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Luther and Paradox: Justification, Ethics, and the New Finnish School of Interpretation

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Given his insistence on the dual temporal and spiritual spheres in which Christians live in the tension of freedom and *service to others, Martin Luther's theological ethics prove paradoxical. This conundrum unfolds at the intersection of Luther's doctrine of justification and consequent Christian freedom (1520), and his doctrine of two kingdoms, which elucidates the complex world in which we live (1523). How is one to live in service to the neighbor as an unconditional subject, love enemies, and uphold justice? This article explores the New Finnish School interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification as* theosis *in order to elucidate the Reformer's convoluted ethics. We may ultimately understand Luther's tensive position in terms of the believer's soul united to Christ, thereby becoming a Christ to others albeit,* simul justus et peccator, *imperfectly. This more fully accounts for Luther's appreciation for the ethical contingencies faced by Christians in everyday life.*

Keywords: Luther, theological ethics, theosis, Finnish School, neighbor, freedom

Given his insistence on the dual temporal and spiritual spheres in which Christians live in the tension of freedom and service to others, Martin Luther's theological ethic of service to the neighbor is a seeming paradox.[1] By paradox we mean that for Luther the nature of a life lived as a Christian in the world proves at times to be replete with

[1] See Part 3, "Reformation and Post-Reformation 20. Martin Luther (1483–1546)," in *Readings in Christian Thought*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). Kerr argues that Luther's theology is "simple and straightforward," and yet admits his notion of Christian freedom is an "evangelical paradox," 139; Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165–78;

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purportedly irresolvable contingency. On the one hand, for instance, by his interpretation of Matthew 5:38–42, Luther insists Christians not seek personal vengeance against enemies for civic wrongs. On the other hand, however, he suggests believers support their neighbor who seeks punitive justice for being so wronged. If a Christian is physically threatened in isolation, Luther instructs that person to accept death without struggle; but if the person is threatened while being tasked with the care and protection of another, a Christian is to defend one's own life and the neighbor's life from harm.[2] How then do we make sense of Luther's intention for Christian freedom in everyday service to our neighbors?

The first part of this article traces the seemingly paradoxical nature as it arises in Luther's theological ethic, namely, in both his understanding of faith as the Christian's freedom in Christ for service to the neighbor (1520), as well in his two kingdoms doctrine (1523).[3] By faith Christians are free, Luther maintains, but not unburdened. Luther has difficulty explaining how one might live as a Christian in relation,[4] as one who serves the neighbor's needs in temporal society, and also as a citizen of God's kingdom, who forgives and loves enemies.[5] This leads to a number of ethical difficulties regarding justice and social order.

The difficulty pertaining to Luther's seemingly paradoxical theological ethic is to articulate the relation of individual faith to secular social-political

and David M. Whitford, "Luther's Political Encounters," 179–91, in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*.

[2] Martin Luther, "Matt. 5:38–42, The Sermon on the Mount," in *Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, vol. 21, *Luther's Work*s, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 105–15. From here, all volumes of *Luther's Works*, once introduced, are rendered by the abbreviation LW with the volume and page number, for example, "LW 21:105."

[3] Here I rely on two works written within three years (1520 to 1523) of one another: Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, eds. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012); and Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority—To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *The Christian in Society 2*, vol. 45, *Luther's Works*, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962).

[4] A term Luther coins in his commentary, based on a series of sermons in Wittenberg (1532), on Matthew 5:38–42, LW 21:109. His treatment of this pericope in Matthew is indicative of the paradox of Christian life, namely, that "There is no getting around it, a Christian has to be a secular person of some sort," LW 21:109.

[5] Luther says plainly, "In short, the rule in the kingdom of Christ is the toleration of everything, forgiveness, and the recompense of evil with good. On the other hand, in the realm of the emperor, there should be no tolerance shown toward any injustice, but rather a defense against wrong and a punishment of it, and an effort to defend and maintain the right, according to what each one's office or station may require," LW 21:113.

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responsibility.[6] One should not be surprised at this tension. Luther often resorts to paradox (*simul justus et peccator*) to describe the nature of faith lived between the realities of sin and righteousness.[7] This tension is also expressed between the "forensic and effective aspects of justification" that pertain, respectively, to God's merciful disposition toward humankind, and to the transformative effect of grace on humankind.[8] However, this tension has not been satisfactorily resolved by the traditional interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification, which posits a forensic model of righteousness that prioritizes grace as the declarative-imputational aspect of faith. The effective aspects, like regeneration, are taken as subordinate features of justification.[9] This interpretation entails an overly passive Christian relation to the greater world.

In the second part, it is argued that Luther's theological ethic of Christian freedom in service to the neighbor can be elucidated if we consider it in light of the articulation of justification as theosis identified by the New Finnish School.[10] As a program, the Finnish reading of Luther on justification posits

[6] We should note immediately that there is indeed a vein of social and political concern in Luther's writings, while acknowledging the needful critique of his involvement in and acerbic condemnation of the peasants' uprising during 1524 to 1525, as well as his obeisance to German princes. See Hans J. Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics': Martin Luther and the Societal Order," in *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies*, eds. Kirsi I. Stjerna and Brooks Schramm (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 207–19; Michael Richard Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology: Freeing Luther from the Modern Political Narrative* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016); and Carter Lindberg and Paul Wee, eds., *The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2016).

[7] John M. G. Barclay, "Interpreting Paul on Grace: Shifting Patterns of Perfection," in *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 108. This is the major theme for Luther in his "Against Latomus," in *Career of the Reformer 2*, ed. George W. Forell, trans. George Lindbeck, vol. 32, *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1958), 135–261. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," in *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, vol. 4, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 155.

[8] Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*): The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 42. Cf. Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 150–53, on the issue of Osiandrism as it pertains to this dispute over forensic and effective or "essential" righteousness.

[9] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 42–48.

[10] Represented in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "'Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics': Insights from the Finnish Interpretation of Luther's Theology," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 2 (April 2007): 85–96.

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faith in terms of the human soul, *simul justus et peccator*, united to Christ as an ontic reality.[11] To be sure, this is a mysterious union.[12] But there is still sense to be made of the relation of faith to the world. This sense obtains in the Finnish interpretation of grace (*favor*) and gift (*donum*) as co-constitutive moments of faith.[13] Christ present in faith entails for Luther not only that by God's grace is forgiveness imputed to the believer, but also that a Christian participates in the divine life and is conformed to Christ by regeneration and renewal.[14]

The third and final part considers this interpretation as a potential theological ethical imperative. Luther's seemingly paradoxical ethic of Christian freedom entails both that we should forgive wrongdoing *and* that we should demand temporal justice for our neighbor.[15]

The Finnish interpretation of justification allows one to posit Christians in relation as cooperators with God in this vein.[16] Christ present in faith means that we are not merely beneficiaries of grace, but that we bear the gifts of God by participation in Christ. Though we as the world persist in sin, we truly become a Christ to our neighbors by his indwelling. Christians do not

[11] Tuomo Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 33. See Kärkkäinen, "'Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics,'" 90.

[12] Luther's understanding of Christ present in faith is apophatic. In Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," Tuomo Mannermaa notes of Luther that "It is in the darkness of faith that Christ sits on his throne in all his reality and reigns, just as God did in the darkness and cloud in the most holy place of the Temple," 37. Or as Luther says, "But the mode in which He is present cannot be thought, for there is darkness, as I have said," LW 26, quoted in Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 37.

[13] See Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 42–69. See Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 32–36.

[14] See Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 60–63.

[15] This is reflected in Luther, LW 45:102–05, 124; cf. Luther's reflection on the Fifth Commandment, Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism: Exposition of the Ten Commandments," in *Christian Ethics—Sources of the Living Tradition*, eds. Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1973): 253–54.

[16] Antti Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 113–16. It was Robert W. Jenson who spurred me on in this vein, with his claim that Luther's doctrine of justification, read from the vantage of theosis, carries material and moral weight. Robert W. Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 281–84.

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transcend the exigencies of secular contingency, but we might transform them even as we are transformed.

Part I: Luther's Social Ethic and the Christian-in-Relation Paradox

I.1—The Freedom of a Christian and the Two Natures

In perhaps his most well-known work, *The Freedom of a Christian*, Martin Luther enjoins believers to an ethical paradigm that has liberation at its center. But for Luther the freedom of a Christian is not merely divinely endowed autonomy. It entails a seeming paradox.[17] Freedom describes the state of the Christian who by God's grace, through faith, has been justified and set free from sin, death, and false righteousness. However, freedom for Luther also describes the Christian's willing and bounded service to the neighbor.[18] To be freed *from* sin by Christ is simultaneously to be freed *for* the other as Christ was. "It is in the nature of love to be attentive to others and to serve the one who is loved," Luther interprets Romans 13:8, for "[so] it is with the case of Christ … he was at the same time a free man and servant, 'in the form of God' and in the 'form of a slave' (Phil 2:6–7)."[19] Christian freedom is necessarily analogous to the life of love Jesus lived, as well as to the sacrificial death he died. Christians are called to enjoy in Christ an "un/freedom." Disjunction therefore besets Luther's position at the outset.[20]

Luther accounts for this tension as a difference of natures. Each of us is composed of both an inner and an outer or a spiritual and a bodily nature, he claims.[21] The inner nature will be the subject of the following analysis, but we consider it here to place it in proximity to the outer nature. The life of Christian freedom is wrought through an inward "transformation" by which we are enabled to live a life of "righteousness, and freedom" through hearing the "word of God, the gospel of Christ."[22] That through faith we

[17] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404.

[18] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404.

[19] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404. Cf. Robert W. Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," who notes (on page 280): "But the real God appears [for Luther] with nails in his extremities and mockery over his head, so that if we want images of security and peace, we must make them up ourselves. These are the idols."

[20] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404.

[21] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404.

[22] Luther "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 404–05. On the nature of the gift that is given by God, namely, God in Godself, see Oswald Bayer, "The Self-Giving God," *Lutheran Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 125–36. Bayer notes that "The word in

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hear the Word and believe it is indicative of the grace demonstrated by God to sinners. "For faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the word of God," faith alone in the good news of Christ that justifies an unrighteous sinner.[23] In this familiar Reformation *sola*, Luther beats back the tide of "all pieties of achievement" by which Christians unduly committed themselves to innumerable spiritual labors thought to augment faith and put one in right relationship with God.[24] Luther's *sola fide* is a response to this accounting of righteousness that put Christians perpetually in God's debt.[25] Faith for Luther is the inspired belief and acceptance of the sufficiency of Christ's justifying work declared to unbelievers in the gospel. However, faith in Christ does not give one license for apathy. Quite the opposite is true.

It is *for what* we are freed that concerns the outward and bodily nature. How are we to live in response to freedom granted by believing the Word of God in Christ? The life of faith is one lived out of boundless and active love for our neighbor, Luther argues. This brings us first to a significant point regarding Luther's theological ethic: he did not repudiate good works.[26] To those who would say "Let us take our ease and do no works and be content with faith," Luther answers "such a wicked person with an emphatic 'No!'"[27] The inward transformation wrought by God through the hearing and believing of the gospel of Christ is the ground of salvation. But it is also the beginning of a new life. "Insofar as a Christian is free, no works are necessary," Luther affirms, but "Insofar as a Christian is a

which, with which, and under which God gives himself [*sic*] is the word which expects trust and kindles and nurtures it. For Luther, the gift-word does not simply state what already exists, but actually creates what did not exist before," 129. See Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 148.

[23] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 405.

[24] Lindberg, "Luther's Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues," 165. In "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," editors Russell and Lull comment in note 7: "In making this claim Luther is swimming against the stream of the entire medieval tradition," represented alternatively in Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham (406). Justification for these eminent theologians entailed a more complementary role of human agency in which we supplemented God's grace with works of righteousness intended to commend ourselves by charity to God's reckoning. See Scott Hendrix, "Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, eds. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 48.

[25] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 145–47. Lindberg notes that for Luther, freedom in Christ meant liberation from an interminable attempt to justify ourselves in "striving to ascend to God," 165.

[26] Luther says "we do not reject good works. Indeed, good works are cherished and taught by us." See "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 417.

[27] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 414.

