

**Divine Love and Human Love:
An Asian Ecumenical Revisit of Luther's
Heidelberg Disputation 1518**
神愛和人愛：
就亞洲合一再訪路德 1518 海德堡辯論

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[ABSTRACT] This essay argues that Martin Luther's thesis on divine and human loves articulated in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) was intended to be a criticism against Aristotelian philosophy and the related scholastic theology represented by Thomas Aquinas, but Luther's criticism was not entirely fair to Aquinas. Through making references to the contemporary studies of Luther and Aquinas, this essay attempts to articulate a dialogue between Luther and Aquinas, and to explore the significance of this dialogue for the contemporary ecumenical movement in Asia.

[摘要] 本文認為，馬丁·路德關於神愛和人愛的論點在其 1518 海德堡辯論中是對亞里士多德的哲學和聖多瑪斯·阿奎那所代表的學術神學的批評，但路德的批評對阿奎那並不完全公平。通過引述當代對路德和阿奎那的研究，本文試圖在路德與阿奎那之間構築對話，並探討這種對話對亞洲當代基督徒合一運動的重要性。

Introduction

After the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999, it seems that this doctrine constitutes no longer an unbridgeable gap between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. One may then wonder what remains the most divisive doctrinal issue between them. Is it the doctrine of love? ¹

In his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517), Martin Luther (1483-1546) began his criticism against the scholastic theology which dominated Roman Catholicism for centuries.² He continued his criticism in *Heidelberg Disputation*, which was presented on 26 April 1518.³ It is rather well-known that the 21st thesis of *Heidelberg Disputation* articulated a contrast between theology of the cross and theology of glory: "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."⁴ This signified a break with scholastic theology as well as the emergence of Luther's theology of the cross.⁵ This essay focuses instead on the 28th thesis, which is equally important for an understanding of the development of Luther's theology and his break with scholastic theology. The thesis reads, "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing

¹ Zhe Gao, "Doing Christian Intra-religious Dialogue Inter-religiously: Taking a Mahayana Theology of Agape as an Example," *Logos & Pneuma* 45 (Autumn 2016), pp.364-395 (in Chinese with English abstract).

² English translation: Luther, "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology", translated by Harold J. Grimm, in: *Luther's Works*, volume 31, edited by Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 9-16.

³ English translation: Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation", translated by C. M. Jacobs and revised by Harold J. Grimm, in: *Luther's Works*, volume 31, 39-70.

⁴ Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation", 40.

⁵ See further: Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, paperback 1990).

to it.”⁶ The contrast between “love of God” (*amor Dei*) and “love of man” (*amor hominis*) expresses not only Luther’s understanding of human and divine loves, but also his understanding of the difference between his own theological position and that of scholastic theology.⁷ In this thesis, *amor Dei* and *amor hominis* are defined by their contrastive characteristics, rather than the agent or recipient involved – God or human being. So, it might better be translated respectively as “divine love” and “human love”, rather than “God’s love / love of God” and “human being’s love / love of human being.” This is not merely a matter of translation because one has to consider the case of Jesus Christ. According to the Chalcedon Definition (451), Jesus Christ is believed to have both divine and human natures. It is thus debatable as to whether his love could be neatly categorized as either “God’s love / love of God” or “human being’s love / love of human being” in a mutually exclusive way. A related interesting question is: Is his love divine or human or both? If both, whether and how the two divergent kinds of love co-exist in Jesus Christ? In addition to the Christological issue, Luther’s thesis on the relationship between human and divine loves concerns also the dialogue between Lutheranism and Catholicism. It is because, as we are going to see, Luther’s thesis implies a criticism targeted at the theological tradition associated with Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who is regarded as the most important representative of Roman Catholic theology.

This essay attempts to review Luther’s thesis in the perspective of Catholic-Lutheran dialogue by making references to the contemporary studies of the theologies of Luther and/or Aquinas. It

⁶ Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation”, 41.

⁷ See further: Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther’s Religious World*, translated, edited and introduced by Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

will make special reference to the Finnish interpretation of Luther pioneered by Tuomo Mannermaa (1937-2015). The significance of the Finnish interpretation for the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, especially on the doctrines of justification and deification, is rather well known. This essay will consider its significance for the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue by making reference to some of the contemporary studies of Thomas Aquinas. Through reviewing the theological dialogue on the relevant issues among the Christian denominations, this essay will conclude with a preliminary exploration concerning the significance of this intra-Christian ecumenical dialogue for the wider ecumenism, namely the dialogue among Christianity and other cultural / religious traditions.⁸ Due to the limit of its length, this essay will focus on Confucianism and Mahāyāna Buddhism flourishing in East Asia.

