Sin and Salvation

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Duncan Reid and Mark Worthing

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Luther's Finnlandisierung:
A Recent Debate about Salvation in
Reformation Thought

Duncan Reid

In the last decade the work of a circle of Finnish Luther scholars has become known in the English-speaking world. Writing about a Luther seminar held in the United States in 1993, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson report that 'the Finnish delegation was by far the most impressive and interesting new voice'.1 A recent assessment by Eric Gritsch is even more extravagant: 'The theosis thesis in Mannermaa's research has caused neuralgia along the course of nerves in the body of Luther research'.2 The new interpretation, proposed by what is variously known as the 'Finnish School' or the 'Mannermaa circle'3 after their founding thinker, Prof. Tuomo Manermaa of the Finnish Academy for Luther Studies in Helsinki, has not however been without its critics. In this paper I intend to outline what is new in the Finnish interpretation, that is, how it differs from the received view of Luther as promoted by the scholars of the 'Luther Renaissance'. Then I shall report on the reaction to the new interpretation, especially as it appears in a very thoroughly researched and carefully written


response by Reinhard Flogaus.4 All this is directly relevant to the theme of this conference, as this debate centres on the concept of theosis (or deification) as a way of understanding salvation.

1. The Finnish Interpretation

It is perhaps not surprising to learn that the Finnish interpretation has been prompted by ecumenical dialogue, especially (but by no means exclusively) with the Orthodox, for whom theosis is fundamental in the understanding of salvation. The dialogue with Roman Catholicism is also clearly an important one for the Finnish school. Even so, it is important to note that the Finnish school is less concerned with doing ecumenical theology than with Luther research, i.e. re-examination of the sources of Lutheran theology.6 This has led the Finnish scholars not to make of Luther a Western proponent of Eastern Orthodoxy—indeed, there are still issues to be resolved with regard to the relationship between the Finnish interpretation and contemporary Orthodox thought. Rather, they seek to reread Luther so as to see in him themes that had not been noticed in the standard research. This is achieved by an attempt to comprehend “the whole” Luther, without postulating anachronistic differences between “reformatory” and “catholic” or between “modern” and “medieval” aspects of his thought.5 The Finnish school argues that the concept of theosis in particular is essential for understanding particular loci in Luther’s works.7 This new ‘Finnish’ Luther is not totally recognisable. The key insight that Luther brings to the tradition, according to

Mannermaa, is the theology of the cross,8 and this modifies the patristic speech of participation in God and union with Christ. The believer must empty him- or herself—here the Finnish school is at one with traditional Luther research—and the one who does so empty themselves for Christ’s sake is enabled thereby to become ‘savior’.9 Mannermaa cites De Uniate Christiana as a key source for the notion of participation and theosis in Luther’s thought. In this text, Luther links the Lutheran tradition into “the common classical Christian heritage”,10 according to Mannermaa, and does it in a way that not always apparent from the perspective of later Lutheranism as defined in the confessional writings, the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord. There are systematic themes in Luther’s thought that have been overlaid by interpretation, and which need to be uncovered. Indeed, it can be these hidden themes that make Luther relevant to current concerns. In particular for Mannermaa and his school, it is this theme of participation in the divine nature, this assertion that God comes near to us and gives Godself to us as favour and gift, that is most relevant to ecumenical dialogue.

Mannermaa argues that Luther research in the twentieth century has been dominated, and misled, by its own Kantian presuppositions. This has led scholars to understand Luther as proposing a “community of willing and affecting” between God and the believer as the foundation for the salvation,11 and to think of our relationship with God in terms of personal trust. But this, he argues, is a reduction of the claim Luther wants to make.12 There no place here for salvation locating itself in a sense of the real indwelling of God in the believer, or

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5. Peura’s article ‘Die Vergöttlichung des Menschen als Sein in Gott’, Lutherjahrbuch 60 (1993): 39-71, makes virtually no reference to Orthodox or patristic sources. Its focus is theosis in Luther’s own work. Elsewhere Peura points to the value of ecumenical dialogues in that they ‘encourage us to re-examine our own tradition’ (G Peura, ‘Christus Praesentissimus: The Issue of Luther’s Thought in the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue’, Pro Ecclesia 2/3 (1993): 564-573, here 364).
12. R Saaire, ‘The Presence of God in Luther’s Theology’, Lutheran Quarterly 8/1 (1994): 1-13, here 10. Saaire is careful to point out that this ‘real-ontic’ union is less than total fusion of two elements, because it respects the continuing otherness of the elements united, and is thus best described as perichoretic (58). Furthermore, it does not have to import to the discussion a philosophical ontology (10).
an ontological union with Christ. A real union between a human subject and God (or even a real apprehension of God by the human subject) is ruled out by Kantian epistemology. For example, Albrecht Ritschl's distinction between a 'physical' and a 'personal-ethical' relationship with God, which became standard for Luther interpretation for most of the 20th century, means that there can be no 'communion of being' between God and the believer, but only a causal nexus of affecting and being affected. This has in turn led to a forensic understanding of salvation, and an ethical emphasis in the notion of discipleship.

