

United with Christ in Baptism

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Introduction

Since the mid-seventies, the so called “new Finnish school”, founded by Prof. Tuomo Mannermaa at the University of Helsinki, has contributed with a pioneering interpretation of Luther’s teaching on justification. Because the doctrine of justification is at the heart of Lutheran theology, this new interpretation affects also other central loci of Lutheran theology. This essay will exhibit how this interpretation affects theology of baptism by enquiring into the following research question: *How does the new Finnish interpretation of Luther offer new possibilities for articulating theology on how forgiveness of sins and union with God are related in baptism?*

In this essay I will argue that this new interpretation of Luther reveals a distinction in the notion of forgiveness as a condition for union with God. I will argue that this distinction is significant for the question of how to communicate baptism in contemporary context.¹ The essay will begin with an analysis of *Union with Christ*, which is an introduction to the new Finnish interpretation of Luther.² This analysis will enquire into how forgiveness of sins and union with God are related according to this new interpretation, and what this implies for theology of baptism. In the end of the essay, a proposal for a new liturgy of baptism in the Church of Norway will be discussed with the perspective of the results of the analysis.

Union with Christ and forgiveness of sins

Indwelling of Christ means real participation in God

A central figure in the “new Finnish School” or the “Mannermaa School” is Risto Saarinen. He argues that in traditional Lutheran theology the idea of Christ present in faith has been understood on the condition of epistemology connected to neo-Kantian philosophy.³ Hence, the presence of Christ in the believer has been denoted as the effects of the will of God on the soul. This means that the believer’s union with Christ not has been understood as ontological, but as a union of will. In *Union with Christ* it is argued that Luther describes Christ as *ontologically* present in faith, and that this means real participation in God.

¹ Gregersen defines the task of dogmatics as “analyzing and re-articulating contemporary expressions of Christian faith, while evaluating the potentials of Christian semantic for future Christian communication practices” Gregersen, “Dogmatik som samtidsteologi,” no. 71 (2008): 290. The philosopher Nicholas Rescher describes the impact of distinctions in a way not only relevant for philosophical reasoning, but also for theological reasoning. See Rescher, *Philosophical reasoning : a study in the methodology of philosophizing* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publ., 2001), 116-132.

² Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ: the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998). The book contains seven essays written by central theologians representing this school.

³ *Ibid.*, 5ff.. Saarinen refers to the philosopher Herman Lotze and the theologians Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Holl, and even Karl Barth and Ernst Wolf.

Mannermaa claims that this idea is at the core of Luther's theology and that it is close to the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* or divinization.⁴

How does Luther understand Christ as ontologically present in faith?⁵ Explaining this, Mannermaa underlines that even though Luther uses philosophical terms, his ontology is foremost theological. Luther understands God's essence as inseparable from his attributes effecting salvation. When the believer receives God's Word, God's love and so on, she therefore receives God as gift. Further, God's divinity consists in that he gives. What God gives, ultimately, is himself.⁶ God is in relation to himself the movement of the Word, and is this movement himself: "In Christ the inner-trinitarian Word, which is the being of God, becomes incarnate. The presence of Christ's word and the word about Christ in faith are the presence of God himself".⁷ God's being is relational; God is the giving of himself in Christ the Word. It is on the premises of this theological ontology Luther understands Christ as ontologically present in faith and that this presence means real participation in God.

Justification by faith alone

Christ as true God is God's love and grace and is "God giving himself to the believer". Mannermaa refers to Luther's concept of Christ as the "greatest sinner".⁸ As a collective person, Christ took upon himself all the sin of the human being. Christ therefore became the "only sinner" because all sins are immersed in him. With the resurrection all sin, death, and curse are conquered in the person of Christ. Participation in Christ, which is participation in the righteous person of Christ, therefore means participation in the victory over sin and death.⁹ This includes that the sins of the believer is forgiven. We here see that the forgiveness of sins is understood as logically following the believer's union with Christ, and not *visa versa*. Correspondently Mannermaa emphasizes that Luther does not separate the person of Christ from his work. The Christian is justified by faith alone, because "in fait itself Christ is present, and so the whole of salvation".¹⁰ Moreover, since God is the giving of himself to the believer and is identified with his attributes causing salvation, the believer is, in Christ, united with the institution of blessing, righteousness and life.¹¹ We here see that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is seen with the perspective of the doctrine of divinization.