Love in Luther's Heidelberg Disputation

Luther's statements cited above might sound rather paradoxical. In fact, Luther started his *Heidelberg Disputation* with an explanation that he was going to employ 'theological paradoxes' in order to highlight his own position. Etymologically speaking, "paradox" means contrary (*para*) to the appearance or opinion (*doxa*). It usually employs two (or more) apparently contrary statements in order to express a view which is radically different from the appearance and conventional opinion. However, contrary does not

⁸ See: Peter C. Phan (ed.), *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

necessarily mean contradictory, for it is also possible that the two contrary or paradoxical statements are complementary.⁹

The *Heidelberg Disputation* consists of two main sections. The first section covers 28 theological theses, and the second 12 philosophical theses. In other words, the 28th thesis is the last theological thesis immediately before the philosophical theses. While the thesis itself relates theology to philosophy merely in an implicit way, Luther's defense of the thesis explicitly disputes against the Aristotelian philosophy and the related Scholastic theology. It is interesting to note that although Luther's defense of the thesis highlights the contrast between theology and philosophy, it starts with the second part of the thesis concerning human love, especially the theologians' and philosophers' consensus on human love. It reads,

“The second part is clear and is accepted by all philosophers and theologians, for the object of love is its cause, assuming, according to Aristotle, that all power of the soul is passive and material and active only in receiving something. Thus it is also demonstrated that Aristotle's philosophy is contrary to theology since in all things it seeks those things which are its own and receives rather than gives something good.”¹⁰

Regarding divine love, Luther explains:

“The first part is clear because the love of God which lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and

⁹ See: Pan-chiu Lai, “Buddhist-Christian Complementarity in the Perspective of Quantum Physics,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 12.2 (2002), 148-164.

¹⁰ Luther, “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology”, 57.

weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore, sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive: For this reason, the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons."¹¹

It is rather obvious that Luther's criticism of Aristotelian philosophy and the related scholastic theology is targeted mainly on their understanding of divine love, rather than that of human love.

Regarding Luther's characterization of divine love, whereas the thesis itself seems to focus on the doctrine of creation and assume the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the defense of the thesis actually refers to the doctrine of salvation, especially the salvation of sinner.¹² As David Fergusson points out, though there had been many patristic fathers and theological masters affirmed the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which was understood as an expression of the divine sovereignty and love, it is Luther's important breakthrough and contribution that he linked up the divine creation with the unmerited mercy of God towards sinners in his *Small Catechism* in 1529.¹³ According to our analysis above, Luther's linking up creation with salvation of the unmerited might have started in *Heidelberg Disputation* in 1518, much earlier than Fergusson suggests. Notwithstanding of this theological contribution, Luther's using the

¹¹ Luther, "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology", 57.

¹² It is noteworthy that some Biblical passages interpret salvation in terms of creation or new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17; Galatians 6:15). Being inspired by these, Paul Tillich (1886-1965) makes use of the concept of "New Being" to explain Christ and salvation. See: Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* (London: SCM, 1978); *The New Being* (London: SCM, 1956), 15-24.

¹³ David Fergusson, "Loved by the Other: *Creatio ex nihilo* as an Act of Divine Love," in *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alternity*, edited by Ulrich Schmiedel & James M. Matarazzo, Jr. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 271.

concept of creation to differentiate human and divine loves may bring forth a complicated problem concerning whether it is possible for human being to practice divine love. Strictly speaking, according to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, only God can create. As a creature, it is impossible for human being to create *ex nihilo* the recipient or object of human love - no matter whether the recipient or object is divine or human. It is thus impossible for human being to love God or another human being with divine love. In other words, human being can only love God or another human being with human love and thus with self-interest. In fact, Luther had already argued in the 13th thesis of *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* that “It is absurd to conclude that erring man can love the creature above all thing, therefore also God. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.” And, he further disputed in the 18th thesis that “To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were. This is contrary to common teaching.” Alas, if this is the case, one has to wonder how the dual commandments concerning love God more than oneself and love one’s neighbor as oneself are to be understood? A related question is: whether and/or how the practice of the dual commandments of love is humanly possible without becoming blasphemous?

Mannermaa’s Interpretation of Luther

Mannermaa admits that in Luther’s theology, divine love and human love are divergent – moving towards opposite directions. Similar to human intellect which aspires to something real, human love orients to something not only real but also good and beautiful,

whereas divine love orients to those of empty or evil.¹⁴ In Mannermaa's own words,

"The direction of human love is upwards, that is, it turns toward what is grand, wise, alive, beautiful, and good. God's love, in turn, turns itself or is oriented downward, that is, toward what is lowly, disgraceful, weak, foolish, wicked, and dead."¹⁵

However, Mannermaa endeavors to argue that for Luther, divine love and human love are not mutually exclusive, and it is not impossible for human being to practice divine love because this is precisely the goal of Christian faith.¹⁶ Mannermaa clarifies that Luther did not neglect the love among human beings, including that between husband and wife, among friends, among parents and children, or even people's love for animals; furthermore, what Luther attempted to emphasize is that although human beings seek their own good in their loves of God and other human beings,

"God's love helps human beings, first of all, to love God as God and not only the goodness received from God, and, second, to love other human beings for themselves and as persons, instead of loving only their precious qualities and for what could be gained from them for the benefit of the one who loves."¹⁷

¹⁴ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*, 2.