However, Mannermaa argues, this is true neither to Luther nor to the best in the Lutheran tradition, according to which 'God, in the very fulness of his essence, is present in the believer. Important here is to recognize that any notion that God himself does not "dwell" in the Christian and that only his "gifts" are present in the believer is explicitly rejected.' According to Mannermaa, Luther knows no distinction between justification and sanctification. As these are inseparable in Christ, so must they be inseparable in the one who is united with Christ in faith and love. Thus justification must be defined in immediate relationship to sanctification through divine indwelling, or in other words, to the patristic notion of theosis. The new interpretation reminds us that Luther's own epistemological background was of a classical realist variety, whereby the thing known was present in the knower. Luther himself continued to follow this epistemology even in his Reformation writings, according to the Finnish school.

The difference might be described this way. We can see our discipleship of Christ either in ethical terms, as a 'following' or 'imitation' of Christ, whereby I model my behaviour on that of Christ. Or we can see discipleship in more ontological terms, whereby Christ dwells in me and I am given union with him, so that we share more than a communion of willing and affecting—a union of being. As a believer I do not simply follow after, but I really participate in the life of Christ: 'The "divine nature" of the believer is Christ himself. The Christian himself no longer lives, but rather Christ lives in him or her.' Mannermaa argues that this more ontological understanding (which bears a clear relationship to the emphasis in Luther's eucharistic theology on real presence) better reflects Luther's own understanding of discipleship and salvation. The practicalities of Christian life become more a matter of spirituality than of ethics in this framework, and the patristic notions of syneresis (cooperation) and theosis (deification) take on a degree of meaning that could find no place in more traditional interpretations. We are, for example, helped in times of temptation not by looking to the example of Christ in his temptation and following him, but by virtue of his (as the one who has been tempted and successfully overcome temptation) dwelling in us. We in fact becoming united with Christ, becoming Christ as it were, in the concrete situation of temptation that faces us.

Love plays a key role in the Finnish interpretation, though in a way quite different from the scholastic understanding of it. The core of Luther's program of Reformation itself can be formulated by saying that the form (ie the living reality) of faith is not divinely elevated human love, as in the scholastic program . . . but is in reality Christ himself. This is in fact an affirmation, against the scholastic notion of created grace, of the primacy of uncreated grace—or in other words, of the indwelling of God's presence in the believer. This uncreated grace—which has clear links to the Eastern notion of grace as energeia—is linked by Mannermaa to faith: 'faith is like the cloud of God's presence in the temple.'

Several of the themes outlined by Mannermaa are developed in depth by his associates. Justification is the focus of the paper by Simo Peura, this motif being explicated in a discussion of grace (gratia or favor) as gift (dona). These concepts are seen as mutually interpreting in Luther. The gift is the gift of God's righteousness, bestowed in the event of union with Christ. According to Peura, the standard interpretation of the Formula of Concord suggests an intellectual apprehension of a new relationship with God, a coram-relationship.

17. Ibid, 7.
22. S Peura, 'Christ as Favor and Gift: The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification', in Braaten and Jensen, 42-69, here 47. Here Peura implicitly calls
but not the substantial change in the believer that union with Christ would imply.\textsuperscript{23} This in turn has allowed Lutherans to magnify the gulf between Luther's (supposed) view of justification and the Roman Catholic understanding of the same concept. Peura's emphasis on the real indwelling of Christ, in Luther's own thought, allows no such gulf to emerge. Luther, for Peura, remains firmly within the Catholic tradition of the early and medieval church, except that, in his debate with late scholasticism, he 'abandons the concept of created grace'.\textsuperscript{24} Love is the gift, but is only present when the giver is also present. Peura underlines the identity of God's essence and actions ad extra when he writes: 'Luther holds all saving divine attributes in the same way: he does not separate God's essential nature ontologically from the divine attributes effecting salvation.'\textsuperscript{25} God is essentially identified with God's names, or attributes.\textsuperscript{26} These statements would seem problematic from an Orthodox, especially Palamite, perspective, and I will address this issue below. Strangely, in another place Peura seems to allow for a distinction in Luther between God's being and God's doing\textsuperscript{27}—a position that I believe could bring Luther much closer to a Palamite understanding of God. Peura emphasises the notion of cooperation\textsuperscript{28} in Luther (again with reference to De libellute christian), and conformitas Christi\textsuperscript{29} There is a movement into Christ,\textsuperscript{30} whereby the believer becomes Christ.\textsuperscript{31} In this union with Christ, the justified believer receives the gift of Christ's attributes, primarily Christ's righteousness before God. The theology here is clearly Lutheran in its sensibility, but Peura is emphatic that this gift or favour does not come about without the real indwelling of Christ, and real union with Christ. Furthermore, to say this—although it may be at variance with later Lutheran thinking, even at variance with the sentiments of the confessional writings in places—is, he argues, true to Luther's own perception of salvation. It is, in other words, a proper return to the sources, according to Peura, laying aside the Kantian filter through which Luther and the confessional writings have been read for over a century. In saying all this, Peura emphasises the common catholic heritage Lutherans hold with other Christians of the Eastern and Western traditions. Lutherans may speak, with the early church tradition, of \textit{thesis}, provided it is always acknowledged that the giver of this state is God.\textsuperscript{32} Luther's quarrel with scholasticism and its notion of created grace is that it could lead to the misapprehension that the agent of deification is somehow ourselves.\textsuperscript{33} The giver of union with Christ is the Holy Spirit and none other. Union with Christ is thus fundamentally trinitarian and perichoretic.

