

# **The Genuine Luther : A New Interpretation from Mannermaa ' s Perspective**

——A Review on the Collected Works of Mannermaa  
the Father of the Finnish School : A Study on Martin Luther

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## **1. Tuomo Mannermaa and the Finnish School**

Most of the Chinese scholars are not familiar with Tuomo Mannermaa and the Finnish School. As a new interpretation of Martin Luther, the Finnish School has had an international influence. Recently, Paulos Huang has translated the masterpieces of Tuomo Mannermaa, the Father of the Finnish School, into Chinese. In order for the Chinese readers to understand the content of the book, it is necessary to introduce some academic and historical background first.

Before the birth of the Finnish School, research on Luther has had a strong tradition in Churches and seminaries in Finland. During the period of the Protestant Reformation, Catholic Sweden was reformed as a Protestant nation. Finland was still dominated by Sweden at that time. From then on Lutheranism was promoted and became the mainstream faith in Finland. However, the Finnish School and their new interpretation on Luther was not established until the 1970's. In 1973, the World Council of Churches held a conference in Bangkok discussing the topic of Salvation Today, where Salvation was simply understood as a social and ethical phenomenon. This conclusion was criticized by the representatives of the Finnish Lutheran Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, and led to a new dialogue among them in 1977. In this dialogue conference held in Kiev, Tuomo Mannermaa, the Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Helsinki, was invited to give a report on the relationship and connections between the Lutheran doctrine of Justification and the patristic – Orthodox doctrine of Divinization. By interpreting a comment made by Luther on the Galatians, that Christ is really present in faith itself, Mannermaa contended that because Christ is our righteousness, we were not only declared righteous but also made righteous. From this point of view, the doctrines of justification and divinization began to converge instead of being distinguished from each other.

Mannermaa's teaching is totally different from those of Lutheran churches. Traditionally, Lutheran believers are taught that they are claimed to be righteous by faith in Christ with no change in their human

nature. The substantial difference between being declared and being made righteous is viewed as the watershed between the Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Catholics. From the point of view of these traditional Lutheran scholars and priests, Mannermaa's view was a new interpretation on Luther. It led to a hot debate in the field of global Lutheran studies and had an international influence very quickly. In response to some criticisms and suspicions, Mannermaa extended his report into a more detailed book, which was titled as *Christ Present In Faith: Luther's View of Justification*. It was also used as a textbook in the University of Helsinki and a group of young scholars were trained by Mannermaa. Due to their studies with the aim of promoting the Finnish interpretation of Luther, they became to be called the Finnish School by scholars from other countries. However, the Finnish School members did not think that they had established a new school because their work was to read and know about the original Martin Luther. From their point of view, the real Luther did not establish a new kind of Christianity because there were many more connections between Luther's theology and the older Christian theologians than had been expected previously. For the study on Luther, Mannermaa and his followers said, the most important thing was to rethink whether we had been too extensively shaped by the Lutheran tradition and perhaps missed the "authentic Luther".

## 2. Introduction of Mannermaa's Book

The collective works of Mannermaa, the Father of the Finnish School contains three masterpieces: *Christ Present in Faith*, *Two kinds of Love and God*. The first of these books seems to be the milestone of the Finnish School. In this book, Mannermaa argues that in Luther's view, Christ is the greatest sinner for he bore the sins of all human beings in the human nature that he assumed. However, he is also the "perfect righteousness and life" for he is God and the incarnation of the Logos. Through the battle between righteousness and sin in himself, sin and death are first conquered in the person of Christ. As a consequence, the whole world is transformed through Christ. At this point, Mannermaa controversially proposed that justification is regarded as participation in and union with the person of Christ. Christ is the divine power and righteousness. He also is life without sin, curse and death. Some change has taken place in the human nature of Christians when they have participated in the divine nature through their faith. In the light of this view of justification, Christ is not only the favor of God which signifies God's forgiveness, but is also a gift that denotes the real God to human beings with all of his essential attributes. In Luther's view, the best expression of Christ's presence in faith is the communication of attributes, that is, Christ communicates God's saving attributes to his believers and believers are given all the goods of God in faith. It is easier to find a point of contact with the patristic concept of divinization in the theory of Christ as a gift and favor. The concept of justifying faith and the idea of the indwelling of Christ in faith cannot be absolutely separated.

