

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN LUTHERANISM AND ORTHODOXY¹
Basil Ross Aden

Published in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30/1 (1994). Posted with permission.

A widely circulated book laments the current "abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of nearly all the classic spiritual disciplines" ² That concern of Richard J. Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* no doubt applies to Lutherans. On the whole, we are suspicious of spirituality, confused about its definition, dubious of its motivation, and doubtful about the prospect of spiritual growth? ³ Despite increasing interest in spirituality, most of us in the Evangelical-Lutheran tradition are couch potatoes when it comes to the spiritual life.

The Anglican A.M. Allchin raises the question why most of us are not "pressing on" toward the goal of becoming like Christ in his death and resurrection, ⁴ suggesting that it might have something to do with our theology:

"In many parts of Protestantism, there has been a consistent tendency, helped by certain unhappy ways of formulating belief, to cease to look for any radiant transformation in the life of man in this world... to take the formula that man in Christ is, before God, always *simul justus et peccator* to mean that God accepts us as we are and leaves us as we are, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, but not imparted." ⁵

The Lutheran Robert Jensen confirms Allchin's analysis, at least as far as those in his denomination are concerned, in his review of our typical sermon:

¹ An abbreviated version of this article appeared in *dialog*, vol. 32 (Spring 1993), pp. 102-107. I must express a word of appreciation at the outset to the V. Rev. John Breck, Professor of New Testament and Ethics, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, for his patient and insightful guidance, as well as for his generous sharing of time and the then unpublished documents of the Lutheran/Orthodox dialogues.

Also a word of thanks to:

- St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, faculty, and library for gracious hospitality and generous sharing of resources during my two stays there as a "Visiting Fellow";
- The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago library;
- Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Hancock, Michigan, for sabbatical and continuing education time and funds;
- The Growth in Excellence in Ministry program of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry (Lutheran Brotherhood supported) for extended study funds;
- Bishop Dale Skogman, Northern Great Lakes Synod, ELCA, for his support.

² Richard J. Foster, *Fostering Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p.

3

³ Grace Adolphsen Brame, "Theology and Spirituality," *Lutheran Partners* 8.3 (May/June 1992) pp. 12-13.

⁴ Philippians 3:10-11

⁵ Marina Chavchavadze, ed., *Man's Concern with Holiness: With the Anglican Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox Traditions* (Hodder & Stoughton), p. 43. Robert Jensen, "The 'Sorry State' of Lutheranism," *dialog* 22 (Fall 1983), p. 281.

There will be an analysis of some aspect of fallen human life, often very well done. Then will come the "gospel" part: "To be sure we must recognize that we cannot by our own reason or strength do it differently. Never mind, for Jesus' sake, God loves you anyway."⁶

Instead of complaining about our spiritual apathy, this article asserts that we should attempt to identify the unfortunate theological formulations we share which encourage our passivity in the Christian life. We should reconsider the theology behind the typical Lutheran sermon which our members take as the "Good News" that they need not bother themselves with the good fight of faith.

To get beyond the current quandary in our thinking about spirituality, a fresh point of view would be helpful. Fortunately, in the twentieth century a number of different theological perspectives are becoming readily accessible for this purpose through the ecumenical dialogues. One of the least known of these traditions, the Eastern Orthodox, has become more accessible to Lutherans through the recent publication of *Salvation in Christ: a Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*.⁷ The Canadian Henry Edwards has observed, "Eastern theology acts like a prism which allows Lutherans to see their own theology in a different manner..."⁸ In keeping with Edward's image of the usefulness of Orthodox thought, this paper will look at the Lutheran approach to justification and sanctification through the lens of related Eastern understandings expressed in the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues.⁹ Our goal will be to rediscover a basis in the Lutheran tradition for the development of a theology that would guide us as we encourage our members to grow in the spirit.

The Division between Justification and Sanctification

Conversations between Lutherans and Orthodox have been held intermittently since at least 1575, but unlike earlier failures to reach mutual understanding,¹⁰ the contemporary bilateral dialogues have made much progress. The conclusion of the "Common Statement" of the second round of talks in the U.S., "Christ 'In Us' and Christ 'For Us' in Lutheran and Orthodox Theology," states the accomplishments:

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we have found ourselves drawn together in Christ on the very topics where we anticipated greater disagreement. If Lutherans can begin to understand and appreciate the Orthodox emphasis on deification (*theosis*) as communion with God, and the Orthodox can begin to understand and appreciate the Lutheran emphasis on the

⁶ Robert Jensen, "The 'Sorry State' of Lutheranism," *dialog* 22 (Fall 1983), p. 281.

⁷ John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, eds., *Salvation in Christ: a Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992).