¹⁵ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 3.

¹⁶ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 5.

¹⁷ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 6.

So, for Luther, what the golden rule of love one's neighbor as oneself commands is not self-love and its extension to the others, but a pure love of the others without self-interest.¹⁸

As Mannermaa points out, Luther's interpretation of love aimed to counter the interpretation offered by Aquinas because, for Luther at least, Aquinas tended to emphasize that love inclines towards the good and exhibits different degrees of love towards different objects.¹⁹ Furthermore, Aquinas' understanding of friendship love (*amor amicitiae*) or benevolent love (*amor benevolentiae*) appeared to be mutual or reciprocal, aiming at sharing each other's goodness and helping each other to actualize each's own inherent good, and was thus entirely different from the divine love orienting towards "what is not" or that which is empty and evil.²⁰ According to Aristotle's philosophy, which was supposed to be the basis of Aquinas's ethics, the human endeavor of actualization one's own goodness is based on love of oneself. In this sense, self-love is the root of all other kinds of love, and this applies to not only the commandment of love thy neighbors but also God's love of Godself.²¹ Mannermaa further explains that Aquinas understood *caritas* as a free gift bestowed by God and at this point this was not different from Luther's understanding, but Luther preferred to understand the divine-human relationship in terms of faith (*fidem*), which is the reception of God's love, instead of *charitatis*, particularly not in the sense of a desiring love seeking for self-actualization.²² This is to say that it is through faith, Christians participate in God's love; and, as God's love effects one's love of

¹⁸ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 23-25.

¹⁹ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 10.

²⁰ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 16.

²¹ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 17-19.

²² Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 22.

God and one's neighbors, the Christian love carries the characteristics of God's love, including particularly that of without self-interests.²³ In other words, due to their acceptance of the divine love embodied in the salvation of Jesus Christ, it is possible for Christians to love God without self-interest and love their neighbors as Christ loves them.

According to Mannermaa's interpretation, Luther took the salvific work of Jesus Christ as the paradigm for divine love, the clue for our understanding of God's love, and the foundation for the commandment of love one's neighbors. This Christocentric approach to the understanding of God's love was in line with Luther's theology of the cross. According to Luther, contrary to the theology of glory associated with scholastic theology and common opinion, which tends to uphold the inherent value and goodness of the object of love, a theology of the cross affirms that God's divinity is hidden in God's humanity, God's wisdom is revealed in the seemingly foolish cross, and God's love orients to the sinful, poor and foolish human beings.²⁴ Regarding the commandment of love one's neighbors, Luther repeated again and again, one should love one's neighbor as Christ loves them.²⁵ As Jesus Christ represents God's pure love without self-interests, one should love one's neighbors in the same way – love them for their own sake and not for the sake of any good or advantage we might gain from them.²⁶ In short, one should be "Christ to one's neighbors."²⁷

Mannermaa endeavors to argue that for Luther, to be "Christ to one's neighbors" is not merely a moral commandment. It is because,

²³ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 80.

²⁴ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 27-43.

²⁵ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 67.

²⁶ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 70.

²⁷ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 64-65.

“In Christ, God bestows upon human being not only the good gifts of the created world but also God’s own divine essence. In Christ, God begins to restore and return the paradise where God is in the hearts of human beings, and human beings are in one another’s heart.”²⁸

Mannermaa further elaborates,

“It is fair to say that Luther is a representative of a particular doctrine of divinization, to use a concept from the early church. In agreement with the common heritage of Christian churches, Luther teaches that the Word became flesh, so that the flesh might become Word. This applies primarily to Christ, but it also applies to Christians in the sense that Christ is truly present in their faith.”²⁹

As Christ’s presence in faith is real, Mannermaa argues, it is possible to say that “the Christian ‘is Christ’.”³⁰

Based on Mannermaa’s explanation, for Luther’s theology as a whole rather than the letter of the 28th thesis alone, selfless love is not absolutely impossible for human being. But the crucial question remains: is it possible for Christians to love God and their neighbors with divine love, which, according to Luther’s characterization, refers to “what is not” and evil?³¹ If it is possible, does it imply that God is either evil or non-existent or created? In other words, even with Mannermaa’s interpretation, it remains impossible for Christians to love God with divine love, according to Luther’s characterization of divine love. However, as Mannermaa explains, in

²⁸ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 55.

²⁹ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 64.

³⁰ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 64.

³¹ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 78.

addition to the paradoxical expressions, Luther employed also the method of synecdoche, meaning that Luther's characterization of human and divine loves focused merely on a particular aspect of them, namely their contrast vis-à-vis each other. In this sense, though human love is characterized as a kind of love which seeks for one's own interests and orients towards "what is" and/or valuable, this characteristic does not represent the totality of human love and does not exclude the possibility that someone – in a sense or to a certain extent - can love others with divine love. Therefore, human love is not always or absolutely in contradiction with divine love.³² Of course, one may then wonder if Luther's characterization of divine love, which was closely associated with his theology of the cross, might have similar problem of being one-sided or over-generalized.

