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Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World

Gordon A. Jensen

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, gordon.jensen@usask.ca

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Book Review

Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World.

Tuomo Mannermaa. Translated, edited and introduced by Kirsi I. Stjerna. Afterword by Juhani Forsberg.
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010

Originally published in Finnish in 1983, this English translation by Stjerna introduces the Finnish Luther scholarship, led by Mannermaa, to English speaking theologians. *Two Kinds of Love* goes to the heart of the Finnish re-interpretation of Martin Luther. Challenging the traditional interpretations that place forensic justification in the centre of attention, Mannermaa proposes that Luther's distinction between God's love and human love is the key to understanding Luther's theology in general and his theology of the cross in particular. focus



Based on his study of the Heidelberg Disputation, Mannermaa explains the basic differences in these two kinds of love. On the one hand, God's love is giving, creating that which is loving to it, while human love receives, coming into being through those things that are loveable to it (1). The major difference between the two kinds of love is that while human love strives toward that which is lovable and good, God's love encompasses that which is unlovable and of no account. This 'giving love' of God thus transforms the unlovable. Mannermaa argues that late medieval theology had misunderstood the radical nature of God's love. For Aquinas and others, the command to "love our neighbour as ourselves" meant that people had to have self-love in order to love others. Further, the human desire to love their neighbour is based on finding this kind of love in others. As Mannermaa notes, such human love is, in reality, self-centred. It seeks out others who love me as I love myself. He proposes that God's love, on the other hand, creates out of nothing. God's love, since it is the opposite of what humans strive for as the ultimate love and good, cannot be loved by a human love. Nevertheless, God's love, which brings to life that which is nothing or rejected, is thus nothing short of an act of creation. In this creative act, God gives God's own divine nature to that which was unlovable by human standards, including God's righteousness, life and power. Mannermaa goes on to simply hint that this creative, justifying action is akin to the Orthodox idea of *theosis*, or divinization (64).

These two kinds of love form the basis for Mannermaa's new interpretation of Luther. By using the starting point of the two kinds of love, the obstacles encountered by starting with forensic justification, which was developed after Luther, are overcome. Forensic justification, he argues, severely limits or even blocks the transforming power of God's love, and downplays human love for one another. Furthermore, forensic justification also stunts the growth of human love for God. Any movement toward God is suspicious, a sure sign of effective justification, and thus, another attempt at a spiritualized works righteousness.

This important, ground-breaking monograph by Mannermaa is an important contribution to Luther research. He brings back into the conversation many of Luther's ideas that have been pushed to the sidelines by the majority of Luther research of the last two centuries. For example, the reaction against the medieval insistence on 'faith active in love' rather than 'faith alone' overlooked Luther's frequent emphasis on love in the divine-human relationship. Also shunned was any talk of effective, or transformative, justification.

At the same time, one might ask whether the 'two kinds of love' are really at the heart of Luther's theology, as he claims. As the book progresses, Mannermaa tends to define God's love more in terms of faith and justification. (57-66). Moreover, one can also argue that Luther's consistent understanding of justification flows from his theocentric approach to theology, rather than love. This theocentric approach totally contradicts any anthropocentric, self-centred approach, be it human love or sin. Further, Luther writes a treatise on *Two Kinds of Righteousness* in 1519 and supervises a *Disputation on Righteousness* in 1536 that both deal with two kinds of righteousness within the context of justification, while treatises on two kinds of love are non-existent. This suggests that Luther consistently considered righteousness and justification the key to his theology. Could it be that Mannermaa's 'two kinds of love' are one of the ways Luther explains righteousness and justification, rather than justification and righteousness explaining two kinds of love? Mannermaa himself proposes that God's alien and proper work, terms consistently used by Luther to describe justification, also apply to God's love (34). Is it love or justification that is a subset of the other? It would also be helpful if he had clarified how human love is a fruit of God's love (to use his terminology) in the same way that any kind of 'effective' or 'transformative' justification are fruits of forensic justification. Otherwise, the self-centred (*incurvatus in se*), human love still sets the agenda for love of God and love of neighbour, which Luther named as sin.

Despite these concerns, this monograph is an extremely important contribution to Luther research, however, and should be read carefully. The Mannermaa school challenges contemporary Luther research, along with the preconceptions and misconceptions of Luther that have developed over time. His critiques of Luther research need to be taken seriously, especially in light of ecumenical dialogue and an increasing move away from justification language in a world that increasingly sees less need to be justified.

Gordon A. Jensen
Lutheran Theological Seminary
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan