

Response to Tuomo Mannermaa »Glaube, Bildung und Gemeinschaft bei Luther / Faith, Culture and Community«

By Eric W. Gritsch

I The Theosis Thesis

The author has a distinguished record of extricating a generally neglected component of Luther's theology for the purpose of advancing the dialogue for Christian unity, in his case the relationship between Finnish Lutheranism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Mannermaa summarized this ecumenical purpose in the thesis that »deification« (Vergottung, Theosis) is a common ground between Luther and Eastern Orthodox theology because systematic theological Luther research has shown that Theosis constitutes an essential part of the inner structure of Luther's theology grounded in the »chief article of faith«, justification.¹ At the same time, Mannermaa and his doctoral students have called attention to specific hermeneutical presuppositions in the history of Luther research which is suspicious of any ontological element in Luther's theology and disallows a priori a unity of substance between Christ and the believer. At issue is the thesis that Luther was in basic agreement with the »theosis« tradition of the early church fathers, exemplified by Irenaeus of Lyons – »He has been made what we are, so that He accomplish that we become what He is«;² and by Athanasius of Alexandria – »Christ became a human being so that we might be deified«.³

Mannermaa and his students have shown that Kantian and neo-Kantian epistemology, especially the philosophical stance of Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881),

1 Argued in seminal work Tuomo MANNERMAA: *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung; zum oekumenischen Dialog*. Hannover 1989; thesis in Tuomo MANNERMAA: *Theosis als Thema der finnischen Lutherforschung*. In: *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie*/ hrsg. von Simo Peura und Antti Raunio. Helsinki, Erlangen 1990, 18-20.

2 IRENAEUS VON LYON: *Adversus haereses* 5, praef.; *Patrologiae cursus completus: series graeca*/ hrsg. von Jacques-Paul Migne. Bd. 7. P 1857, 1120 B (292): *Jesus Christus »propter imensam suam dilectionem factus est quod summus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod est ipse.«*

3 Cf. ATHANASIUS VON ALEXANDRIA: *De incarnatione verbi* 1, 13; ebd 25. P 1857, 119 B (47): *»Quapropter Dei Verbum per seipsum advenit, quo, ut imago Patris, hominem ad imaginem factum reficere posset.«*

have shaped Luther research, especially with regard to the presence-of-Christ-motif. Lotze taught that there is no knowledge of any being »in itself« (an sich), but only a knowledge of the »effect« (Wirken) of it. Such knowledge can only be stated in terms that reflect the ways in which human nature experiences the effect. This epistemology is grounded in the Kantian argument that knowledge of the infinite is impossible in theoretical reason. Consequently, any knowledge of God is relegated to a postulate of »practical« reasoning. Lotze followed Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in denying epistemic access to the infinite, arguing that in principle only God's effects could be known – and these only through the experience of value. God, therefore, or anything infinite remain »transcendental«, inaccessible to human reason. Mannermaa and his students reject this epistemology as a tool of Luther research, contending that it prevents a full exploration of Luther's references to theosis.⁴

The theosis thesis in Mannermaa's Luther research has caused neuralgia along the course of nerves in the body of Luther research, but perhaps with results that may make Luther appear even more interesting than he already is.⁵ Moreover, Luther uses theosis language extensively in his writings so that it can be said that his theology of justification is also a theology of love echoing Eastern Orthodox views of salvation. This theology of love can be viewed as anchored in his image of justification as the »joyous exchange« (fröhlicher Wechsel) between Christ's divine characteristics with sinful human ones.⁶ The notion of theosis as participation in the divine nature is also part of the apostolic Tradition (2 P 1, 4: »we become participants of the divine nature – *θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*«) which Luther cherished. Mannermaa's paper is just one further attempt to show how steeped Luther was in that tradition. It also makes quite clear how Luther's christo-centric theology encompassed not only the justification of the sinners but also their sanctification. Or, to recall the old-fashioned Lutheran rhetoric: humans are not only pronounced just by the Word of God, but also are made just.⁷

4 See Risto SAARINEN: Gottes Wirken auf uns: die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung. S 1989.

5 See the reactions of Friedrich BEISSER: Zur Frage der Vergöttlichung des Menschen (theosis) bei Martin Luther. KD 39 (1993), 266-281; and Steffen KJELDGAARD-PEDERSEN: Der finnische Beitrag zur heutigen Lutherforschung. In: Nordisk Forum för Studiet av Luther och Luthersk Teologie 1: Referate des ersten Forums für das Studium von Luther und lutherischer Theologie in Helsinki 21.-24. 11. 1991/ hrsg. von Tuomo Mannermaa ... Helsinki 1993, 7-23.

6 So argued by Ulrich ASENDORF: Die Theologie Luthers nach seinen Predigten. GÖ 1988, 409.

7 Also affirmed by Paul ALTHAUS: The theology of Martin Luther (Die Theologie Martin Luthers (engl.)/ tr. by Robert Schults. Phil 1966, 234-242.

II A Hermeneutical Master Key

Mannermaa enters Luther's realms of faith, educational formation or culture (*Bildung*) and community with a hermeneutical key he regards as necessary for any understanding of Luther's concept of faith: the category of participation. Mannermaa uses this term to describe Christ's real presence in the believer, echoing Luther's eucharistic language: »It is in faith that Christ is really present.«⁸ According to Mannermaa's view of Luther's theology, faith is participation in the nature of Christ, not just in what Christ did through his person and work as saviour. This, he contends, is the difference between the neo-Kantian or »transcendental interpretation« of the presence-of-Christ-motif in Luther research and one that takes seriously Luther's language of »deification«. At issue is the use of ontology by Luther. Mannermaa argues that Luther does use it, at least in the sense in which it was used in the classic epistemology exemplified by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who summarized it in the sentence: »Knowing and what is known are identical.«⁹ Moreover, Mannermaa shows that Luther used this classical epistemology throughout his career. He stresses that Luther's view of justification is based on the insight that the righteousness of God is the presence of God in the believers, not just God's effect on them.¹⁰ Neo-Kantians, like Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), acknowledged that Luther occasionally used ontological language, but still understood the presence of Christ in faith as the effect of God's will. Accordingly, »Christ in us« means that God uses an independent impulse in the human will, without any human cooperation. »Christ in us, therefore, means that we ourselves live a moral life for him.«¹¹ According to Mannermaa, this »transcendental thinking in terms of effect« (*Wirkungsdenken*) is not the right hermeneutical key for the interpretation of Luther texts that speak of participation in God and Christ, that is, in their divine nature. Example: »... for we become one spirit with Christ through faith and receive from him his nature.«¹² Another false hermeneutical key is the idea of participation as »indwelling of God« (*inhabitatio Dei*, *Einwohnung Gottes*) in the »Formula of Concord« of 1577. It

8 See Mannermaa above page 167: »..., in ipsa fide Christus adest.«

9 See Mannermaa above page 171: »Species cogniti est in cognoscente« .. »idem est intellectus et quod intelligitur«.

10 See Mannermaa above page 173.

11 See Mannermaa above page 179, quoting Saarinen, note 25.

12 WA 10 III, 213, 15: »... dann durch den glauben werd wir ain gaist mit Christo und entpfahen von im sein natur ...«; see Mannermaa above page 175.

rejected Andreas Osinader's (1498-1552) view of justification as the indwelling of »the essential righteousness« (*essentialis iustitia*) in the believer. This was done by making a distinction between »the righteousness of faith« by which believers are pronounced righteous and »the indwelling of God« as forgiveness of sin, one following the other. This is not Luther's view, as Mannermaa shows. Luther did not understand the indwelling of God as something that logically follows justification. He understood faith as the means by which Christ is present as the one who brings God's »favour« (*favor*), the forgiveness of sin, as well as God's »gift« (*donum*), the presence of the fullness of divine love in the sinner. Luther, Mannermaa contends, did not separate divine »favour« and »gift«, but reflects in his view of justification the Chalcedonian understanding of not separating or mixing the two natures of Christ, or applying his person and work in differing ways to the righteousness of faith. Thus Mannermaa concludes that, according to Luther, Christ is fully present in the believers. That is why Mannermaa's hermeneutical master key for the true meaning of Luther's view of the presence of Christ is the understanding of faith as participation in the being of God, respectively, in the divine nature and its properties.¹³

Mannermaa's use of this key is quite convincing since he is able to use the key for early and late Luther texts as well as for an assessment of the relationship between word and faith. The younger Luther used the biblical term »gods« (*Götter*) to describe Christians as beings who participate in the divine properties;¹⁴ and the older Luther described his own discovery of righteousness by faith alone as participation in the properties of God, such as »power«, »wisdom«, and »glory«.¹⁵ These properties, contends Mannermaa, are ontological properties because they attest to participation in the being of God. He does not see any segregation between the notion of ontological participation and Luther's theology of the word. According to Mannermaa, they are properly linked with each other. For Christ is the trinitarian word made flesh, and whoever participates in this word also participates in the very being of God.¹⁶ Mannermaa also sees in this view of word and faith a protection against any idea of »self-deification«— the original sin of idolatry.

13 See Mannermaa above page 178.

14 See Mannermaa above *ibid*.

15 See Mannermaa above page 173, citing Luther's autobiographical retrospective, Cl 4, 428, 1-16 $\hat{=}$ WA 54, 186, 11-13 $\hat{=}$ StA 5, 637, 2-14.

16 See Mannermaa above page 177.

III Theological Extensions

Mannermaa's sketches of Luther's view of »culture« (*Bildung*) and »community« (*Gemeinschaft*) rest upon the thesis that Luther derives his view from a systematic theological extension of the category of participation as the chief instrument for playing the presence-of-Christ-motif in the symphony of his theology. »Bildung« means »to be formed« (*gebildet*) by Christ according to G 4, 19 – »Christ is formed in you« – and/or »transformed« into the glory of God according to 2 K 3, 18 – »transformed from one degree of glory to another«. ¹⁷ »Gemeinschaft« means that »every Christian becomes Christ for his/her neighbor«, reflecting the participation of the believer in Christ, exchanging sin for grace, and following the »golden rule« of loving the neighbor as one loves oneself. ¹⁸ Since »faith« is participation in Christ, »love« is the extension of such participation to »Bildung« and »Gemeinschaft«.

1 »Culture« (*Bildung*)

Since Luther does not know the modern idea of »Bildung« one can, as Mannermaa does, relate the notion of »formation« to Luther's view of faith, according to which one is formed by Christ, or participates in his life as the resurrected Son of God. ¹⁹ But such a logical extension of Luther's christo-centric use of the category of »participation« by-passes much of what Luther had to say about the Christian as a creature of God and as a citizen in a sinful world. Luther used the language of participation and formation more in his extension of baptism than in his treatment of education as christo-centric formation and basic ingredient of »culture«.

Mannermaa correctly points out that Luther did not share the humanistic view of »Bildung« as a continuous human development from some God-given foundation, such as an innate divine image, to a mature, God-pleasing life. On the contrary, the old human nature must be drowned, »put to death«, to give way to a new nature, cleansed from sin and transformed into an obedient witness of God's work of salvation in the world. ²⁰ To this extent Luther viewed the Christian life as a continuous transformation through participation in Christ. Manner-

¹⁷ See Mannermaa above page 184.

¹⁸ See Mannermaa above page 191.

¹⁹ See Mannermaa above page 182.

²⁰ Best expressed in Luther's exposition of baptism in the Small Catechism of 1529; BSELK, 516, 35-38 ≙ WA 30 I, 382, 5-10.

maa lifts up this view of transformation as Luther's rejection of the humanistic ideal of »Bildung«. But Mannermaa does not refer to Luther's teaching on baptism.²¹

Luther, on the other hand, portrayed life in the world as an orderly, divine arrangement of power, manifested in »estates« (Stände) or »hierarchies« (Hierarchien), such as the priestly office, marriage, and temporal government (Obrigkeit).²² Here one can trace a development of thought in Luther, dealing with the nature and function of reason, the notion of law, both »natural« and divine, and significant reflections about Christian life in two realms. The three »estates« seem fundamental in Luther's view of the world as God's creation. None of these estates is higher than the other, according to Luther. But they are subject to decays through the human state of sin. Nevertheless, they are mandated for law and order and, when viewed in relation to various human vocations, they also provide the arena for the love of neighbor. Here Luther stresses the function of reason (Vernunft) as the basis for justice in the world. He assumes that reason and law existed before the Fall; both became »a law of nature«, known by the human conscience which teaches »that I should do as I would be done by«. ²³ So viewed, the Christian lives in two realms as a composite of two persons, one in Christ (Christperson) and one in the world (Weltperson). Accordingly, ethical decisions have to be made in the relation of two persons, when one acts for oneself or for another.