Anyway, according to Mannermaa's interpretation, the contrast between divine and human loves made by Luther in *Heidelberg Disputation* was primarily rhetorical – aiming at highlighting their relative contrast, and should not be taken as formal definitions of human and divine loves. Given this understanding of the literary style employed by Luther, a relevant question is: whether and to what extent the 28th thesis of *Heidelberg Disputation* could accurately reflect the difference between Luther's position and that of his intended opponent(s)?

As Mannermaa admits, in the recent studies, it is found that the difference between Luther and Aquinas on the issue of human and divine loves is not as huge as previously thought.³³ According to Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther, the most distinctive contribution made by Luther might lie perhaps not in the contrast between divine and human loves made in *Heidelberg Disputation*,

³² Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 5-6.

³³ Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 10.

but the Christocentric approach subsequently developed. Werner Jeanrond agrees that instead of neglecting human love, Luther tended to emphasize the limitation or imperfection of human love that it always includes egoistic dimensions. Furthermore, Luther took serious the union between God and human being, and shift the emphasis from God's gift of love to God's love in Christ.³⁴ Concerning the difference between Aquinas and Luther, Jeanrond succinctly summaries "Whereas for Thomas Aquinas love was infused by God, in Luther love is essentially linked to the work of Christ and the cross."³⁵ Notwithstanding of this contrast in terms of their theological approaches to love, the question remains whether and to what extent Luther's criticism of Aquinas was valid, especially on the latter's understanding of divine and human loves.

Love in Thomas Aquinas

After the *Heidelberg disputation*, Luther made a statement concerning the disputation. The statement reads:

"These theses were discussed and debated by me to show, first, that everywhere the Sophists of all the schools have deviated from Aristotle's opinion and have clearly introduced their dreams into the works of Aristotle whom they do not understand. Next, if we should hold to his meaning as strongly as possible (as I proposed here), nevertheless one gains no aid whatsoever from it, either for theology and sacred letters or even for natural philosophy. For what could be gained with respect to the understanding of material things if you

³⁴ Werner Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 98-99.

³⁵ Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 102.

could quibble and trifle with matter, form, motion, measure, and time — words taken over and copied from Aristotle?"³⁶

According to the statement, Luther's disputation aimed to show the inadequacy of Aristotle's philosophy for theology as well as the prevalent theological misunderstanding of it. Though the statement did not explicitly mention the name of Aquinas, one may wonder if Luther's thesis on human and divine loves implies his criticism of Aquinas' adoption of Aristotle's philosophy.

There is no doubt that Aquinas made extensive references to Aristotle and there seemed to be certain similarities between their thoughts. However, the differences between Aquinas and Aristotle are equally if not more important. As Michael Sherwin points out, Aquinas clearly differentiated sensual love from spiritual love, which refers to the love among the divine persons as its paradigm and to the friendship between God and human being. For Aristotle, friendship between God and human being is impossible because they are not on the same par, whereas for Aquinas, it is possible, but it is based not on the similarities between God and human being, but on God's active communication (*communicatio*), which is comparable to Aristotle's concept of participation (*koinonia*).³⁷

In similar vein, Eleonore Stump clarifies that although Aquinas also talks about the four virtues advocated by Aristotle, namely prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, Aquinas contends that

³⁶ For an English translation of "A Statement Concerning the Heidelberg Disputation, made by Luther Apparently Soon After its Conclusion", see: Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation", 70.

³⁷ Michael Sherwin, "Augustine and Aquinas on Charity's Desire," in: *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, edited by Harm Goris & Lambert Hendriks & Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 177-198, esp.189-198.

what really belonging to Christianity are the theological virtues of faith, hope and love (*caritas*). Whereas the former four virtues are to be acquired through relevant practice, the last three theological virtues are the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be infused to us through the works of God. Furthermore, for Aquinas, without love, there is no virtue at all. In short, Aquinas' ethics is not Aristotelian at all.³⁸

Dominic Farrell further highlights the Christian or theological character of Aquinas' ethics, instead of its philosophical character, by pointing out that Aquinas discussed love, faith and hope mainly from the Trinitarian and eschatological perspectives, without neglecting the Christological dimension. It is through Christ, especially his humanity, Christians can participate in the divine essence. Aquinas makes reference not only to 2 Peter 1:2-3 concerning one may share the essence of God through Christ, but also Ephesians 3:17 concerning Christ lives in us through faith. Besides, Christ, especially his paschal, is the perfect embodiment or example of love. In other words, through faith, Christians can become participants of Christ and his grace, or sharers of the divine essence.³⁹

One may thus find that although Aquinas made use of many terms from Aristotle, there were fundamental differences between their positions. Furthermore, what Luther attempted to criticize concerned Aquinas' discussion on sensual love rather than on spiritual love. Aquinas' view of spiritual love actually exhibited

³⁸ Eleonore Stump, "True Virtue and the Role of Love in the Ethics Aquinas," in *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, pp.7-24. Similar emphasis on the non-Aristotelian character of Aquinas's ethics can be found at: Eleonore Stump, "The non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions," in: *Faith, Rationality, and the Passions*, edited by Sarah Coakley (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 91-106.

