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## **BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST** **The Finnish Luther Interpretation** **and the Justification Debate**

This article examines the work Finnish school of Luther interpretation and assesses its significance for the ongoing dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics about their faith in general and about justification in particular. No attempt will be made to analyze the subtle differences between the individual Finnish scholars. Nor will the adequacy of their Luther interpretation be the object of evaluation. The ecumenical significance of 'the Finns' lies in the fact that they discover in the works of Luther a richer and more complex vision on the Christian faith than in certain forms of contemporary Lutheran theology.

In the first section, the general characteristics of the Finnish approach are described. The second section reflects on the relevance of their work for the theme of justification by faith. This theme is put in a wider theological perspective in the concluding section.

### **1. The Finnish School of Luther Interpretation: General Characteristics**

'The Finnish school of Luther interpretation' refers to the work of Tuomo Mannermaa and his students during the last quarter of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>. Their explorations into Luther had an ecumenical orientation from the outset. In the background of their research is the dialogue between the Lutheran Church in Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church. Central to the Finnish reading is the concept of *theosis*. Mannermaa wants to show that this concept, which might sound

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the dissertations written by Mannermaa's students, see T. MANNERMAA, *Why is Luther so Fascinating: Modern Finnish Luther Research*, in: *Union with Christ*, ed. C. E. BRAATEN, R. W. JENSON, Grand Rapids 1998, 1-20, 2-3.

somewhat 'mystical' and 'physical' to many a Lutheran theologian, is present in Luther's own writings. Although the idea of divinization is not central in the theology of Luther<sup>2</sup>, Mannermaa demonstrates that it can be used as a possible key to understand Lutheran soteriological notions such as justification by faith, the relationship between law and grace and the Christian as simultaneously righteous and sinner.

From an ecumenical point of view, one could immediately identify two ways in which the theological exchange between the churches can benefit from this approach. Firstly, it provides the ecumenical dialogue between Lutheran and Orthodox churches with a theological point of contact. In the standard view on the Lutheran doctrine of justification, personalistic, relational and ethical aspects of salvation are contrasted with physical and ontological soteriologies such as the Orthodox ('platonic') idea of *theosis* and the Roman Catholic ('aristotelian') concept of habitual grace. According to Mannermaa, this modern contrast between the ethical and the ontological is not present in patristic thinking on divinization, nor in Luther's idea of justification<sup>3</sup>. Rather, the Lutheran understanding of justification cannot be understood without reference to the 'real-ontological' presence of Christ in faith and the equally real union between the believer and Christ.

Secondly, the Finnish interpretation is able to avoid some historical misinterpretations of the theology of Luther. Already at an early stage in the Lutheran tradition, the idea of justification was reduced to its forensic side, thus separating it from salvation as regeneration and vivification<sup>4</sup>. In the Formula of Concord, for instance, justification is considered as the imputation of God's righteousness, wholly detached from the 'new obedience' of the Christian. As Mannermaa's student Simo Peura points out, the only effective change involved in this view of justification is the mere taking cognizance by the believer of God's forgiveness<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the event of justification takes place both outside the believer (in God's declaration of the forgiveness of sins) and in the mental state of the believer (in the awareness of this divine grace), but not within the ontological reality of the life of the Christian. This imputative understanding of justification has strongly affected subsequent Lutheran soteriological thinking.

The tendency to stress one-sidedly the forensic aspect of justification was further amplified by the influence of neo-Kantian philosophy. The work of Hermann Lotze has left its mark on 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theology, as Risto Saarinen

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<sup>2</sup> See R. FLOGAUS, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen 1996, 375.

<sup>3</sup> T. MANNERMAA, *Christ present in faith: Luther's view of justification*, Minneapolis 2005, 2.

<sup>4</sup> S. PEURA, *Christ as Favor and Gift (donum) The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification*, in: *Union with Christ*, ed.: C.E. BRAATEN, R.W. JENSON, Grand Rapids 1998, 42-69, 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

en has shown in his study *Gottes Wirken auf uns: Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motiv in der Lutherforschung*<sup>6</sup>. In the work of theologians like Albrecht Ritschl, Luther's idea that Christ is present in faith is deprived of its metaphysical objectivity, in favour of a dynamic and relational interpretation. Against all metaphysics of substance, the presence of Christ is only considered from the perspective of God's *effects* on the believer through the historical mediation of Jesus Christ. In accordance with the Kantian division between the noumenal and the phenomenal realm, the divine reality in itself (*an sich*) remains inaccessible behind God's actions upon the believer. In a way that is analogous to the understanding of justification in the Formula of Concord, the metaphysical presence of God is replaced on the one hand by a divine existence 'in itself' which lies wholly outside our grasp and on the other hand a series of effects in the mind of the believer. The possibility of a real-ontological presence of Christ in faith – let alone a real union of the believer and Christ – is thereby excluded.

The study of Saarinen merely ascertains that 20<sup>th</sup> century protestant theology is profoundly influenced by Lotze, but leaves open the question whether the impact of neo-Kantianism leads to a distortion of Luther's own theology<sup>7</sup>. It is clear, however, that the overall conclusion of the Finnish Luther scholarship does entail an answer to this question. The Finns indeed claim that Luther can be called a metaphysical realist and that therefore anti-metaphysical tendencies in the Lutheran theological tradition misrepresent the Reformer's thinking.

## 2. The Finnish School and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic debate on justification

From the outset of the official ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics after the Second Vatican Council, the theme of justification has been high on the agenda of the discussions. The reason for this is not only the historical fact that the doctrine of justification has played a divisive role during the time of the Reformation. Nor can the importance of justification be reduced to the presence of doctrinal condemnations on this topic in authoritative documents of both traditions. Over and above this, the issue of justification seems to be seen by many as symptomatic for an alleged 'fundamental difference' (*Grunddifferenz*) in the life and theology of both groups of Christians<sup>8</sup>. The issue is indeed fundamental in as far as the relationship between human beings and God

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<sup>6</sup> R. SAARINEN, *Gottes Wirken auf uns: Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung*, Stuttgart 1989.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>8</sup> For the concept of 'fundamental difference', cf. the study *Grundkonsens – Grunddifferenz: Studie des Strassburger Instituts für Ökumenische Forschung. Ergebnisse und Dokumente*, ed. A. BIRMELÉ, H. MEYER, Frankfurt am Main/Paderborn 1992.

and the human role within this relationship are at stake. The question the dialogue attempts to answer is whether the differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in their understanding of justification are an obstacle for both groups on the way to more ecclesial unity.

In which way can the Finnish Luther research contribute to this dialogue? There are in my view at least two possible roads to show the relevance of Mannermaa and his school for the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. Firstly, on a systematic theological level, it can be made evident that the content of the Finnish-Lutheran concept of justification bears closer resemblance to the Roman Catholic approach to salvation than Lutheran soteriology shaped by the Formula of Concord and neo-Kantianism. Secondly, on a fundamental theological level, the Finnish interpretation can put a supposed 'fundamental difference' between Lutheran and Roman Catholic faith and theology into perspective. That is to say, the Finnish assertion that Luther had a metaphysically realistic concept of Christ's presence in faith at least questions formulations of this *Grunddifferenz* in terms of dynamic thinking versus substance-thinking.

The remainder of this section deals with the systematic theological question of justification, focused on forensic and effective justification and on the meaning of *simul iustus et peccator*. The relevance of the findings of the Finnish scholars for the shape and content of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue will be highlighted. The fundamental theological problem of the 'fundamental difference' will be discussed in the concluding section.

### a. Forensic and Effective Justification

As regards the issue of forensic and effective justification, the work of the Finnish school seems most promising. Mannermaa's work *Christ Present in Faith* accentuates the christocentric nature of Luther's thought. In the union of the believer with Christ sins are not only forgiven, but also destroyed. Christ is not only God's goodwill (*favor*) towards the sinner, because of which sins are not reckoned, but also the gift (*donum*) to the believer, who now really participates in Christ's divine nature<sup>9</sup>. The unity of acquittal and renewal is founded in the person of Christ. Simo Peura points to the fact that both aspects, favour and gift, are necessary to deliver the human being from evil, for the misery of the sinner consists of both the wrath of God and the wickedness of man<sup>10</sup>.

Instead of defending an absolute priority of forensic justification over the transformation of the Christian, as is often done in Lutheran theology and as is often assumed to be the only possible Lutheran position, Peura states that in

<sup>9</sup> T. MANNERMAA, *Christ present in faith*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> S. PEURA, *Christ as favor and gift*, 43

Luther grace (*favor*) and gift (*donum*) depend upon each other. On the one hand, the perfect righteousness of Christ covers the sins of the sinner and only within this protecting shield the inner renewal of the Christian (the gift) is possible. On the other hand, the real regeneration of the believer is the condition to remain within the protection of Christ<sup>11</sup>. This remarkable description of the mutual dependence of acquittal and transformation can be seen as a compromise in a controversial issue in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue: whether justification is to be understood analytically or synthetically<sup>12</sup>.

This would be an all too easy and insubstantial solution, however, if it were not for its christological foundation. For both grace and gift are themselves wholly dependent upon the indwelling of Christ in the believer. Two dangers are thereby avoided. Firstly, the emphasis on the real presence of Christ prevents theology from thinking God's righteousness as a purely virtual reality for the believer. Justification does not only imply a mental awareness of God's saving grace on the side of the believer, but also the actual life-changing union between the believer and Christ. Secondly, the presence of Christ prevents theology from thinking that one can detach the gift from the giver and have it at one's disposal. The idea of the *inhabitatio* of Christ means that the gift and the Giver are identical and that the believer remains radically dependent upon God.

The inaccuracy of any Luther interpretation that claims to find a purely forensic view of justification in the work of the Reformer did not remain unnoticed before the work of the Finnish school<sup>13</sup>. Nor is the emphasis on the divine presence in faith as a way of reconciling the forensic and effective aspects of justification a novelty introduced by the Finns<sup>14</sup>. Still, the Finnish interpretation of justification in terms of Christ's presence in faith as *favor* and *donum* is all but superfluous.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58. For the reciprocity of *favor* and *donum*, see also: S. PEURA, *Baptism, Justification, and the Joint Declaration*, in: *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology*, ed. N. H. GREGERSEN ET AL., Minneapolis 2005, 117-130, 121.

<sup>12</sup> This is the question whether God's acquittal of the believer is merely an acknowledgement of a righteousness that is already there due to the believer's transformation (analytical) or rather a 'performative' declaration of a righteousness which is created by this 'speech act' (synthetical). For this question, see H. G. POHLMANN, *Rechtfertigung*, Gütersloh 1971, 352-361.

<sup>13</sup> See: *Ibid.*, 313-328. Cf. also T. BEER, *Die Ausgangspositionen der lutheranischen und der katholischen Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, Cath 21 (1967) 1, 65-84. Beer also refers to Luther's distinction between *favor* and *donum* in order to demonstrate the proximity between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran idea of justification. Unlike the Finns, however, Beer emphasizes the difference in the way Christ is present as favour and as gift (namely in a kind of 'mechanical exchange' and as a living, life-renewing presence respectively). BEER, *Die Ausgangspositionen der lutheranischen und der katholischen Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, 70-72.

<sup>14</sup> John Henry Newman in his *Lectures on Justification*, to mention one notorious example, attempted to find a middle path between extreme understandings of justification precisely by emphasizing the divine indwelling in the believer. Newman, however, did not avoid the typical error of ascribing a forensic view on justification to Luther. J.H. C. NEWMAN, *Lectures on Justi-*

Firstly, repeating time and again that Luther's convictions on justification are more subtle than is commonly assumed seems to be a permanent necessity. Misunderstandings and stereotypical misrepresentations of theological positions are persistent in theological discourse. The main reason for this is not difficult to guess: simplifications make both theological teaching and the definition of one's own identity over against the opponent easier.

Secondly, the Finnish interpretation offers an additional explanation of the obstinacy of the forensic Luther interpretation. The reference to the neo-Kantian intellectual climate does present a plausible account of the fact that the theologians repeatedly reduce the reality of Christ's presence in faith to an 'awareness', a 'recognition' or any other mental event<sup>15</sup>.

Thirdly, the Finnish interpretation seems to do justice to the concerns underlying both Lutheran and Roman Catholic doctrinal positions on justification. Both the 'Lutheran' insistence that justifying grace can never be abstracted from Christ as the source of all salvation and the 'Roman Catholic' emphasis on the actual reality of the righteousness bestowed upon the Christian – as opposed to righteousness as a purely virtual or hoped-for reality – are contained in the Finnish interpretation of Christ being present in faith<sup>16</sup>. The approach of the Finnish school therefore bears resemblance to the way the topic of justification has been dealt with in the ecumenical dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. For in these dialogues it has become customary to refer to underlying concerns of doctrines, to the 'spirit' of conflicting dogmas rather than to their 'letter'<sup>17</sup>. Instead of directly comparing and harmonizing Lutheran and Roman Catho-

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*fication*, London 1838. For a confrontation of Newman and Luther, see: T.L. SHERIDAN, *Newman and Luther on Justification*, JES 38 (2001) nr. 2-3, 217-245.

<sup>15</sup> In that sense a parenthetical remark of Daphne Hampson is telling. While writing on the ontological interpretation of the Finnish Luther school and its concept of participation in God, she adds between brackets: 'I am reminded of what my teacher Arthur MacGill was wont to say: that for Luther the circumference of my self-understanding is now nothing less than my sense of God'. This shows that Hampson somewhat misses the point of the Finns, spontaneously translating the explicitly 'real-ontological' language of Mannermaa and his students ('participation', 'presence') into purely mental terms ('understanding', 'sense'). It is no surprise then that Hampson, looking at the Finns through neo-Kantian glasses, doubts whether their interpretation makes any difference in the discussion between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. D. HAMPSON, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, New York Cambridge 2001, 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> 'Lutheran' and 'Roman Catholic' are within quotation marks here precisely because the Finns have shown that the concerns mentioned are not exclusively Lutheran or Roman Catholic.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. K. LEHMANN, W. PANNENBERG, *Lehrverurteilungen-Kirchentrennend?* Bd 1: *Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute*, Göttingen 1986, 22-23.46. The idea that both Lutheran and Roman Catholic theological 'concerns' are legitimate whereas the literal meaning of doctrinal expressions should be put into perspective is also implicit in the *Joint Declaration's* claim that the condemnations of the Reformation era are no longer applicable to today's dialogue partner while remaining valid as 'salutary warnings'. *The Joint Declaration*

lic dogmatic statements, the question is asked whether the doctrines of one dialogue partner also give expression to the concerns that lie behind the dogmas of the other partner<sup>18</sup>. This approach is sometimes thought to be superficial or inattentive to the possibility that differences at the level of language may betray crucial doctrinal discrepancies<sup>19</sup>. However, the Finnish Luther scholars show that it would be short-sighted to play theocentrism and salvific realism off against each other in the discussion on justification. For both concerns converge in the idea of Christ being present in faith. In that sense the Finns offer a theological foundation of the ‘concern for concerns’ and the use of the ‘differentiated consensus’ in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, at least in this particular issue.

### b. *Simul iustus et peccator*

Even if Lutherans and Roman Catholics can affirm together that the Christian undergoes a real transformation and that he or she really becomes righteous, the question remains which role sin still plays in his or her life. This is the problem of the right interpretation of the Lutheran *simul iustus et peccator* and the question whether or not – and in which sense – Roman Catholic theology can agree with this formula<sup>20</sup>. The discussion on the simultaneity of being sinful and being justified in the Christian is, of course, closely related to the issue of forensic and effective justification. For a strictly forensic interpretation of the righteousness of the believer corresponds with a view of the Christian as someone who remains completely sinful in him or herself while being held wholly righteous by God for the sake of Christ. The fact that the Mannermaa school sees a reciprocal relationship between declarative transformational aspects of justification already implies the exclusion of certain interpretations of *simul iustus et peccator*. This does not mean, however, that both topics simply boil down to the same thing. The Finnish argument is more sophisticated here than in the issue of fo-

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on the Doctrine of Justification Between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, OCh 36 (2000) 1, 56-74, §§ 41-42.

<sup>18</sup> This question is crucial in the method of the ‘differentiated consensus’ which is followed in the *Joint Declaration*. In *Communio Sanctorum*, a more recent ecclesiological document resulting from the German Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, this same method is adopted with reference to *Lehrverurteilungen-kirchentrennend: BILATERALE ARBEITSGRUPPE DER DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ UND DER KIRCHENLEITUNG DER VEREINIGTEN EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHEN KIRCHE DEUTSCHLANDS, Communio Sanctorum: die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, Frankfurt am Main/Paderborn 2000, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. L. SCHEFFCZYK (ed.), *Die Heilsverwirklichung in der Gnade: Gnadenlehre* (Katholische Dogmatik vol. 6). Aachen 1998, 480.

<sup>20</sup> An exposition of the traditional discussions on *simul iustus et peccator* can be found in: PÖHLMANN, *Rechtfertigung*, 361-378; M. BOGDahn, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre Luthers im Urteil der neueren katholischen Theologie*, Göttingen 1971, 189-205.

rensic and effective justification, though equally dependent on Luther's distinction between *favor* and *donum*.

In order to see how Mannermaa is dealing with the phrase '*simul iustus et peccator*', it is instructive to first examine the classical problem of the *simul*-expression, which comprehends at least two sub-issues. Firstly, the question is in which way the Christian can be described as *iustus* and *peccator*. Is he or she at the same time *wholly* sinner and *wholly* just (*totus-totus*) or are both characterizations to be understood as *partial* descriptive of the Christian's life (*partim-partim*)? Secondly, the question is how the simultaneity of sin and righteousness is to be conceived. Are they to be seen as necessary elements in the invariable structure of Christian existence? Or is their relationship rather a dynamic one?

Often, a *totus-totus* interpretation goes hand in hand with a static-structural view on *simul iustus et peccator*. The underlying idea is in that case that it is only the sinner as such who is justified and therefore only the total sinner who is totally justified. This can be traced back to the Lutheran theology of the cross. Just as God's definitive salvation for humanity is hidden in the revelation of radical human sinfulness at Golgotha, the liberation of the Christian remains hidden in his or her misery as a sinner and is only revealed in this paradoxical way<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, the idea that we are only justified *as* sinners is aimed against the sin that radically perverts the relationship to God: religious self-glorification. In this earthly life, the Christian is not righteous as one who can boast of fulfilling the law nor as a master in spiritual growth, but only as a miserable sinner who stands empty-handed before God, in Whom alone he or she has to trust<sup>22</sup>. It is clear that from this point of view the present life of the Christian appears both *wholly* and *necessarily* as that of a sinner. At the same time God does not 'stop at half measures' when justifying the sinner. He or she is, at least in some respect, *wholly* righteous. The simultaneity of complete righteousness and complete sinfulness builds the greatest paradox for the theologian, who is forced to ask in which way both characterizations apply to the Christian.

Conversely, the *partim-partim* explanation of *simul iustus et peccator* is usually connected with an emphasis on the dynamic aspect on the simultaneity of sinfulness and righteousness. The Christian is caught up in a lifelong process of transformation in which his or her existence as *iustus* is constantly threatened by ever emerging sinfulness. The fact that the Christian is *peccator* is an undeniable empirical fact here rather than a necessary constituent of the life of the baptized.

<sup>21</sup> This aspect of *simul iustus et peccator* is emphasized in: R. FLOGAUS, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, 353-374.

<sup>22</sup> Therefore, this interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* presupposes a certain interpretation of the Pauline idea of the law and justification, one that assumes that Paul is engaged in a polemic against the law because 'the law fosters an attitude of pride' Cf. V. KOPERSKI, *What are they saying about Paul and the Law?*, New York Mahwah, Nj 2001, 7-18.

In this interpretation, believer is essentially righteous and only in a secondary sense a sinner<sup>23</sup>. As a righteous person, the Christian is still *partly* attached to the vanishing 'old man'. This prevents him or her from being fully *iustus*. In this way the description of the believer as *simul iustus et peccator* is an expression of the renovation of the life of the Christian, rather than a theological paradox.

It would be tempting for theologians to summarize the two approaches to *simul iustus et peccator* outlined above into one catchphrase like: 'only as sinners we are righteous and only as righteous we sin'. The advantage of such a reformulation would be that both explanations of the *simul*-formula are acknowledged as containing some theological truth. On the other hand, it would also mean exchanging one paradox for another without the new formulation really elucidating the old one. For the ambiguities of the terms *iustus* and *peccator* are not uncovered by translating the Lutheran formula in such a way. What Mannermaa is doing in his interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* is equally preserving both explanations of the phrase, without immediately having recourse to new paradoxes. Rather, he clearly distinguishes the *totus-totus* reading and the *partim-partim* reading and shows how they illuminate two sides of the same justification event.