Antti Raunio extends the discussion into the area of ethics, and argues the believer's ontological participation in Christ brings with it a parallel participation in Christ's attributes. 'The attributes are essential qualities: therefore the Christian participates through them in the divine essence itself... the person becomes a participant in the divine nature, which is the love that gives itself to the other.'\textsuperscript{34} The 'golden rule' is thus understood not as 'enlightened self-interest', but as transforming the believer into Christ, and into the other person who is also the heart of Ebeling's existentialist reading of Luther. See G Ebeling, \textit{Luther: An Introduction to His Thought} (London: Collins, 1972), 192-209. The Finnish school thus attempts to retrieve an essentialist interpretation. Flogaus supports the Ebeling position, 378.

\textsuperscript{23} Peura, 'Christ as Favor', in Braunen and Jenson, 46-7.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 48.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 49.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 50, and Braunen, 'Response', 74.
\textsuperscript{27} Peura, 'Christ as Favor', in Braunen and Jenson, 65; cf S Peura, 'What God Gives Man Receives: Luther on Salvation', in Braunen and Jenson, 76-95, here 82, where the same distinction is allowed for human beings—as it is in Palamite thought—between person and property.
\textsuperscript{28} Peura, 'Christ as Favor', in Braunen and Jenson, 57-8.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 60.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 62.
\textsuperscript{31} Braunen, 'Response to Simo Peura', in Braunen and Jenson 74; cf W Elert on the Christusbild (\textit{Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie: Eine Untersuchung
\textsuperscript{32} Peura, 'What God Gives', in Braunen and Jenson, 84-5.
\textsuperscript{33} Dr Peura emphasised this in conversation (3 July 1999): part of the the distrust of the language of deification is understandable reserve about Nietzsche's self-deifying \textit{Ubermensch}, and before that, Feuerbach's call for theology to be transformed into anthropology (See R Flogaus, 'Die Theologie des Gregorios Palamas—Hindernis oder Hilfe für die ökumenische Verständigung?' \textit{Osiris} 47 (1998): 105-123, here 119).
\textsuperscript{34} Peura, 'Christ as Favor', in Braunen and Jenson, 91.
\textsuperscript{35} A Raunio, 'Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology', in Braunen and Jenson, 96-124, here 113.
seen as Christ. The process is the opposite of the modern affirmation of the autonomous individual. Instead, it is the transformation of the individual, first ontologically, and then as a consequence, ethically. The argument here demands a tight identification of being with attributes, and it is here that again, certain problems emerge, not least in the terminology. When Raunio says that ‘Christ possesses divine essences such as wisdom, strength, justice, goodness, freedom and so on’, the reader is left wondering not only about the boldness of the identification of essence with attribute, but also the use of the plural self; surely there is only one divine essence. Despite this problem, the strength of the paper is in drawing out the practical ethical consequences of the Finnish interpretation—one that would find ready support from other strong proponents of what I have elsewhere called the ‘identity principle’.  

