chaeology, director of archaeological publications, and associate curator for the Horn Archaeological Museum, notes, “We find a lot of western terra sigillata and African red slip. These kinds of wares have been known for a long time in Europe.”

Due to the “long history of imported wares,” scholars are able to date ceramic remains down to 25-year increments. “We have experts that come in and tell us exactly what part of a specific time period the artifact is from,” says Ray. The team also uses 3D scanners to scan the objects.

Photography and drawing top plans are another important part of the data collection process. Jacob Moody, a PhD student, took photos of each field every day using an industrial camera pole, which functions like a glorified selfie stick. After taking photos of the fields from several different angles, he used special software to stitch the photos together, creating a 3-D geo-referenced panorama of the field.

The Andrews’ team members are not the only ones excited about what they were discovering. “The local people are very much interested in archaeology,” says Younker. “The press came out several times and we were in several newspapers.” “They are so excited that we care about their history, their ancestry, and their world,” agrees Gane. The local archaeology group has shown their support for the project by putting together an evening conference at the end of each season to highlight the excavation.

Findings from the excavation have also been presented at the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) annual meeting in a special session dedicated to Sicily. “This year we are having a second all-Sicily session and we have some important speakers including Lorenzo Negro, the director of digs at Jericho and Sicily,” says Younker.

Younker is also working with contacts in Sicily and ASOR to set up an ASOR-run archaeology research institute in Sicily similar to ASOR’s American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Jordan. This would provide visiting and resident archaeology scholars with a central location for relevant books, articles and other resources relating to Sicilian archaeology. It would also function as a place for visiting scholars to stay during extended research periods.

The team returned to Sicily this summer with the goal of learning more about the history and inhabitants of San Miceli. Younker plans to continue opening up a large structure, which they now think is a villa, in Field A and excavate more of the basilica in Fields B and C. “We hope to find some houses,” he says, particularly “earlier houses during the transition” from the Roman period to Christianity.

San Miceli provides archaeology students with the Paleochristian context for excavation, which is a first at Andrews and in the Adventist church. Students can now excavate at sites relevant, both in location and time, to the Israelite exodus, the monarchy, the exile and the fledgling Christian church. In all likelihood, early believers meeting together at San Miceli discussed events that took place not far from the Madaba Plains and the sites of Tall Hisban and Tall Jalul.

2 http://www.madabaplains.org
3 Fine red Ancient Roman pottery with a glossy slip

Below: Shelly Cox excavating a tomb at San Miceli

Deep Text

Developing a Canonical Theological Method

“Divine love is a central component of God’s character, with abundant implications regarding all areas of theology.” So begins the opening chapter of “The Love of God: A Canonical Method” by John Peckham, associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy.

“The Love of God” was born from Peckham’s dissertation, which he completed at Andrews University. Peckham was originally interested in working on the problem of evil, but found that it was too large to engage in a dissertation. “At the center of the problem of evil is the concept of God’s love,” explains Peckham. Peckham decided to focus on divine love, “not just love itself, but what it is in the context of the God-world relationship, which has implications relative to determinism and other essential theological concepts.”

However, in order for Peckham to study the biblical concept of divine love, he needed a methodology. Adventist systematic theology is still in the developmental stages, so Peckham “had to think carefully about how to construct a model systematically that was consistent with our well-established exegetical models.”

Peckham began by inverting the standard methodology of investigating from “first principles” to the text. Instead, he attempted to begin with the text, searching for what it could tell him about the first principles. Building on the work of Fernando Canale, professor emeritus of theology and philosophy, Richard Davidson, J.N. Andrews professor of Old Testament interpretation, and eminent scholar Brevard S. Childs, Peckham developed an approach he calls the “canonical theological method.”

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The canonical theological method understands “canon” to mean both rule of faith and a unified collection or corpus, namely the biblical text. For Peckham, “Scripture is the canon because it consists of just those writings that God divinely commissioned to be canonical in the sense of a rule of faith. And if God commissioned them to be canonical in the sense of faith, what else should we build our theology on?”

This method posits that, if one takes the canon as the rule, all interpretations must continually be measured against the canon. Individuals may not come to the same interpretation and may in fact disagree, and Peckham argues, “our interpretations will never be final. This is not a problem, rather it’s an opportunity to continually reform and correct our views so that they are in line with Scripture.”

While modern scholars took a stance of “hermeneutical positivism,” believing that everyone could come to the same conclusions if they read the text using a certain method, Peckham acknowledges that reading the biblical text is far more complicated. He also disagrees with communitarians, who argue for the community or its creeds to play the role of “normative interpretive arbiter,” reading the text through the lens of the Nicene or other ecumenical creeds in order to reach a consensus.

“The problem with the communitarian view is that if you say there is an extra-canonical normative interpretive arbiter of Scripture, then what truly has functional authority? Scripture can only say what the interpretive arbiter allows it to say,” he explains. Peckham rejects isolationism, the idea that every individual becomes their own interpreter, as well. “We have to recognize that there is a proper role for the community, it’s just not determinative or final.”

So how do we interpret the Scriptures? Peckham suggests looking at the interpretive process as a “hermeneutical spiral,” which he defines as “a continual spiral at two levels of what are called the hermeneutical circles.” In the first circle, there are two parties: the reader and the text. The reader brings presuppositions to the text, “but the text affects the reader and, if it is a canonical text, the reader should always submit to the text. It is a kind of disposition towards the text; an intentional posture that you take, not just a methodological step.”

“I found many things that contradicted what I would have thought, which was comforting, because it led me to believe that I wasn’t imposing my view on the text all the time.”

The second circle “is the circle between the individual parts of Scripture, or micro-exegesis, and the canon as a whole.” The reader’s presuppositions affect how they read the individual texts and their reading of the individual texts informs the understanding of the canon as a whole. “Both should be working together in a reciprocally helpful spiral in a way that the reading of the canon never imposes on the individual texts.”

Exegetically, there may be more than one acceptable reading. But, Peckham suggests, “the canonical reading can help choose between those options. If the canon is a congruent corpus, there may be only one or two options in a given pericope that fit with what the rest of the canon says.”

He applied the canonical theological method in his research on divine love, taking great care to allow his questions of the text to be shaped by the canonical investigation. “I found many things that contradicted what I would have thought, which was comforting, because it led me to believe that I wasn’t imposing my view on the text all the time,” he says with a laugh.

Peckham worked his way through the entire Bible, flagging any texts that related to the questions he was asking. Using this inductive method, he systematically analyzed all the flagged verses, looking for patterns. His analysis factored in “how words were used in the text both thematically and conceptually. It opened up an abundance of word groups related to delight and pleasure, which are closely associated with love.”

He eventually came to five aspects of divine love, which are distributed across the various canonical sections (law, writings, prophets, etc.). “I also used secondary sources, going through commentaries on both sides of the historical critical argument, and developed a model that responded to the questions about divine love,” he says. He then used that model to flesh out the implications for the God-world relationship.


Peckham is now coming full circle to the topic that originally sparked his interest: the problem of pain. Using the same inductive method, he has systematically surveyed the entire biblical text for relevant pericopes and is now analyzing the themes and patterns that have emerged from the text. Before him lies a laborious journey through the data he has gathered.

For Peckham, the theological landscape changes with his deepening understanding of biblical literature and each new project he tackles. “Classical Theology,” he says, “was trying to build a cathedral that they could defend. I use the analogy of a moving wilderness sanctuary. We aren’t trying to build all the structures of ontology and epistemology, not that we don’t speak to these areas, but we don’t answer all the questions these areas raise because we might not have enough data to answer all of them to our satisfaction. We want to move with our understanding of the canon.”