Many scholars studying how religious faith develops around the world today emphasize one important transition. Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, following the philosopher Charles Taylor, characterize this ongoing transformation as a spiritual revolution. It reveals itself, inter alia, as a growing interest in a multifaceted variety of activities associated with various religious traditions that have one important thing in common. They have traditionally been conceptualized as spiritual training since they have been assumed to contribute to a more flourishing relationship with God or a deeper contact with a spiritual reality. Yoga, pilgrimages, and meditation are examples of such undertakings.

Spiritual exercises are a prominent feature both within the Christian and non-Christian traditions. The Greek term *askesis* is frequently used as a Christian designation of this kind of training and the growth sought is set apart, in turn, as the human being’s sanctification or *Heiligung*. Consequently, present-day Christian congregations can easily draw upon resources within their own heritage and put them to use so as to offer a way of being religious that might appeal to contemporary people living in the Western world. However, it is not at all obvious that this opportunity is open to Christian congregations belonging to the Lutheran tradition. The reason

2. In what follows, I use the term *asceticism* and the expressions *spiritual training* and *spiritual exercises* as synonymous.
for this is, quite simply, that their portal figure, Martin Luther, fought forcefully against the belief that human undertakings such as spiritual exercises can support a person’s relationship with God. Instead, he emphasized the life-threatening dangers that accompany the assumption that there is such a possibility. As a result, it is quite easy to make use of Martin Luther’s theological perspective in order to criticize or denounce present-day interest in spiritual training.

My aim in this chapter is not to elaborate such an argument. Instead, I want to highlight three possible lines of reasoning that all end up with the conclusion that certain activities stand out as recommendable spiritual training even in light of Luther’s explication of the Christian faith. My motivation for undertaking this assignment is twofold. First, I believe that Luther is not as reluctant to encourage asceticism or spiritual training in general as he is routinely claimed to be. Secondly, I believe that if Lutheran congregations are to survive in the future, they have to offer what people today can conceptualize as valuable opportunities to grow spiritually. Based on that assumption, I find it interesting to investigate what kind of spiritual training Lutheran congregations might encourage, endorsed by Luther’s theological work, and how they might present the value of such training. In that sense, what I am aiming for is a Lutheran theology that clarifies the content and function of recommendable asceticism.

Since spiritual training is set apart by its contribution to the practitioner’s religious development, each of the three lines of reasoning that I will be investigating is based on an exposition of Luther’s understanding of sanctification. The first option is put forward by the Finnish professor Tuomo Mannermaa (born 1937). The second is offered by Arvid Runestam (1887–1962), a distinguished representative of Swedish Luther renaissance. The third option is articulated by Professor Rudolf Hermann (1887–1962), a prominent scholar of the German Luther renaissance. My reason for choosing to present and analyze these three options is that, in my opinion, they are the most promising accounts of Luther’s understanding of the Christian believer’s sanctification that are available to a contemporary Lutheran theologian who wants to argue in support of the view that it is possible to encourage some kind of spiritual training without jeopardizing Luther’s most fundamental insights. My judgment is based on four considerations. First, Mannermaa, Runestam, and Hermann all aim at presenting a historically adequate account of Luther’s theology that might evoke people’s faith in more recent times. Secondly, they discuss Luther’s conception of sanctification at length. Thirdly, they emphasize that Luther’s conception of sanctification is of crucial importance within his overall theological perspective. Fourthly, each of them explicate Luther’s understanding of the Christian...
believer’s growth in faith, i.e. her sanctification, in a way that enables us to demarcate some kind of spiritual training that is worth encouraging.

I will present the three options in sequence. I will begin with the interpretation of Luther that Mannermaa elaborates and end with the alternative presented by Hermann. When discussing each option I will first summarize the conception of sanctification that its proponent attributes to Luther. Then I will clarify the understanding of recommendable spiritual training that the conception in question generates. Lastly, I will evaluate the different options. My evaluation will form a line of reasoning in support of the conclusion that the explanation of Luther’s understanding of sanctification that Hermann elaborates is to be preferred. My argument in favor of Hermann’s interpretation of Luther is basically that there are certain flaws in the options put forward by Mannermaa and Runestam that speak against them. Hermann’s account is superior since it corrects those errors.

SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO MANNERMAA

Tuomo Mannermaa’s key claim is that the leading idea in Luther’s theology is his insistence on Christ’s real presence in faith. According to Mannermaa, this presence implies that the believer becomes one person with Christ and, consequently, that she is made holy as he is holy, i.e. she is divinized or sanctified. Accordingly, Mannermaa portrays Luther’s conception of sanctification as corresponding to the notion of *theosis*, i.e. divinization, a notion that is accentuated in the Ancient Church as well as in the Eastern-Orthodox Christian tradition.

Mannermaa maintains that Luther scholars tend to be quite ignorant of the fact that Luther understands the believer’s becoming one with Christ in faith as a radical ontological change. For this reason, according to Mannermaa, they regularly misconstrue Luther’s notions about sanctification/divinization. Primarily, their misreading is due to their tendency to use a latter-day philosophical perspective, namely neo-Kantianism, when they elucidate Luther’s theology. In particular, this criticism is directed against scholars representing what is known as the Luther renaissance, a research era that had its prime time during the first decades of the twentieth century and was highly influenced by the Kant renaissance that flourished at that time. Arvid Runestam and Rudolf Hermann belong to this school of thought.

According to Mannermaa, neo-Kantianism is mainly set apart by the claim that we can only know reality through the effects it has on us.3 Mannermaa, “Why is Luther so Fascinating?” 4–9. Cf. Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf uns*, 229–31.
nermaa argues that Luther asserts that the believer’s divinization/sanctification is ontologically real in a more substantial sense than neo-Kantianism allows for since Luther assumes that the believer’s union with Christ is a state of affairs in reality even if it has no effect discernible to human beings. Consequently, neo-Kantianism prohibits a historically adequate account of Luther’s theology and conceals the fact that the believer’s ontological unity with Christ is the focal point that Luther’s theology revolves around.

Mannermaa elaborates on his argument in support of the opinion that the believer’s divinization/sanctification is Luther’s main concern by calling attention to Luther’s use of the distinction between favor (grace) and donum (gift). He emphasizes that, according to Luther, Christ is not only God’s favor, i.e. an external/imputed righteousness that belongs to Christ and is attributed to the believer, but also a gift (donum), i.e. God’s presence within the Christian believer. Since Christ is a divine person, Mannermaa argues, the notion of Christ as a gift means that the believing subject becomes a participant in that divine nature. Consequently, when Christ in faith gives himself in a real way to the Christian, it brings about her participation in the divine life. This participation, in turn, is characterized by Luther, as Mannermaa reads him, as a mystical union that brings forth the believer’s continuous transformation into the likeness of Christ. This union implies that the Christian believer has a spiritual existence (esse gratiae) that is absolutely real. Mannermaa depicts this reality as “real-ontic.” The real-ontic unity between Christ and the Christian entails that God changes the human being ontologically by making her righteous, according to Mannermaa’s interpretation of Luther. Accordingly, she is not only considered to be righteous (although she is not). She is, in fact, righteous since her self/I, i.e. her personal identity as a spiritual being, is united with Christ. Christ and the believer are one person. Consequently, they share every personal quality and have the capacity to act jointly in order to fulfill God’s will.

In light of his elaboration of Luther’s understanding of Christ’s real presence in faith, Mannermaa argues that Luther, contrary to later Lutheranism, gives equal emphasis to the “forensic” and the “effective” aspects of justification. This implies that justification and sanctification, rather than being two distinct states, are intertwined with one another and come about simultaneously. Consequently, the doctrine of justification and notions about sanctification constitute one whole in Luther’s theology. Christ as united with the Christian is simultaneously the imputed, alien righteousness

that justifies the believer by protecting her against the wrath of God (the forensic aspect) and a transforming gift that renews the believer by making her righteous (the effective aspect).  