Where Raunio takes the discussion forward, as it were, into the realm of practical ethical consequences, Sammeli Jantunen takes it back into the more foundational area of metaphysics. Luther has little to say explicitly about ontology, Jantunen acknowledges, and this has led his interpreters—especially those of the ‘so-called personalist Luther-interpretation (Gerhard Ebeling, et al)’ into an explicitly anti-metaphysical reading of his work. But this supposedly anti-metaphysical reading rests, according to Jantunen, on a particular set of metaphysical presuppositions, namely the Kantian distinction between phenomena (events that are apprehended as the works of God) and the noumenon (God’s essence). This interpretation argued that ‘God can be present in the world only in his actual effects (especially on the will and the conscience of the believer), which are to be differentiated categorically from his being’. But Luther does not, according to Jantunen, deny an analogy of being and goodness between God and the world, nor does he deny the validity of philosophical concepts, so long as they are ‘bathed’ or baptised so as to receive a new and different meaning from the the significance they normally carry in philosophical discourse. It is this nova vocabula that breaks open the syllogistic reasoning of scholasticism, but not in a way that does away with metaphysics as such. Here again, being and attribute (‘goodness’) are held close together, and yet they are not simply identified with one another. Jantunen in fact allows a distinction between being and act in Luther, so that being remains behind the outward action. With regard to the issue of participation, Jantunen argues that while William of Ockham had denied the ontology of participation, Luther’s Ockhamist teachers were not always consistent in the absence of a reliable alternative ontology. Other authorities who did assume such an ontology, notably Augustine, were held in high regard and had their own influence. Ockham understood creaturely being as the outworking of God’s creatio continua, and the scholars of the Luther Renaissance emphasised this element in Luther’s work by replacing being (Sein) by becoming (Werden). But this leads us to read Luther within a particular, rather skewed metaphysical framework, according to Jantunen: we either fail to notice Luther’s references to being and participation, or read into them a lesser significance than their author intended.

2. Reaction to the Finnish interpretation

Reinhard Flogaus has responded to the Finnish interpretation in a book on salvation as theosis in Palamas and Luther. Flogaus sets himself the question: are Luther and Orthodoxy closer than previously thought, as the Finnish interpretation would seem to suggest? His book is characterised by the thoroughness of German scholarship at its very best, and is unquestionably a major contribution to Palamas research, making extensive use of the full scope of the primary sources as well as a range of contemporary Palamas scholars, both Eastern and Western. Flogaus parallels this Palamas research with an exhaustive examination of relevant texts in Luther. Flogaus is careful to reject a

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39. Ibid., fn 5.
40. Ibid., 132.
41. Ibid., fn 24.
42. Ibid, 148-153.
43. Ibid., 142-4.
number of older Protestant assessments of both *theosis* and justification. *Theosis*, for example, can no longer be dismissed as self-deification, and justification is not to be presented primarily in forensic terms. Even so, Flogaus makes a number of criticisms of the Finnish interpretation of Luther. Here I do not follow Flogaus’s own lengthy discussion of what he sees as the points of disjunction between Palamas and Luther, but offer my own summary of the criticisms of the Finnish interpretation that emerge throughout the book.

Flogaus argues there is a problem of a lack of parallelism between Orthodox and Lutheran terminology. There are very few allusions to deification in Luther, far less references to union with God than to union with Christ, in terms of ‘becoming Word’ ([*Wortverdienst*]). Further, the question of salvation may have been less important for Palamas than previously thought. Uppermost in Palamas’s own mind was the question of our knowledge of God. Linked to this is the relative importance of the key concepts in the different traditions. While the Protestant understanding of salvation must engage with *theosis*, justification has no place in either Orthodox liturgy or theology. Luther’s theology is uncompromisingly a theology of the cross, as indeed the Finnish school readily admits, while the cross—and thus christology—seems to have little role in the Eastern doctrine of *theosis*. To this it has to be admitted that the Finnish interpretation has largely focused on Luther rather than Palamas. It critiques the older readings of Luther by Ebeling and others in the hope of going beyond what it sees as an essentially closed, and therefore ecumenically unhelpful, interpretation. On the whole, it has not yet actively explored a convergence of Luther with specifically Palamite thought. For this reason, the problem of being and act continues to be raised in a way that would seem not to be amenable to Palamite thought. When Flogaus quite properly asks whether Lutheran and Orthodox are closer than previously thought, there is a sense in which he is going beyond the brief of the Finnish school.

There is a gradualism implicit in the Palamite notion of *theosis*, and this contrasts strongly with the either/or (or both/and) of Luther’s more dialectical approach to salvation. The notion of growth or progress of created nature towards God is foreign to Protestant thought, according to Flogaus. There is indeed a tension here between the now (*in re*) and the not yet (*in spe*), but this is a dialectical tension, in which the justified human person is both sinner and just. Where Luther would have us understand ourselves as at once, dialectically, both sinners and justified, Palamas sees us as on a journey from here to there, from sinners to saints. But again, this may be too simple a contrast, as Flogaus unwittingly shows. In Luther also he sees a tension between the now and the not yet, between that which is *in re* and that which is as yet *in spe* (but which will be *in re*). There is, in other words, a progression in Luther, just as in Palamas there can be a fullness of the creature’s being in God, here and now. In any case, Peura has pointed out that ‘synergism in no way threatens justification: God’s imputative act does not depend on human cooperation’. Rather, justification can be seen as the start of the process of sanctification.