³⁹ Dominic Farrell, "Partakers of the Divine Nature through Christ," in *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, 61-78.

significant similarities with that of Luther, including their emphases on the initiative taken by God in communication and sharing with human being, the paschal of Christ, Christian participation in God's life through faith, etc.

Between Luther and Aquinas

Based on the above clarifications on Aquinas' position on love, one may find not only the major differences between Aristotle and Aquinas, but also the significant similarities between Aquinas and Luther. Furthermore, some of the implicit or explicit criticisms of Aquinas were based on misinterpretation or oversight of some aspects of his thought. For instance, there is no doubt that in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas did talk about that God loves the creatures according to their various degrees of perfection, and the concept of order of charity (*ordo caritatis*) is thus formed.⁴⁰ As the source of all goodness as well as the totality of goodness, God is at the top of this hierarchy, and the creatures are ranked according to the respective degrees of perfection or similarity to God.⁴¹ It is thus a graded, hierarchical, or differentiated love. However, in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas also suggested, while it is possible to say that God loves one thing more than another, it is equally possible to say the contrary that God does not love this thing more than that.⁴² In other words, the criticism made by Luther and echoed by Mannermaa might have overlooked the universal and impartial aspect of love advocated by Aquinas.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II/2, 26: 1.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II/2, 26: 9.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 91.

An illustrative example to the universal and impartial aspect of love advocated by Aquinas is Aquinas's concept of compassion (*miser cordia*). Contrary to Aristotle, Aquinas took it as one of the virtues, and endeavored to argue that it is a moral as well as natural virtue. According to Aquinas, although it is not a theological virtue, it is motivated by love and aims at those who are in suffering, including those who suffer because of deserved punishment.⁴³ In this sense, as a sort human love,⁴⁴ *miser cordia* may orient to sinners, fools, etc. As Paul J. Wadell points out, according to Aquinas, human love and divine love are distinct but not separate. One loves God for the sake of God and loves other human beings also because of God. Since God loves all creatures, one should love all creatures, including sinners, accordingly. In this sense, it is impartial and universal without any discrimination. However, according to human nature, one's loves towards other human beings, in terms of form and intensity, may vary according to the nature of relationships involved and how close are their respective relationships. It is a reflection of the human finitude as well as the divine wisdom. This is not to say that one should restrict one's love within the boundary of family or kin because this will lead to injustice. On the contrary, one should have *miser cordia* towards the strangers, especially those who suffer; not to see the others as unrelated strangers, but to take them as those who are loved by God.⁴⁵ Furthermore, to love the neighbors for God's sake is not to take them in an instrumental manner, but to help

⁴³ John O'Callaghan, "Misericordia in Aquinas: A Test Case for Theological and Natural Virtues," in *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, 215-231, especially 222-231.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that for Confucianism, especially Mencius, *miser cordia* should be a natural virtue reflecting the natural goodness of human being. See: Pan-chiu Lai, "Confucian Understanding of Humanity and Rationality in Conversation: A Chinese Christian Perspective," in *Rationality in Conversation: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, edited by Markus Mühling et al (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 321-335.

⁴⁵ Paul Wadell, "Charity as a Way of Life," in *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, 199-214, esp. 205-211.

them turn away from sin and embrace virtue.⁴⁶ Aquinas' concept of *miser cordia* may be a counter example illustrating that human love can carry the characteristics of divine love, and thus challenging Luther's rather negative stereotype or over-generalization of human love as well as the validity of Luther's stark contrast between divine and human loves. Furthermore, closely related to it is an even more fundamental query concerning the ethical adequacy of Luther's own interpretation of love one's neighbors.

Luther's interpretation of love one's neighbor, according to Mannermaa, was based mainly on Jesus Christ's self-sacrificial love which represented the divine love towards human beings. This seems to be in stark contrast to Aquinas' concept of friendship love or benevolent love, which was supposed to be based on self-love because it was a sort of reciprocal love sharing each other's goodness and helping each other to actualize the inherent or internal goodness. As Eberhard Schockenhoff indicates, Aquinas was probably the first Christian theologian introducing the Aristotelian concept of friendship (*philia*) to analyze God's charity and to highlight the mutuality and equality in friendship (*amicitia*). According to Aristotle, friendship, which is supposed to be "love of like for like and exchange among equal partners", is impossible between God and human being. However, Aquinas argued that it is possible because God effects the communication (*communicatio*) with human being in creation, incarnation, and election; and, in the fellowship (*koinonia*) between God and human being, it is God who takes the initiative, and human being responds with love rather than merely receives in a