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servant, all kinds of works are done."[28] The assumption for the Reformer was that, freed from the anxiety of trying to escape from sin through self-righteous acts of piety, Christians enjoy the freedom of knowing that by grace our faith in Christ justifies us without qualification.[29] But this does not excuse us from good works; it revalues them appropriately as loving responses to the freedom in Christ we now enjoy as faith.

Good works are characterized by Luther as faith acting in love for the other indicative of Christ's love for us as sinners.[30] This is the significance of the inward life for the outward life: in faith "Christ and the soul become one flesh," as he takes on "sins, death, and damnation," and we receive from him "grace, life, and salvation."[31] By this marital union the outward nature is freed for radically unbounded service to the neighbor. A Christian's righteousness is Christ's own, Luther reminds us, and it "saves and makes one acceptable," but importantly it also "gives the Christian all things that Christ has."[32] By his grace through faith Christ enables believers to consider the needs of their neighbor above all else. One should think:

> Although I am an unworthy and condemned person, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part ... I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me. I will do nothing in this life except what is

[28] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 414.

[29] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 417. On Luther's response to the scholastic tradition of *quod in se est* and the *fides caritate formata*, writ large, see Heiko A. Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," *The Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 1 (January 1966).

[30] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 419. "Indeed, we live for others and for ourselves," Luther says, and so we are freely subject to the needs of our neighbors insofar as we no longer seek to escape this world, but realize instead that "it is necessary to live fully among people, conversing and dealing with them as Christ did, who was made in human likeness (Bar 3:37)," "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 418. Cf. Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 147.

Luther also admonishes penitents to relinquish themselves from reflection on the cross of Christ as an occasion for self-diminution and chastisement. He instead tells them to reflect on the love of God present in Christ's act for which God gave God's son for us. See Martin Luther, "A Meditation on Christ's Passion," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, eds. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, 126–32. See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 67–76.

[31] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 409. See Laffin, "Ontology and Politics," in *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology*, 43–46; and Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 21.

[32] Luther, ""The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 419. More on this following in the section treating the Finnish School of Lutheran thought.

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> profitable, necessary, and life-giving for my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.[33]

Further, the freedom of faith means to be Christ to the neighbor precisely as Christ is for us, loving without any regard for prior merit or demerit, but with abandon.[34]

> From love there proceeds a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves the neighbor and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss. We do not serve others with an eye toward making them obligated to us. *Nor do we distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or gratitude.* Rather, we freely and willingly spend ourselves and all that we have, whether we squander it on the ungrateful or give it to the deserving.[35]

This point is significant for what comes next. Luther's radical theological ethical paradigm of service to the neighbor as faith acting in love is both liberating and demanding. He makes no distinction between neighbors. We are to bear with all so that our righteousness in Christ might "cover and intercede for the sins of [a] neighbor."[36] But, how do Christians serve the needs of all at once? How can we be Christ to all in a sinful and broken world? What must we do?

I.2—The Two Kingdoms and the Christian in Relation

Reform for Luther meant a holistic transformation of church and society. This required, he believed, the intervention of the state and its powers in new and significant roles.[37] Already in his *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther makes the case to Charles V that, given the failures of "the Roman church … the secular authorities had to step in" if meaningful reform were to take place.[38] Luther's intent was to delineate theological grounds for the investment of secular authorities, specifically, the nobility, with power to reform Christendom. However, the peasantry was not always willing to work for reform within the confines of secular "law and order" and, becoming more agitated, Luther noted their tendency to "*Aufruhr* (uproar, rioting)" with increasing disdain.[39] A further 1522 treatise marked

[33] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 420.
[34] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 420. See Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 73–74.
[35] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 420. Emphasis added.
[36] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 423.
[37] Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics,'" 210–13.
[38] Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics,'" 211.
[39] Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics,'" 213.

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his attempts to stanch the surge of growing discontent and outbreaks of violence among Christian peasants. Luther admonished these poor believers, though sympathetic to their plight, imploring them to be obedient to secular authorities for the good of reformation.[40] What is at stake for Luther is to at once defend Christian freedom while protecting the cause of reform by investing power in secular authorities. The question is still: how to be a Christian in relation in the tension between faith and the world.

The freedom of the Christian entails that by faith we are servants to all, regardless of whether they are friend or enemy. But Christians do not live in isolation. On the one hand, believers are bound to God by grace through faith. On the other hand, the freedom of the Christian means that we are also bound to one another in the world. In *Temporal Authority—To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523), Luther makes his case in this regard for two intersecting kingdoms between which Christians find themselves living and serving others: the temporal and the spiritual.[41] The "two kingdoms" is a theological model he conceives in order to practically address the tension between the ethic of Christian freedom he develops and the divinely ordained temporal administration of social order.[42] Luther is pressed specifically to interpret two scriptural passages that seem to put Christian freedom at odds with the demands of social-political life. In Matthew 5 Christ commands that one should not resist evil (v. 33), but further (v. 44) "love [their] enemies," and in Romans 12 Paul restricts vengeance to God alone.[43] Luther must address these passages as they prompt two questions for his notion of Christian freedom: What is the extent of a temporal ruler's authority, that is, does it command civically and spiritually with equal authority? And, more importantly, how should Christian citizens exercise freedom as dual citizens, as both temporal subjects and believers?

Luther answers the first question swiftly. Temporal authority is precisely that. Whether it is the emperor or his princes, temporal rulers command only that which they have been given by God to command, namely, the earthly sphere. Luther thus denounces rulers who overstep their bounds, "who actually think they can do—and order their subjects to do—whatever they please," with the result that "the subjects make the mistake of believing

[40] Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics,'" 214–15. The 1522 work by Luther is "A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard against Insurrection and Rebellion," in *Christian in Society 2*, vol. 45, *Luther's Works*, 57–74.

[41] LW 45. See Hendrix, "Luther," 88–91.

[42] Hillebrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to Do with Politics,'" 215.

[43] LW 45:81. Luther seems to reference v. 44 when he says to "make friends with your accuser," LW 45: 81.