Although Luther's doctrine of justification has something in common with the patristic concept of divinization, it is distinguished with scholastic doctrine in terms of salvation. The scholastic view could be summarized in the formula "fides charitate formata" (faith formed by love), while Luther's view can be freely expressed as "fides Christo formata" (faith formed by Christ) according to Mannermaa. In the view of scholars of the Catholic Church, faith means something that is beyond the reach of rational knowledge. Consequently, the relationship between man and God should be realized with the help of the human basic tendency, that is, love. If love is graced and thus receives the powers of grace, it can reach to God and rise to

God. It is believed that faith would be dead and lifeless without love that is elevated and inspired by grace. Luther criticizes that even if love is elevated and divinized by grace, it nevertheless still remains human love and grace is merely accidentally attached to it. However, grace is not an accidental but a substantial reality, it can only be Christ himself. In other words, it is Christ who forms faith. Moreover, if love is regarded as the center of salvation, then the human being's relationship with God must be considered within the framework of the law. This is because love causes us to focus on the way of striving to God. Still, because in the "before God" perspective Christ is the only righteousness of human beings, Christ becomes the only way to human salvation while love is served as the law that belongs to the domain of secular social relations. Mannermaa thought that although the criticism that Luther presents here is directed primarily against the so-called Spiritualists of the Reformation era, it applies to scholastic theology as well, for both of them regard God as being "up" in heaven instead of being "down" in the faith. In this way the image of God, who is also our savior, has been distorted.

In terms of the law, the first point that Luther makes is that the law lacks the capability to serve as a way to salvation. Efforts to achieve salvation with the help of the law and the works demanded by the law are works of "Sisyphus" and "the daughters of Danaus". And this is what the young Luther had experienced. However, this law also has the function to reveal sin and bring death to the old Adam. It is a spiritual instead of negative function as it has marked the beginning of the divine power, that is, it causes humans to commence participating in the person of Christ and his divine life. According to Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther, the participation or union of the person of Christ and the believer makes the ordinary Christian a divine human being, for the union is so complete that they have become "one person". From this point of view, there is no strict distinction between justification and sanctification as the mainstream Lutheran tradition emphasizes, for in faith in Christ is both the forgiveness of sins and the effective producer of everything that is good in human beings. Here Mannermaa cites the "Parable of a Tree" which is used by Luther frequently, that is, faith creates a new "tree", namely a new "person", which bears good fruits. He regards it as a kind of theological ethic which is distinguished with the philosophical ethic, for the latter teaches that human beings become righteous by performing righteous works, while the former claims that only a justified person who has been made righteous could perform righteous works. However, although the nature of human beings is transformed in faith, sin is not eliminated fully because the flesh or precisely, the old Adam, still exists. But this is a great comfort rather than a negative phenomenon from Luther's point of view, for it allows the feelings, such as sadness, anxiety, anger and so forth, to exist. These feelings make the faith so weak that justification is necessary. From Mannermaa's point of view, the justification is not merely forensic, meaning that we are forgiven by God, it is also effective because Christ as the righteousness has been imputed to us through faith and becomes the subject of our good behaviors. The idea of Christ present in faith is the key to understanding Mannermaa and the Finnish School.

*Two Kinds of Love* is another foundational work of the Finnish School. In this book, Mannermaa distinguishes the love for "what is not" with the love for "what is". The former concept of love indicates God's love and the latter one is directed to human love. God's love has the tendency toward the empty and the nothing, while human love, by contrast, is oriented toward that which is good and beautiful. It seems that such a concept of human love is closer to what we have experienced, but in Luther's view, it is God's love that can cause humans to love each other without any consideration for themselves. According to Thomas Aquinas, love is a movement that leads to a union of the lover and the beloved. Friendship love is the highest

form of human love because one does not ask for good things for oneself, but wills goods for others in it. By distinguishing between concupiscent and friendship love, Aquinas seeks to solve the debated problem concerning the relationship between “self-interested” and “not self-interested”. However, from Luther’s perspective, the difference between them is not as clear as it is stated in Thomas’s definition, and this is partly because even friendship love is also to love a friend like another “I”. It is based on the reciprocal sharing of goods that is different from God’s love, which is directed toward nothing. As a matter of fact, Thomas Aquinas did make clear on the point that love for self is the model and root of all love including friendship. At least, he interprets the command of love (love your neighbor as yourself) in this manner. Luther admits that the idea of love described by Aquinas is a suitable portrayal of human nature, but he denies that it is a suitable way to think about God’s love analogically as if it were also a kind of self-love. This is a kind of theology of glory, which is criticized by Luther on the basis of the theology of the cross. In his understanding, although God’s essence can generally be known through God’s works of creation, we cannot reach to the knowledge of God if we ignore Christ. In the light of Christ’s crucifixion, God unites with those who are deficient, sinful and weak in order to transform them into righteous, good and strong human beings. From this point of view, the commandment of love or the golden rule does not command human beings to love themselves in the first place but requests human beings to consider the needs of their neighbors on an equal level with theirs. In this way, what Christians need to do for their neighbors is quite similar to what Christ has done for his people. Thus the golden rule and the whole of Christian ethics have received a new interpretation and meaning in Luther’s theology of Cross.