⁴⁶ Paul Wadell, "Charity as a Way of Life", 206-207. Here Wadell mentions that for Aquinas, only demons are to be excluded from charity's love because they resolutely set against God's good and our own. Against this, in a Mahayana Christian theological perspective, perhaps even demons can be objects of love as well. See: Pan-chiu Lai, "Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective," *Ching Feng*, n.s. 12 (2013), 19-42.

passive way.⁴⁷ Without denying the mutuality and equality in Aristotle's concept of friendship, Aquinas affirmed the mutuality or reciprocity between God and human being by appealing to the divine salvation which elevated human being to friendship with God.⁴⁸ Furthermore, for Aquinas, friendly love (*amor amicitiae*) is a sort of pure love (*amor purus*) which aims at benefiting one's friend, whereas concupiscent love (*amor concupiscentiae*) seeks for one's own good. Though friendly love should be mutual instead of unilateral, it can be initiated by one side of the friendship. In this case, friendly love can be altruistic or for the friend's / neighbor's good, instead of egoistic or for one's own profit. This is not to suggest a dichotomy between altruism and egoism. In fact, the actual situation is more complicated. For Aquinas, there are so many objects of love involving different forms of love. Other than God and oneself, human being may love one's parents, spouse, children, brothers / sisters, etc. in different forms with different degrees of intensity. In terms of form, for instance, one loves one's spouse with passion, but one's parents with respect. In terms of intensity, one may love those who are nearer to oneself than those with remote relationship with oneself. An order of charity (*ordo caritatis*) is thus to be formed.⁴⁹ The order of charity seems to assume the primacy of self-love, but as Schockenhoff clarifies, for Aquinas, the apparent primacy of self-love over love of neighbor refers primarily to the natural weight of the human will, rather than a statement of normative ethics.⁵⁰ Furthermore, for Aquinas, "Since the order of charity is not primarily grounded by the natural limits of the human ability to love, but by

⁴⁷ See: Eberhard Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23-46)," trans. by Grant Kaplan and Frederick G. Lawrence, in: *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown university Press, 2002), 244-258, especially 246-251.

⁴⁸ Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23-46)", 248.

⁴⁹ Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23-46)", 254-255.

⁵⁰ Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23-46)", 253.

the many-leveled orientation to God as the principle and foundation of life, its validity remains unconfined to one's 'state in life'.⁵¹

In contrast to Aquinas's concept of order of charity, which can respond to different kinds of recipients with different kinds of love, Luther's approach tends to talk about love one's neighbors indiscriminately without further differentiation. One has to wonder if this indiscriminating love of one's neighbors can adequately respond to the diversity of neighbors with various kinds of relationship with oneself. This is not merely a matter of unintended omission or under-development of Luther's thought because Luther's Christocentric approach to love one's neighbors simply does not support it. For Luther, from a soteriological point of view, everybody is sinner in front of God and there should be no difference among different persons in this regard. Assuming that in his salvific work Jesus Christ embodied divine love alone without human love, if Christians have to love their neighbors as Christ loves them, the diversity of natural relationships with one's various neighbors should play no role here. But for Aquinas, as God creates different kinds of creatures, there can be different kinds of relationship among the creatures themselves.⁵² One may then challenge, on behalf of Aquinas, if Luther's Christocentric approach to the commandment of love one's neighbors can take into proper consideration these diversified natural relationships among the creatures to form a more adequate as well as practical ethics for Christians. One may then further query, if Luther's thesis, together with Mannermaa's interpretation, misleadingly assumed the contradiction between

⁵¹ Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23-46)", 255.

⁵² Based on Aquinas' interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo*, one may affirm not only the diversity of creation, which reflects the richness of the divine goodness, but also the inter-dependence of the creatures. This may lead to a more environmental friendly attitude. See: David Fergusson, "Loved by the Other: *Creatio ex nihilo* as an Act of Divine Love", 270.

benefiting the others and benefiting oneself. For Aquinas, they should not be mutually exclusive or in opposition to each other because love can and should be mutual or reciprocal rather than merely unilateral. Given these differences, perhaps Aquinas might query, if he had the chance to do so, if divine and human love are as divergent as Luther articulated in *Heidelberg Disputation*.