Luther, however, clearly rejects the notion, perceived by him as erroneous (Schwärmerei), that the world can be ruled by the gospel. Here Christians must, like all other people, live in obedience to the Ten Commandments which respect a basic order for the world.²⁴ Mannermaas systematic conception of Luther's view of culture is exclusively christo-centric. It could be argued that Luther might have extended his christo-centric view of salvation to a portrayal of life in the world – how faith helps to shape culture. But he does so only insofar as he speaks of the extension from personal faith to love of neighbor. Such love, however, acts within God-created structures intended to prevent chaos in the world. It would seem logical for Luther to extend his view of participation in the real presence of

²¹ See Mannermaa above page 183.

²² See the recent summary of Luther's view on being a human »creature of God« in Bernhard LOHSE: *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang*. GÖ 1995, 256-262.

²³ WA II, 279, 279, 19 f: »... das ich thun soll, was ich myr wollt gethan haben.«

²⁴ This is the starting-point of ethics (der Ansatz der Ethik) for Luther; see Lohse: *Op. cit.*, 340 f.

Christ to his view of culture as the result of a collective, human formation by Christ. Mannermaas citation of Luther texts certainly points in that direction. But Luther's dialectic of law and gospel, God and world, reason and love, obscure this direction. But since baptism initiates into an enduring struggle of sin and grace, the daily repentance and re-formation of human nature, culture could be seen by Luther as the realm of a continuing »reformation« of human nature and society until the return of Christ. Given this connection of baptism and life in the world one could expect Luther to extend to culture what Mannermaa formulated in his name: just as God took on human nature by love, so Christians, who have become part of the divine nature by faith, must empty themselves and take upon themselves, by free love, the misery and poverty of their neighbors.²⁵

2 Community (*Gemeinschaft*)

Luther's use of the term »Gemeinschaft« is virtually synonymous with »church«. Mannermaa provides an excellent sketch of Luther's view, focusing on Luther's description of »communio«: how the exchange of Christ's »goods« (bona) for the »no-goods« (Ungüter – mala) of the believers (sin, weakness, death) constitute the foundation for true community, marked by Christians bearing each other's burdens, just like Christ bore theirs.²⁶ Mannermaa identifies Luther's language as sacramentological because Luther referred to the eating of the one bread shared by all, thus echoing the celebration of Holy Communion. Such mutual giving and taking is an expression of love, mandated by the golden rule, »Love your neighbor as you love yourself.«

Mannermaa sums up his sketch of Luther's view of »Bildung« and »Gemeinschaft« with the thesis that both of these realms are part of Luther's theology of love which assumes »the whole agapetic order«. Based on another Finnish effort in Luther research,²⁷ Mannermaa contends that »the starting-point of Luther's social-ethical thinking is the conception that the entire structure of reality reflects the being of God, self-giving love«. According to this view, all human communities must be in agreement with the »order of creation« as the order of love.²⁸

25 This summary echoes the »kenotic« christology of Paul in Ph 2, 5-11 (7: »he emptied himself – ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν«).

26 See Mannermaa above page 190.

27 The work of Antti RAUNIO: *Summe des christlichen Lebens: die »Goldene Regel« als Gesetz der Liebe in der Theologie Luthers von 1510 bis 1527*. Helsinki 1993.

28 See Mannermaa above page 193.

Further, this order is linked with the metaphor of the body in Luther's theology, indicating mutuality, interdependence, and appropriate function.

Mannermaa does not simply extend this christo-centric stance, taken from Luther, to a view of community as »society«. He accepts Luther's distinction of »spiritual« and »social« community, using the category of »erudition« (eruditio – book learning) in addition to that of »Bildung« as formation by Christ.²⁹ According to Mannermaa, therefore, the starting-point of ethics for Luther is the combination of »Bildung« and »erudition«. Only such a social-spiritual understanding of »Bildung« and »Gemeinschaft« rounds off Luther's view of faith, culture and community. The distinction between temporal and spiritual government is a distinction within this one community.³⁰

This is a decisive, self-imposed caveat against any simplistic application of Luther's christo-centric stance to the realm of ethics. Mannermaa exemplifies this caveat by a reference to the use of Lutheran church orders in German cities. They were governed by both powers, the temporal and the spiritual, maintaining law and order as well as caring for the sick and the poor. But both powers aim in their own manner towards the realization of love and justice.

IV Literal Sense and Theological Sensibility

Mannermaa's exposition is marked by an attractive loyalty to Luther texts and a zeal for their systematic-theological value in motif-research, centered in the motif of »participation«. When Luther writes that believers »take part and have communion with the divine nature«³¹ Mannermaa insists on the literal sense meaning full participation in what is »God's nature: eternal truth, righteousness, wisdom, eternal life, peace, joy and everything called good«. Luther also insists on the literal sense of Scripture when he dealt with the texts of the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper. He advised his readers to accept the literal meaning without any explication³²:

29 See Mannermaa above page 193.

30 See Mannermaa above *ibid.*

31 WA 14, 19, 3-15, bes. 4 f: »... teylhafftig sind und geselschafft odder gemeynschafft mit der Göttlichen natur haben.«; see Mannermaa above page 173, note 12.

32 »Es haben sich viel hie bekummert, wie die seele und der geyst Christi, darnach die gottheit, der vater und der heylige geyst ym sacrament sey. ... Das sind alles gedancken müssiger seelen unnd lediger hertzen, die ynn dißem sacrament der wortt und werck gottis vergessen unnd begeben sich auff yhre gedancken und wortt. Yhe eynfeltiger du an den wortten bliebest,

»There have been many who have been concerned about how the soul and the spirit of Christ, and thereby the Godhead, the Father and the Holy Spirit is in the sacrament ... All these are thoughts of idle souls and empty hearts, who forget the words and works and give themselves over to their own thoughts and words. The more simply you stick to the words of the sacrament the better it will be for you ... Eat and drink there, and nourish your faith ... And say to yourself: I am not commanded to investigate or to know how God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or how the soul of Christ is in the sacrament.«

Luther did not view theology as an exercise in metaphysics for the sake of satisfying human curiosity. The subject of theology, he contended, is the salvation of human beings from sin by God, the Saviour of sinners. Anything else is »error and poison«. ³³ Luther was committed to the literal limitations of a biblical text and to the boundaries of a biblically based theology.

Mannermaa exhibits a similar attitude when he insists on the literal meaning of texts that describe the wondrous relationship between the believer and Christ. But he also discloses a theological sensibility, at times mixed with zeal, for the proper application of the literal meaning of a Luther text in a theo-logical chain of assertions needed for a fundamental doxological affirmation. This is refreshing when Luther research is entangled in complex epistemological and hermeneutical debate. But it is also disturbing when theo-logical moves are made without any consideration of complicated historical developments. Nevertheless, if Luther still has something to say to the descendents of his reform movement, a well-built systematic theological bridge may facilitate constructive dialogue among thinkers charged with the preservation of Christian unity and justice in the world.

A parabolic use of an incident in the history of modern philosophy may illustrate the value of Mannermaa's care for neglected texts, his insistence on their literal sense, and his theological sensibility for a creative link between past and present.

When Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) offered his interpretation of Kant he was criticized for having presented Kant in a way that seemed to be neither philosophically nor historically correct. He responded that he was interested in setting »in motion a thoughtful dialogue between thinkers«. ³⁴ He wanted to lift up some-

yhe besser dyrs were. ... Da iß und trinck und neere deynen glawben. ... Und sprich: myr ist nicht befohlen tzu forschen noch tzu wissen, wie gott vater, son, heyliger geyst oder Christus seel ym sacrament sey, ...«; WA II, 449, 34 - 450, 11 ≙ LW 36, 297.

³³ WA 40 II, 328, 17. 26-28.

³⁴ Martin HEIDEGGER: Kant and the problem of metaphysics (Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik (engl.))// tr. by James Churchill. Bloomington, Ind. 1962, XXV.

thing that may not have sounded Kantian and so was neglected, but nevertheless existed in Kant's literary work, though more on its horizon than in its center. Heidegger contended that he lifted up neglected texts in order to allow them to address the reader's contemporary problematic concerns and so enter the discussion as a genuine dialogue partner. Mannermaa, too, tries to be simultaneously committed to the literal meaning of Luther texts and to a theological sensibility for the sake of possible new insights derived from this ever so richly endowed reformer.