⁸ Henry Edwards, "Justification, Sanctification, and the Eastern Concept of *Theosis*," *Consensus: A Canadian Lutheran Journal of Theology* 14.1 (1988), p. 65.

⁹ The sources of this paper were first studied as unpublished papers of the Lutheran/Orthodox dialogues provided by Fr John Breck, dialogue participant. After these papers were published in *Salvation in Christ*, the citations were revised to correspond with that publication.

¹⁰ George Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople: the Correspondence Between the Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982).

proclamation of "justification by grace through faith" as we have done in this dialogue, then we have taken a significant step in breaking down the wall of partition that divides us.¹¹

When we look at Lutheranism from the point of view of these productive conversations, we discover a launching pad for reconsidering the Lutheran theology of the spiritual life. It is a prevailing Lutheran tendency to separate the categories of justification and sanctification. The Lutheran-Orthodox talks found that an important difference between the two traditions exists in the fundamental conception of the mystery of salvation: "The Orthodox think of one continuous process, whereas the Lutherans distinguish the initial act of justification and regeneration from the process of sanctification."¹²

Such a stark contrast begs us to rethink the division we have often assumed without critical awareness, a division brought to our attention by Luther Northwestern Professor Gerhard O. Forde's important essay, "Justification and Sanctification," published in his *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. II?¹³ Why does Lutheranism tend to split these two theological categories? What are the results and how do they influence the actual practice of the Christian life? And what is the alternative? If we did not make such a distinction, would we find a more positive and active approach to spirituality? In his dialogue paper, ELCA Bishop Michael McDaniel states: "To confuse works with faith, law with gospel, or sanctification with justification, is to make all the promises of God concerning forgiveness of sin and everlasting life unintelligible and uncertain."¹⁴

Here is the practical, pastoral rationale for isolating sanctification from justification. It is to comfort and assure the troubled conscience and to save it from anxiety about whether one has acquired "enough" sanctity to be justified. If what sinners are and do is not distinguished from what Christ is and does for them, then something besides the work of Christ might be assumed to be a *condition* of that divine sentence. And then the sense of the unconditional character of salvation would be lost and sinners would become anxious.

We must note that the distinction does not *necessarily* mean that the two categories must be completely divorced from each other. The Lutheran Formula of Concord holds that there *is* a connection between justification and sanctification; it only insists that the road is a one way street:

This is not to be understood... as though justification and sanctification are separated from each other in such a way that on occasion true faith could coexist and survive side by side with wicked intention, but this merely shows the order in which one thing precedes or follows the other.¹⁵

¹¹ "Common Statement, Christ 'In Us' and Christ 'For Us' in Lutheran and Orthodox Theology," *Salvation in Christ*, pp. 32-33.

¹² "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 30.

¹³ Gerhard O. Forde, "Justification and Sanctification," *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), pp. 425-444.

¹⁴ Bishop Michael C. D. McDaniel, "Salvation as Justification and *Theosis*," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 78.

¹⁵ Theodore O. Tappert, ed. and trans., *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 40, 546.

That is, once the sinner is justified, *then* the dynamics of sanctification come into play: good works do not precede but *follow* faith in the atoning work of Christ. The theological problem which lies behind the Lutheran tendency to neglect the spiritual life is that the careful distinction was transformed into total division. Once the line was drawn, however finely, everything had to be placed on one side of the line or the other. Albert Schweitzer described the consequence:

In the doctrine of justification by faith, redemption and ethics are like two roads, one of which leads up to one side of a ravine, and the other leads onwards from the opposite side-but there is no bridge by which to pass from one side to the other?¹⁶

Here is a vivid picture of our problem, a conceptual cause of the neglect of the spiritual life in Lutheranism. Etched into our thinking is a deep gulf between the work of Christ from whom we receive the gifts of grace, and the life of the believer, internal as well as external. With such a gap, we are left to protest that our Sunday worship and our Monday world are far apart, but so is our hearing of the Word of Grace and our active response to it. For the response to the Word involves a spiritual struggle to lay hold of, retain, apply, and appropriate this Word into our manner of life and into our very being.¹⁷

The Origin of the Division: The Forensic Metaphor

The Lutheran theologian Gerard Forde blames the forensic metaphor itself for our problems. According to Forde, both traditional Lutheranism and traditional Catholicism are caught in the same "legal scheme."¹⁸ The one side guards the purity of the doctrine of grace but tends to make salvation into something unreal; while the other side insists that justification must involve transformation but tends to compromise the gracefulness of God's declaration of righteousness in Christ by requiring its realization in a holy life.¹⁹ Both sides of the impasse are controlled by the fundamental metaphor of the divine law court, a metaphor which fails at the critical point because it cannot answer the very question of how the work of Christ changes the sinner.²⁰ Forde holds that the forensic metaphor must no longer be allowed to dominate our theology but that it should be balanced by another metaphor.²¹ To make his case, he demonstrates that at the point where St Paul himself confronts our question of the intrinsic connection between grace and the Christian life, the apostle switches from a forensic to a death/ life image.²² We should follow St Paul's example, Forde insists, and translate our judicial language of justification into a more dynamic death and resurrection vocabulary, for "Full and complete justification is death and resurrection."²³ If that were done, he argues, there would be no question that justification means

¹⁶ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), p. 295.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. anon. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 213.

¹⁸ Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 43.

¹⁹ Forde, *Justification*, p. 43.

²⁰ Forde, *Justification*, p. 8, 41-43

²¹ Forde, *Justification*, pp. 3-4.

²² Forde, *Justification*, pp. 11-12.

²³ Forde, *Justification*, p. 17.

the death of our presumptuous self-righteousness and the birth of a New Being in us that incarnates the will of God in a life of sanctification.²⁴

Gerhard Forde's powerful argument proves that the hegemony of the forensic image must be broken if we are to grasp the relationship between the life of grace in sanctification and the gift of grace in justification.²⁵ But his work leads us to ask: What kind of a soteriology would be possible if we set aside the legal metaphor for salvation, and so avoided the problems it has caused in linking the ongoing process of being made holy in Christ with the once-for-all event of being justified by Christ?

The Alternative Presented by Eastern Orthodoxy

The Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues are a gift to twentieth-century Lutheranism, because Orthodoxy offers a wholly different way of understanding salvation. Orthodox scholars, like the late Father John Meyendorff, assert that the Augustine-Anselm tradition dominates in the West,²⁶ and they agree with Gerhard Forde about the predominance of the juridical model in that tradition. The Lutheran-Orthodox "Common Statement" observes that the Orthodox "non-legalist" alternative is the result of the application of a different controlling image for salvation: "the different emphases [in Eastern and Western soteriology] can be traced back to different biblical metaphors."²⁷

The dialogues did agree that both Eastern and Western traditions view salvation as *communion* with God. However, the difference between Orthodox and Western soteriology is already apparent in the different answers given to the question of the obstacle to communion with God, the need for salvation. Looking at Western theology as a whole, the Orthodox see the prevailing emphasis on the legal model of salvation as clearly as Gerhard Forde sees it in Lutheran theology. But the Orthodox suppose that the foundation of this predominance is the underlying assumption that the way to God is blocked by inherited sin and guilt.

The Orthodox show how this seminal Western understanding of original sin "reflect[s] a particular interpretation of Romans 5:12."²⁸ The Vulgate translates the critical "*eph ho*" in this passage as "in whom," suggesting that all are subject to death *because* all sinned *in* Adam.²⁹ To the Orthodox, this interpretation grounds Western theology in the assumption that Adam's sinfulness and guilt, and God's wrath against them, are passed along from one generation to another as the inheritance of "original sin." Western doctrines of atonement reach for legal metaphors to explain how the redemptive death of Christ paid the debt of this legacy of Adam.

²⁴ Forde, *Justification*, p. 59

²⁵ Forde makes a highly charged case for his thesis that "Sanctification is the art of getting used to our justification." in Donald L. Alexander, ed. *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), p. 27. See Forde's essay "Justification and Sanctification," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, eds., *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), pp. 425-444.

²⁶ John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), pp. 66-67.

²⁷ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, pp. 30, 15.

²⁸ John Breck, "Divine Initiative: Salvation in Orthodox Theology," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 110.

²⁹ David Weaver, "From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis (Part I)," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27/3 (1983), pp. 187-205.

David Weaver, "The Exegesis of Romans 5:12 among the Greek Fathers and Its Implication For the Doctrine of Original Sin: The 11-12th Centuries (Part II)," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 29/2 (1985), pp. 133-59.

David Weaver, "The Exegesis of Romans 5:12 among the Greek Fathers and Its Implications For the Doctrine of Original Sin: The 11th-12th Centuries (Part III)," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 29/3 (1985), pp. 231-57.

Thus the "Common Statement" observes that Lutheranism stands fully within this broader Western mainstream:

Lutherans have emphasized the language of vicarious atonement, imputation, and forensic justification... <which is> that act by which God removes the sentence of condemnation on human beings, releases them from guilt, and ascribes to them the merit of Christ.³⁰

In this quotation we see that Lutherans have a distinct view of how the benefits of the saving work of Christ are acquired. Yet in the eyes of the Orthodox, we share a largely unconscious presupposition with the mainstream of Western theology: that; salvation has to do with the satisfaction of the demands of the Law of God, that is, of divine justice.