Mannermaa talks of two 'points of view' regarding the sinfulness of the Christian. If one looks at the believer in his or her struggle between the old and the new, then a dynamic *partim-partim* view is appropriate. He refers to Luther's image of the leaven already present in the dough without yet permeating it, symbolizing Christ's transforming presence in the believer<sup>24</sup>. To the extent that the dough remains unleavened, the Christian is still partially a sinner. In view of Christ's real presence which is already bearing its first fruits in the life of the Christian, he or she can be called righteous. When the relationship of the Christian with God is taken into consideration, a *totus-totus* approach of *simul iustus et peccator* is justified. For in all his or her spiritual and ethical progress, the Christian remains wholly dependent upon God's 'favor'.

Mannermaa's description of the *totus-totus* interpretation is not unambiguous, for he seems to relate the permanent dependency of the Christian upon God both to the *real* imperfection of the believer's faith and to his or her *hypothetical* misery when Christ would abandon him or her<sup>25</sup>. Mannermaa does not clearly distinguish between these two aspects. The meaning of '*peccator*' is therefore much clearer in the *partim-partim* interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator*. This simply means that the Christian remains characterized by a deep-seated tendency to

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<sup>23</sup> This is the view of Horst Georg Pöhlmann: „Der Gerechtfertigte ist bei Luther *grundsätzlich* und *in erster Linie* *sündelos* und erst *erfahrungsgemäß* und *in zweiter Linie* *Sünder*” H.G. PÖHLMANN, *Rechtfertigung*, 362.

<sup>24</sup> T. MANNERMAA, *Christ present in faith*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

be disobedient to God, an aversion towards the transforming presence of Christ. In the *totus-totus* interpretation, as Mannermaa describes it, the actual sinfulness of the believer and the permanent reliance on God's grace – and therefore even the 'infinite qualitative distance' between the Creator and His creatures – seem to merge in the concept of *peccator*.

Strangely enough, it looks as if Mannermaa is in accord with Reinhard Flogaus on this point, a critic of the Finnish school who defends a nearly exclusive *totus-totus* interpretation<sup>26</sup>. Against the Finnish emphasis on *theosis* as the key to understand Luther, Flogaus refers to Luther's own conviction that 'Christ has become man in order to lead us back to our true self-knowledge and to turn us from *haughty gods* back into true *human beings*, that means: *wretches* and *sinner*'<sup>27</sup>. By drawing an opposition between 'sinner' and 'haughty god', Flogaus (like Luther) uses the concept of 'sinner' in a paradoxical way. The *peccator* here is the one who does not commit the greatest sin: pride. It means the absolute neediness of the Christian in the face of the living God, so much so that all his or her good works shrink into nothingness and even appear as unworthy. Similar to Mannermaa's description of the Christian as *totus peccator*, the elements of dependence, difference and moral unworthiness seem to flow together in the notion of 'sinner'. Flogaus would assent to Mannermaa's statement that 'when believers are viewed from the perspective of their relationship with God, all are on the same footing'<sup>28</sup>. All Christians are 'poor sinners' in need of God's mercy. The levelling down of all human achievements by means of the umbrella term '*peccator*' is not an aim in itself. Rather, both Flogaus and Mannermaa want to show that the *full righteousness* of the Christian remains dependent on God's favour towards the human being.

The difference is that for Flogaus this *totus-totus* perspective is the only way of looking at the righteousness of the Christian. The side of transformation and growth is not only secondary to the believer's justification *as* sinner. It is even dangerous to the extent that it can create the fatal illusion that we can 'become like gods'. For Mannermaa, by contrast, the growth perspective, which is articulated in the *partim-partim* interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator*, is part and parcel of the righteousness of the believer. Both perspectives are not merely complementary viewpoints. Rather they describe one and the same thing: the presence of Christ who is both undeserved *favour* and regenerating *gift*.

<sup>26</sup> R. FLOGAUS, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, 363.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37: '[D]er altkirchliche Zusammenhang von Inkarnation und Vergöttlichung konnte von [Luther] durch die Feststellung ersetzt werden, Christus sei Mensch geworden, um uns zur rechten Selbsterkenntnis zurückzuführen und so aus *hochmütigen Göttern* wieder *wahre Menschen*, und das heißt, *Elende* und *Sünder* zu machen.'

<sup>28</sup> T. MANNERMAA, *Christ present in faith*, 66

This does not mean that the tension between 'grace' and 'works' disappears in the Finnish approach. The tension becomes even stronger and more concrete. For on the one hand the justification of the sinner cannot be conceived apart from the real renewal of the life of the Christian. God's favour always implies a real gift to the believer. But on the other hand this new life is always but a dim light reflecting the infinite sun of God's love. The gift always remains a favour. But the fact that the transformation of the Christian is in the final analysis the ontological presence of Christ in the believer prevents theology from thinking of this dim light as something purely prospective or something merely existing in the mind of God.

It is therefore unlikely that Mannermaa would agree with Flogaus when the latter states that 'the *re*-ality of the new being of the human is and remains [...] hidden under the cross. Its eschatological reality is anticipated only in the act of faith'<sup>29</sup>. The Finnish *partim-partim* interpretation and its foundation in the real-ontological presence of Jesus Christ implies that the righteousness of the Christian is never completely hidden. Nor can it be something that will become real only at the end of time and which we can only 'anticipate'. The Finns do not merely add their *partim-partim* interpretation as a supplement to a *totus-totus* approach à la Flogaus. Rather, the *partim-partim* reading limits the range of possible meanings of the *totus-totus* reading. For the *totus-totus* interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* can be seen as a theological adaptation of the Augustinian 'love of God carries even to the point of contempt for self'<sup>30</sup>. It stresses the splendour of God's grace even to the point of calling the believer a complete sinner. The fact that the Finns defend the equal importance of the *partim-partim* interpretation, however, means that theology should not end up in contempt for the Christian as historical being, denying him or her any progress in real righteousness in this earthly life. The growth perspective is not destroyed by an emphasis on God's amazing grace.

At the same time, all growth remains linked to the real presence of Jesus Christ. This means that genuine spiritual and moral development in the life of the Christian is not and should not be 'love of self carried even to the point of contempt for God'<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> „Die Re-alität des neuen Sein des Menschen ist und bleibt also eine unter dem Kreuz verborgene, deren eschatologische Wirklichkeit lediglich im Glaubensakt antizipiert wird” R. FLOGAUS, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, 363. The italicized 'Re' of 'Re-alität' refers to Luther's statement that the Christian is a sinner *in re* and righteous *in spe*. See also: G. BAUSENHART, *Simul iustus et peccator: zum römischen Einspruch gegen die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zwischen der katholischen Kirche und dem Lutherischen Weltbund über die Rechtfertigungslehre”*, *Cath* 53 (1999) nr. 2, 122-141, 127.