According to Mannermaa’s explication of Luther’s theology, Christ can permeate the believer as a transforming gift to a greater or lesser extent, i.e. her divinization or sanctification may be more or less extensive. However, in most cases this process will be invisible to humans—the sanctified person herself included—since the Christian believer’s spiritual existence is mostly hidden to everyone but God. Mannermaa highlights this invisibility in his criticism of Luther scholarship influenced by neo-Kantianism. I will be making clear that this invisibility is the main reason for me not supporting the conclusion that Mannermaa’s interpretation of Luther is the best option available for Lutheran theologians who want to argue in favor of the opinion that certain activities stand out as recommendable spiritual training in light of Luther’s explication of Christian faith. In brief, my objection is that we are unable to make the claim comprehensible that a reality exists, which it is possible for us to identify only in exceptional cases. In other words, the notion that such a reality exists is philosophically untenable. Before elaborating on this line of reasoning, I will examine the understanding of recommendable spiritual training that Mannermaa’s work results in.

**A BROAD AND A NARROW UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL TRAINING**

As I made clear at the outset, recommendable spiritual training is per definition set apart by the fact that it contributes to the believer’s sanctification. Consequently, if a person’s sanctification is usually invisible, the appropriate delineation of promotable asceticism will mostly be undetectable. For that reason, Mannermaa’s explication of Luther’s theology results in the conclusion that although there are actions that contribute to the believer’s deification, i.e. actions that Christ as *donum* accomplishes in and through the believer and the outcome of which is an increasing divinization, we cannot usually tell whether a certain action belongs to this category or not. However, what we do know, according to Mannermaa, is that Luther assumes that the word and the sacraments establish a real-ontic unity between Christ and
the Christian. Consequently, Mannermaa’s work results in both a very broad understanding of spiritual training and a very narrow demarcation of recommendable asceticism. The broad understanding entails that every action that Christ as donum accomplishes in and through a Christian believer may be depicted as spiritual training, be it a visit to an elderly relative, an hour of physical exercise with the local soccer team, or cooking the family dinner. The narrow demarcation, however, clarifies that since we only know for sure that reading/listening to the Word and receiving the sacraments contributes to the Christian believer’s spiritual existence, such activities as studying the Bible, paying attention to sermons, being baptized, or taking part in the Eucharist are the only undertakings that we undoubtedly and generally can conceptualize as recommendable spiritual training in light of Mannermaa’s work.

AN OBJECTION CONCERNING ONTOLOGY

My main argument against Mannermaa’s explication of Luther’s views on sanctification is that the notion that there exists a “real-ontic” union between Christ and the Christian lacks comprehensible content. In my opinion, it is possible to explain what this union ontologically implies if we are allowed to employ neo-Kantian arguments and distinctions. However, Mannermaa’s rejection of Luther research influenced by neo-Kantianism deprives us of this possibility. Consequently, we are stuck with an inexplicable notion of the real-ontic union.

In the absence of a precise and understandable clarification of the meaning of the term “real-ontic,” we cannot evaluate Mannermaa’s elucidation of Luther’s understanding of sanctification. Arguably, if Mannermaa did meet this criticism by clarifying that it implies that Christ is really present in the believer with the help of neo-Kantianism, the invisibility that Luther, according to Mannermaa, associates with the believer’s spiritual existence would not necessarily seem as radical as Mannermaa suggests. This is due to the fact that Kant’s work regularly inspires philosophers to argue that claims concerning what is real only make sense to us if the truth of the claims is at least in theory possible for us to discover. For this reason, Mannermaa argues that every clarification of the term “real-ontic” that we can provide, using neo-Kantian distinctions and arguments, is not in

in accordance with the history of ideas since Luther had a “deeper” or more substantial view on ontology than Kant’s perspective allows for. However, I am of the opinion that if we cannot explain Luther’s ontological claims in a way that we can understand today, we are not justified in concluding that Luther had a comprehensible ontological perspective. Furthermore, I believe that every ontological perspective that we can understand is, in some sense, neo-Kantian owing to the immense influence of the Copernican revolution that Kant brought about within the field of philosophy. As a result, every theologian aiming at presenting a historically adequate account of Luther’s theology that might evoke people’s faith today has to present an account that is, basically, neo-Kantian. This goes for Mannermaa as well.

SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO RUNESTAM

According to Arvid Runestam’s exposition of Luther’s theology, Luther understands sanctification as a certain extension of the freedom of the Christian. Runestam maintains that there are three different aspects to the freedom of the Christian. First, the Christian is religiously free, i.e. she is free from the law, from sin and from the belief that justification depends on her own actions, and, consequently, she is liberated to exercise the true worship of and communion with God. Secondly, the Christian is morally free. This moral freedom springs from the believer’s religious freedom and it consists of her willingness and strength to do good deeds spontaneously. Thirdly, the Christian believer has a freedom to act or refrain from acting. Luther illustrates this freedom, according to Runestam, when he argues that occasionally it is up to the individual herself to decide what to do in a certain situation.10 This third kind of freedom is important to note since it paves the way for Runestam’s interpretation of Luther’s understanding of the bondage of the will.

Influenced by the neo-Kantian philosophy of his day, especially the work of Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), Runestam finds it difficult to reconcile himself to the view that we humans, according to Luther, altogether lack the capacity to choose between faith/God/good and disbelief/the devil/evil. If we humans were deficient in that capacity, we would be puppets and not persons, in light of the neo-Kantianism that Runestam adheres to, since persons are set apart by their ability to make deliberate decisions. Furthermore, in view of the fact that puppets are unable to choose what they do, they lack moral responsibility. Consequently, Runestam maintains that moral behavior would not exist if it were true that we humans were

unable to choose between good and evil. Fortunately, Runestam argues, we do not have to conclude that Luther claims that we are basically puppets. Runestam’s explication of Luther’s reasoning about the bondage of the will explains why this is so.

Runestam depicts Luther’s claims concerning the bondage of the human will as corresponding to his understanding of the freedom of the Christian. Although Runestam emphasizes that the bondage of the human will is an important presupposition for the Christian believer’s religious freedom, he argues in support of the view that Luther attributes a good free will to the Christian believer that parallels the evil free will that he undoubtedly ascribes to human beings who are turned away from God. In both cases, this freedom is associated with a certain liberty that is of vital importance to Runestam, namely our psychological freedom, i.e. our ability to act according to and motivated by our own personality. Inspired by Wilhelm Windelband, Runestam characterizes a particular individual’s personality as a cluster of constant motives that trigger off her actions. Unlike constant motives, temporary motives such as emotions that surge up at a particular moment are not expressions of a particular individual’s personality, according to Windelband. Instead, they are a threat to her psychological freedom since they might hinder her constant motives/personality from finding expression in her actions.11

In light of the neo-Kantian accentuation of the human person’s psychological freedom, Runestam wrestles with the question of whether, according to Luther, our psychological freedom is only a chimera. His conclusion is that it is not. We can be faithful to Luther, yet at the same time ascribe a genuine psychological freedom to the human being, to the sinner as well as to the Christian believer.12 Runestam supports this conclusion by arguing that Luther understands the evil free will of human beings who are turned away from God as their self, their identity. Correspondingly, he understands the free will of the Christian believer as her self, her identity. Runestam refers to the Christian believer’s self as her spiritual self and he portrays the psychological freedom that he associates with the believer’s spiritual self as the freedom to act without selfish motives, or to act in order to overcome them. This freedom to act without—or against—egoistic intentions is the psychological freedom of the Christian and its growth is the aim of the recommendable spiritual training that Runestam identifies.13

13. Ibid., 95, 197, 202–4.
TWO KINDS OF ASCETICISM

Runestam explicitly discusses the question of whether some kind of spiritual training stands out as recommendable in light of Luther’s theology. His answer is in the affirmative and it rests on a certain explication of Luther’s portrayal of the relationship between faith and good works. Runestam argues that the relationship between faith and good works in Luther’s theology is so intimate that we have to understand it as reciprocal. This reciprocity implies that faith not only results in good works, i.e. that loving deeds automatically flow forth from the believer’s heart, but that the opposite is also true: good works can result in faith since people can gain, regain or grow in faith as a consequence of their actions. This is true since loving deeds shape my heart just the same as unloving deeds infect my heart with sin. Consequently, a certain individual’s caring actions can be a means of grace not only to others but also to the doer herself, i.e. my actions can spread or increase the gospel’s reign in my life, Runestam explains, by helping me to keep my relationship with God open, by reviving my spiritual life and confidence and by leading me back into a position of faith in times of doubt or unbelief.14