Within this thought world, the forensic picture of justification best preserves what both the Lutheran and the Orthodox would want to maintain, namely our complete and continuous dependence on the grace of God in Christ for salvation. The dialogues admit that the forensic picture is scriptural, and they affirm the Lutheran logic if the legal metaphor is to be used:

If, however, the primary biblical metaphor is that of vicarious death, Christ "for us," and God's saving action takes place independent of us, then the idea of cooperation in justification is unnecessary and misleading.³¹

Yet to the Orthodox there is something incomplete and one-sided about this whole Western approach. In Orthodoxy, the obstacle to communion with God is not conceived to be inherited sin/guilt. The Eastern fathers, as well as most Protestant versions of the Bible, translate the crucial "*eph ho*" in Romans 5:12 as "because" (not "in whom"). The Orthodox take this to mean that the inheritance of Adam is not the transmission of sin but of *mortality*, which now becomes the cause of sin.³² The saving work of Jesus Christ did "trample down death by death," to quote the often repeated Orthodox Pascha (Easter) affirmation. But if the work of salvation was not to appease God's wrath, its purpose was nevertheless more than to overcome the nemesis of death. Here Orthodoxy broadens the scope of our understanding of the office of Christ:

Salvation itself is not the end or *telos* of human experience; it is merely the negative aspect that achieves liberation from the consequences of sin and death. The true meaning of God's work in Christ can only be seen in the ongoing process that leads from initial salvation, through sanctification, and on to a "deification by grace" of the human person.³³

Here is a positive conception of humankind's ultimate vocation of "salvation as communion with God," based on the metaphor of communion itself as "ontological" participation.³⁴ Instead of the Lutheran stress on Pauline justification/righteousness expressions, this soteriology emphasizes the Johannine imagery of union with God.³⁵ These metaphors of personal interpenetration or communion ("I in them and you in me that they may become completely

³⁰ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 21.

³¹ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 30.

³² Breck, p. 110.

³³ Breck, p. 116.

³⁴ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 25.

³⁵ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 117.

one..." John 17:23) find their expression and application in the striking vocabulary of "*theosis*," "deification" or "divinization." They can best be defined by a key Orthodox quotation attributed to St Athanasius: "God became man in order that man might become God (or: divine)," an echo of 2 Peter 1:4.³⁶

Thus the Orthodox hope of salvation in its broadest sense is more than hope of a divine sentence of "not guilty" or even of a beatific vision;³⁷ it is "human participation in the being of God... a total sharing in the Triune life."³⁸ In such a perspective, no division can exist between justification and sanctification. In Orthodox tradition, salvation and the Christian life are viewed together as the continuing process of transformation³⁹ toward the destiny of ineffable intimacy with and sharing in the reality of the living God. The "Common Statement" of the dialogues explains how the practicalities of the Christian life and the effect of Christ's saving action can be held together in the same thought:

If the metaphor for salvation is communion or participation, then it is natural and inevitable that one speaks of cooperation, of willing, and of love as ways in which fellowship with God is deepened and strengthened.⁴⁰

When Orthodoxy is explained to Lutherans, it is important to stress that the whole process of divinization is "by grace,"⁴¹ according to another key Orthodox theme: "to become *by grace* what God is by nature." To understand this theme is to understand the dynamics of the deifying transformation that Lutherans typically would separate into two categories, our explanation begins with the affirmation we hold in common with the Orthodox, justification and sanctification that humankind is made in the image of God. In contemporary Orthodoxy, the image of God is equated with our quality of personhood, "the divinely bestowed capacity for relationship with God, self, and others, exercised in freedom and love."⁴² Created in the *image* of God, human beings are called to become *like* God by realizing this potential for ontological sharing in the life of God.⁴³

Adam failed in that human vocation, because he tried to become "a god without God,"⁴⁴ cutting himself off from his destiny and from the only source of life. The result is that now death has become the corrupting influence in human life. Lacking the intimate knowledge of the Giver of Life, we strive desperately to escape the inevitable grasp of death by selfishly establishing ourselves as individuals. And so we commit sin.⁴⁵

Jesus the Christ brings God's grace to this human situation in a two-fold way. The first is to save in the narrow sense of defeating the corrosive powers of death and sin, which divert us from

³⁶ Breck, p. 114.

³⁷ John Warren Morris, "Salvation in Orthodox Theology," Unpublished Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue paper, p. 28.

³⁸ Breck, p. 116.

³⁹ Morris, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Common Statement, " *Salvation in Christ*, p. 30.

⁴¹ Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis, "Sin in Orthodox Dogmatics," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21/4 (1977), p. 182.

⁴² Breck, 109.

⁴³ Breck, 116.

⁴⁴ Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis, p. 182.