<sup>30</sup> 'Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestum vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui'. AUGUSTINE, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, London 1966, XIV, xxviii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

### c. A Roman Catholic Appraisal with the Aid of Hans Urs von Balthasar

The double viewpoint on *simul iustus et peccator* upheld by the Finnish school offers interesting prospects for ecumenical theology. This becomes evident when one confronts this interpretation with the way Hans Urs von Balthasar approaches the issue of *simul iustus et peccator* in his book on Karl Barth<sup>32</sup>. Von Balthasar is an interesting dialogue partner here because he seems to read the protestant theological tradition benevolently while remaining faithful to the distinctive Roman Catholic approach to justification. According to von Balthasar there are two ways in which the Lutheran formula can contradict the Roman Catholic standpoint, namely when it expresses an 'exaggerated eschatologism' or a 'juristic nominalism'. In these cases, the reality of the believer's love and righteousness is reduced either to something that is merely hoped for (*in spe*) or to a change in the mind of God, which can only be believed (*in fide*).

As apparent from the above description of the Mannermaa school, the Finnish approach excludes such interpretations due to their emphasis on the real presence of Christ in faith. Von Balthasar observes that Karl Barth equally avoids eschatologism and nominalism. In a kind of dynamic *totus-totus* interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator*, Barth depicts the existence of the Christian as taking place at the turning point away from being wholly sinner towards being wholly righteous. Therefore, the righteousness of the believer is in no way virtual for Barth. The simultaneity of *iustus* and *peccator* does not mean an equilibrium (*Gleichgewicht*) between both but precisely the removal of the equilibrium. The victory over sin has already become the determining reality for the Christian<sup>33</sup>.

In von Balthasar's opinion, however, the Barthian recognition of the present reality of the Christian as *iustus* does not remove all possible Roman Catholic objections to his reading of *simul iustus et peccator*. Von Balthasar suggests that the concrete historical existence of the human being receives scant attention in Barth so that 'in this theology of the happening and of history perhaps nothing happens after all, because everything already happened in eternity'<sup>34</sup>. Among the symptoms of this suspected neglect of history von Balthasar mentions the lack of

<sup>32</sup> H. URS. VON BALTHASAR, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, Köln 1962, 378-386.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 379. That this interpretation is influential in Lutheran thinking can be seen in the works of Eberhard Jüngel and Wilfried Härle, both of whom explicitly refute the idea of a '*Gleichgewicht*' between sin and righteousness in the life of the believer. They instead speak of a 'theological imbalance' (*theologisches Ungleichgewicht*) resp. an 'infinite overbalance' (*unendliches Übergewicht*) of the love of God over any human infidelity. See: E. JÜNGEL, *Amica exegesis einer römischen Note*, ZThK Beiheft (1998) 252-279, 261-264; E. JÜNGEL, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des Christlichen Glaubens: eine theologische Studie in ökumenischer Absicht*, Tübingen 1998, 187; W. HARLE, *Dogmatik*, Berlin 1995, 163-164.

<sup>34</sup> H. URS. VON BALTHASAR, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, 380.

ontic categories in Barth's treatment of grace and justification and his rejection of all talk of growth and progress. Precisely on these points – ontic justification language and the idea of growth – the Finns seem to succeed better than Barth in allaying the fears of Roman Catholic theologians about '*simul iustus et peccator*'. Their double interpretation of the Lutheran motto allows for a positive appreciation of history. The fact that, in some respect, everything has already happened in Jesus Christ does not diminish the significance of what happens here and now in the life of the concrete historical Christian.

The removal of the traditional Roman Catholic objections to *simul iustus et peccator* (nominalism, eschatologism, disregard for history) in the light of the Finnish proposal opens the way for a more substantial and more positive comparison of Lutheran and Roman Catholic teachings on sin and justification. Here, too, von Balthasar can be helpful. According to von Balthasar, there are two ways in which Roman Catholic theology can positively receive *simul iustus et peccator* and he claims that they are in line with Luther's own intentions. Firstly, the Christian lives *in statu viatoris* and has to turn away from sin daily. Secondly, the saying also expresses the fact that the righteousness of the Christian is and remains given by God and therefore cannot be considered as one's own natural property. Comparing this with the Finnish interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* it becomes immediately evident that the *partim-partim* side as the Finns describe it resembles von Balthasar's reference to the believer as *homo viator*, while the *totus-totus* reading corresponds to the Christian's righteousness as coming 'from outside'. This is, however, a first, superficial similarity that emerges when putting the Mannermaa school and von Balthasar side by side.

There is an ecumenically more important observation to make. Von Balthasar writes that *simul iustus et peccator* is in the end too short a phrase to fully communicate the 'mystery' that it intends to express. He therefore offers a Roman Catholic interpretation of the phrase by sketching a kind of dialectics of sin and righteousness in the life of the Christian. It can be called a 'dialectics' because the real sanctification of the Christian and his or her absolute dependence on the divine love are not considered merely as two theological ideas that balance each other, but rather as two mutually amplifying realities. In order to grasp this, it is important to see that von Balthasar is quite radical in his depiction of the believer as *peccator*. Far from trivializing the reality of sin in the life of the Christian by focussing exclusively on the external possibility of venial sins, von Balthasar talks of the inclination to sin as an 'active potentiality' which is rooted in our existence and which not only gives rise to actual sins, but even 'colours' our good works<sup>35</sup>. If God did not generously accept our good works, which are in this world

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 383. Also Karl Rahner is among the Catholic theologians who have tried to offer a Catholic interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* by referring to the possibility of a deeper sinfulness

always contaminated by an 'air' of sinfulness, the Christian would have only reason for despair. This idea is not only the hypothetical result of a speculation about what would happen when God would withdraw his *favor* from us, but is rooted in a real experience of '*Anfechtung*' where the Christian faces his or her ultimate failure in the light of the God's judgement.

One can notice that von Balthasar is not softening the paradox of the Lutheran *simul totus iustus et totus peccator*. He is speaking of a radical sinfulness that is interwoven with the historical existence of the Christian. His view on the believer as *totus peccator* bears similarities to that of Mannermaa and Flogaus in the sense that in his concept of 'sinner' the moral unworthiness and the broader idea of absolute dependence upon God are not always easy to distinguish. The acknowledgement of the mere fact that this sinfulness is part of the life of the believer and that it leads to utter despair when it is experienced seems to open the door for a Catholic recognition of a 'forensic' moment in the reality of justification.

Some Roman Catholic theologians might be disturbed by this conclusion because it risks crossing the boundaries of what is doctrinally permissible in Roman Catholic theology. In the decree on justification of the council of Trent, for example, the person is anathematized who says that the righteous man sins in every good work and therefore deserves eternal punishment unless God does not reckon these works<sup>36</sup>. In its decree on original sin, the same council also condemns the one who says that the inclination to sin (*concupiscentia*) remaining in the Christian after baptism can truly and properly be called 'sin'<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, some theologians would argue that acknowledging a forensic aspect of justification would imply a theory of 'double justification', as if the Christian would need an extra 'imputation' of righteousness by God in addition to his or her becoming righteous through the grace of God<sup>38</sup>. This theory was excluded by the council fathers in Trent<sup>39</sup>.

