

## **Reclaiming the Spirit: Reception of BEM as the Starting Point for Rethinking Eucharist in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.**

The Faith and Order document Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry (BEM) was a milestone in the multilateral ecumenical dialogue on Eucharist but also a theological challenge to many churches. While its chapter on the Eucharist generally received a warm welcome among Lutheran churches, its push for epiclesis on the eucharistic elements of bread and wine raised some questions and critical remarks across geographical boundaries.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) the first reactions to BEM's pneumatic recommendations were twofold: some were suspicious the document had adopted a spiritual presence of Christ over a real presence in the elements of bread and wine. Others argued that by the power of the Christ's promise in the Words of Institution the bread and wine would become the body and blood of Christ so surely that praying for the Holy Spirit to effect it would be not only unnecessary but even harmful. What was agreed upon by these critical voices was that the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist was not to effect the presence of Christ, but to enable the recipients of the Eucharist to receive its benefits and become sanctified. The official ELCF response adopted the critical stance.

However, by the mid 1990s a new wind was blowing. The ELCF worship renewal process was moving towards accepting an epiclesis over the elements. How had the theological reasoning changed in a decade? The purpose of this systematic theology paper is to examine the reception of BEM and the subsequent development of epiclesis in the theology of the Eucharist in ELCF until 1995.

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Heikki Repo

Doctoral Student

*Doctoral Programme in Theology and Religious Studies in Helsinki University*