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Some Notes on Theology in Finland Today

REIJO ARKKILA
Parkano, Finland

FINNISH THEOLOGY IS NOT WELL KNOWN outside Finland, because the Finnish language is used by only a few people in the world. Translations of Finnish theology are few in number. Most dissertations of international interest being published either in German or in English. In this short article, I want to fill in the gaps by mentioning some of the leading features and men of Finnish theology.

In the thirties there was in Finland, as in Sweden, strong interest in Luther and in Luther-studies. The leading men in this area in Finland were Eino Sormunen and Yrjö Alanen, both of whom published their books in German. Sormunen followed in his dissertation, *Die Gnade Gottes* (The Grace of God), the Lundensian motif-research, but he was not in other ways a follower of Lundensian thought. Sormunen represented good conservative Lutheranism. He had a strong influence on his students in Helsinki University and later on the ministers when serving as Bishop of Kuopio for many years. Two other Luther-scholars from Finland are better known in the English-speaking world because of their books in English. Lennart Pinomaa, whose book, *Faith Victorious*, is a theology of Luther, has been the leading Luther-scholar after World War II. He is still writing but has not published any greater study on Luther after that book. Pinomaa has an obvious dependency on Lundensian thought. Uuras Saarnivaara, whose book, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, was published by Concordia, has not continued with his Lutheran studies. Saarnivaara is much influenced by pietistic ways of thinking and worked busily in these groups in Finland.

There were some dissertations on Luther also in the fifties and sixties by men who are not ordinarily recognized as Luther-scholars. Professor of ethics Lauri Haikola has written about the theology of Formula of Concord. Today there is less interest in Luther and Luther-studies than several decades ago. In an interesting dissertation two years ago Ahti Hakamies dealt with the ways of interpreting Luther in the end of last century and in the beginning of this one.

Scholars in the systematics field have shown an increasing interest in the study of Roman Catholic theology. The reason for this may be that the professor of dogmatics at Helsinki University, Seppo A. Teinonen, is well acquainted with and has written much about the ecumenical movement. Raimo Harjula, now a professor in Tanzania, has written a dissertation on the pope's encyclicals, while Karl Rahner's theology is the subject of a dissertation by Tuomo Mannermaa. At present, three scholars are working with studies of Hans Kung's theology. The entire last issue of the leading theological magazine in Finland (*Teologinen Aikakauskirja*) dealt with Hans Kung and his theology.

Recently some discussion has taken place in Finland regarding the so-called *Leuenberg Concord*. It is interesting to note that the Lutheran Church of Finland gave one of the most critical evaluations of that Concord. The Church of Finland pointed out that agreement with Leuenberg Concord means loss of our special Lutheran identity. This critical evaluation by the Church of Finland has been very much noted in the other countries of Europe. In commenting on 'the Concord,' the Finnish Church seeks to uphold simultaneously both the Lutheran doctrine and the true unity of the apostolic church. Attempts have been made within the Finnish church to form some kind of confessional Lutheran movement in opposition to liberal theology and liberal church policy. Leading men in this movement have been from the *Lutheran Gospel Association* (Luterilainen Evankeliumiyhdistys), which had its 100th anniversary last summer. One of the speakers for the occasion was Dr. Gerhard Aho of Springfield. These attempts have borne fruit, since the importance of our special Lutheran identity is seen better now than some years ago. The Lutheran identity is stressed in some measure also in the theological studies.

Studies in church history have for the most part centered on the problems of Finland. But one scholar whose studies have awakened interest also in other countries, *Eino Murtorinne*, has specialised for some years in the study of the so-called confessional church in Germany during Hitler's rule. He has published two books about the relations between Germany and Scandinavian churches during that difficult time.

The German influence has been strong in Old and New Testament studies. Some of the professors have had close connections with the Bultmannian way of interpreting the Bible. For this reason there was in the Finnish Church about three years ago much discussion of and struggle with Bible interpretation. To ease the situation, the bishops of the Lutheran Church of Finland published together the so-called twelve theses concerning the Bible. These theses are quite conservative in the way they speak about the inspiration of the Bible. But at the same time they leave the door open to the historico-critical method. Nevertheless these theses have eased the tension within the Church of Finland.

Because of this German liberal influence, there are only few good conservative scholars working in this area of theology, and there is a great shortage of good conservative Lutheran writings about the Bible in Finnish. One of the best young scholars among the conservative Lutheran men is Jukka Thuren, who just last year had published his dissertation in German on the last chapter of Hebrews, (*The Thank offering of the Hebrews*). In his dissertation Thuren shows that this last chapter is actually the key chapter to the whole book. Thuren has now agreed to write a commentary on the whole book of Hebrews, which I really hope will be translated into English when it is ready.

The last few years have seen a growing interest in the theology of missions, as well as in the work in the mission fields. The writings of Seppo Teinonen, Henrik Smedjebacka, and Raimo Harjula may

be noted. Smedjebacka in his dissertation focused on the church in Tanzania and its way to unity. Raimo Harjula has been working in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and has published some books for use of students of theology over there.

Although Finnish theology is not well known in other countries it seems to me that just now there is a rather active group of young scholars whose works may become widely known within a few years. Many in this group of scholars are strongly conservative Lutherans. For this reason, I am looking forward excitedly to the effects which their labors will have upon the spirit and work of the Lutheran Church of Finland. There is hope for the rise of good Lutheran theology in Finland.

Editor's Note: The writer, the Rev. Reijo Arkkila is a pastor of the Church of Finland (Lutheran) in Parkano and is associated with the "Lutheran Gospel Association," the conservative wing of the Finnish state church. Pastor Arkkila is a frequent contributor to the official journals of the "Lutheran Gospel Association," a group strongly active in African and Asian missions. He is now in America in connection with research for his doctoral dissertation dealing with the association's dealing with Finnish Lutherans in America from 1920-1930. Pastor Arkkila is writing his doctoral dissertation for Professor Mikko Jura, current president of the Lutheran World Federation and Chancellor of the University of Helsinki where the degree will be awarded. He was a guest professor at the seminary during the Spring Quarter, 1974.