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that they, in turn, are bound to obey their rulers in everything."[44] It is one thing for a ruler to command obedience to the law and claim secular authority over subjects. It is quite another thing for an emperor or prince to command the obedience of one's faith or conscience.[45] Nevertheless, Luther does not dispose with temporal authority altogether. The law, and the sword, symbolizing the law's punitive exercise, have been ordained by God and must be upheld by temporal authorities for social order.[46] Otherwise, evil would go unrestrained, and the wicked likewise would not recognize their need for grace in order to be made righteous by faith in Christ.[47]

Granting that temporal authorities serve this divinely appointed role, however, the question nevertheless remains: Does the freedom of the Christian require submission to the temporal authority that resists and restrains evildoers, which recourse Christ not only prohibits, but counterbalances with an admonition to forbearance and radical toleration of wrongdoing (Matt 5:38, 44)? Yes and no, Luther says, for we must also account for the "two classes" of inhabitants.[48] As one class of inhabitants, Christians occupy the second sphere, the spiritual kingdom governed by God according to the grace of Christ, which produces faith and obtains in righteous believers.[49] "[T]hese people need no temporal law or sword" to restrain them from evildoing or admonish them toward a righteousness they already possess inwardly by grace through faith in Christ.[50] They can abide by Jesus' ethic in Matthew 5. The law and the sword are necessary for that other class, namely, who are *not* inhabitants of the spiritual kingdom, and therefore are not ruled by the spirit of Christ.[51] This constitutes the "no" of Luther's answer.

However, Christians *are* subject to the temporal authorities, and do need the law, insofar as they live with and, most importantly, *for* others. Christians form a unique class of inhabitants who simultaneously reside in and are subjects of the spiritual sphere, governed by God, and the temporal sphere,

[44] LW 45:83, 106.

[45] Whitford, "Luther's Political Encounters," 189. Here Luther has in mind not only the injustices he has suffered from the German nobility, but also their rote hypocrisy. Luther argues that if the emperor tried to take a castle or lands from these same nobles, they would "find themselves obliged to resist," but that "when it comes to fleecing the poor or venting their spite on the word of God, it becomes a matter of 'obedience to imperial command,'" LW 45, 84.

[46] LW 45:86–87.

[47] LW 45:88–90. These are the two uses of the law, according to Luther.

[48] LW 45:88.

[49] LW 45:88–90.

[50] LW 45:88–89.

[51] This is because Christians already "have in their heart the Holy Spirit, who both teaches and makes them to do injustice to no one," LW 45: 89.

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governed by secular authorities. Christians must therefore find ways of living together among all of their neighbors between the kingdoms.[52] This describes the tensive reality of what Luther later would name the "Christian in relation," his admonition that believers must learn to "be a secular person of some sort" in the temporal sphere.[53] This constitutes the "yes" of Luther's answer. And, importantly, this accords with his ethic of service to the neighbor that accompanies the freedom of faith in Christ bestowed by the grace of God. To live in service to our neighbor in a sinful world where "the wicked always outnumber the good" means, on the one hand, that believers already made righteous in Christ are able and encouraged on an individual level to suffer any number of injustices and wrongs without recourse to vengeance.[54] On the other hand, believers freely consider the needs of their neighbors, and in this vein "tolerate no injustice,"[55] and by faith cover the neighbor with the righteousness of Christ against enemies.[56]

This puts Christians in a precarious position. So far as they are personally concerned, as inhabitants of the spiritual kingdom, Christians relinquish recourse to the law or to the sword and choose instead to love their enemies.[57] If they are wronged, they seek neither to resist the evildoer nor vengeance against them, whether in the matter of stolen property or even murder.[58] But insofar as they exercise their freedom in Christ as a service to the needs of their neighbor in the temporal kingdom, Christians are obligated to defend others against injustice and wrong:

> Although you do not need to have *your enemy* punished, your *afflicted neighbor* does ... You suffer evil and injustice, and yet at the same time you punish evil and injustice; you do not resist evil, and yet at the same time, you do resist it. In the one case, you consider yourself and what is yours; in the other, you consider your neighbor and what is his.[59]

[52] LW 45:92.

[53] Luther, "Matt. 5:38–42, The Sermon on the Mount," LW 21, 109. See Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 403–04.

[54] LW 45:91, 101. See LW 21:108.

[55] LW 45:96.

[56] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 423. See LW 45, 98.

[57] LW 21:106–08.

[58] LW 45:92.

[59] LW 45:95–96. Emphasis added. Luther declares the two opposing issues harmonized (96). He says further on that "the one who loves his enemies and is perfect leaves the law alone and does not use it to demand an eye for any eye. Neither does he restrain the non-Christians, however, who do not love their enemies and who do wish to make use of the law; indeed, he lends help that these laws may hinder the wicked from doing worse ... he may and should wield it and invoke it to restrain wickedness and to defend godliness," LW 45, 103.

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Luther clearly recognizes the believer's paradox. But by positing Christians as inhabitants of both spiritual and temporal kingdoms, the Reformer believed he had provided a theological rationale. We must both turn the other cheek to our enemies *and* we must defend our neighbors against the injustice and violence of a sinful world. A believer must learn to inhabit the world in this tensive manner. "Just learn the difference between the two persons that a Christian must carry simultaneously on earth," Luther blithely suggests elsewhere.[60] But is it really this simple?

Part II: Justification, the Finnish School of Interpretation, and Theosis

We have been discussing the tension of Luther's theological-ethical paradigm of Christian freedom as faith acting in love in service to the neighbor. Although his clarifications regarding the inner and outer natures, and the two kingdoms and the classes of their inhabitants, prove elucidating, one is nevertheless left in the tension of life between the kingdoms as a Christian in relation. One question, specifically, lingers in the wake of this rationale. How can Christians, as inhabitants of both spiritual and temporal kingdoms, abide by Luther's radical definition of service to the neighbor as an unconditioned class of persons? Differently, how do we love our enemies, as Christ demands, and love our neighbors who seek justice?

In order to address this impasse, it is necessary to return to the inner nature in Luther's thought, a point we passed through earlier in his *Freedom of a Christian* without extensive critical comment. Here we consider more carefully the doctrine of justification in terms of grace and gift and what bearing these concepts have for Luther on the inward transformation wrought by Christ in faith. Specifically, by incorporating the work of the New Finnish School of interpretation on Luther's doctrine of justification, we might further clarify his theological ethic and make more sense of the seeming paradox of the Christian in relation. In this evaluation and application of the Finnish reading of Luther, this section will consider traditional readings of this doctrine to which these scholars respond, as well as critiques of their positions.