Flogaus accuses the Finnish school of positing a Luther who is a consistently mystical theologian. Against this view, he proposes a break between the early Luther and the later writings in which a mystical theology is more and more strongly rejected. Even Luther’s early thought is marked by an emphasis on christology not found in Palamite thought. From the end of the 1520s, we see in Luther emerging distinctions between grace and gift (the continuing identification of which is important to Peura’s argument), and between justification and sanctification. These distinctions cannot be restricted, as Mannermaa would have, to later Lutheran writings—it is there in

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44. Flogaus, *Theosis*, 5.
51. An exception is the contribution to the debate by H Kammari.
54. Erich Vogelsang (‘Luther und die Mystik’, *Lutherjahrbuch* 19 (1937): 32-54) argues that there is a consistent approach to mysticism throughout Luther’s mature works, and that Luther’s criterion for valid mysticism is experience (as opposed to speculation). It defensible, this argument would place Luther close to contemporary Palamism in its understanding of mystical encounter with God. See AM Allehin, ‘The Appeal to Experience in the Triads of St Gregory Palamas’, *Studia Patristica (Texte und Untersuchungen, 93) B* (1966): 323-328.
Luther himself. To this charge we have to acknowledge that Luther did indeed, as Flogaus argues, move away from the German mystical tradition during the course of his working life.\textsuperscript{56}

Finally, Flogaus asks: Is deification a helpful concept for us nowadays? Contemporary christology looks to the humanising of humanity rather than its deification (Küng, Jüngel).\textsuperscript{57} Our end in Christ is to become true human beings. Also for Luther the end of salvation is not to become gods, but servants. According to Flogaus, Luther wants us to be united not with God, but with Christ, the \textit{verus homo}, and in a way that ‘would make deification obsolete’.\textsuperscript{58} But this might not be so far from the state to which Palamas is calling us, if we are to take seriously what his modern interpreters have said. The whole point of the essence-energies distinction, as regards salvation, is to maintain the ultimate ontological distinction between the defined human person and the eternal persons of the Trinity. We are to become, like Christ, children of God, but not trinitarian hypostases, for we are children of God by adoption and grace. Christ alone is child of God (\textit{pater theou}) by nature. Even so, Flogaus’s question raises a much larger issue as to whether discourse about union is in any way helpful to a postmodern mindset. Does such discourse serve simply to assimilate, and thus erase, difference? We are rightly suspicious of such usuries of difference—including the difference between God and humanity. We need also to be suspicious of any erasure of difference between two different and perhaps incommensurable theological systems.\textsuperscript{59}

Flogaus’s treatment of Palamite thought is not without its problems. There are, for example, occasional cases of special pleading, as when Flogaus sees contradiction to the rules of logic as dialectic in Luther but oxymoron in Palamas.\textsuperscript{60} More seriously, Flogaus sees Palamas’s thought as neo-Platonic\textsuperscript{61}—and then seems surprised that it regards human beings as closer than the angels to God, on the grounds that we are embodied and thus, unlike the angels, have the benefit of aesthetic, sensual knowledge.\textsuperscript{62} So Flogaus harbours the suspicion (despite his own disclaimers in other places) that the Palamite doctrine of \textit{theosis} may just be yet another expression of the ancient and ever-present Greek tendency to bridge the gap between the divine and the human.\textsuperscript{63} Flogaus’s more recent accusation that the teaching of Gregory Palamas and its doctrinal consequences are now the major reason for continuing alienation between East and West is, in my opinion, and for reasons explored elsewhere, far too simple.\textsuperscript{64}

Also problematic is Flogaus’s charge that the Finnish school, in common with other Scandinavian scholars,\textsuperscript{65} makes use of a \textit{Grundmotiv}, a single hermeneutical key to the interpreting of Luther. The Finnish school claims in fact to free Luther scholarship from an older tendency to interpret Luther through particular hermeneutical keys—for example the forensic understanding of justification or the \textit{covet-relationship}\textsuperscript{66}—and see Luther in a new light, as a mystical theologian.\textsuperscript{67} It is precisely such interpretations of Luther through a single hermeneutical key that the Finnish scholars, for their part, are calling in question.\textsuperscript{68}

Despite his references to the energies of the Spirit as the means of deification,\textsuperscript{69} Flogaus in the end sees the energies as offering \textit{theosis} in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 261.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 13, 15-6, 364. See also Flogaus, ‘Einig in Sachen \textit{Theosis} und Synergia’, \textit{Kerygma} und \textit{Dogma}, 42 (1990): 225-243, here 226.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 364.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 292.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 126.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 141, 145.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} R Flogaus, ‘Die Theologie des Gregorios Palamas—Hindernis oder Hilfe für die ökumenische Verständigung?’, \textit{Österrische Studien} 47 (1998): 105-123, here 109.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 34. He has G Aules and A Nygren in mind.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ebeling, \textit{Luther}, sees this as ‘the very basis of Luther’s mode of thought’ (193) and that it ‘determines his thought’ (223).
  \item \textsuperscript{67} An important source is Erich Vogelsang, ‘Luther und die Mystik’, \textit{Lutherjahrbuch} 19 (1937): 52-54. I am grateful to Dr Peura for this reference (conversation 3 July 1999).
  \item \textsuperscript{68} As Carl Braaten recognises in his response to Peura, in Branten and Jenson, 74. See also R Shafran, ‘Liberty and Dominion: Luther, Palamas and Ringleben’, \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie}, 50 (1998): 171-181; here 171: ‘... the Kantian line (as of interpretation) is problematic in its tendency to reduce the many-sided phenomena of religion and theology to moral notions and value-judgements’. By contrast, Eric Gritsch welcomes Mannenmaa’s discovery of a ‘hermeneutical key’ to understanding Luther; see E Gritsch, ‘Response to Tuomo Mannenmaa “Glaube, Bildung und Gemeinschaft bei Luther! Faith, Culture and Community”’, \textit{Lutherjahrbuch} 66 (1999): 197-206, here 199.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 81-3, and his criticisms of D Wendebourg, 190, 228-9.
\end{itemize}
the form of a relationship with the divine essence rather than with a specific trinitarian hypostasis, viz. the hypostasis of the Spirit.\footnote{70} This becomes for Flogaus one of the two great weaknesses of the Palamite theosis doctrine.\footnote{71} I have argued elsewhere (and Flogaus also seems to support this position in places\footnote{72}) that the energies, because of their relationship with the hypostasis of the Spirit, are mediated by the Spirit, and thus give us access not to divine essence as such, but to the trinitarian God.

The other great weakness Flogaus sees in Palamism is an inner-divine subordination of energies to essence, on the grounds of a causal relationship between essence and energy. This is simply not a sustainable charge. One of the achievements of the trinitarian theology of the 4th century was the insight that causation does not necessarily involve a relationship of inferiority or subordination. The first trinitarian hypostasis is the source or cause (\textit{aitia}) of the second, but it does not follow that the second is subordinate to the first. The trinitarian theology of the 4th century was quite prepared to think of the second person as caused, but rejected the suggestion that this implied subordination. This has also become an important principle of political life: an adult person (and in many circumstances this increasingly applies to children as well), though 'caused' by his or her parent, is not consequently considered subordinate as a political agent. By the same logic, the divine energy may have its cause in the divine essence, but still be no less divine. Flogaus correctly sees two ontological levels (\textit{Seinstufen}) in Palamas’ doctrine of God,\footnote{73} in which the \textit{ousia} is the \textit{aitia} of the energy. This is helpful in saying that energy is in fact a way of God’s being God, though causally dependant upon some other way of God’s being God that is beyond it. But it in no way implies subordination.

Despite these problems, Flogaus’s book justifies its modest subtitle ‘contribution to ecumenical conversation’ in several ways. First, Flogaus uncovers strong evidence for Palamas’s reliance on key texts in Augustine—whom he calls the ‘spiritual father’ of Palamas’s chris-

tology.\footnote{74} While this might give some discomfort to the original proponents for the 20th century Palamas Renaissance, it also suggests an unexpected meeting point for Eastern and Western thought in Augustine. Second, both Palamas and Luther are presented as opponents of scholasticism.\footnote{75} This can be seen in their understanding of grace as uncreated grace, and their non-speculative approach to the knowledge of God. The theology of grace is developed by Palamas in a way that precludes created grace,\footnote{76} and Luther rejects the scholastic understanding of grace as created \textit{habitus}.\footnote{77} Similarly with regard to theological speculation—neither for Palamas nor for Luther is this a reliable way to God. Luther’s famous dictum that one becomes a theologian ‘not by understanding, reading or speculating, but by living’\footnote{78} may, in fact, stand much closer to Palamas’s ascetic way than Flogaus is willing to allow. Admittedly, Luther’s characteristic addition ‘and much more by dying and being damned’ (\textit{in morte et damnado}) is a sentiment foreign to Palamas. The same might also be said for God’s \textit{abscendit sub contrario} in Luther\footnote{79}—this may not be a point of disagreement with Palamas, but of commonality with what Vladimir Lossky called the antinomic method.\footnote{80} Neither for Luther nor for Palamas\footnote{81} do we human beings possess an ‘organ of sense’ for the discernment of God’s presence. For both, God’s presence is given by God alone, through the hypostasis of the Spirit. For Palamas, deification is effected by the energies of the Spirit; for Luther, union

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item 70. Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 210-1, where Flogaus sees the special role of the Spirit in \textit{theosis} as a ‘nicht mehr intengierbares Relikt aus der Tradition’, cf 202-3.
\item 71. Ibid, 284.
\item 72. Ibid, 95, 115, 181-3, 219, 259-60.
\item 73. Ibid, 274.
\item 74. Ibid, 243. See also 98-100, 109, 149, 243, 248, 256, 258, 277. Flogaus also points out where Palamas is at variance with Augustine, for example (an example of relevance to this discussion) where Palamas distinguishes between the Spirit and the Spirit’s gift (of grace). Augustine had explicitly identified Spirit as the gift (Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 259-60), and the whole Western tradition has followed him in this identification.
\item 75. And also, it could be said, both have an at least ambivalent relationship with humanism. See K-H zur Mühlen, ‘Korrefort zu Thoma Mannermans “Glaube, Bildung und Gemeinschaft bei Luther”’, \textit{Lutherjahrbuch}, 66 (1999): 207-218.
\item 76. Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 159-60, 279.
\item 77. Ibid, 373.
\item 78. Cited in Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 292-3.
\item 79. Ibid, 292, 249.
\item 81. Flogaus, \textit{Theosis}, 177, 272.
\end{itemize}}
with Christ is a work of the Spirit. Finally, the theology of the cross is seen as Luther's innovation, but this is nowhere linked to the Orthodox understanding of \textit{askesis}—which, if not seen primarily as a human activity but as a divine initiative in the believer—may offer a point of contact with the \textit{theologia crucis}. Both are theologies, undertaken—each in its own way—\textit{sub cruci}.

3. The problem of act and being

To my mind the key problem in the Finnish interpretation—as I have hinted already—is that of being and act, or essence and attributes. What I want to say here is tentative, because I write as an outside observer, neither Lutheran nor Orthodox, but involved in sympathetic dialogue with both. Mannermaa, in reference to 2 Peter 1:4, writes: '... the presence of Christ means that the believer participates in the "divine nature". And when participating in God's essence, the Christian also becomes a partaker of the properties of the essence.'

This statement, and others like it, are common in the works of the Finnish school. While it clearly seeks to make common cause with a patristic notion of \textit{theosis}, and thus with contemporary Orthodox thought, it also seems to contain elements problematic to contemporary Orthodox theology. Elsewhere, Peura argues, Luther himself is at odds with the neo-Kantian interpretation of Luther, which characteristically separates God's being (esse) from God's effects or works (\textit{Wirkungen}). This renders the 'effects' less real than the essence, but paradoxically places the essence beyond our reach: knowledge of God, and even more so union with God, become impossible. The Palamite distinction between essence and energies is superficially like the Kantian distinction between being and act. But it is a mistake to think that Palamism posits an unknowable God in the way Kant asserts God's essential intellectual unknowability. For Palamism, God is indeed in essence beyond knowability, but is really (and immediately) apprehended and known in God's energies.

82. \textit{Ibid.}, 311. \textit{(See R Prenter, Spiritus Creator [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955]. This is another Scandinavian treatment of Luther that could presumably also be accused of taking a single-issue approach, this time in terms of pneumatology.)}


84. Mannermaa, 'Justification', in Braaten and Jenson, 34.

85. Peura, 'Christ as Favor and Gift'.


87. \textit{Ibid.}, 159.

Palamite scholars make a clear distinction between essence (or super-essence) and energies in God, and this would seem to run parallel to the Kantian distinction between being and act that is so anathema to the Finnish scholars. This would seem to mean the Finnish interpretation, though initiated by ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox, remains ecumenically problematic. If anything, Kant might have offered a point of contact. By contrast, the Finnish interpretation seems to present us with an uncompromising version of the identity principle, i.e. the identity of God's inner trinitarian being with God's trinitarian actions \textit{ad extra}. If my reading of contemporary Orthodox theology is correct, this would not be an acceptable methodological axiom. And yet there is ambiguity on both sides: Palamite scholars are not always as consistent as we might like them to be, and the Finnish Luther scholars at times seem to allow a notion distinct between God's being and God's actions. Luther himself, as Flogaus acknowledges, allows a distinction in God between \textit{quidens} and \textit{qualitas}, which would indeed suggest a parallel with the Palamite distinction between essence and attributes.

