

It is evident to me that Osborn has opened a dialog that is important and fascinating. Those who have an interest in hermeneutics (principles of interpretation) in relation to science and theology should read this book. Whether or not you agree with specific details of Osborn's proposal, you will be informed and challenged by the very relevant issues he has presented.

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Peckham, John C. *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 297 pp. Paperback, \$32.00.

In *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*, John C. Peckham compares two sharply opposed concepts of divine love and offers a constructive alternative to both. Central to what he labels the "transcendent-voluntarist model" is the notion of a radical distinction between God and world. God is entirely self-sufficient, and God's love for the world is purely voluntary. God does not need this world or any creaturely world. Moreover, God's relation to the world contributes nothing to God's experience. Nothing in God is conditioned by anything outside of God. In contrast, the "immanent-experientialist model" envisions God as both intimately and essentially related to the world. For "process panentheists," like Charles Hartshorne, God's very existence requires the existence of beings other than God, and God's experience includes God's relations to all non-divine reality.

According to Peckham, these views of divine love present us with an impasse. While they offer sharply different views of God, neither does justice to the biblical portrayal of God. As an alternative to both, Peckham offers a perspective on divine love derived directly from the "canonical data." According to "the foreconditional-reciprocal model," as he calls it, God's love for the world is "voluntary," but not "exclusively volitional" (90). That is to say, while the world exists solely as the result of God's decision to create, God is not responsible for everything that happens in the world, and God is genuinely affected by it. To spell this out, Peckham describes God's love as having five important aspects—volitional, evaluative, emotional, "foreconditional" (his novel expression), and reciprocal—and he devotes a chapter to each of them.

God's love for the world is volitional in the sense that creating a world was a choice God made rather than something God was required to do by nature. It is not exclusively volitional, however, because within God's general commitment to the world and care for it, God occasionally chooses to act in specific ways. Divine election, for example, expresses specific decisions involving particular people. And while it rests on God's loving choice, it also requires a human response. Love between God and the creatures presupposes freedom on both sides.

Other aspects of God's love clarify and amplify its volitional character. God's love is evaluative in the sense that God not only bestows value on the creatures, God receives value from them. "The joy of others is integral to God's own joy" (145). It also indicates that God's response to human behavior

is not one of mere undifferentiated “sympathy.” Good and evil are real to God, and God’s responses to them are different.

Similarly, the canonical data indicate that God is genuinely affected by human decisions and actions. Numerous passages, from Hosea to the parables of Jesus, attribute compassion and joy to God as well as pain, disappointment, and even “wrath” in response to human behavior. God is also described as changing God’s mind in response to human decisions and actions. While human emotions are only analogically applicable to God, it is impossible to do justice to the biblical accounts of divine experience without attributing emotions to God.

To the volitional, evaluative, and emotional aspects of God’s love, Peckham adds “foreconditional” and reciprocal aspects—the two features he uses to identify his position. There is a sense in which God’s love is unconditional, he states, but it is not exclusively so. Divine love is not universally experienced, not because God arbitrarily withholds it or withdraws it, but because God’s creatures have the freedom to reject it and thereby forfeit its benefits. To put it succinctly, God’s subjective love is unconditional, but God’s objective love is not. He also notes that the five aspects of divine love surveyed in his book pertain to God’s objective love, since they refer to God’s love in relation to the world (212).

Peckham’s discussion of God’s love as reciprocal brings to a climax his commitment to the interactive nature of God’s relation to the world. “This (ideally) reciprocal love relationship is the framework that encapsulates and requires the volitional, evaluative, emotional, and foreconditional aspects of divine love” (219). God’s love seeks, and finds fulfillment, in a relationship where it is returned, or reciprocated, as we see in the history of the biblical covenants. While God’s universal love—God’s love for all—is unconditional, God’s love for those who respond to God has unique qualities; it is “special and intimate” (242). Whether the reciprocity of God’s love is realized, therefore, depends on the specific way in which people respond to God.

Peckham’s concluding chapter mentions a number of questions that require further discussion, such as divine determinism, which he rejects, and exhaustive divine foreknowledge, which he accepts, although he acknowledges that his concept of God’s love does not require it.

By any account, Peckham’s project is a noteworthy achievement. Extensively researched and carefully documented—the footnotes are invaluable—it is expansive in its coverage of an important and complex topic, yet clearly and accessibly developed. It follows a well organized path over a broad landscape of theological issues.