It is important to note that underlying the important yet subtle differences between the positions of Luther and Aquinas on the relevant issues is the divergences of their approaches to the issues. First, Luther tended to understand divine love rather exclusively in the perspective of Jesus Christ's salvific work and thus highlight the divergence between divine and human love along this line. In contrast, Aquinas attempted to interpret divine love in the perspectives of not only the incarnation and suffering of Jesus Christ, but also the doctrines of the Trinity as well as creation, and then understood human love accordingly. Second, Luther took the salvific work of Jesus Christ as the paradigm for a self-sacrificial love without self-interest towards those undeserving in order to affirm the contrast between an altruistic divine love and an egoistic human love, whereas Aquinas assumed the mutuality among the divine persons of the Triune God as the basis to affirm the mutuality in the friendship between God and human being, and to affirm that self-love and altruistic love are not mutually exclusive. Third, Luther took Jesus Christ's salvific work as the paradigm to interpret the commandment of love one's neighbors and to uphold a universal and impartial love which disregards the variety of natural relations among human beings. In contrast, Aquinas preferred to interpret the commandment in the perspective of order of charity, which affirms a universal and yet differentiated love which may respond to different recipients of love with different forms of love. These differences between Luther and Aquinas indicate that Christology plays a crucial role in Luther's

approach to and interpretation of divine and human loves. The question is whether there is an alternative interpretation of Christ, including his salvific work, leading towards a more adequate understanding of the relationship between divine and human loves.

Concluding Remarks

Based on the analysis outlined above, one may find that in *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther emphasized the contrast or tension between divine and human loves. He might have misinterpreted Aquinas and exaggerated the differences between his theology and scholastic theology. However, the most important problem is not whether Luther's criticism of Aquinas is fair, but whether Luther's own position is theologically tenable and ethically practical. If one follows Luther's characterization of divine and human loves, one has to ask if it is possible for human being to practice divine love and whether Jesus Christ, who is supposed be fully human and fully divine, had "human love" as it is negatively characterized in the *Heidelberg Disputation*. If it is affirmed that Jesus Christ had both divine and human loves, one has to wonder whether and how human love, which seeks for one's self-interest, was united with divine love in Jesus Christ.

If one follows Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther, one may find that there is no absolute contradiction between divine and human loves, and practicing divine love is possible for human being. Furthermore, there can be some common grounds between Luther and Aquinas and thus basis for dialogue between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. As David Tracy suggests, the greatest contribution made by Augustine (354-430) towards the Catholic understanding of love lied at his efforts in integrating the concepts of *eros* with *agape*

in *caritas*, and affirming that in this synthesis *agape* transforms instead of rejects *eros*.⁵³ As the above discussion indicates, this position was basically inherited by Aquinas, and in line with the Thomist principle that grace perfects instead of neglects nature. According to Mannermaa, Luther might agree that due to God's love, human being may start with self-love and then learn how to love God and other human beings without self-interest. In this sense, divine love transforms rather than rejects human love. There are thus significant similarities between Luther and Aquinas in this respect, which is reminiscent of the Orthodox doctrine of deification.⁵⁴

Following this line of thought, perhaps one may further explore if the issue concerning how human love and divine are united in Jesus Christ can be addressed by exploring further the Orthodox theological tradition. Based on the Christological definition adopted at the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Third Council of Constantinople (680), under the influences of the theology of Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662), affirmed that Jesus Christ had two wills - one human and the other divine - as well as two operations (or principles of action), and that the relationship between the two wills, as well as that between the two operations, was comparable to the two natures of Christ – “no division, no change, no partition, no confusion”, and the two wills and two operations occurred most fitly in him for the salvation of the human race.⁵⁵ In line with this understanding of Jesus Christ, Orthodox theologian

⁵³ David Tracy, “God as Infinite Love: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” in: *Divine Love: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Jeff Levin & Stephen G. Post (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2010), 139-144.

⁵⁴ For a comparison between Thomas Aquinas and orthodox theology, especially Gregory Palamas (1296-1357), on the issue of deification, see: A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford university Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ See further: Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 258-289.

Vigen Guroian suggests, with a Trinitarian perspective, the tension between self-sacrificial love and love as mutuality is overcome in the incarnated Christ, who demonstrated that *agape* is not merely self-sacrificial love, but rather a dynamic process opens onto reciprocity, intimacy, and communion with the other, while *eros* points to the capacity for unity, especially the unity with goodness, instead of selfishness.⁵⁶ Guroian thus concludes, "In Christ, man's [sic] 'natural' 'inner' movement toward the Godhead is consummated, and man's [sic] capacity to reciprocate God's love is perfected in communion. In Christ, human love and divine love are commensurate: they are one in his Person."⁵⁷ This Christologically based understanding of the unity between human and divine loves seems to be in stark contrast to the "dialectical" understanding of divine and human loves articulated in *Heidelberg Disputation*. However, without constructing a similar Christological basis, Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther, with its emphasis on Luther's understanding of deification, seems to indicate that it is possible for Luther to accept this orthodox and balanced Christological basis for a more coherent understanding of the relationship between the human and divine loves. To this extent, in spite of its limitations, Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's position on human and divine loves can make certain contributions to the ecumenical dialogue on this issue among the Protestants, Catholic and Orthodox churches. In fact, the Orthodox Christological approach to a more coherent understanding of divine and human loves is also relevant to the dialogue between Christianity and the religions it encounters in contemporary Asia.