⁴⁵ Breck, p. 111.

the fulfillment of our true destiny. Our salvation is *by grace in* this sense, because only the God-man could overcome these overwhelming powers, "destroying death by death." The second and positive role of Christ is to become the Second Adam who unites in His own person God and the human creature. That is, in the incarnation, God did not just become "a man," but "God became man" so that there is now a unity of God and humanity.⁴⁶ The union of the two natures of Christ in one person reopens the possibility for our *theosis*, our sharing in the divine life of God, but only *by grace--in and through* our connection with Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind. Jesus Christ has defeated the power of sin and death and brought God and humankind together in *the unity* (but not confusion) of his two natures. This same justifying work becomes the source of our *sanctification*, our union with Christ (being "in Christ"), which brings us communion with God.

Lutherans insist on the primacy of grace to avoid pretension about works. In a parallel way, the Orthodox also give priority to grace, to avoid the possible pretension that *theosis* means sharing in God's essence (nature). Lutherans and Orthodox would agree that the essence of God is utterly transcendent and therefore inaccessible to any created reality. But though God is outside of creation in His essence, St Athanasius taught that He is active in creation through His acts of power. Gregory Palamas developed this thought into the pivotal Orthodox doctrine of the "uncreated energies" of God, through which God is available to intimate communion: sharing the life of God does not mean attaining God's ineffable nature but knowing God through His energies or divine attributes, especially through the "energy" of grace.

The point can now be made that to the Orthodox, grace is not a divine pardon, attitude,⁴⁷ or promise as it is for the Lutherans, who tend to focus grace primarily on justification. It is the divine dynamic (energy) that comes from God, unites us to Christ, and changes us⁴⁸ so that "Christ is formed in us" (Gal 4:19). Thus deification is a process of transformation initiated and driven by deifying grace.⁴⁹

How is this theology of grace different from that of "infused grace" that the Lutheran Reformers so adamantly opposed? In the thought of the champion of Orthodoxy, Gregory Palamas, divine energies are not created, as opposed to *the gratia creata* of the scholastics.⁵⁰ The uncreated, deifying grace of Orthodoxy is a gift and endowment of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ It is more than a way of achieving merit by means of cause and effect, as infused grace is in the scholastic system,⁵² for in deifying grace, God is fully present to bring us into union with Himself.

We asked what a soteriology would look like that was not affected by the limitations of the forensic metaphor. In the above discussion, we found the alternative Eastern theology presented in the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues to be a theology permeated by the thought of divine grace. This way of understanding the saving action of God is relational, not mechanical, that is dynamic, not static. What Lutherans have divided into justification and sanctification, Orthodoxy

⁴⁶ St. Gregory Nazianzus taught that by assuming human nature, Christ united himself to all that is human, that "he might destroy the condemnation by sanctifying like by *like*."

⁴⁷ Morris, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Morris, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁹ Morris, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁰ Bengt Hagglund, *History of Theology*, trans. Gene J. Lurid, (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 190-93.

⁵¹ Morris, p. 28.

⁵² Breck, pp. 111-12.

sees as two aspects of the single process of human transformation into union with the divine life. This growth in grace is initiated by the person and work of Christ; applied in baptism; nourished by the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit in Word, sacrament, and the disciplines of the spiritual life; expressed in love; and finally completed in the full realization of the goal for which humans were created: attainment of the likeness of God through personal intercommunion with Him.

A Promising Possibility within the Lutheran Tradition

The dialogues have proved that exposure to such Orthodox theology can help Lutherans grasp their theology and its limitations more clearly. But the dialogues have also brought forward a possibility in the Lutheran tradition for addressing the unfortunate division between justification and sanctification. This possibility entails renewed emphasis on the category of *faith*. The "Common Statement" reports: "In answer to questions from the Orthodox as to how grace can be 'external,' Lutherans affirm that faith is a divine work 'in us' as well as 'for us' and that it 'changes us.'"⁵³

Lutheran Bishop Michael McDaniel explains that "'faith' is the word most often used by Lutherans to refer to this participation in and penetration by the divine life": what the Orthodox call *theosis*.⁵⁴ Both the "Common Statement" and Bishop McDaniel's dialogue paper refer to statements by Martin Luther that faith is the means of our partaking of the divine nature as children of God.⁵⁵ The Lutheran-Orthodox conversations thus seem to point us away from the forensic notion that faith is *only* passive reception, to the concept that faith is the active dynamic of our life and growth "in Christ." Lutheran and Orthodox interchange in Finland has already begun to map out this rediscovered territory, suggesting that the Lutheran equivalent to the Orthodox concept of *theosis* is found in Luther's statement "in faith itself Christ is present."⁵⁶

Recommendations for Further Conversation

The Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues did not set out to solve the problem of the spiritual apathy of Lutherans. Nevertheless, in conclusion we would recommend that the dialogues follow up on the rich possibilities concerning the role of faith in the Christian life which have come to light through these discussions. The talks between the Orthodox and Lutherans would thereby not only advance the cause of church unity. They would also provide material that could be shaped into a pastoral strategy for turning the passivity of Lutherans around. The discussion might explore three aspects of active faith: 1) appropriation; 2) means of sanctification; 3) communion.

(1) Faith as Appropriation

First, Lutherans and Orthodox might discuss how close they are on the matter of the necessary *personal appropriation* by faith of the divine work of justification. The "Common

⁵³ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 31.

⁵⁴ McDaniel, p. 82.

⁵⁵ "Common Statement, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 21; and McDaniel p. 82.

⁵⁶ Hannu T. Kamppuri, ed., *Dialogue Between Neighbours: The Theological Conversation, Between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1970-1986* (Helsinki: Publication of the Luther-Agricola Society, 1986), p. 13.

Statement" notes that though Lutherans will not admit any role of human cooperation in justification,⁵⁷ they do insist that to be justified requires faith, "for it is through faith that believers make Christ's redemptive death and resurrection their own."⁵⁸ Orthodox scholar Dr. Constantine Dratsellas expresses the same thought when he states, "... Cyril teaches that true faith is the condition for the personal application of the divine gifts of Christ's sacrifice, and therefore for obtaining justification."⁵⁹

The similarity of these typical Lutheran and Orthodox statements on the agency of active faith⁶⁰ suggests the possibility that Lutherans and Orthodox could agree that personal appropriation by faith does involve a "synergy" (a mutual and simultaneous cooperation) of divine initiative and human receptivity, as the Orthodox maintain.⁶¹ This possibility is suggested by the Lutheran use of active verbs to describe the operation of faith, such as "to want and to accept." Although it should be noted that Lutherans like Professor Carl A. Volz are quick to qualify this: "*This daring reliance and clinging to the promise is the extent of our human activity, but it cannot be defined as a human work.*"⁶² A potential agreement concerning divine initiative and human response is also latent in the statement of Luther scholar Gerhard Ebeling, in his classic work, *The Nature of Faith*:

"We must therefore say that both are alike essential to faith: both its divine character as a gift and its being always my faith, being really faith when it is responsible action and commitment of my person, in a faith that is my own and nobody else's."⁶³

Lutherans resist putting such affirmations of the necessary appropriation of justification by faith under the Orthodox concept of synergy. Yet in dialogue with the Orthodox, they struggled to maintain the necessity of a human faith-response to God's grace. In further talks, Dr. Volz's use of the imagery of a parent's promise and a child's response might be compared to Fr. John Breck's assertion, that in synergy both the initiative and the saving and sanctifying grace are God's alone: "a person merely responds to that grace by welcoming and interiorizing it."⁶⁴ The result might be an agreement on the problem that both Fr. Breck and Dr. Volz address. Whether it is called "synergy" or not, both the Orthodox and the Lutherans want to teach an active human responsiveness to the saving action of God--but without the use of cause/effect terms which would elevate such receptivity to the level of meritorious works.

While Lutherans may never allow the concept of synergy within the theological sphere of justification, the dialogues have already reached agreement that *after* justification a willing faith does cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit, to make the life and ways of God one's own.

⁵⁷ Common Statement, " *Salvation in Christ*," p. 29

⁵⁸ Common Statement, " *Salvation in Christ*," p. 23.

⁵⁹ From Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis, p. 50.

⁶⁰ Carl A. Volz, "Human Participation in the Divine/Human Dialogue," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 12. And also: Tappert, pp. 50 & 56, 114.

⁶¹ Breck, p. 112

⁶² Volz, p. 95.

⁶³ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 112.

⁶⁴ Breck, p. 112.

"After regeneration, the will of the believer, nourished by Word and Sacrament, learns to desire the good and to work with the Holy Spirit in achieving holiness. Once liberated by "God's power and activity," the human will "becomes an instrument and means of God the Holy Spirit, so that human beings not only lay hold of grace but also cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the works that follow."⁶⁵

Lutherans would benefit by further elaboration of these neglected insights from the Formula of Concern, which came to light in the dialogue discussion of free will. Relating the Orthodox concept of synergy to the already justified person and the process of sanctification would help Lutherans emphasize the active side of faith. And such an application would provide an antidote to the paralyzing pessimism in Lutheranism concerning the prospects of spiritual change, since it posits both the internal inclination and the ability of the believer to follow the Spirit.

Continued discussion of synergy and faith would provide an opportunity to clarify the nature of the "believer's will" that cooperates with the Holy Spirit. Consistent with the phrase "after regeneration" in the above quotation, the Lutheran Confessions speak of a "resurrected" or "reborn" will which arises out of the conversion of our "corrupted" will.⁶⁶ It is this "reborn" will that is "not idle in the daily exercise of repentance but cooperates in all works that the Holy Spirit does through us."⁶⁷ The concept of a rebirth of the will realistically acknowledges the corruption of the human will and its resistance to the Spirit, a resistance which remains even after justification. However, it also includes the belief in a New Being (a New Adam) which is capable of contending with the "flesh" (the Old Adam) and of growing in grace. In this Lutheran notion of the reborn will lie the seeds of a helpful description of the Christian life and an effective challenge to the passiveness of Lutherans who practice according to the formula, "Don't worry, God loves you anyway."

(2) Faith as a Means of Sanctification

A second area for more extensive dialogue concerns faith as a *means of sanctification*, a topic that focuses on the Holy Spirit as the agent of faith, just as the previously discussed topic emphasized the believer as the subject, the "I," of faith. When Dr. Carl Volz addressed charges that the doctrine of justification could lead to ethical permissiveness,⁶⁸ he introduced Lutheran concepts of faith that go beyond the recognition of one's acquittal in the divine court. Stemming from Luther himself, these understandings speak of faith as an internal process, not merely an external event. Volz includes the most well-known of the many quotations of Luther, which sees faith as the dynamic of an inner process of change that leads naturally to good works:

Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and births us anew out of God (John 3:5), and kills the Old Adam, makes us into entirely different people from the heart, soul, mind, and all powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this

⁶⁵ "Common Statement," *Salvation in Christ*, p. 30, referring to Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 18, 472.

⁶⁶ Tappert, pp. 87-88, 538.

⁶⁷ Tappert, pp. 83, 538.

⁶⁸ Volz, pp. 96-97

faith! So it is impossible that it should not do good. It does not ask if good works should be done, but before one asks, it has done them and is always active."

A passage from Orthodox theologian Serge Verhovskoy is striking in its similarity to this quotation from Luther. The topic is deifying grace and not faith; but there is a remarkable parallel in the description of the internal process of sanctification:

Grace inspires and warms our soul. It is the light by which we see the truth clearly and discern good from evil. It is the joy of the divine life, in freedom and power. It is the love of God which awakens love in us. It is the fire which purifies and transfigures us from within according to the image of Christ: it unites us with Christ and gives us the power to live in a Christian way.⁶⁹

This similarity between Luther's rhapsodic description of the transforming work of faith and Verhovskoy's hymn to sanctifying grace poses a question concerning the correspondence between these two ways of speaking about the means of sanctification. Both Orthodoxy's "deifying grace" and Lutheranism's "faith" change us from within. In and through the action of both, God is known. As deifying grace is the divine energy of God Himself which unites us with Christ, so faith is the gift of God which "brings with it the Holy Spirit" so that God dwells in the believer.⁷⁰

Continued conversations about this comparison might identify a convergence of thought: that both Orthodox and Lutherans are referring to the same work of the Holy Spirit when they speak of the operation of "deifying grace" or of "faith." Further explorations of this possibility would at least encourage Lutherans to put more emphasis on the transforming power of a busy, active faith. As the discussion progresses, the Lutheran side could contribute their formula *simul justus et peccator*, which guards against perfectionism and naive assumptions of inevitable progress in spirituality. Yet that principle of realism need not stultify "justified sinners," since the faith that gladly hears and embraces the Word of God fights its "good fight" against the resistance of the "flesh."⁷¹

(3) Faith as Communion

A final area for further discussion, following the lead of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues in Finland, would concern how the work of the Holy Spirit, conceived in terms of deifying grace or faith, leads to *union with God*. The "Common Statement" quotes St Gregory Nazianzus' compelling vision of *theosis*:

On that day when God will be all in all, we will no longer be captive to our sinful passion, but will be entirely like God, ready to receive into our hearts the whole God and God alone. This is the perfection to which we press on.⁷²

⁶⁹ Serge S. Verhovskoy, *The Light of the World: Essays on Orthodox Christianity* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), pp. 82-8

⁷⁰ Tappert, ed., "Formula of Concord," pp. 68, 604.