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at the root of venial sins. K. RAHNER, *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich*, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd 6: *Neuere Schriften*, Einsiedeln 1965, 262-276, esp. 271-274.

<sup>36</sup> Can. 25: 'Si quis in quolibet bono opere iustum saltem venialiter peccare dixerit, aut (quod intolerabilius est) mortaliter, atque ideo poenas aeternas mereri, tantumque ob id non damnari, quia Deus ea opera non imputet ad damnationem: anathema sit' (DH 1575).

<sup>37</sup> 'Hanc concupiscentiam, quam aliquando Apostolus „peccatum" [cf. Rm 6,12-15; 7,7 14-20] appellat, sancta Synodus declarat, Ecclesiam catholicam numquam intellexisse, peccatum appellari, quod vere et proprie in renatis peccatum sit, sed quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinatur. Si quis autem contrarium senserit: anathema sit' (DH 1515).

<sup>38</sup> See for instance, the approach of C.J. MALLOY, *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration*, New York 2005.

<sup>39</sup> DH 1529. See also: A.E. MCGRATH, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Cambridge 1986, 80-86.

One could defend the orthodoxy of von Balthasar, however, by pointing to the way he skilfully avoids violating the rules set by Trent. Von Balthasar does state that *de facto* and *generally speaking* the good works of the baptized are contaminated by the sinfulness of the world in which they are performed and by the Christian's internal tendency to sin. He avoids, however, suggesting that this contamination is a necessary constituent of the Christian's good works or that it leads to eternal damnation. By talking about an 'active potentiality' that is operative within the Christian as an instigator of sin, he equally avoids calling the remaining concupiscence in the believer 'damnable sin'. Finally, von Balthasar's recognition of a 'forensic' side of justification is minimized by the fact that he uses this term only between inverted commas in this passage, thus indicating that he does not understand it in the same way as did the Reformers<sup>40</sup>.

These references to the subtle ways in which von Balthasar remains within the constraints set by the Roman Catholic Magisterium, relevant as they may be, seem to miss the point somehow. They run counter to what von Balthasar is actually doing in his Catholic retrieval of *simul iustus et peccator*. He is not making the phrase more Roman Catholic by playing down the depth of the sinfulness of the believer. What is decisively 'catholic' in von Balthasar's interpretation is rather his insistence that this radical sinfulness and the fact that all righteousness remains in an important respect 'extrinsic' is pre-eminently experienced by 'saints', that is: by believers who have already undergone a profound and real 'intrinsic' transformation. In other words, the reality behind the *totus-totus* interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* manifests itself more overwhelmingly to the believer as he or she becomes more *iustus* and less *peccator*.

More generally speaking, von Balthasar's position implies that the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of justification do not constitute a zero-sum balance in Roman Catholic theology as if an emphasis on one side would necessarily entail a reduction of the other. Rather, both aspects reinforce and illuminate each other. On the one hand the paradox of the *totus-totus* interpretation is maintained: the justified are really righteous only insofar as none of their righteousness comes from themselves but only from outside. As was said above, von Balthasar does not postpone the reality of this righteousness in the life of the Christian to the future, as if the Christian would be only *peccator in re* and only *iustus in spe*<sup>41</sup>. Nor does he locate *iustus* and *peccator* in two separate 'spheres of being', as if

<sup>40</sup> H. URS. VON BALTHASAR, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, 381

<sup>41</sup> This is an interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* that can be found in the works of Luther. L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung“ und die Norm des Glaubens*, in: *Ökumene: der steile Weg der Wahrheit*, ed. L. SCHEFFCZYK, Siegburg 2004, 261-282, 277; G. BAUSENHART, *Simul iustus et peccator: zum römischen Einspruch gegen die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zwischen der katholischen Kirche und dem Lutherischen Weltbund über die Rechtfertigungslehre“*, *Cath* 53 (1999) nr. 2, 122-141, 126-127

the Christian would be a sinner as historical being, but righteous according to God's eternal ordinances. Both eschatologism and nominalism would dissolve the paradox, whereas von Balthasar even sharpens it. For according to him it is precisely to the extent that righteousness becomes more intrinsic to the believer's existence that the sense of its radical extrinsic nature grows.

There is a certain formal analogy between the Finnish interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* and the way von Balthasar understands it. The Finns recognize both the forensic and the effective sides of justification, as was mentioned above. Moreover, they claim that the real presence of Jesus Christ in faith is the unique foundation of the justification event in its two dimensions. Their treatment of *simul iustus et peccator* shows that they affirm these two sides each in their full strength, without one diminishing the importance of the other. The reason for this is precisely the fact that they are both rooted in the real-ontic presence of Christ. If this real presence – and therefore God's forgiveness for the sake of Christ – would be taken away from the believer, his or her existence would end up in complete misery (*totus-totus*). On the other hand, the same real presence necessitates that the Christian realizes the gift of righteousness in his or her own existence (*partim-partim*).

It is clear that the way von Balthasar elaborates the interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of justification differs in many respects from the Finnish interpretation. His approach as a Roman Catholic systematic theologian who meditates on the meaning *simul iustus et peccator* does not coincide with the Finnish ambition of 'simply' interpreting Luther. However, like von Balthasar the Finns unravel the different threads in the expression *simul iustus et peccator* and thereby describe more fully the multi-faceted reality of the dialectics of sin and righteousness in the life of the Christian. One can perceive both in von Balthasar and in the Finnish school a certain ecumenically interesting 'perspectivism'. They both do not shrink from statements that could be understood by fellow-members of their respective denominations as exaggerated or even dangerous. They seem to assume that these statements can be accepted when looked at from the right perspective. Von Balthasar, for instance, ultimately calls the crucified Christ the real *simul iustus et peccator*<sup>42</sup>. The idea of Christ as *peccator* derives directly from Luther as is highlighted by Mannermaa, but does not fit comfortably into Roman Catholic dogmatics<sup>43</sup>. Simo Peura from his part calls attention to Luther's ideas of the Christian's *own* righteousness (to be distinguished from self-justification) and of his or her *cooperation*, thus excluding certain Lutheran interpretations of the externality of grace and of the passivity of the believer in faith<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> H. URS. VON BALTHASAR, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, 385-386.

<sup>43</sup> T. MANNERMAA, *Christ present in faith*, 13-16.

<sup>44</sup> S. PEURA, *Christ as favor and gift*, 59.68.

