

Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

Turku, Finland, September 2009

The Rev Dr. Antti Raunio is Adjunct Professor in Ecumenical Theology at Helsinki University. What follows is a summary of his presentation as heard by Bishop Rupert Hoare.

His lecture, delivered on 12th September 2009 was entitled

Towards Church Unity: Martin Luther Reinterpreted

Drawing on contemporary Finnish research on Luther, stemming from the work of Thor Manermaa, Professor Raunio underlined the need for an ecumenical approach to Luther's theology, based on thorough knowledge of the Luther documents, and facing the question: is it possible to find 'the real Luther'?

The new approach recognises the influence that neo-Kantian philosophy has had on Luther interpretation, and stresses the similarity between Luther and medieval and patristic research. It sees the doctrine of justification undergoing development during the Reformation and interprets Luther as speaking of God justifying believers and also renewing them in faith; it is about God's favour as well as God's gift. Luther's theology is not just about faith, but rather about faith-and-love, faith being needed to receive God's love.

As regards Trinitarian theology, Luther is interpreted as stressing the first and the third persons of the Trinity, as well as the second. God as a real being, maintains the life of all being, and enables believers to partake of the divine love. Thus justification is interpreted as deification: participation in God's being as love. Thus justification by faith is more than simply God's declaration of the believer's righteous status before God.

In conclusion Professor Raunio emphasised that Thor Manermaa was working within an ongoing research academy, drawing on his own teachers, and having students develop his work, particularly in respect of Luther's understanding of love, of sacramental theology, and of the relation between divine and human love. He referred to Manermaa's Commentaries on Luther's Catechism, and Luther's own commentary on the Galatians.

[Ed. note: it is hoped to obtain a full script of Professor Raunio's address. In discussion, some said that his exposition of Luther's theology was at one with what they had always held. My own view was that the Finnish re-interpretation of Luther links justification by faith and Christian ethics in a way that, for example, many German commentators would be unwilling to do.]