⁵⁶ Vigen Guroian, "The Humanity of Divine Love: The Divinity of Human Love," in: *Divine Love: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, 201-218, esp. 210, 212-213.

⁵⁷ Vigen Guroian, "The Humanity of Divine Love: The Divinity of Human Love", 216.

It is noticeable that Luther's "dialectical" approach to divine and human loves in *Heidelberg Disputation* may sound all too "dualistic" in comparison to the "non-dualistic" way of thinking prevalent in various religious / philosophical traditions in Asia.⁵⁸ For instance, Mahayana Buddhism, which flourishing mainly but not exclusively in East Asia, emphasizes the ideal of bodhisattva which combines supreme wisdom with infinite compassion, especially the self-sacrificial love towards all sentient beings.⁵⁹ This may be reminiscent of Luther's emphasis on Jesus Christ's self-sacrificial love. However, following the early Buddhist doctrine of dependent arising or dependent co-arising (*pratīyasamutpāda*), Mahāyāna Buddhism affirms not only the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), but also the ontological non-duality between sentient being and the Buddha through upholding the doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha or Buddha-nature, which is embodied in all sentient beings.⁶⁰ As Ernst M. Valea suggests, the Mahāyāna doctrine of Buddhahood as human perfect exhibits certain similarities with the Orthodox doctrine of deification.⁶¹ Instead of affirming some sorts of infinite *diastasis* between humanity and divinity, both traditions tend to affirm the non-duality between humanity and divinity. In similar vein, one may find also the convergence at this point between the Confucian affirmation of the unity of Heaven and humanity (*tian ren he yi*) and the orthodox (and not exclusively Orthodox) doctrine of

⁵⁸ For the non-dualistic way of thinking in Asian religious and/or philosophical traditions, see: David Loy, *Non-duality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ See: Sangharakshita, *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Wisdom and Compassion in Buddhism* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1999).

⁶⁰ See: Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, second edition 2009), 103-128.

⁶¹ Ernst M. Valea, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 26-79.

deification.⁶² In other words, in contrast to the position articulated in *Heidelberg Disputation*, the Chalcedonian Christological tradition advocates for a non-dualistic understanding of human and divine natures as well as loves, is more compatible to the non-dualistic understanding of humanity and divinity advocated by Mahāyāna Buddhism and Confucianism. It is thus expected that there are many grounds for the Christian dialogues with Mahāyāna Buddhism and Confucianism.

As the Chalcedonian understanding of the non-duality of human and divine natures in Jesus Christ may lead to a non-dualistic understanding of divine and human loves, the doctrinal dialogue on the non-duality of humanity and divinity may also lead a dialogue at ethical level concerning the relationship between divine and human loves and its implications for the Christian praxis in Asia. This kind of dialogue may be particularly relevant to the dialogue with Confucianism which plays an important role in the cultural and ethical traditions of East Asia. It is rather well known that Confucianism upholds the human capacity of benevolence (*ren*) as the foundation of morality, and advocates for love with various gradation (*cha deng zhi ai*) based on the diversity of natural relationships. These seem to contradict Luther's position on human and divine loves, especially his taking the self-sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as an expression of divine love towards undeserved sinners as well as the foundation for a Christian ethics of love one's neighbor indiscriminately. In contrast, Aquinas' approach to the non-duality between divine and human loves may make positive

⁶² See: Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Pan-chiu Lai, "Shaping Humanity with Word and Spirit: Perspectives East, West and Neither-East-Nor-West," in: *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World* edited by Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 131-149.

contributions to the ethical dialogue with Confucianism. For instance, Aquinas' understanding of order of charity, which affirms different kinds and/or degrees of love in different kinds of relationship, is quite comparable to the graded love associated with Confucianism as well as the evolutionary understandings of human altruism.⁶³ It may also benefit the development of ecological ethics and its dialogue with Confucianism on ecological ethics.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most important contribution of a non-dualistic understanding of divine and human loves towards the Christian dialogue with other religions lies at its emphasis on the mutuality and reciprocity in love or friendship, which should be the basis as well as goal for the Christian participation in inter-religious dialogue.⁶⁵

⁶³ See: Pan-chiu Lai & Tao Wang, "Altruism in Christian, Confucian and Evolutionary Perspectives," *Sino-Christian Studies* 15 (2013.06), 183-214 (in Chinese with abstract in English).

⁶⁴ See: Pan-chiu Lai & Tao Wang, "Reconsidering St. Thomas's Ecological Ethics," *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture* 37.11 (2010.11), 155-173 (in Chinese with abstract in English).

⁶⁵ This article incorporates materials from: Pan-chiu Lai, "Divine Love and Human Love: Between Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas," *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 12 (2017.06), 109-119 (in Chinese with English abstract); and, "Divine Love, Human Love, and Non-Duality of Self and Other: A Sino-Christian Perspective," *Logos & Pneuma* 48 (2018.07), 197-222 (in Chinese with English abstract).

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