An informed and well developed argument will always raise interesting questions, and Peckham’s project certainly does that. One concerns the “canonical model” of the Bible that he identifies as basic to his enterprise (note the book’s subtitle). It expresses the conviction that the biblical documents as we have them, all sixty-six, bear the distinct imprint of divine authority and, for that reason, constitute a unity (See Peckham’s account of “intrinsic canonicity” in “The Biblical Canon: Do We Have the Right Bible?” *Ministry*

Magazine 80.6 [2008]: 16–19). This allows the interpreter to regard various biblical statements on a topic as having more or less the same significance and to look for consonance within varied biblical descriptions. As Peckham sees it, such an approach excludes attempts to account for the contents of the Bible by going behind the extant texts in order to reconstruct their development. He dismisses such endeavors as “speculative” and irrelevant to his purposes. His view also renders virtually irrelevant the history of the canonical collection itself, even though it spanned centuries.

In spite of the emphasis Peckham gives it, this particular view of the Bible is not really essential to his project. One need not accept his dismissal of historical and canonical criticism in order to appreciate his insights into the biblical accounts of divine love. Nor is one required to do so in order to treat the Bible as a unity. As Peckham mentions in a footnote, one can embrace a “canonical horizon” from a literary perspective and treat the final form of the canon as a unified document (57, n. 40). The fact is a number in the scholarly world today do just that. They desire to move beyond historical criticism, with its preoccupation with the history and composition of the biblical documents, and its tendency to ignore the reality that the biblical documents may function as a unity, and have done so for centuries within communities of faith. See, for example, Yvonne Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and B. H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

If Peckham’s canonical view of the Bible receives, perhaps, more attention than it really needs, in light of the book’s principal concern, there are other topics that arguably receive less. Given both the specific theme of the study and the impressive scope of its analyses, for example, I find it curious that Peckham declines to explore the Trinitarian dimensions of divine love. True, we cannot expect a single work to do everything, and Peckham specifically limits his inquiry to “divine love in the context of the God-world relationship” (60). But his extensive discussion of the latter invites at least some consideration of the Trinity, especially since he acknowledges that “love between the persons of the Trinity . . . models the ideal nature of all love relationships” (228). This echoes the conviction of numerous contemporary theologians that the love characteristic of God’s relation to the creaturely world both reflects and expresses the love that constitutes the divine life itself. (“Rahner’s rule” inevitably comes to mind: The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity). I would like to have heard more from Peckham on this topic.

I am also puzzled by the relative lack of attention that open theism receives. Those who advocate the openness of God are dedicated to the same objective that drives Peckham’s own discussion, namely, to find a biblically informed alternative to unacceptable views of divine independence from, and divine dependence on, the world. Peckham cites their work from time to time, yet he nowhere discusses it at length. Along with the work of Thomas J. Oord, which he cites here and there, often in conjunction with that of Charles

Hartshorne, he might have mentioned the extensive efforts of Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory A. Boyd, to mention a few, all of whom address a number of Peckham's central concerns from a perspective similar to his.

One question that open theists are bound to ask, however, is how Peckham can consistently affirm God's intimate sensitivity to the world and God's genuine interaction with the creatures—both features of his foreconditional-reciprocal model and important elements in an open view of God—and yet accept the traditional view of divine foreknowledge. True, he concedes that the latter is not essential to his model of divine love, but for open theists the two are logically incompatible. If God sees the future in all its detail, open theists maintain, then God's experience already includes the future, and the actual occurrence of events contributes nothing new. It may be true that we anticipate things without fully experiencing them, but this distinction could hardly apply to God. For if God knows the entire future absolutely, then there can be no difference in God's experience between anticipation and realization. The notion of exhaustive foreknowledge excludes it.

There are other theologians, too, whose work Peckham might well have considered. He mentions Charles Hartshorne a number of times, an important process thinker, and one whose writings provide a good example of the "immanent-experientialist model." But Hartshorne—as well as Alfred North Whitehead, who is somewhat better known—was a philosopher, not a theologian, strictly speaking. I wonder why Peckham, in view of his extensive analyses of theological sources, did not rely more on thinkers who employ process thought in their work as Christian theologians, such as John B. Cobb, Jr., Schubert M. Ogden, Daniel Day Lewis, David Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki. In general, representatives of the "transcendent-voluntarist model" receive far more space than those of this position.

Whatever additional avenues Peckham's discussion might have followed, the wealth of information he provides and the clarity of his presentations will make his study valuable to a wide variety of readers. It is a noteworthy contribution to contemporary reflections on God.

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Smith, Gary V. *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook*. Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014. 214 pp. Paperback, \$22.99.

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