In Christ present in faith, both the favor of God (the forgiveness) and the gift of God (God giving himself with his attributes) are present in the believer.¹² Hence, justification is

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ This paragraph refers to Ibid., 10ff., 49f.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ Ibid., 29ff.

⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹² Ibid., 28.

understood as both grace and gift.¹³ Grace is God's friendly and favorable attitude against a sinner "by which he is disposed to pour Christ and the Holy Spirit with his gifts into us". Gift is the internal good in the believer through participating in the love of God, that opposes sin, removes sin and increasingly transforms the sinner to christlikeness. Because both grace and gift follow indwelling of Christ, these are two aspects of justification that can not be put in strict logic succession in relation to each other.¹⁴

Mannermaa and his colleagues argue that traditional Lutheran theology has emphasized the forensic aspect of justification in a degree foreign to, and contradictory to, Luther's own theology. This they exemplify by comparing the notion of justification in the Formula of Concord (FC) to Luther's own theology.¹⁵ In the FC justification by faith alone is understood in purely forensic terms. Justification is denoted as the forgiveness of sins imputed to the believer, because of the perfect obedience and merit of Christ. The indwelling of Christ in the believer is seen as logically following this imputed and declared righteousness. Simo Peura concludes that "According to the FC, the indwelling of God is not that righteousness by which we are declared righteous. The indwelling of God follows that antecedent justification by faith. This means that God is not really present in a Christian when declaring him or her righteous through faith for Christ's sake".¹⁶ Mannermaa claims that practically all Lutheran theology after the FC has followed this view on justification, and Peura argues that this view has been strengthened under the impact of neo-Kantian philosophy and theology.¹⁷

Baptized to union with Christ

According to Luther, the sacrament of baptism contains and conveys all God is and all God is able to do. Hence; the main purpose of baptism is to save.¹⁸ Describing baptism in the Large Catechism, Luther mentions both forgiveness of sins and union with Christ as central aspects of salvation. I will now discuss how these two aspects are related within the frame of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther.

Union with Christ logically precedes forgiveness of sins

¹³ Simo Peura has contributed with an extensive research on this, which is highly relevant for ecumenical discussions. *Ibid.*, 42ff.

¹⁴ This interpretation questions a traditional description of the Lutheran notion of justification as forensic in opposition to the Orthodox teaching on divinization and the Catholic emphasis on the effective aspect of justification.

¹⁵ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ: the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 27f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷ This, they argue, is at least the case when it comes to German Luther scholarship. According to neo-Kantian philosophy, as in the philosophy of Herman Lotze, we can not say anything about the being of a thing, but only about this thing's effect upon us. *Ibid.*, 4ff.

¹⁸ Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 439.

Pivotal in the new Finnish interpretation of Luther, is the assertion that forgiveness of sins and divinization logically follow union with God in Christ. Does this mean that the forgiveness of sins is not considered as a condition for union with God?

On one hand the answer must be yes. Mannermaa strongly criticizes a forensic view on justification, where forgiveness of sins is understood as logically preceding union with Christ. Mannermaa's point of departure is Luther's argument that if the person of Christ and the person of the believer are separated from each other in the locus of justification, then salvation is seen within the framework of the order of the law.¹⁹ In the forensic approach to justification, the believer is declared righteous on the basis of the perfect obedience and merit of Christ. The indwelling of Christ follows this declaration. Mannermaa argues that in this respect practically all Lutheran theology has followed the forensic view on justification in the FC. It is then quit serious when Mannermaa proposes: "One must ask here whether what Luther considers damning for the believer to think is exactly what the Formula of Concord calls sound doctrine; in the locus of justification the divine person of Christ is separated from the person of the believer, because justification is only a forensic imputation and does not presuppose the divine presence of Christ in faith".²⁰

Yet, Mannermaa and his colleagues are aware that Luther regards forgiveness of sins as necessary for salvation. Mannermaa states that according to Luther, justification as indwelling of Christ and justification as forensic forgiveness must not be divided.²¹ I will now propose an answer to the question above: Within the frame of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther, the forgiveness of sins is understood as a condition for the believer's union with God, but only in the sense that this forgiveness is inseparable from the person of Christ and the essence of God and that it logically follows the divine indwelling in the believer.