### 3. Some Comments on the Book

The reason why the interpretation of the Finnish School on Martin Luther could play an important role in the relevant academic field is that it has challenged and changed the basic doctrines of Lutheran churches (which is presented in the Book of Concord) to some extent. The most basic doctrine of Lutheran theology is Justification by faith, which is usually interpreted from a forensic and judicial perspective. Justification is only reception of forgiveness from God who is “a judge” for the sake of the obedience and merit of Christ. But the question here is whether the nature of human beings is transformed in this process. In Mannermaa’s view, what Luther teaches about justification is that we are not only declared righteous but also made righteous through the communication of attributes and union with God. From this point of view, justification has real effects, in that we become “gods” instead of merely being declared forgiven. The key to understanding this view of justification is that Christ as the redeemer does not operate only for us but also has his influence inside us. In other words, the indwelling of Christ in us is not the consequence of the imputation of righteousness but is the cause for us being made and declared righteous.

Mannermaa maintains that Luther gives equal emphasis to both the forensic and the effective sides of righteousness, the latter of which is always a controversial idea in Lutheran academic circles. In Mannermaa’s view, the reason for ignoring the effective side by traditional Luther research is related to the deep influence of neo-Kantianism on German protestant theologians. These traditional researchers always interpret or explain the relationship between human beings and God as an ethical relation. The neo-Kantianist focus is on the division between the “ontological” and the “ethical” aspects. This is especially prominent in the

interpretation of Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack and Karl Holl. However, based on Mannermaa's reading, the genuine Luther is a theologian whose theology has more contact with the teachings of the early church and patristic theology, and consequently is better understood from an ontological perspective. In Mannermaa's view, it is an ontological fact for Luther that Christ really is present in us and sacrifices for the well-being of every one of us. To better understand Mannermaa's view, some concepts should be analyzed in more detail. First of all, the concept of divinization, which is alien to most of the Luther scholars, is not at all a marginal concept in Luther's theology. Certainly it does not mean any kind of apotheosis of human beings, as it means participating in faith and love under the sign of the cross. Thus the concept of participation is another concept that should be paid more attention to. In the concept of divinization and participation, human beings in themselves remain "nothing". In order to unite with God, Christians constantly destroy their efforts through a "nihilation" in order to accept Christ dwelling in them. The usage of such terms as divinization and nihilization causes Luther's theology to sound more mystical and ontological. This is in accordance with both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic views on what happens to human beings in the relationship with God in Christ.

Love is another core concept, which Mannermaa and his Finnish School have discussed a lot. In the book of *Two Kinds of Love*, Mannermaa separates God's love from human love according to Luther's classification of the two concepts. This is not an original theory in the history of Christian theology. In response to this point, the Swedish Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren has written the book entitled *Agape and Eros* that presents a similar way in explaining different kinds of love. In this book, Nygren argues that some of the main features of agape are spontaneous and unmotivated, uncalculating, unlimited, and unconditional, while that of eros are acquisitive and egocentric. They are not only different in nature but are also two motifs in competition. However, when Nygren discusses the topic of union with God, it is always discussed under the motif of eros, which is criticized by Mannermaa. In his view, union with God in Lutheran theology does not mean that he has rejected God's love as agape. On the contrary, according to Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's theology, the union with God could only occur under the motif of agape in which God descends and incarnates within human beings in faith, because it is Christ instead of eros or human love that is the real and divine form of faith. In other words, Christ is the subject of God's love and we are transformed through his person and work. From this point of view, the long-prevailing concept from Nygren that sets agape and eros as two opposite ideas may not be an appropriate way to understand Luther's position, because God's love is certainly the foundation of human love rather than its opposite.