Runestam himself explicitly emphasizes the value of two kinds of asceticism, namely what he identifies as the asceticism of concentration, i.e. practices that help an individual to focus on God and distinguish God’s will for the world and in her life, and the asceticism of reduction, i.e. practices that help an individual to remain independent of things that stand out as unimportant in light of the gospel.15 However, further actions can be characterized as part of a sound spiritual training by reference to Runestam’s explication of Luther’s theology. In fact, any action that springs forth from the believer’s true (spiritual) self and promotes the gospel’s reign in her life can be depicted as part of a recommendable asceticism. Furthermore, Runestam portrays human beings as being quite capable of discerning the real reasons behind their actions. Consequently, in most cases the doer herself can tell whether a certain action promotes the gospel’s reign in her life or not, i.e. whether it is adequately differentiated as part of her spiritual training. The visibility that this implies is, I believe, philosophically an advantage. However, Runestam’s optimism concerning our human capacity to know ourselves is quite problematic, in my opinion. My criticism of Runestam’s Luther interpretation revolves around this appreciation of our human intellectual competence.

AN OBJECTION CONCERNING ANTHROPOLOGY

My main argument against Runestam’s explication of Luther’s views on sanctification concerns his characterization of the human person. Inspired by Windelband, Runestam portrays a human being’s personality as her conscious and deliberate decisions. He assumes that every individual has a core identity which consists of her constant motives. This core identity is the cause of her actions and it is primarily associated with reason and rationality. Owing to his characterization of the human person along these lines, Runestam is unable to do justice to Luther’s appreciation of the emotional elements of faith. As Birgit Stolt argues, according to Luther reason (intellectus) and emotion (affectus) are always intertwined in the life of a Christian believer. Consequently, the anthropological perspective that Runestam attributes to Luther stands out as historically deficient.

Furthermore, Runestam’s characterization of a human being’s personality is difficult to reconcile with our present-day understanding of ourselves. Today, we usually assume that people are more complex and ambivalent than Runestam’s perspective allows for. For example, we tend to think that our personality consists not only of rational choices but also of mixed emotions and subconscious motives, which influence our actions. Sigmund Freud, among others, has taught us that. Although it might be possible to improve on Runestam’s interpretation of Luther by linking it to a more dynamic and multidimensional concept of a human being’s personality, my conclusion is that in the absence of such an upgrading, Runestam’s work is not the best available option for a theologian who wants to argue that certain activities stand out as recommendable spiritual training in light of Luther’s theology.

SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO HERMANN

According to Rudolf Hermann’s exposition of Luther’s theology, Luther understands sanctification as a time concept (ein Zeitbegriff). More than anything else, this implies that he does not conceptualize sanctification as a quantity concept (ein Massbegriff). Hermann suggests that, according to Luther, to grow in faith is not to acquire something that can be likened to a greater spiritual muscle mass. Instead, a certain individual’s spiritual development consists in her increasingly conscious and responsible participation in her dialogue with God. This dialogue, Hermann explains, is a necessary condition for every human being’s existence and it begins when God calls a certain individual into being by creating her. It then evolves into a genuine

16. Stolt, “Luther’s Faith of ‘the Heart.’”
and redemptive communication when, in light of the Gospel, a person's response within this dialogue turns into a committed confession to Christ. When this happens, a new reality is created, according to Hermann. This reality is set up and manifested by a certain linguistic behavior, namely a particular verbal exchange between Christ and the human being. This conversation is governed by a specific set of basic rules that Hermann identifies. Essentially, those rules specify that the human being's most fundamental statement in this dialogue is her confession of sins. In turn, Christ's most important response is in his words of forgiveness.\(^{17}\)

Hermann refers to this new reality as a certain time, namely God's time or eternity. This time or reality conveys communion with God, which is going to be fully realized in the world to come. At present, it is at hand in the proper dialogue between Christ and the Christian, i.e. a conversation governed by the basic rules that Hermann identifies.\(^{18}\) In other words, it is realized in the Christian believer's communication with Christ in prayer. Consequently, it can be portrayed as the heart's discourse with Christ.

According to Hermann's interpretation of Luther, a Christian believer's sanctification implies that in a certain sense God's time, God's eternal reality, is stretched out in the believer's life by increasingly permeating her existence in earthly time. This development comes about, Hermann explains, when the human being responds to Christ in situations that occur by consciously relating herself and leaving her life to Him. In other words, Hermann portrays a person's sanctification as her discourse with Christ in further moments and in situations. More precisely, growth in a believer's faith implies that she includes additional aspects of her own life story in her dialogue with Christ by admitting that past transgressions belong to this narrative, i.e. by confessing her sins, and by committing herself to Christ in a particular moment.\(^{19}\)

It is important to note that Hermann, in characterizing the Christian believer's sanctification as her dialogue with Christ in prayer, does not deny that this process is of importance not only to her verbal behavior but also to her non-verbal actions. Rather, it is the other way around. Hermann emphasizes that in a broader sense our deeds, including those actions that we accomplish by uttering words, can be conceptualized as replies in our dialogue with God. In addition, our actions are expressions belonging to further dialogues that we are engaged in. For example, when I take my sister's


dog for a walk, my doing so is a response to my sister (who asked me to walk the dog) and to the dog (who barked consistently before we went out). Furthermore, it is a response to God, who brought me into being with the intention of enriching the world. Because of this simultaneity and interconnectedness, every transformation in my discourse with God will influence my verbal and non-verbal responses in other conversations, for example my communication with my sister and my behavior towards her dog. In short, as my replies in my dialogue with God mature, this will have implications for my actions since God, by fostering our dialogue, will influence my way of living in a certain direction in order for me to be of use to God in God's overall ambition to save the world.²⁰

Hermann's portrayal of the Christian believer's sanctification in terms of her dialogue with Christ entails that growth in faith is essentially associated with our language and a particular use of it. This intimate relation between the believer's verbal behavior and her sanctification implies, for one thing, that Hermann, contrary to Mannermaa, does not depict the Christian believer's spiritual life and existence as invisible to us humans. Since we are aware of our own verbal behavior, we can recognize God's time when it is at hand in a particular moment. Consequently, we are able to judge whether a particular claim concerning sanctification is justified or not. In short, we do have a criterion that we can use in order to demarcate between true sanctification and other personality developments. This I deem to be a huge advantage as regards Hermann's interpretation of Luther.

Furthermore, unlike Runestam, Hermann portrays a certain individual's personality as a dynamic cluster of different and constantly changing motives. His basic assumption is that a human being's personality is her current responses in the dialogues that she, in a particular moment, is engaged in. Since her dialogue with God is her most fundamental conversation, i.e. the discourse that her life depends upon, her response within this conversation is her core identity. A person's response to God, as well as her replies in every other dialogue that she is involved in, varies over time. This implies that the human being's core identity is continuously recreated during her life in earthly time.²¹ However, according to Hermann, one fact about the Christian believer's reply to God will remain true throughout her life. Her response to God will be a multidimensional mix of trust/faith and distrust/unwillingness. This is what it means to be a sinner and to be righteous simultaneously.

²⁰ Iwand, Review of Rudolf Hermann, _Willensfreiheit und Gute Werke im Sinne der Reformation_, 570.

Hermann emphasizes that, according to Luther, the human being’s affirmative answer to God is never her own accomplishment. The bondage of the will implies that the human being is incapable of loving God. Furthermore, it implies that the human being can never remain in a particular moment. Every moment will pass and, consequently, every human being has to respond anew in the next moment by choosing some course of action.22 This is also true of the Christian believer. The spiritual training that appears as recommendable in light of Hermann’s interpretation of Luther is closely connected to Hermann’s explication of Luther’s understanding of the bondage of the human will since it consists in the believer’s affirmative answer to God in further moments. The believer’s positive response is characterized by Hermann as teamwork involving God as well as the Christian believer. They act simultaneously, in God’s time, i.e. in a time other than our earthly time, in which a particular moment precedes or succeeds another moment. Their joint action is made possible in a very fundamental way by their access to certain linguistic resources. Accordingly, this access is decisive for the spiritual training that stands out as recommendable in light of Hermann’s clarification of Luther’s conception of sanctification.

