

only religious body to regularly utilize America's forests within worship services? This seems unlikely, but if so, how did this style of worship impact other Christian denominations? For example, Richey explains that many Methodist's "conversion experiences and calls to ministry came as they prayed and meditated in the woods" (p. 38). Other ministers, such as the Baptist William Miller, also experienced a call to ministry after prayer and meditation in the woods (cf. David L. Rowe, *God's Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World*, Library of Religious Biography, Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and Allen C. Guelzo, eds. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], 98). How did Miller's experience, and others like it, relate to Methodism? Or, are these experiences entirely unrelated? Perhaps early Americans in general found religious meaning and significance in the forests—a haven for spiritual devotion and prayer? Though it would not be necessary to give these questions lengthy consideration, at least some discussion may have been beneficial, as it would highlight the uniqueness and/or influence of Methodism.

In spite of a few distractions and suggested additions, it should be emphasized that Richey's book is highly recommended. It has an important focus—one with which all Christians can relate. It reminds the reader of an important aspect of early American religious life and offers principled lessons that remain valid today. Though times have changed, Richey has done a great service in highlighting the "theologically potent images" that early Methodists found in the American forest while journeying through "wilderness, grove, and garden" experiences.

Kevin M. Burton
Andrews University, USA

The Love of God: A Canonical Model, by John C. Peckham. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 295 pp. ISBN 978-0-8308-4079-3. Softcover, US\$32.00.

John C. Peckham (PhD, Andrews University) is an associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Peckham is author of *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* (Peter Lang, 2014) and several theological and philosophical articles in journals such as *Trinity Journal*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, and *Themelios*.

This book is a summarized and re-organized version of his dissertation about divine love. Peckham evaluates two models of divine love in the context of the relationship between God and the world and proposes a third. The first model is grounded in classic theism, and he calls it tran-scendent-voluntarist. The second model is described as immanent-experientalist and comes from process panentheism. Using Scripture's canon as the foundation of his research, Peckham proposes what he calls the foreconditional-reciprocal model of divine love. He focuses on five particular aspects in this evaluation: whether God's love is (1) volitional or essential, (2) disinterested or evaluative, (3) impassive or emotional, (4) unconditional or conditional, and (5) unilateral or reciprocal.

The book has nine chapters that can be divided in three sections: Three introductory chapters (first, historical; second, methodological; and third, regarding vocabulary), five chapters that analyze the five aspects of divine love (volitional, evaluative, emotional, foreconditional, and reciprocal), and a final chapter about divine ontology. The book includes three indexes: by author, subject, and Scripture's references.

The historical review shows that the classic concept of love is the result of the ideas of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Anders Nygren, and eventually systematized in the thought of Carl F. H. Henry. God is impassible and unaffected by the world. Divine love is sovereignly willed, unconditional, impassible, and unilateral. The opposite view, the immanent-experientalist model, comes from the panentheistic system of Charles Hartshorne. God includes the world via essential relationship, and, yet, is more than the world. Divine love is thereby essential to His existence, unconditional, relational, emotional, and supremely passible.

Peckham's methodology is introduced as a "canonical approach." Scripture in its final form is established as the foundational presupposition, including a high view of the process of revelation-inspiration. This approach considers the criteria of correspondence and coherence of the entire canon as a unified composition that includes human involvement and the context contained in the biblical record.

Peckham challenges the traditional distinction between *agape* and *eros*, in which *agape* corresponds to a kind of love which is unilateral beneficence, volitional, unconditional, unilateral, and impassible, whereas *eros* is egoistical and an inferior kind of love. The biblical evidence shows that both their Hebrew forerunner and the Greek words themselves are used interchangeably and overlap in meaning.

For Peckham, the Scriptures describe divine love as voluntary and not necessary or essential to God's being. However, divine love is not merely volitional or arbitrary because God has granted human freedom and therefore, includes other aspects of his love (evaluative, emotional, foreconditional, and ideally reciprocal).