I suggest the problem may be one of terminology as much as anything else. The Palamite position alternates between speaking of essence (\textit{oousia}) and super-essentiality (\textit{hyperousiotes}), when referring to the ungraspable, transcendent side of God. It is uncomfortable with any notion of divine essence as a Kantian noumenon or thing-in-itself. God's essence is beyond knowing, and also beyond linguistic description—hence the paradoxical term 'super-essence'. Contrary both to Palamas's opponent Barlaam and to Kant, however, this position does not imply an agnosticism about the inner being of God. God allows Godself to be really known. \textit{Theosis}, as Flogaus points out, is not something that leads to (or arises out of) theoretical knowledge (\textit{Wissen}) of God, but to knowledge (\textit{Kennen}) by acquaintance—it is the outcome of experience (\textit{erlebnis}). Palamite thought is insistent that God can be and is known personally through the energies (or acts, attributes, names, etc), even though these are not final encapsulations of divinity. Through the energies the believer really and ontologically participates in the divine life, and knows God through this existential participation. Palamite writers use this concept to interpret the 2 Peter
14 statement about participation in the divine nature. 'Divine nature' here is understood to include both God's actions and the divine life that transcends the actions. Palamism has its own safeguard against self-deification by placing the initiative with God the Holy Spirit, and through the gradualism that Flogaus finds incompatible with Luther's thought, the notion of epiktasis, or continual reaching out and movement ever deeper into the life of God in a never-ending pilgrimage of salvation. When the Finnish scholars assert the identity of God's being and actions (attributes, names, etc), they are also saying that we participate in the divine being of Christ and know the divine being through that participation. Both positions assert we know God, we know the divine nature, ever against a Kantian skepticism about that which lies beyond the perceptible world. Both positions assert a participatory way of knowing, ever against any purely intellectual knowing—the reverse side of which is necessarily an arena of not-knowing. Not-knowing is located on the side of God's essence, and it refers to that in which we do not participate. Palamite theology maintains the distinction, but asserts that our not-knowing is subsumed under a participatory knowing through the energies or works of God ad extra. The Finnish scholars deny the distinction in order to deny the Kantian proposition that there is a realm of the inherently unknowable, namely the realm that is beyond sense perception, and that God resides in this dimension.

There is no doubt that the Finnish Luther scholars are still working within a Western theological framework. Flogaus may well be correct in saying that thesis means something different for Palamas than it does for Luther, though we should not forget we are dealing with Flogaus's interpretations of Palamas and Luther.88 Ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox has led the Finnish Luther scholars to reinterpret the sources of their own theology. But the theological terminology still needs to be clarified if this dialogue is to be taken further. There are points in the discussion where the Finnish school still seems to be speaking at cross-purposes to the Orthodox—assuming that I understand both positions correctly. The point in common is that both the Finnish Lutherans and the Orthodox are stating, in their own ways, that the utterly transcendent God is knowable through participation, and that this participation is to be understood not intellectually but experientially, and salvation is understood ontologically, as union. Where Palamite theology sees this participation and thesis occurring through the mediation of the Holy Spirit (and in practice through the energies of the Spirit), the new thinking within Lutheran circles locates the mediation in Christ—access to whom, however, is given by the Spirit.

The Finnish school offers a new, open-ended reading of Luther. It can be accused of emphasizing a single hermeneutical motif, though this is not its intention, and in reality other interpretations lend themselves to the same accusation. Flogaus, while acknowledging the value of the new interpretation, has cautioned against its hasty and uncritical reception. I leave it to scholars more familiar with Luther than I comment on whether the Finnish interpretation can be justified. In any case the debate will not be concluded in a hurry. The take-home message from the debate is the reminder that the meaning of any text is in front of the text, between ourselves as readers and the text itself. What Luther intended is not available to us, except through what he has written. New readings are not only possible but inevitable. As Eric Grösch puts it at the end of his article, 'Mannermaa... tries to be simultaneously committed to the literal meaning of Lutheran texts and to a theological sensibility for the sake of possible new insights derived from this ever so richly endowed reformer'.89 We will inevitably read

88. An example of how the same term can be used with different connotations is Luther's expression 'the joyful (or wonderful) exchange' (commercium admirabile, or frohlicher Wechsel). Flogaus reads this to mean 'the exchange of the sin of the Christian for the righteousness of Christ' (Austausch der Sünde des Christen gegen die Gerechtigkeit Christi, Flogaus, Theosis, 301), and his argument in the following pages is bounded by this definition. By contrast, an Anglican commentator on the theosis theme in his own tradition uses Luther's term to explicate a sermon passage from Lancelot Andrews, but in a fully ontological sense: 'Here already is the marvellous interchange of human and divine which the whole Christian mystery celebrates' (AM Alchim, Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition [London: DLT, 1988], 17). The


It is to Dr Juntinnen that I owe the humorous notion of Luther's Finnlandisierung (personal correspondence, 8 June 1999)—the significance of which I hope will be apparent from the paper as a whole. I am also particularly grateful for the time Dr Peura gave me for a meeting and conversation in Helsinki, 3 July 1999.
the texts with the question in mind: what here is helpful to us? For an earlier age, it may have been helpful and even legitimate to emphasise what was distinctive in Luther, what helps consolidate a specific confessional identity. For us, I suggest (with the caveat that we honestly look for the intended meaning of the texts) the helpful and appropriate endeavour is to seek common ground with those whose theological worldview, in whatever way, is other than our own. This task the Finnish school, in re-examining their own formative texts, has begun.