In the FC the logic between forgiveness of sins and union with Christ is different from how it is in *Union with Christ*. In the FC forgiveness of sins is seen as logically preceding union with Christ. The forgiveness is understood as a condition for union with God in the sense of giving access to this union.

Both in the FC and in *Union with Christ* the forgiveness is seen as a necessary condition for union with God, and in both places the forgiveness is seen as an expression of God's love and grace. In both places the doctrine of justification by faith alone is emphasized. Hence, both views are connected to pivotal Lutheran ideas. It can, however, be argued that the logic in *Union with Christ* coheres better to some central Lutheran ideas. This can display the significance of the distinction between the two different logics in the notion of forgiveness as condition for union with God.²²

¹⁹ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ: the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 38f.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Peura even emphasizes that without the indwelling of Christ in the believer, and with that the forgiveness of sins, God's wrath is directed to the human being. This view is not unproblematic compared to the main content of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther. This question is, however, not possible to frame within the limits of this essay.

²² Notice the aim of this discussion. It is not to decide which of the view that is most coherent with the Scripture, tradition and other semantics than the Christian semantic, but simply to display the significance of the

In line with traditional Lutheran theology, Peura points out that Luther is convinced that the human being is not intended to find in herself what is needed to love purely; God is the giver of the love God demands.²³ When the FC argues that forgiveness of sins has to precede divine indwelling, it presupposes that moral righteousness has to precede divine indwelling. This idea is not easily collated with the idea of God as the giver of all good. This problem of coherence is offered a solution with the new Finnish interpretation of Luther: Through union with Christ the believer receives both moral righteousness and ability to do good deeds. God is the giver of unconditional grace and of the love God demands. This coheres to Luther's definition of what a god is: "A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in all our trouble. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart".²⁴

According to this view on God as the giver of all good, God equips with the possibility of loving, forgives sin, destroys sin and conquers the negative effects of sin. This coheres well with the traditional Lutheran view on God's unconditional love. Moreover, this indicates a view of God not tolerating sin in the sense that he totally conquers it. The thought of God as immune to sin or transcended above sin is impossible within this frame of thought.²⁵ The forensic notion of justification indicates that God must be protected against sin, since God's declaration of the righteousness of the believer must precede the believer's union with God. It is, however, difficult to understand why God needs the believer's purity in order to let the believer into God's communion, if God is the purifier. I propose that this view implies that the love in the communion of God is not unconditional, but conditioned by the forensic forgiveness.

It can also be argued that the notion of forgiveness as following the believer's union with Christ, rather than preceding this union, coheres better to the idea of Christ as the righteousness of the believer. According to the forensic view on justification, the declaration of forgiveness, on the basis of Christ's merit, makes the believer righteous. Hence; Christ is only indirectly the righteousness of the believer. It is the effects on the soul of what Christ has done, that is present in the believer, and not Christ himself. The new Finnish school understands Christ as the righteousness of the believer, because the righteous Christ is ontologically present in the believer.²⁶ Mannermaa refers to Luther's saying: "Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the Christian righteousness....Here is no work of the law, no love; but there is an entirely different kind of righteousness".²⁷

distinction. We have already seen how Mannermaa argues that his interpretation of Luther coheres better than the FC to the idea of Christ as a union of person and work, so this will not be repeated here.

²³ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ : the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 78f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁵ Peura actually argues that God in Jesus became the greatest sinner of all.

²⁶ Mark the theological understanding of Christ as ontological present in faith, in contrast to the "physical" understanding of ontology that neo-Kantian critics of ontology presupposes.