⁷¹ Luther, *Galatians*, p. 214

⁷² "Christ in 'In Us," p. 17

In this world, however, "we live by faith and not by sight." With St Paul we affirm that "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The point is that in this world no one can get beyond this Pauline "by faith" to some closer state of communion with God. In Orthodox theology, our union with God is the "total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory."⁷³ But "divine grace and glory" have the character of uncreated divine energies. They are the very presence and manifestation of God, though they are not God's essence "which remains unapproachable?"⁷⁴ Stated positively, the uncreated deifying grace of God must be the means of the faithful's communion with God. One cannot get "beyond" this deifying grace to a more direct relationship with God. A quotation of St Gregory of Nyssa makes the same point, using the term "faith" instead of "sanctifying grace": "One cannot "draw near to God" unless faith mediates and unites the soul that seeks God to the <divine> nature which is beyond comprehension."⁷⁵

Reasoning in what seems to be a parallel way, the Lutheran confessions focus on faith as the means for establishing communion between God and the believer: "God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is eternal and essential righteousness, dwells *by faith* <emphasis added> in the elect who have been justified through Christ and reconciled with God..."⁷⁶ Here too, the implication is that one cannot get "beyond" faith. Faith is the essential character of the Christian's relationship with God. "Faith is a new life,"⁷⁷ according to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Do Lutherans and Orthodox thus share a common sense of the character of the sanctified life, the life of communion with God? A reading of a statement by Greek Orthodox Bishop Gerasimos Papadopoulos seems to suggest that they do, for his words could well have been written by a Lutheran:

Faith, then, is the main means of salvation. Yet we will see that *faith is salvation itself* <emphasis added>. When a person attains faith in Christ in its highest form, then he is actually living his salvation, he lives the life of righteousness, reconciled, and saved, he lives as a son of God. Salvation is precisely this life of peace and absolute confidence in the love of God, with a personal communion with Christ.⁷⁸

Lutheran Bishop Michael McDaniel asserts the same, climaxing his argument with a quotation from Luther: "the one who has faith is a completely divine man, a son of God, the

⁷³ "Christ 'In Us,'" p. 4.

⁷⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 72.

⁷⁵ Common Statement, " *Salvation in Christ*," p. 23. Note: this quotation may be found in a different translation in Herbert Musurillo, SJ., trans. and ed., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), p. 121. The Orthodox would interpret that here St Gregory did not have the distinction between divine essence and energy in mind, and that there is no intent to say that humans can unite with the ineffable nature of God.

⁷⁶ Tappert, pp. 54, 548.

⁷⁷ Tappert pp. 143, 250

⁷⁸ Gerasimos Papadopoulos, *Christ in the Life of the Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981), p. 52.

inheritor of the universe."⁷⁹ Further conversation might lead to agreement that the goal and substance of the Christian life is the life of "active faith," which might be expressed alternatively as the life of "deifying grace."

Conversations between Lutherans and Orthodox about ecclesiology might start from this point. Both the Lutherans and the Orthodox affirm that the Church, the Body of Christ, is the arena for the work of the Holy Spirit, whether one defines the Spirit's action as "deifying grace" or "faith." In his dialogue paper, Father John Morris refers to Vladimir Lossky's teaching that "one enters into union with God in the sacramental life of the Church."⁸⁰ Likewise, the Lutheran Carl Volz states categorically that "One's growth in Christ is related to one's exposure to the Word of God, i.e. the proclamation of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments."⁸¹ The Church, therefore, is essential as the *means* of establishing and nurturing the life of faith. It is also essential as the *end* or goal of faith; for the nature of communion itself requires that the life of faith be lived by persons in communion with others (in the "Communion of Saints," the "Body of Christ,"), and not by individuals who are isolated from one another.

Besides achieving mutual understanding, these projected reflections would have as a by-product the laying of groundwork for pastoral guidance of church members towards a more intentional practice of the spiritual life. Sharing concerns and insights with Orthodoxy would reinforce ideas we already hold in common: that participation in the life of the Church, in Word and Sacrament, in prayer and fellowship, and in study and service, cannot be treated indifferently, since they are integral to one's very life with God.

A Final Word

Our suggestions for continued theological dialogue between Lutherans and Orthodox are drawn from the remarkable achievements of the recent talks. The ultimate purpose of ecumenical talks, of course, is to overcome Christian divisions. Yet they also provide a valuable way of doing theology in a global context. For example, the Lutheran-Orthodox conversations have cast new light on the problem of the passivity of many Lutherans in regard to their spiritual lives, and on ways that apathy might be overcome. We have further suggested that continuing conversations on deifying grace and faith would be helpful to ground in a sound theology our efforts to encourage spiritual growth.

We have sought the bridge between justification and sanctification and have found it in *faith*, which is the middle term between the two categories, since it applies to both sides of the unfortunate divide in Lutheran thinking. Accordingly, the theological platform for strengthening the life of sanctification among Lutherans can be built on the profound understanding of faith already present within our own tradition. For faith is indeed "a mighty, active, busy thing." It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is so effective in its struggle against sin, in its motivation to love and good works, and in its mediation of the indwelling Presence of Christ, that the Lord could declare, "your faith has made you well."⁸²

⁷⁹ McDaniel, p. 83.

⁸⁰ Morris, p. 31.

⁸¹ Volz, p. 100.

⁸² Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34, Mark 10:52, Luke 17:19, Luke 18:42