PRAYER TO CHRIST AND SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

Inspired by Hermann’s interpretation of Luther, we can portray a particular linguistic exchange, namely the believer’s prayer to Christ, as recommendable spiritual training. Consequently, promoting spiritual training implies teaching other people, and learning from other people, how to maintain such a conscious dialogue as that which Hermann portrays as generating a new reality. Since this new reality is associated with a specific communication, i.e. a certain use of language, recommendable spiritual training is basically about language acquisition. It mainly involves intentionally relating oneself to Christ in further situations by praying in accordance with the insight that the human being’s most basic reply in this dialogue is her confession of sins, though the conversation contains significantly more statements than the believer’s prayer for forgiveness.

In light of Hermann’s explicit words of warning against a particular misunderstanding more precisely the belief that spiritual training can generate something measurable, praying to Christ appears as the only asceticism that can be encouraged without risk of misunderstanding. Furthermore, on the basis of Hermann’s interpretation of Luther, elaborating on sound teachings about the Christian believer’s growth in faith that remedies

frequent confusions about asceticism appears to be a major undertaking for the Lutheran theologian. To carry out that task is to get involved in a theological sub-field that I believe is of immense importance today, owing to the growing interest in activities that have traditionally been conceptualized as spiritual training, namely *spiritual theology*.\(^{23}\) The fact that Hermann’s explication of Luther’s theology encourages such work speaks in its favor and is a further reason for me to conclude that Hermann’s clarification of Luther’s conception of sanctification is to be preferred by a Lutheran theologian who wants to encourage spiritual training.

**CONCLUSION**

Hermann’s line of reasoning, as well as those of Mannermaa and Runestam, results in the conclusion that certain activities can be characterized as recommendable spiritual training in light of Luther’s explication of Christian faith. Consequently, a contemporary Lutheran theologian who wants to respond to today’s growing interest in spirituality by recommending some kind of spiritual training can give content to and argue in support of such an approach by using any of these three explications of Luther’s concept of sanctification. However, in my opinion, the option that Hermann advocates is a preferable point of departure since, as I have argued above, there are vital flaws inherent in the other two. The ontological outlook that Mannermaa attributes to Luther is quite incomprehensible. The anthropological perspective that Runestam associates with Luther’s theology is, in turn, outdated. Hermann, on the other hand, elaborates a comprehensible and philosophically tenable ontological position as well as a dynamic characterization of the human person’s identity. Consequently, his explication of Luther’s understanding of sanctification is the best option available to a theologian who wants to argue in support of the view that there are activities that we can identify as recommendable spiritual training without jeopardizing vital elements in Luther’s theology. According to Hermann’s interpretation of Luther, praying to Christ in accordance with certain basic rules contributes to growth in the Christian believer’s faith. As a result, such praying is spiritual training.

A present-day Lutheran theologian who formulates a considered answer to the question of what helps people make progress in their spiritual life will be involved in the discipline of spiritual theology.\(^{24}\) This field of research has long since been neglected by Lutheran theologians, most ob-

\(^{23}\) This sub-field is introduced, *inter alia*, in McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*. A classic Catholic textbook is Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*.

\(^{24}\) Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 18.
viously due to the fact that scholars tend to assume that Luther is of the opinion that the believer is not capable of doing anything to contribute to her spiritual growth. In light of today’s growing interest in spirituality, some scholars—correctly, in my opinion—argue that this is a disadvantage that has to be addressed if Lutheran traditions are to prosper in the future.

My intention in this chapter is to encourage and facilitate a discussion addressing this particular shortcoming. In light of Mannermaa’s, Runestam’s and Hermann’s elaborate explications of Luther’s understanding of sanctification, certain activities undoubtedly stand out as recommendable spiritual training. Consequently, these three theologians and our critical reflection on their work smooth the way for a Lutheran spiritual theology. Such a theology is, I believe, of vital importance to the continued existence of Lutheran traditions in a post-Christian society characterized by, inter alia, an increasing interest in spiritual training. Accordingly, Lutheran theologians ought to pay this field of research the attention it is due.

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