity of the grace and gift. He rejects the notion that it is possible to be a beneficiary of the grace of God without simultaneously receiving the gift of the present Christ, who works real righteousness in the believer. But is it really the case that someone like Mattes is sundering the declaration of God's righteousness from the transformation of the believer in such a way as to falsify the presentation of righteousness that the Bible and Luther set forward? What is the source of Saarinen's opposition? Is there an aversion to the declaration of righteousness in Christ through the gospel because it does not fit with a view of divinization? Or, is it that the

³⁵ On this point see especially Timo Laato, “Justification: The Stumbling Block of the Finnish Luther School,” *CTQ* 72 (2008): 327–346.

³⁶ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 55–61.

³⁷ The main work here is Raunio, *Die Summe des christlichen Lebens*. See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One With God*, 58–61, for a helpful summary.

Finnish approach does not have a strong embrace of the concept of performative language, or of the declaration of God's Word that makes things come into being? It makes one wonder what the Finns would say about the word of absolution in the Office of the Keys. Is there no room for any forensic aspect to Luther's view of justification?

Robert Kolb, reflecting on Gerhard Forde's treatment of the doctrine of justification, writes the following:

First the "Holl school" and recently the "Finnish school" of Tuomo Mannermaa challenged the so-called "forensic" interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification. Holl recognized that Luther had emphasized the performance of good works and tried to tie the sanctified life to the act of justification. Mannermaa associates Luther's view with the Eastern Orthodox concept of *theosis* or divinization, in arguing that justification is more real than "merely" a divine verbal observation. Both interpretations wish to avoid regarding justification as the creation of a legal fiction—believers remain really sinners but God simply refuses to consider them as such. Gerhard Forde rightly recognized that such attempts are both historically inaccurate and theologically unnecessary when he observed that the more "forensic" Luther's teaching becomes, the more effective it is, because nothing can be more real than that which God's Word declares. Furthermore, Luther's distinguishing God's restoration of human righteousness and the effect it has on human performance of new obedience dare not be confused with a separation of the two, as though there were no moral consequences of receiving a new identity and new dignity as God's child.³⁸

III. Conclusion

The fascinating and creative work of the Finnish School of Luther interpretation has stimulated discussion and raised significant issues in Luther studies. The following observations are in order.

First, the Finnish School has already achieved significant gains and has made contributions to the wider community of Luther scholarship. The Finnish interpretation stands as a necessary corrective to the post-Kantian trajectories of German Liberalism. If it achieves nothing else, this contri-

³⁸ Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127–128. Kolb is referencing Gerhard Forde, *Justification: A Matter of Death and Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982; reprint, Mifflintown, Pennsylvania: Sigler Press, 1991), 21–38, especially 36.

bution to Luther scholarship is invaluable. To be able to speak again in terms of "real presence" may take us a step closer to Luther's worldview and help us to rethink some of our presuppositions in Luther studies.

Second, the Mannermaa school has produced a sizable corpus and mobilized the talents of a new generation of Luther scholars whose energy and love for the Luther corpus is winsome and catching. The works that have already been published will generate further discussion that promises to keep Luther studies dynamic and interesting. The Finnish School, with its emphasis on the realism of Luther, has achieved a platform from which to be heard.

Third, serious issues remain, especially when it comes to methodology, decontextualized reading of key Luther passages, and the assertion that *deification* constitutes the structural content of Luther's theology. There is no question that there are significant and vivid passages where Luther uses this powerful terminology, but to say that this constitutes the structural content is not completely convincing.

Finally, one hopeful sign is that there is movement within the movement. That is to say, the critiques and the exchanges have produced change in some positions. For example, while Risto Saarinen has stated that the Finnish position has seen the favor of God and the gift of God as having a unity such that one does not have precedence over the other, he is now willing to say that his view gives priority to favor over gift.³⁹ The original position separating Luther from Melancthon and the Confessions has also been modified by the work of Olli-Pekka Vainio.⁴⁰ He applies the doctrine of union with Christ as an outside standard by which the various documents of the Book of Concord can be seen in unity. Thus the original stance of the Finnish interpretation, which sought to separate Luther from the Confessions, is being modified. For what else in the Finnish approach will be modified, we will have to wait and see.

In summary, Finnish Luther research advocates a reformer who is ready to be set forward afresh. The Finnish School wants to promote a fas-

³⁹ Saarinen, "Finnish Luther Studies," 23, where he modifies the Finnish paradigm in terms of a "giver-oriented perspective." It is unfortunate that this admission of the precedence of grace over gift does not allow him to recognize Mattes' position in a positive light.

⁴⁰ Olli-Pekka Vainio, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Book of Concord—Harmony or Contradiction?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48 (Winter 2009): 380–389.

cinating Luther who has something to say in the forum of contemporary ideas. The Finns have in mind to overcome stereotypes and misunderstandings perpetuated at the highest levels. At every turn, they seek to set forward a Luther who is “evangelical and catholic.” If they can help us find our way to a new presentation of Luther, we will all be the better for it.