The New Finnish School of interpretation, spearheaded by Tuomo Mannermaa, is responsible for a renascence of interest in Luther's contemporary significance, as well as for revolutionary interpretations of the Reformer's

[60] LW 21:110.

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most entrenched doctrines.[61] Chief among these is the forensic model of Luther's doctrine of justification. For many Luther scholars following the Formula of Concord (FC), justification was "understood in a one-sidedly forensic manner, that is, only as a reception of the forgiveness that is 'imputed' to Christians for the sake of the obedience of Christ."[62] This emphasis is not a malicious attempt at obscuring the authentic Luther that the Finnish School later claims to retrieve.[63] On the contrary, the formulation of the doctrine of justification in terms of forensic declaration of forgiveness and the imputation of righteousness arose from historical need.[64] In this case, the need of many confessions, including the Formula of Concord, was to clarify the reformed position on justification, in this case against that of Andreas Osiander. Osiander identified the righteousness of justification, which he believes we receive and participate in, with the righteousness of Christ's *divine nature*.[65] This smacked not only of christological heresy, but also of "affinity with the scholastic definition of grace as an infused quality in man rather than as the favor of God."[66] In order to avoid arrogating to humankind what belongs to God, the emphasis of justification remained with righteousness as a quality of God and not of human nature. Traditional interpretations of this doctrine (FC) therefore maintained a hermeneutical priority of grace, though with the addition of faith with Christ as its object, while subordinating the inward effects of Christ's righteousness on sinners.[67]

According to Mannermaa, however, this is not a faithful interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification taken comprehensively.[68] His primary

[61] See Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ*; and Kärkkäinen, "'Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics.'" See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).

[62] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4.

[63] See Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line the New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231–44, at 233. See also Jenson's response in Robert W. Jenson, "Response to Mark Seifrid, Paul Metzger, and Carl Trueman on Finnish Luther Research," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 245–50.

[64] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 150–55.

[65] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 151.

[66] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 152–53.

[67] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 154.

[68] A point that Pelikan echoes in "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church": "Thus Luther's 'forensic' doctrine of imputation, as made precise by Melanchthon, gained dominance in the confessional interpretations of justification (whether Lutheran, Calvinist, or Arminian) over other ways of speaking that could also find a legitimate place within the full range of Reformation thought," 152. This includes Luther's own position, Pelikan notes, for "In a

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disagreement is that the forensic model promulgates a sequential distinction between the declaration of righteousness and the *inhabitatio Dei*, where divine indwelling is "not the same phenomenon as the 'righteousness of faith,'" but was "logically subsequent to justification."[69] Mannermaa argues that no such sequential distinction existed for Luther, who believed *in ipsa fide Christus adest*—in faith Christ is actually present.[70] By faith, justification constitutes simultaneously the union of the soul with Christ (*unio personalis*) and the righteousness imputed to the believer. "[Luther] does not separate the person (*persona*) of Christ and his work (*officium*) from each other," but instead "*Christ himself*, both his person and his work, *is* the Christian righteousness, that is, the 'righteousness of faith.'"[71] For Luther, justification does not merely entail a forensic declaration, but an intimate communion of subjects.[72] "Christ and the soul become one flesh," he observes in *Freedom of a Christian*, and "[given] this marriage, it follows that they hold everything in common."[73] Christians do not merely receive righteousness passively in faith. By grace we are united with Christ who is really present in us. But, in this case at least, it is not by grace alone.

The significance of the *unio personalis* is demonstrated by the Finnish School through attention to the Reformer's prioritization of both grace *and* gift as the two moments of his doctrine of justification.[74] Luther did not

sermon delivered about the same time, he attacked those among recent scholastic thinkers who located the forgiveness of sins and justification in a sheer act of divine imputation." See "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 154.

[69] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4.

[70] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 5. See Braaten and Jenson, eds., "Introduction," *Union with Christ*, viii; and Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," in *Union with Christ*, 14–15.

[71] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 5. This is part of a larger conversation in the Finnish school surrounding the philosophical heritage of Lutheran theology following the Formula of Concord (1577). Mannermaa summarizes Risto Saarinen's 1989 dissertation that sought to read against the neo-Kantian ontology of Hermann Lotze that relativized metaphysics in Luther's works in favor of a transcendental interpretation, which, asserting the inaccessibility of being-in-itself, suggested that the God-human relationship is purely personal-ethical, and known only by effect. Lotze's epistemology thus mimicked his ontological assumptions, as he suggested that the object of knowledge is ultimately separated from the knower and is known merely by its effects, a step Saarinen notes that Luther does not make. This interpretation led to an understanding of Christ present in faith by union of will, where what we can know is God affecting our will as the union of the human and the divine. See Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," 4–9.

[72] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 40–41. I explore this further in what follows. See Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," 10–12.

[73] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 409.

[74] Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 27.

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understand faith as mere intellectual assent.[75] As Simo Peura notes, on the one hand, faith entailed for Luther that in hearing and believing the Word, "Christ himself is the grace that covers a sinner" by which one is declared righteous.[76] On the other hand, faith meant also that "Christ himself is the gift that renews the sinner internally and makes him righteous" *in unio personalis*.[77] This is evident in Luther's 1521 work, *Against Latomus*, in which he argues that, granted the union with Christ effected in baptism, the sin that remains in the believer truly is sin.[78] Sins are forgiven by God in baptism, which "removes all [sins] ... but not their substance.... Day by day the substance is removed so that it may be utterly destroyed."[79] It is the day-by-day that concerns the effective righteousness of faith.[80]

> A righteous and faithful man [*sic*] doubtless has both grace and the gift. Grace makes him wholly pleasing so that his person is wholly accepted, and there is no place for wrath in him anymore, but *the gift heals him from sin and from all his corruption of body and soul*.... Everything is forgiven through grace, but as yet not everything is healed through the gift. The gift has been infused, the leaven has been added to the mixture. It works so as to purge away the sin for which a person has already been forgiven.[81]

Faith understood in terms of union with Christ is not only a declaration of forgiveness, but also the transformative process in which, by Christ's righteousness, we are healed.[82] This is the tensive reality of *simul justus et peccator*, forgiven sinners clinging to Christ. Faith is what "makes you a chick, and Christ a hen, so that you have hope under his wings ... faith is the gift of God, which the grace of God obtains for us, and which purging away sin,

[75] Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 145–46.