God's love is evaluative meaning that God can appraise, appreciate, and receive value from external agents. This does not mean He is ontologically deficient. Love is not pure altruism, because "appropriate self-love and self-interest that does not exclude other-interest" (p. 131). God has voluntarily bounded His happiness to that of His creatures. The evaluative aspect of divine love is also related to divine evaluation in judgment.

Peckham rejects impassibility by saying that the Bible depicts divine love as profoundly emotional, but not merely emotional. God is able to have affective responses to the external world. Biblical language about God's emotionality is interpreted analogically. Yet divine love is not merely emotional because such love acts in conjunction with its volitional and evaluative aspects. God's emotions are affected, but not determined, by external stimulus.

Peckham has coined the term "foreconditional" to express the idea that divine love is bestowed prior to any conditions and that some elements of God's love are unconditional, while others are conditioned to a response. Peckham differentiates between (1) God's subjective love, which expresses His unconditional and everlasting loving disposition of His character of love and (2) God's objective love, which is conditional with respect to divine evaluation and relationships because God expects a proper response to His love. In a corporate sense, divine love is unconditional because God will love and save some people and is conditional because those who will be loved and saved are those who will fulfill the conditions.

God's love is ideally reciprocal, yet asymmetrical. God desires and seeks to establish bilateral relationships with His creatures. This mutuality is part of the multilateral circle of love, which includes (1) love between the persons of the Trinity, (2) love from God to humans, (3) love from humans to God, and (4) love from believers to one another. These four are alike in nature, though not necessarily equal or symmetrical. Universally relational love is different than God's subjective love because it is bestowed foreconditionally. This kind of love can be forfeited if it is not reciprocated.

The author does not pretend to have a complete understanding of God's essence. Such a goal is beyond human cognizance. He posits that while intra-trinitarian love is essential to God, His love for His creatures is voluntary, and is not essential or necessary for His being. God is ontologically independent from the world and self-sufficient, but He "has voluntarily bound his own interests to the best interests of creatures" (p. 256). God's will is ontologically independent and significant because it is free. He also has given significant, albeit limited, freedom to His creatures. God is thereby not the only causal agent in the universe, and His ideal will is not always done. Peckham rejects divine impassibility. God's immutability is understood as God's changelessness of character rather than His inability to

experience history and respond to it. God is omnipotent—He does not require the use and exercise of power. He has voluntarily limited Himself by bestowing freedom of choice on other beings. Without that freedom, authentic love can not exist. Allowing evil is the result of human freedom, which in turn is the result of divine love for them.

There are many things to praise about this volume by Peckham. His methodology allows a biblical-grounded description of divine love. It is not only biblical theology, but a very systematization of the biblical idea of divine love. It is a conservative methodology, one that uses Scripture in its final form as the ultimate epistemological basis. The analogical interpretation of the language of God helps to reach an idea of divine love more coherent with the biblical content. There is no need of interpreting the Bible as an accommodative language thereby imposing preconceived presuppositions about the nature of God. The Bible must interpret itself.

The abundant bibliographical references and explanations are an example of well-grounded and quality research. The precise prose is structured and written in a way that is easy to follow. Peckham does not avoid deep philosophical debates. He offers an alternative, and necessary, explanation of the Biblical data about God that is different from both the impassible God of classical theism and avoids the impersonal God of liberal pantheism.

Peckham proposes a picture of God that is much closer to the active and personal God of the Bible. It is a balanced view that includes both His highest capacities as described in the Bible (sovereign, all-powerful, etc.) and those attributes that define His treatment with His creatures, highlighting His relational being. He interacts and lives day by day with His creatures. He shares emotions and argues with them. The final outcome is a beautiful picture of divine love.

The limitations of the book are imposed by the very nature of the topic, as recognized by the author. It is not possible to go beyond what is revealed about God and the way He loves us. Even so, Peckham presents a carefully reasoned ontological basis for his proposed model that is foundational for further developments in the study of the character of God, specifically the relationship between God's being or essence, His will, and His moral attributes. This is important to understand the role of God's character in divine providence or governance, and the place of divine love in the eschatological judgment. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to know more about God, His love, and how to have a closer relationship with Him.

Sergio Celis

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, PHILIPPINES