The idea of a combination of agape and eros can also be found in Thomas Aquinas's theology. In his classical book *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas tries to build an order of love in which both the self-love and love for relatives and neighbors are affirmed and included through God's divine love. What Mannermaa criticizes Aquinas about is that love would form a unitive power which orients itself toward the good and worthy, whereas God's love directed itself toward "nothing" and "that which is not" according to Luther. In Mannermaa's view, the concept of love from Aquinas's perspective is always egoistic whereas the love from God should be purely selfless. What Mannermaa expects for human love is based on God's love, which is contrary to human nature. This is the question. Is it necessary to compel and request Christians to love as selflessly or even self-sacrificially as Christ loved? In fact, the study of evolutionary biology and social psychology has shown that the motives of those altruistic behaviors of human beings are egoistic. Scientists claim that the purpose of altruistic behavior is to exist and reproduce for their own species. As a result, the

altruistic behaviors could only extend to families and relatives, or reciprocal objects, but not to all human beings and creations. Thus, from a scientific point of view, Mannermaa's expectation of love seems to be impossible and unrealistic. But this is exactly the core point in Luther's theology of the cross. In spite of the "sins" or selfishness of human beings, God's love would create something that was good and beautiful in us. This is not because we are lovable but in order to make us lovable, God loves us in the first place. We are first loved by God and then express it to our neighbors and to God. God's love only appears on the "backside", that is, in the sin or "nothingness" of human beings.

In terms of the relationship between love and faith, Mannermaa points out that the most appropriate way for human beings to face and respond to God's love is through our acceptable and self-empty faith. This view is quite similar to Max Scheler's phenomenology of faith. From Scheler's point of view, love for "what is" and love for "what is not" can be regarded as ascendant love and descendent love respectively. The former is the love toward nature because the target of love is without love. On the contrary, the latter is the love for salvation because the subject of love, Christ, is an acting person who descends and saves us from sins. Based on this similar distinction, Scheler criticizes Aquinas for ignoring and distorting the original experience of love in Christian belief due to the influence of Greek philosophy, in regard to which he holds the same view as Mannermaa. Moreover, Scheler emphasizes that facing a self-communicating and self-revealing God, a self-open and self-free attitude is appropriate to accepting the love of God for human beings, which is in accordance with the theory of nihilization in Luther's theology. It can be seen that although Mannermaa and Scheler have different backgrounds and there is no direct connection between them, both of them have noticed the different kinds of love. Since love is just one of the important motifs in theology, there will be more similarities and connections between Mannermaa's theory and that of others-if we are looking for different motifs.

#### 4. An Introduction of the Translator

The translator of the book *Collected Works of Mannermaa the Father of the Finnish School: A Study on Martin Luther* is Paulos Huang, who is a researcher in the faculty of theology at the University of Helsinki and was a professor at the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong. Professor Huang is also a member of the Finnish Luther research team. He received his bachelor and master degrees on systematic theology in 1990, and his theology doctorate in 2006, all from the University of Helsinki. His dissertation is a comparative study of Confucianism and Christianity on the topic of salvation. From then on, Professor Huang has devoted himself to the promotion of Finnish Luther research in the circle of Chinese scholars and the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese traditional cultures. In his view, Luther's theology corrects the bias of the theology of prosperity. Additionally, the principles of sola fide and sola gratia could make Calvinists reflect on their legalism. The principle of sola scriptura could be borrowed to the Full Gospel Church's enthusiasm and mysticism. Furthermore, Luther's view on "The Christian as being simultaneously justified and a sinner" is an important reference to the Methodist notion of perfectionist sanctification. He also contributes to the comparative studies between the law and gospel dialectic and the general fundamentalist view of Scripture. From Huang's perspective, Confucianism has a great influence on Chinese society and Chinese Christians in terms of sanctification and divinization. The introduction of the Finnish School to the Chinese Christians and scholars is very helpful to them. This is because of two reasons.

Firstly, in order to unite the two concepts of justification and divinization, and secondly, to avoid apotheosis from Confucianism's perspective. Apart from translating and writing articles on the works of the Finnish School in Chinese, Professor Huang has also organized some conferences to discuss with the scholars and clergies from China. In 2011, professor Huang established the Nordic Forum of Sino – Western Studies along with the related international journal, which has fostered the dialogue and made comparative studies more systematic and academic. It is hoped that there will be more dialogue and achievement by the Finnish School within the Chinese academic field.

中文题目：

曼多马的视野：评《芬兰学派之父曼多马文集：马丁·路德研究》

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