[76] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 53. See Pelikan, who comments, quoting Luther, that the truths of the Apostle's Creed, for example, are true as "they were true 'for me,' a phrase that one was to 'accept with a sure faith and apply to himself' without doubting." See Pelikan, "The Gospel as the Treasure of the Church," 154.

[77] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 53. See Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 32.

[78] LW 32:207. See Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 53–54.

[79] LW 32:208–09.

[80] LW 32:229ff.

[81] LW 32:229. Emphasis added.

[82] LW 32:232, 235. Luther says further on: "For although he has justified us through the gift of faith, and although he becomes favorable to us through his grace, yet he wants us to rely on Christ so that we will not waver in ourselves and in these his gifts, nor be satisfied with the righteousness which has begun in us unless it cleaves to and flows from Christ's righteousness, and so that no fool, having once accepted the gift, will think himself already contented and secure," LW 32:236.

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makes us saved and certain."[83] United by soul to Christ in faith, we are forgiven, and become righteous, day by day.

The result of the Finnish School's scholarship in this vein is a revaluation of justification as *theosis* in Luther's theology.[84] Luther did not, as we saw, maintain a singularly forensic doctrine of justification by grace. *Against Latomus* evinced the effective transformation of our inner nature through the purging of sin, wrought *in unio personalis* by participation in Christ as gift. "The idea of *unio personalis* makes it obvious once again that Luther regards the ontological nature of the presence of Christ as absolutely real," Mannermaa suggests, so that in "the believer's real participation in Christ" there is no distinction between "justification and the divine indwelling of the believer."[85] Further, in fact, Luther articulates this "real-ontic," participatory union of persons by grace and gift in terms of divinization.[86] He reflects in his *Summer Postil* (1544) on evidence in support of Christ's promise in John 14 to abide with the spiritually impoverished faithful. "This is, certainly, a sublime, beautiful promise," Luther notes:

> And, as St. Peter (2 Pet 1, 4) says, one of the precious and exceeding great promises granted unto us poor, miserable sinners, that we through them should become partakers of the divine nature, and should also be so highly honored not only to be loved of God through Christ Jesus and to enjoy his favor and grace—as the highest, the most precious and sacred thing—but should even have the Lord himself dwelling completely in us.[87]

Importantly, Mannermaa notes, there is for Luther no change of substance in this *unio personalis* or confusion of natures by Christ's indwelling.[88] The

[83] LW 32:236. See Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 56–60.

[84] Mannermaa, "Introduction," in *Christ Present in Faith*, 1–9. See Kärkkäinen, "'Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics," 85.

[85] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 41.

[86] Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 33.

[87] Martin Luther, "Pentecost, or Festival of the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Third Sermon. John 14, 23–31," in *Church Postil, Volume 2: Gospels—Pentecost or Missionary Sermons*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker, vol. 12, *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans In All Lands Co., 1907), 316. Mannermaa quotes this postil in "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," 33. Mannermaa also quotes Luther's Christmas Sermon (1514), where the Reformer said: "Just as the word of God became human flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God." See Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," 11. I have decided to foreground the postil from 1544, given that one of Trueman's major critiques of the Finnish School is an overreliance on early, so-called pre-Reformation texts of Luther. This is explored in the following.

[88] Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," 11.

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significance of identifying theosis in Luther is that, for him, faith does not mean merely *receiving* what Christ has but, in that Christ is really present in faith, *participating* in who Christ is, in the divine nature.[89]

Some critics argue, however, that this position does not strictly qualify as deification. Carl Trueman perhaps most forcefully rejects this strain of thought the New Finnish School identifies in Luther. "To describe the presence of Christ using ontological language is perhaps not incorrect," he concedes, "since Christ really is present for Luther."[90] But this is confusing, Trueman thinks, because "ontological presence is understood in terms of its effects with reference to imputation and declaration, not first and foremost of deification."[91] As the *Summer Postil* showed, however, Luther indeed links divine indwelling to participation in the divine nature. The claim to confusion, given that this is not the "first and foremost" frame of reference Luther uses, while verifiable given his infrequent discussion of participation in divine nature, is nevertheless no barrier to identifying or demonstrating its significance. Otherwise, themes as well accepted as the *theologia crucis*, Olli-Pekka Vainio argues, could be discounted on the same grounds.[92]

This alludes to Trueman's major point of contention: the purportedly ahistorical method of the Helsinki circle. Their penchant for reading the "pre-Reformation" Luther, he claims, does a disservice to the mature Reformer's theology.[93] But Oberman warns against obeisance to a definite *Turmerlebnis* (tower experience) by which Luther might be interpreted.[94]

[89] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 50–51. See Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?," 10.

[90] Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning?," 239. Trueman's example (that Laffin repeats) of Luther's "realistic" language of Christ's presence in the elements of the supper not being itself indicative of divinization I find intriguing, but ultimately unhelpful. It seems to me a false equivalency to say what occurs by union of Christ to the elements might be translated to explain what happens by union of Christ to human beings. The bread and wine are not divinized; their substances are unchanged. That is granted. Theosis does not concern sacramental elements, however, but human beings made in the image and likeness of God. Like the elements, the human substance remains unchanged *in unio personalis*, and there is no confusion of natures. Nevertheless, participation by humans in the divine nature remains for Luther a powerful part of the promise of God by grace and gift through faith. As the Reformer argues, "[Christ] does not want us to halt in what has been received, but rather to draw near from day to day so that we may be fully transformed into Christ," LW 32:235.

[91] Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning?," 239.

[92] This is the main contention against Trueman made by Olli-Pekka Vainio, "Luther and Theosis: A Response to the Critics of Finnish Luther Research," *Pro Ecclesia* 23, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 460–63.

[93] Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning?," 236–37.

[94] Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 7–9.