²⁷ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ : the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

Mannermaa expands on this view on righteousness, by referring to Luther's saying that the human being was never meant to make herself righteous through works, but rather created in order to be redeemed: "And just as Christ did not earn his divinity beforehand through works or achieve it by becoming man, but rather had this divinity from birth without any works and before he became man, so also we have not through works of love earned being God's children, by which our sins are forgiven and death and hell cannot harm us, but rather have received this out of grace through faith in the gospel, without works and before love".²⁸ With this we see how the view on union with Christ as logically preceding forgiveness of sins is related to a view on union with Christ as the birth of the Christian, where this birth constitutes the righteousness of the believer. The believer is born to be God's children, by which the believer receives forgiveness of sins. It is now time to turn to the question of what possibilities the new Finnish interpretation of Luther offers for theology of baptism.

Baptism as outwardly means to union with Christ

Simo Peura exhibits how Luther's notion of justification is closely connected to his understanding of baptism.²⁹ Peura refers to how Luther distinguishes between salvation as "inwardly" true and "outwardly" provided.³⁰ Salvation is inwardly true when a Christian participates in God through faith and receives God's gift and grace. Peura underlines that it is God, the Holy Spirit, who gives himself with his gifts to us. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ's work to the believer, helps them to receive it, understand it, to preserve it and to use it.³¹ Luther has a realistic view on baptism, describing it as "a real means of salvation".³² This, Peura argues, is based on Luther's idea that God saves by giving himself and his gifts, in Christ and by the Spirit, to the believer: "When this idea is applied to baptism, it means that God through his word includes in the baptismal water the treasure, that is, his honor and

With the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Luther challenged the Christians of his time to focus on Christ and the need of one's neighbor, instead of being incorporated in one's self in the effort of making oneself righteous by work. Luther sees this incorporation as an expression of the original sin, which is to not trust God. Lutheran theology and practice after Luther has had a strong emphasize on the forgiveness of sins. Paradoxical one can ask whether the focus on one's self in the effort of making oneself righteous, has been replaced by a focus on the forgiveness as what makes us righteous, instead of being replaced by a focus on Christ and the need of one's neighbor. Also a stress on the forgiveness as access to God is namely a self-centered focus. Correspondently one can ask whether a pure forensic view on justification has led to a too strong focus on one's own self in Christian practices like preaching and praying. The new Finnish interpretation of Luther does not question that forgiveness is necessary for salvation, but questions a too strong focus on the forgiveness of sins.

²⁸ Ibid., 13f., 40, 84, 87..

²⁹ See the article "Baptism, Justification, and the *Joint Declaration*" in Gregersen, et al., *The Gift of grace : the future of Lutheran theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 117ff. and Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ : the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 53ff.

³⁰ Gregersen, et al., *The Gift of grace : the future of Lutheran theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.

³¹ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ : the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 90f.

³² Gregersen, et al., *The Gift of grace : the future of Lutheran theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 119.

name, what he is, and what he does”³³. Believing this, the believer participates in the treasure that the water contains, which is God and God’s gifts: “The core of the matter is that the *meaning* of baptism, the death of sin and the resurrection of the new person, becomes effective in the baptized person because God unites himself with the sinner both through the sacramental act and through faith”.³⁴

Union with God and forgiveness of sins in Baptism

I will now conclude this essay so far, by discussing implications of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther for the question of how to relate the forgiveness of sins and union with God in baptism. A direct implication is the assertion that the main content of the salvation, mediated in baptism, is the believer’s union with God in Christ. Another direct implication is the assertion that divinization and forgiveness of sins are inseparable from each other in the believer’s union with God in Christ. We have seen that a view on forgiveness as logically following union with God, rather than preceding it, can be argued to cohere better to the idea of God as the giver of all good, God’s love as unconditional and of Christ as the righteousness of the believer. This offers new possibilities for communicating how the forgiveness of sins in baptism is related to these pivotal Lutheran ideas.

On the premises of the analysis in this essay, I will now articulate a view on the relation between baptism for forgiveness of sins and baptism as entry into a new communion with God: The main content of salvation, mediated in baptism, is the believer’s union with Christ. Through this union the believer participates in the righteous person of Christ. This righteousness does not depend on work, and it is constitutional for the identity of the baptized who believes. Through union with Christ the believer also participates in God, because God is the giving of himself in Christ. God is the giver of all good. This means that the believer is united with the source of unconditional grace. This also means that the believer is transformed into christlikeness through participation in God’s love. The baptized doesn’t have to be cleaned before permitted access to God. God embraces the entire person, also with her bad sides, and includes her in a community that is an institution of blessing and love. Moreover; to be the receptors of God’s grace and love is how the human beings were created to be. The human being was not created in order to be redeemed, in order to be united with God. But the human being was created in order to be redeemed because this is what it is to be in communion with God. Being an external means to salvation, baptism is the place for the constitution of the human being according to this purpose. This means that baptism as new birth must be seen as completing the first birth. Further, this accomplishment itself must be seen as pivotal in what constitutes the right communion between the believer and God, as this was meant to be. Hence; the forgiveness of sins can only be understood as a condition for being included in the righteous communion with God in baptism, when the forgiveness is seen as something that belongs to this communion pursuant to the being of God and the purpose of the human being.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ : the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 54.

Reflections on a new liturgy of Baptism

In September 2008 a proposal for a new liturgy of baptism was sent out for comments by the Church Council of The Church of Norway.³⁵ In the following this proposal will be discussed with the perspective of the analysis and discussion above. The vision of the proposal is to develop a liturgy that “attends to *creation, salvation, and christlikeness* and that corresponds to human’s experiences of life”.³⁶ A crucial question will be whether this proposal succeeds in both relating baptism to experiences of life and to express baptism as means to salvation.

Union with Christ

In the proposal for the new liturgy, the idea of union with Christ is not prominent.³⁷ The Trinitarian formula “baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” is present several places, but this formula does not explicitly express the idea of union with Christ. It is actually possible to perform the liturgy with only two clear references to the idea of union with Christ (if one chooses between alternatives in a certain way).³⁸

How does the new liturgy describe the content of baptism? The introduction words are illustrating.³⁹ Here only the first alternative expresses baptism as union with Christ. The remaining three alternatives expresses that in baptism God opens his great communion for us and promises to be with us all days, we are leaded from death to life and given God’s good gifts, and we are given salvation and are included in the church. This exemplifies how the proposal is marked by an effort to communicate the comprehensiveness of salvation and the communal aspect of belief and baptism. This communal aspect corresponds to the need for identifying communions, a need characterizing the human being in contemporary cultural context.⁴⁰

³⁵ Den Norske kirke and Kirkerådet, *Dåpsliturgi og høringsdokument : saksutredning, forslag til dåpsliturgi for Den norske kirke - 2008* (Bergen: Eide forl., 2008).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷ “Union with Christ” is here understood in line with traditional Lutheran theology, and not as “ontologically union with Christ”.

³⁸ Especially noteworthy is the possibility to not include this idea in the introduction words, that explains what baptism is, and in the words that are said over the water of baptism. It is also noteworthy that this idea is neither reflected in the prayer before the act of baptism, nor in the recommended reading from the Bible. Only one place is the explicit idea of union with Christ not optional. In the beginning of the act of baptism it is said: “We are humans under the condition of sin and death, but in baptism we are united with the risen Christ”. This formulation has, however, been added after the first proposal for a new liturgy was rejected. Den Norske kirke and Kirkerådet, *Dåpsliturgi og høringsdokument : saksutredning, forslag til dåpsliturgi for Den norske kirke - 2008* (Bergen: Eide forl., 2008), 9,16. This strengthens the impression that the idea of union with Christ has not been important to the committee for the new liturgy. The other place where this idea is not optional is in the end of the liturgy where it is said that the baptized shall “belong to” Christ.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13ff.