The recognition of such 'dangerous truths' is required not only in view of the many-sided reality of Christian life, but also on a more fundamental level in view of scriptural Revelation. Scripture is full of statements that could be considered exaggerated or perilous from the perspective of certain forms of Lutheran or Roman Catholic 'scholasticism'. To mention only one example: there is talk about 'reward' (Lk 6:35; Rev 22:11-12), but also about God's sovereignty in granting it (Mt 20:1-16) and about the favour of God being beyond any thinking in terms of reward (Rom 4:1-5). The unravelling of *simul iustus et peccator* by both von Balthasar and the Finnish interpretation might prevent Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians from subsuming this diversity of scriptural perspectives (and aspects of Christian existence) under some *a priori* theological categories. Positively stated, this means that the approach of von Balthasar and of the Mannermaa school to *simul iustus et peccator* can be seen as an invitation to Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians to interpret their own doctrinal system in such a way that it can accommodate this diversity of perspectives. The Finnish interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* is an example of such a re-interpretation of a central theological idea in the Lutheran tradition. Far from forcing an ecumenical agenda upon Luther, the Finns discovered that his work bears testimony to a much wider theological scope than some of his followers would allow for.

One can notice that the 'perspectivism' of von Balthasar and the Finnish Luther school shows an affinity with the abovementioned method of 'differentiated consensus' used in Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues. In this method a plurality of theological viewpoints and languages is accepted as legitimate against the background of a more fundamental common understanding. The analysis of von Balthasar and the Finnish school also has to do with a sensitivity for the many possibilities of language within religious and theological discourse. However, the multiplicity that is envisaged in their interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator* is not a diversity for diversity's sake. Rather, it is rooted in the multiformity of the relationship between God and man. Therefore investigations like those of the Finnish school can offer a deeper foundation of a differentiated consensus on justification and prevent it from becoming merely the cheap recognition of sheer plurality.

### 3. The Fundamental Theological Problem of Relation and Ontology

Behind the Finnish interpretation of forensic and effective justification and of *simul iustus et peccator* stands a fundamental theological conviction, namely that the ontological and the relational aspects of Luther's soteriology are not mutually exclusive. The alleged opposition between the relational and the ontological plays a decisive role in the debates on justification. Cardinal Leo Scheffczyk, for instance, criticizes Lutheran statements in the *Joint Declaration on*

*the Doctrine of Justification* such as: '[O]nly in union with Christ is one's life renewed' (§23). Scheffczyk claims that such assertions appear to have an ontological bearing while in reality they are understood 'purely relationally' by Lutheran theologians<sup>45</sup>. However, when Scheffczyk explains the importance of an ontological interpretation of justification – in terms of 'created grace' – then he himself reaches for relational categories. For he maintains that only when justification is something that takes place, at least partly, at the level of the created being, this being can be taken up into a real relationship with God<sup>46</sup>. This does not mean here that the human being has to *earn* justification, but rather that justification as relation cannot be conceived as entailing complete annihilation or pure indifference on the side of the creature. Nor can the involvement of the human being in justification be considered as the mere 'acceptance of acceptance' considered as a purely mental event. Rather, in order to have a genuine relationship between God and man, the human side of the relationship has to exist as a real *vis-à-vis* and has to be determined in all its aspects (and not only on a mental level) by this relationship<sup>47</sup>.

As has become clear from the above, the Mannermaa school interprets the justification event also in terms of both relation and ontology. These two aspects are considered to be mutually implicative in Luther's thinking. For the relation between God and man in justification can only be described in ontologically realist terms such as real presence, participation and divinization. On the other hand, this implied ontology cannot be abstracted from the relationship it is describing. After all, what is at issue is *Christ's* real presence and participation in the *divine* righteousness. However, the interplay between relational and ontological language constitutes a broader theological and ecumenical problem than the topic of justification, understood as the question of the role of faith and works in man's salvation. On a fundamental theological level, it has to do with the way Lutherans and Roman Catholics understand the nature of human existence, faith and revelation. A brief examination of this broader perspective will reveal additional ecumenical opportunities of the Finnish interpretation but also a remaining difficulty in their approach.

In his article on Luther and metaphysics, the Finnish scholar Sammeli Juntunen criticizes the Luther interpretation of Gerhard Ebeling and Wilfried Joest, both of whom claim that in Luther's theology all 'metaphysics of substance' has to make way for relational thinking<sup>48</sup>. Juntunen does not deny the antimetaphysical

<sup>45</sup> L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung“ und die Norm des Glaubens*, 276.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>48</sup> S. JUNTUNEN, *Luther and metaphysics what is the structure of being according to Luther?*, in: *Union with Christ*, Grand Rapids 1998, 129-160.

character of Luther's theology. However, what underlies this tendency in Luther is not a rejection of the concept of being as such, but rather a suspicion that all metaphysical knowledge is corrupted by the *amor hominis* of the metaphysician. In the interpretation of Juntunen, the concept of being is not discredited completely by the human inclination to self-glorification. As a consequence, his assessment of the 'new being' of the Christian (*esse gratiae*) is different from that of Luther interpreters like Ebeling and Joest. The latter claim that faith is conceived by Luther as a purely extrinsic relationship<sup>49</sup>. According to them, it can best be described in an 'actualistic' fashion, namely in terms of *becoming* (or *being made*) a believer at every given moment. The relation of faith lacks any stable ontological reality on the side of the human being. Juntunen does not altogether dismiss the approach of Ebeling and Joest. He acknowledges that there is a certain 'actualism' in Luther, especially in his idea of continuous creation which implies that all created being is at every moment dependent on a relation to the Creator. Nevertheless, Juntunen rejects the conclusion that this relation would exclude any intrinsic reality in the Christian. The creative activity of God always involves the establishing of a certain *factum*: a 'thing' (and not just an 'act') with a relatively stable existence<sup>50</sup>.

In discussions like these one can easily find oneself running against the boundaries of language, especially when using twin concepts such as intrinsic and extrinsic, fact and act or being and becoming. When one speaks of the 'intrinsic reality' of faith, for instance, the obvious objection would be that the concept 'intrinsic' automatically excludes or critically undervalues extrinsic aspects of grace and faith. For 'intrinsic' here means something like 'belonging to the thing in itself'<sup>51</sup>, whereas the 'extrinsic' nature of faith refers precisely to the fact that there is, strictly speaking, no 'thing in itself'. In faith, the Christian is not 'in him or herself', but in relation to someone coming from the outside. It should be clear, therefore, that Juntunen's insistence on the intrinsic side of faith is always thought against the background of a larger 'externality'. What Juntunen seems to be doing in his discussion with Joest and Ebeling is merely preventing the *esse* of the human being from being completely absorbed into this externality.

This does not only converge with Scheffczyk's concern for what one could call an 'ontological relationality'. It also reveals the limitations of the concepts 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' as characterizations of the Christian faith. Juntunen's analysis shows that these notions can be useful in elucidating the reality of faith, but that their mutual relationship is too complex to simply play them off against

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>51</sup> The definition is taken from *The shorter Oxford dictionary on historical principles*, 2 vols., Clarendon, Oxford 1974.

each other. From this it follows that any description of the relationship between God and human beings that is expressed solely in terms of the *opposition* between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' runs the risk of being seriously misguided. In her book *Christian Contradictions*, for instance, Daphne Hampson defends the radical incompatibility of Lutheran and Roman Catholic faith on the grounds of an alleged 'fundamental difference' between two ways of thinking about the relationship between the self and God<sup>52</sup>. In Lutheran theology, salvation would be thought of in terms of an absolute discontinuity with the previous existence. The new being of the Christian would imply living wholly 'outside oneself' in Christ. Roman Catholic theology, on the other hand, would be characterized by a view in which the self remains essentially the same in justification. The ground of the Christian's salvation lies ultimately in his or her 'intrinsic' being which is transformed into a righteous life pleasing to God.