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We could nevertheless note, abiding by Trueman's logic, the *Summer Postil* is a late text (1544), as are the *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), where Luther argues the first two humans, created in the image and likeness of God, were "suited to be a partaker[s] of divinity," a hope for immortality cast aside in the Fall, but not cast off, "a hope through Christ we also have."[95]

Whether language regarding the real-ontic presence of Christ in faith is related first and foremost explicitly to deification in Luther's entire or even mature corpus is certainly no reason to treat it as adiaphorous.[96] Luther claims a real transformation by participation of the believer *in unio personalis* "into a likeness of Christ," a process that "creates in the Christian the same form (*forma*) as Christ."[97] Theosis is therefore arguably a natural way to describe what Luther means by justification through grace and gift. For Luther, righteousness means that the believer participates in the divine nature insofar as Christ is present in them by faith. This constitutes the effective divinization of the human united to Christ. This communion of persons is the ground of our inward transformation.[98] Faith means not only that Christ forensically declares us righteous before God by grace, but also that we are effectively righteous as we participate in the life of God by the gifts bestowed in Christ. The soul united to God in this way is transformed, indeed even deified. As Luther claims in his 1525 *Church Postil*, "[God] fills us *in order that* everything that He is and everything He can do might be in us in all its fullness, and work powerfully, so that we might be *divinized throughout*."[99] Divinization obtains by God's will for participation through faith in a divine and human communion by the grace and gift of Christ.[100]

[95] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick, vol. 1, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 115.

[96] Regarding Luther's metaphysics and use of ontology, see Sammeli Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics: What Is the Structure of Being according to Luther?" in *Union with Christ*, 129–56; and Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 281–84.

[97] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 60. On the contestation over deification, see Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line the New Beginning?" 239; and Laffin, "Ontology and Politics," 43.

[98] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 409.

[99] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 45, emphasis original. See Jenson, who notes that "but except for some turns of diction, [Luther] could be any of the Greek fathers," "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther,* 281.

[100] This is the significance of *katabasis* and *anabasis* in Vladimir Lossky's account of deification. This, as well as a deeper discussion of theosis as it relates to justification, is taken up by Roland Chia, "Salvation as Justification and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 2 (2011): 130. Chia notes as well that, as "Simo Puera has pointed

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Part III: Theosis and the Christian in Relation

We may now return to the relation of the inner and outer natures, and thereby also to Luther's seemingly paradoxical theological-ethical paradigm of freedom as faith acting in love in service to the neighbor and love of enemies as a Christian in relation. On the reading of the Finnish School, we will reinterpret Luther's theological ethic as being grounded in justification as theosis. What implications does this hold for the question of the Christian in relation, living in the tension between the kingdoms in service to all, friend and enemy alike? What are the temporal consequences of a soul united to Christ?

Let us first briefly restate the paradox that seemingly obtains in Luther's theological ethic. As we saw, Luther clearly understands the tension in which a believer must live as a Christian in relation. They are at once bound by Christ's command in Matthew 5 as citizens of the spiritual kingdom to love their enemies. Yet, while also living in the temporal kingdom, they must "learn to be secular people of some sort," in loving service to all our neighbors.[101] This is complicated when service to our neighbor asks us to demand justice against enemies. This not only seems to contradict the spirit of what he forbids to believers, but it also would seem to abandon his radically open category of neighbor, if we are obliged to distinguish between afflicted-neighbor as friend and perpetrator-neighbor as enemy on behalf of the former. How can we be Christ to all in a sinful and broken world full of injustice? This has been our persistent question regarding this seeming paradox of the Christian in relation.

However, if we accept with the Finnish School that for Luther Christ truly indwells believers, then we might better understand his radical notion of Christian freedom. Let us begin reinterpreting his theological-ethical paradigm first in terms of the inward nature and the soul's union with Christ. On the Finnish School's reading of justification as theosis, faith means for Luther that Christians not only believe they *have* by grace what the gospel promises. That is, righteousness is more than, as Rudolf Hermann suggested, right relationship with God by declaration of forgiveness.[102] Faith as participation in Christ means Christians effectively *become*, through healing and renewal, what is promised. Righteous sinners, Luther reminds, should

out, 'Justification is not only a change of self-understanding, a new relation to God, or a new ethos of love. God changes the sinner ontologically in the sense that he or she participates in God and his divine nature, being made righteous and "a god,"'" "Salvation as Justification and Deification," 134.

[101] LW 21:109.

[102] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 47.

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"draw near from day to day so that we may be fully transformed into Christ."[103] As participation in the divine nature, deification means the Christian, being purged from sin, is being renewed, transformed in likeness to Christ. Where the work of Christ *in unio personalis* is not separated from his person, this means believers are, in a limited sense, becoming Christs.[104]

What does this reinterpretation of the inward nature mean for the outward nature? First and foremost, as it were, justification as theosis brings fresh meaning to Luther's insistence that we become Christ to others. In service to our neighbors as Christians in relation, believers are enabled to bear with others as Christ commands to the extent that Christ indwells us and that we participate in him.[105] Antti Raunio further fleshes out the implications of deification for the outward nature.[106] He argues that when "Christ unites himself with a Christian through [their] faith, he acts towards [them] just as if Christ himself were that person" by taking "the burden of [their] sin onto himself, he gives his own power, righteousness, and wisdom in return," so that Christians become participants in the divine nature, "the love that gives itself to the other."[107] We may now read Luther in a new light in *The Freedom of a Christian*. When he says "It is necessary to live fully among people, conversing and dealing with them as Christ did," he is not asking Christians to imagine how Christ might have dealt with sinners and to do our best imitation.[108] By union with and participation in Christ, faith means that we are able truly to be Christ to others. Luther can therefore say "I will therefore give myself to my neighbor, *just as Christ offered himself to me*," for participation in him is to participate in self-giving love, and from "love there proceeds a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves the neighbor … [so each] of us should *become a Christ* to the other.[109] Faith acting in love as service to the neighbor is, for Luther, constituted by the union of the believer to Christ. By faith Christians are quite literally Christ to others because by Christ's indwelling we both have what Christ has and become what Christ is for others: a loving servant to the needs of all.

This nuanced understanding of the inward nature in terms of becoming a Christ to others also allows us to more deftly navigate the tension of life lived

[103] LW 32:235.

[104] Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (*donum*)," 51.

[105] Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 49, 50. This phrasing is important insofar as Mannermaa argues (on page 54) that for Luther, sanctification "comes solely from Christ who is present and works in faith."

[106] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 96–124.

[107] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 113.

[108] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 418. Emphasis added.

[109] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," 420. Emphasis added.

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between the kingdoms. It is the nature of this becoming, *in unio personalis* with Christ, while living as Christians in relation, that might help ease the paradox of neighbor love as it arises in Luther's theological ethics. It is true Luther shows a generally negative opinion regarding recourse to temporal justice for Christians who have been wronged.[110] But insofar as a Christian "has to be a secular person of some sort," believers are obligated to live simultaneously by Christ's commands to love neighbors and enemies without distinction, and by the laws of temporal society.[111] The freedom of a Christian is freedom as one who must be Christ to all while also being a neighbor among them.[112] Christians, *simul justus et peccator*, however, cannot live purely as though their union with Christ is perfected. Yes grace abounds, but sin remains a persistent and pernicious reality that we inhabit, though in us its substance is being ground away. Hence Luther's admonition that we draw near to Christ day by day to be healed and protected in him who "draws us into himself, and transforms us, and places us as if in hiding."[113] But we cannot remain in hiding as though we live in isolation. "Giving oneself to God and to the neighbor is a process," Raunio suggests.[114] The purging of sin indicative of our transformation in likeness to Christ means above all that we learn, day by day, to put ourselves in the place of our neighbor. This is what it means to become Christ to them, after all.

Concerning one's being a Christian in relation, insofar as believers are united in soul to Christ by God's grace and gift, faith acting in love means Christians become a Christ for neighbors as cooperators with God.[115] To not merely have what Christ has as he imputes righteousness to us, but to become by participation in the divine nature who Christ is for others, is a liberating model for faith. Righteousness does not simply describe the

[110] LW 21:108–13. Luther says "Now, if someone asks whether a Christian may go to court or defend himself, the answer is simply no. A Christian is the kind of person who has nothing to do with this sort of secular existence and law. He belongs to a kingdom or realm where the only regulation should be prayer (Matt. 6:12): 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' Here only mutual love and service should prevail, even toward people who do not love us, but who hate us, hurt and harm us. It is to these Christians that He says do not resist evil, that they should not even seek revenge, but that they should turn the other cheek to an assailant," 108–09. He goes on to ask "But what if only your own person is involved and an injury or injustice has been done to you? Is it right to use force in guarding and defending yourself against this? The answer is no," LW 21:111.

[111] LW 21:109.

[112] LW 21:113.

[113] LW 32:235.

[114] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 114.

[115] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 114–17.

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reconciliation of the human-divine relationship by God in Christ. Righteousness describes the Christian who in faith incarnates reconciliation in a sinful world. Is this not what Paul means when he writes "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" by the work of God "who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation," in that, "[for] our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him *we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Cor 5:17–18, 21)?[116] While Christians remain in relation, with feet both in the temporal and the spiritual kingdoms, we bear the burden of being transformed through the cleansing of sin and loving our neighbors. "In cooperation with Christ's justice," Raunio argues, "we follow the example of Christ and become conformed to his image," and we participate "through faith in everything Christ is and that he has."[117] We are enabled to bear the tension of cooperation through participation in Christ, through a communion of souls *in unio personalis* for the work of reconciliation and righteousness so that all things will be made new, transformed by God.

Conclusion

The tension identified at the outset, the persistent contingency believers experience as Christians in relation, is in one sense indeed insurmountable. Christians inhabit a broken, sinful world alongside broken, sinful people. Luther's example of the Christian on her own who is wronged is not unthinkable: perhaps she really can choose to be defrauded, or killed, if she is able to abide by Christ's commands in Matthew 5. But we almost never live in true isolation. We are freed by Christ in regard to all things, and yet we are servants to all because we are almost assuredly always Christians in relation. We live in community: we are members of Christ's body, the community of believers; but we also live within and among the greater world community. The tension comes down to how Christians, whose souls are united to God by the indwelling of Christ, are to live in and among and as sinners in a sinful world.[118]

It is nevertheless the hope of this article that we might learn to think with Luther in a way that makes more sense of this tension. Justification as theosis, the transformation of the sinner united to and participating in Christ, provides a liberating model for how one might really become Christ to others. We have seen how we are enabled as cooperators, by the grace and gift of God through

[116] 2 Cor. 5:17–18, 21 NRSV. Emphasis added.
[117] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 115.
[118] LW 45:91.

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faith, to assume the position of the neighbor and to serve their needs. Reconciliation, then, is not merely something that happened to us in order to right a wronged relationship, though it is also assuredly that. Reconciliation is something we are to others insofar as Christ indwells us and we "put him on" day by day. Indeed, though we are hidden in Christ to whom we cling for hope and by whom we are healed, we are nevertheless burdened to carry the same hope and the same healing to the world we inhabit.

How in this regard are we loving the one made subject to temporal authority? How do we love the enemy of our neighbor? Presumably, insofar as temporal justice models, albeit imperfectly, the love of God. "The letter of the law," for Luther, "is the demand of divine love, though it cannot guarantee the fulfillment of the law."[119] Justice in the world should evince commitments at once pursuant to reconciliation, social equality, peace, hope, and love. So often, and so blatantly, it does not. These are not failures merely of omission. They have real, daily, human costs. Nevertheless, it should be our aim "that we might become the righteousness of God," not merely to imitate in isolation, but to incarnate justice between the kingdoms. As cooperators with God, Christians are given the ministry of reconciliation. This is the holy work of transforming our sinful world and making all things new even as we are transformed, namely, by purging sin in clinging to, and hoping and healing and hiding in Christ together, by being Christ for one another as Christ was and is and will be for us. This constitutes an imperative for Christian life in relation. We offer, albeit in imperfect form, what Christ offers. We in fact become a Christ to others in a broken world because we are in faith becoming more and more of Christ by participating in him.[120]

[119] Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith," 104. See LW:32, 226–27.

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