⁴⁰ See Krogseth, et al., *Pluralisme og identitet : kulturanalytiske perspektiver på nordiske nasjonalkirker i møte med religiøs og moralsk pluralisme* (Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk, 2001).

Mannermaa and his colleagues argue that according to Luther, union with Christ is the main content of salvation. Union with Christ leads to all the other aspects of salvation. With this they emphasize the pivotal traditional Lutheran idea that only Christ is the salvation of the believer. Given this perspective it is problematic that the idea of union with Christ is not prominent in the new liturgy.⁴¹ It is also problematic that the different aspects of salvation are not presented as outcomes of union with Christ.

Why is the idea of union with Christ, which is a pivotal idea in traditional Lutheran theology, almost avoided in the new liturgy? The proposal is marked by an effort to articulate the content of baptism in a way that gives meaning in contemporary culture. The utterance that we are born to new life in Christ or united with Christ is not immediately understandable to the majority of church members in a post-Christian community. In a post-Christian and multi-religious community the utterances “God”, “salvation”, “gifts of God” are more familiar and understandable. This might be a reason why the idea of union with Christ is not more explicitly emphasized in the proposal. In a post-Christian community it is, however, especially important to articulate a precise and a specific Christian theology of baptism. In a multi-religious community it is even more important than before to express that we are baptized to Christ, because this idea characterizes Christian belief.

Baptism for forgiveness of sins

The proposal for the new liturgy of baptism reflects reluctance to talk about sin and forgiveness of sins. Only in the credo the forgiveness of sins is mentioned explicitly. Additionally the forgiveness can be understood as implied, also by persons not too familiar with Christian semantics, in the saying that “We are humans under the condition of sin and death, but in baptism we are united with the risen Christ”.⁴² This is also the only place the term “sin” is used. The proposal focuses on God’s care and love, which in Lutheran belief includes forgiveness of sins. This is, however, not fully transparent to persons not too familiar with Christian belief. In the prayer before the act of baptism, God’s love and care is related to the experience of fragility of life. This exemplifies how the proposal relates baptism to experiences of life.

Why this reluctance to talk about sin and forgiveness of sins? One reason can be that traditional Lutheran theology and practices strongly, and sometimes one-sidedly, has focused on the forensic aspect of justification. This has been on the expense of emphasizing other central aspects of salvation. By communicating the comprehensiveness of salvation, the new liturgy can be seen as trying to compensate on this. In this connection it is interesting to mark that the proposal avoids an explicit forensic view on justification.

Another reason can be that the term “sin” often is associated with failing moral norms connected to a certain Christian society. Disagreements with these norms can result in disagreement in the church’s focus on sin and forgiveness. This moral notion of sin also causes problems with relating sin to the baptized, if this is a baby.

⁴¹ That the idea of ontological union with Christ is missing is, on the other hand, not problematic. This idea is controversial within Lutheran theology, and does not express a main belief in Lutheran Christian lives today. An interesting question is, however, whether the communitarian focus in the liturgy in some way can be seen as a reaction on the missing theme of divinization in Lutheran theology and practice.

⁴² As mentioned above, this was added after the first proposal for a new liturgy was rejected.

A third reason can be that a strong emphasize on the forensic aspect of justification might be difficult to collate with viewing God as pure love.⁴³ This view on justification can therefore be difficult to relate to the parents' experience of the completely lovable baby carried to baptism. The old liturgy of baptism does not explicitly express thanks for the child, nor that the child is born in the picture of God. Together with an emphasize on the forensic aspect of justification, this can lead to a misunderstanding that in church the child before baptism is viewed as evil and as not pleasing God. The new liturgy is marked by an effort to communicate thanks for the child, and that the child is created in the picture of God and is object for the God's love and concern.⁴⁴ It can, however, seem like this has been on the expense of emphasizing the forgiveness of sins in baptism.