Juntunen's attempt to show that Luther does allow for an intrinsic-ontological side of the God-man relationship would undoubtedly be considered by Hampson as a 'Catholic' endeavour to escape the radical nature of the Lutheran message. Instead of emphasizing the dying of the old 'intrinsic' self, Juntunen still clings to it by stressing its permanence. Michael Root, however, asks this simple question to Hampson: '[I]f the old and the new selves are not fundamentally the same person, then in what sense is the gospel good news to sinners? It isn't good news to tell the sinner that she or he will simply be replaced by an utterly discontinuous new self'<sup>53</sup>. This suggests that there might be sound theological reasons for assuming some 'intrinsic' ontological permanence on the side of the believer in his or her relationship to God. Defending an intrinsic side of the Christian faith-relationship is not necessarily an attempt of the human being to anxiously secure his own independence in the face of God. It can also be a defence of the many-sided reality of this relationship against simplifying theological constructions. The fact that Juntunen finds this many-sidedness reflected in the work of Luther casts serious doubts on efforts like that of Hampson to indicate a clear-cut fundamental difference between Lutheran and Roman Catholic faith.

Also more sophisticated versions of a 'fundamental difference' between Lutherans and Roman Catholics can be questioned by referring to the Finnish approach to Luther. The Lutheran theologian Eilert Herms, for instance, contends that there is a basic difference in the way revelation is understood in both denominations<sup>54</sup>. He is more ecumenically optimistic than Hampson in the sense that he

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<sup>52</sup> D. HAMPSON, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*.

<sup>53</sup> M. ROOT, *Christian contradictions: the structures of Lutheran and Catholic thought*, „Christian Century” 118 (2001) 25, 44-46, 45.

<sup>54</sup> E. HERMS, *Ökumene in theologischen Grunddissens*, in: *Von der Glaubenseinheit zur Kirchengemeinschaft: Plädoyer für eine realistische Ökumene*, Marburg 1989, 188-215; E. HERMS,

does not present Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism as two fundamentally different forms of Christian faith. He maintains that the object of faith is the same in both: the truth of the gospel, namely God's revelation in Jesus Christ. What is different is the manner in which Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology conceive the way this truth becomes present and evident for the believer. According to Lutheran theology the truth of the gospel becomes present in faith due to an 'illumination' (*Erleuchtetwerden*) of the believer by the Holy Spirit. Lutherans do not deny the historical and ecclesial context in which this happens. Visible aspects of the church (such as symbolic actions, preaching, doctrinal statements and ministries) are important and necessary *witnesses* to this revelation. However, the event itself of the truth of the gospel becoming an object of faith remains invisible and beyond the reach of all intersubjective structures. Contrary to the Roman Catholic conviction, Lutheran theology denies that revelation itself can be transmitted or mediated by the church and its ministers. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal God to the human being and awaken faith.

From the perspective of the Finnish Luther school two questions can be raised about the proposal of Herms. Firstly, one could wonder whether Herms is not offering a too 'actualistic' account of the faith-relationship in Lutheranism. Does the permanent reliance on the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit exclude the possibility, for example, of a mediation of the Christian faith through what the Spirit has already created in other Christians? Secondly, the question can be asked to what extent Herms' interpretation is indirectly influenced by neo-Kantian philosophy. For his strict distinction between the invisible revelatory action of the Holy Spirit and the subordinate visible 'witnesses' of this revelation seems to reflect a Kantian divide of spirit and nature<sup>55</sup>.

These questions also reveal a certain problem in the Finnish Luther interpretation. For it is not clear in which way the 'Finnish Luther' can overcome the 'actualism' and 'neo-Kantianism' one could suspect in Herms. The concepts that are central in the Finnish interpretation – *theosis*, *participatio* and *inhabitatio* – are themselves not always easy to interpret<sup>56</sup>. They have proven to be helpful in criticizing one-sided approaches to Luther, especially those denying the ontological aspects of faith. But when issues such as ecclesial mediation and the role of ministry are raised, these concepts appear to be too vague to contribute to the dis-

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*Einheit der Christen in der Gemeinschaft der Kirchen: Der römischen Kirche im Lichte der reformatorischen Theologie*, Göttingen 1984.

<sup>55</sup> Saarinen suggests that Herms is to be seen against the background of a long tradition of Luther interpretation that was shaped by neo-Kantian presuppositions: R. SAARINEN, *Gottes Wirken auf uns: Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung*, Stuttgart 1989, 1-4

<sup>56</sup> See for instance D. BIELFELDT, *Response to Sammeli Juntunen „Luther and metaphysics”*, in: *Union with Christ*, ed.: C. E. BRAATEN, R. W. JENSON, Grand Rapids 1998, 161-166.

cussion. A further reflection on the ethical and ecclesiological consequences of a non-actualistic and non-neo-Kantian interpretation of Luther is therefore necessary. This is required not only with an eye to the ongoing Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, but also in order to avoid a deadlock in the debate among Luther interpreters. For as long as the precise significance of notions like *inhabitatio* and participation is not clarified, it will be easy for critics like Flogaus to interpret them again in terms of the standard 'extrinsicist' interpretation. The Finns may safely say then that 'Christ is really present in faith'. Unless this presence is not fleshed out ethically and ecclesologically, the relationship between the words 'really' and 'faith' in this statement remains open to a variety of interpretations.

### **Być w obecności Chrystusa. Fińska interpretacja Lutra i dyskusja nad usprawiedliwieniem**

#### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł przedstawia osiągnięcia fińskiej szkoły interpretacji Lutra i podejmuje próbę oceny jej znaczenia dla aktualnego dialogu pomiędzy luteranami i katolikami, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dialogu na temat usprawiedliwienia. Jak przyznał Autor artykułu, ekumeniczne znaczenie „Finów” leży w tym, że odkrywają oni w pracach Lutra bogatszą i bardziej złożoną wizję wiary chrześcijańskiej niż ma to miejsce w niektórych formach współczesnej teologii luteirańskiej. W pierwszej części artykułu Autor dokonał ogólnej charakterystyki fińskiej szkoły interpretacji Lutra. Druga część ukazuje, na czym polega znaczenie i wkład dzieła fińskiej szkoły w dialog na temat usprawiedliwienia. W ostatniej części podjęto temat usprawiedliwienia w szerszej perspektywie teologicznej, do której istotne elementy wniosła fińska interpretacja Lutrowej nauki o usprawiedliwieniu.

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