
This is a work of great erudition, as one might anticipate from a Professor of Systematic Theology who moves easily between at least three contemporary linguistic discourses – not to mention ancient ones – and who has been recently appointed as the first lay Master of St Benet Hall, Oxford. The writer’s lucid style enables the reader to navigate smoothly the complexities of the subject as well as to understand the rationale of the difficult choices he has made – the crucial decision in organisation of complex material. This is definitely a work for western Christians. Although the sources are totally Christian, Jeanrond criticises most of them for a lack of awareness that Christian love has deep Jewish roots. The major choice is the definition of *love as praxis*, not principle. Whereas I often wished for more concrete examples of praxis in certain historical instances, *praxis* as grounding metaphor is certainly helpful as interpretive tool in specific controversies.

The major controversy that haunts this work is the *eros-agape* polarity, eros seen as self-love or self-generated desire, and *agape* as love of other, sacrificial love, the mirror of God’s love for humanity in Christ. This polarity is the frame for the wider issue, the contrast or tension between Divine and human loving. Plato’s ghost haunts here. So, whereas after an initial chapter where the canvas of love’s praxis is painted very wide (a breadth that is almost impossible to measure up to in every context), and a biblical chapter where love of God/love of neighbour are seen as a seamless unity in Jesus’ own praxis of love, Jeanrond discusses the weight of Augustinian/Thomistic/Lutheran traditions where – with some differences – *eros-agape* are kept firmly separate, even polarised. The Augustinian attempt at a synthesis between *eros/agape*, namely love as *caritas* is rejected by Nygren – whose shadow has been given almost too much weight. But the gravity of the tension means that authentic Christian love must be seen as agape, because only here, it is argued, is love totally other-centred. The parable of the Good Samaritan is cited by many sources as paradigm of *agape*-love. The stumbling block seems to be not only that *eros* is seen as self-love, but that there is no developed anthropology of self, where healthy self-love is a pre-requisite of being able to love at all! (This is tackled to some extent in the final three chapters).
Not that the Biblical tradition does not have its shadow side! The predominance of the ascetic strand – increased by Augustinian pessimism – and the reduction in the degree of passion (pace The Song of Songs) have tended to mask the need for the whole person to be yearning for God (pp. 40-42). The mediaeval contribution has been – to some extent – to recover the human person as loving subject (Chapter 4). Through the mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, the courtly love of the troubadour culture, Thomas Aquinas’s theology of love, the mysticism of Hadewych of Brabant, the praxis of the Beguines and Luther’s own theology of love (followed by Jungel), a multi-faceted tapestry of love’s praxis begins to appear.

Jeanrond begins to address the *eros/agape* polarity with the contribution of modern theologians, namely Tillich, Rahner, Vincent Brummer and Jean-Luc Marion, all of whom attempt to reconcile *agape/eros*, and to re-think the divine-human relationship of love; Marion contributes a phenomenology of *eros*, but is found wanting when this is linked solely with procreative love (p. 160). But none succeeds in describing the social character of love – except Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005).

This leads to the themes of the final 3 chapters – the wider contexts of the praxis of love. In Chapter 7, ‘Institutions of Love’, there is much attention to marriage as an institution of love and for the growth of love. Whereas Jeanrond rightly underlines the ambiguity of the heritage of marriage, conscious of its potential to ‘underline the perspective of eternity for human love’ (p. 195), his gender analysis is limited. There is neither mention of the violence endured by women in marriage, often endured in passivity through a command to keep the peace at all costs; nor is awareness shown of such contemporary work on *agape* by writers like Sally Purvis. The latter shows how mother-love, while appearing to be sacrificial and other-centred, can often be extremely self-satisfying: such an analysis could have assisted in collapsing the *eros-agape* polarity, which Jeanrond has been attempting throughout. Chapter 8, ‘The Politics of Love’ contributes a helpful analysis of friendship (through Aelred of Rievaulx): but could Elizabeth Stuart’s contemporary work, *Just Good Friends*, not have made a more relevant contribution here, especially as she attempts to include gay and lesbians in her creative account of relational love? This comment is equally true of other areas – charity, peace, global ecological consciousness, and so on. Because