Above I argued that the new Finnish interpretation of Luther clarifies some problematic aspects with a forensic view on forgiveness as condition for union with God. We have now seen how these problematic aspects might be a reason for reluctance to talk about sin and forgiveness of sins in baptism. I have, however, argued that the view on forgiveness of sins as logically *following* union with Christ, offers new possibilities for articulating how the forgiveness of sins is more to be understood as manifesting God's love for the baptized than manifesting God's wrath over sin. This view also offers new possibilities for articulating how God in baptism embraces the entire person, also with her bad sides, and includes the person in a community that is an institution of blessing and love. To focus on the child's value in the eyes of God and to focus on the forgiveness of sins are here two sides of the same coin. This view on the relation between forgiveness and union with God might be easier to relate to the parents experience of what it is to love a child and about the value of their baby.

The new liturgy avoids the utterance "born again as child of God", because the problematic question about when a person becomes child of God.⁴⁵ I have argued that the new Finnish interpretation of Luther, offers a new possibility to understand baptism as completing the first birth. This accomplishment itself is then understood as pivotal in what constitutes Christian identity. This offers an interesting possibility to articulate the break between the old and new life in the perspective of continuity between the old and the new life.

I propose that a main problem with the proposal is that it fails to communicate sin as a feature in life and forgiveness as a resource for life. In Lutheran theology sin is seen as a condition for human life. Sin is not only that the human being is not able to live a life totally in love, but also that the human being is not able to trust God completely. The experience of not being able to love and trust is not limited to Christians. Likewise the feeling of shame and guilt are common human experiences.⁴⁶ Sin, guilt and shame are features that belong to the conditions of living, although this is not what we want to focus on looking at our newborn baby.

⁴³ See the discussion above.

⁴⁴ Den Norske kirke and Kirkerådet, *Dåpsliturgi og høringsdokument : saksutredning, forslag til dåpsliturgi for Den norske kirke - 2008* (Bergen: Eide forl., 2008), 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the self : the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

The solution for the church is not to avoid the term “sin”, but to communicate how sin is a condition for living. Doing so, the church can contribute to contemporary culture with a language for the experience of failing. Theology is both above and within culture. The aspect of being above a culture challenges theology to offer new interpretations of experiences of life, and not to agree in all common interpretations. This does not mean to ignore experiences, but to interpret them in a new way that can help people understand their lives more fully. In our culture failing moral norms is often explained as a result of circumstances, and the one that fails is often understood as a victim. To take sin and guilt seriously can indeed be a burden to a person. But to deal sin and guilt within the frame of being in communion with the highest judge who is also an institution of grace and love is constructive. God takes a person, and those offended by this person, seriously by taking sin seriously. At the same time God is pure love and grace, and raises the sinner through union with Christ.

Divinization⁴⁷

Conclusion

In this essay I have discussed how the new Finnish interpretation of Luther offers new possibilities for articulating theology of baptism. In the beginning of the essay, I argued that within the frame of the new Finnish school, forgiveness of sins is not to be understood as a condition for union with God in the sense of giving access to this communion. Rather forgiveness is to be understood as a condition for union with God in the sense that forgiveness belongs to this communion, pursuant to the essence of God and the purpose of the human being. Then I tried to display how this distinction is significant for the question of how to articulate theology of baptism. More specific I argued that a view on forgiveness as following union with God offers new possibilities for articulating how forgiveness of sins in baptism is an expression of God’s love for the human being.

With this perspective, I discussed the proposal for a new liturgy of baptism in the Church of Norway. The proposal is marked by an effort to communicate baptism in a way that corresponds to experiences of life. This effort is important not at least in a post Christian community. I questioned, however, whether this good effort has been on the expense of bringing out the pivotal Lutheran ideas of union with Christ, Christ as the righteousness of the believer, sin as a feature of life, the forgiveness of sins, and moral transformation of the believer. I also argued that a forensic view on forgiveness as condition for union with God can cause some problems for communicating forgiveness of sins as a central aspect of baptism, and that these problems might be a reason for the reluctance to emphasize sin and forgiveness of sins in the proposal. At the same time I argued that a view on forgiveness as following union with God offers new possibilities for articulating forgiveness of sins as a crucial aspect of baptism.

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⁴⁷ This chapter has been left out to limit the size of this paper.

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