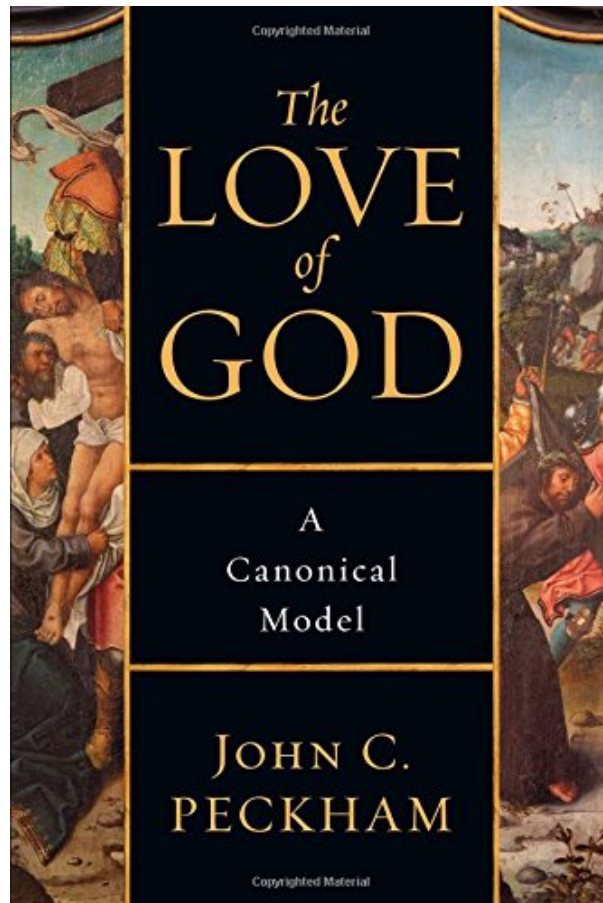
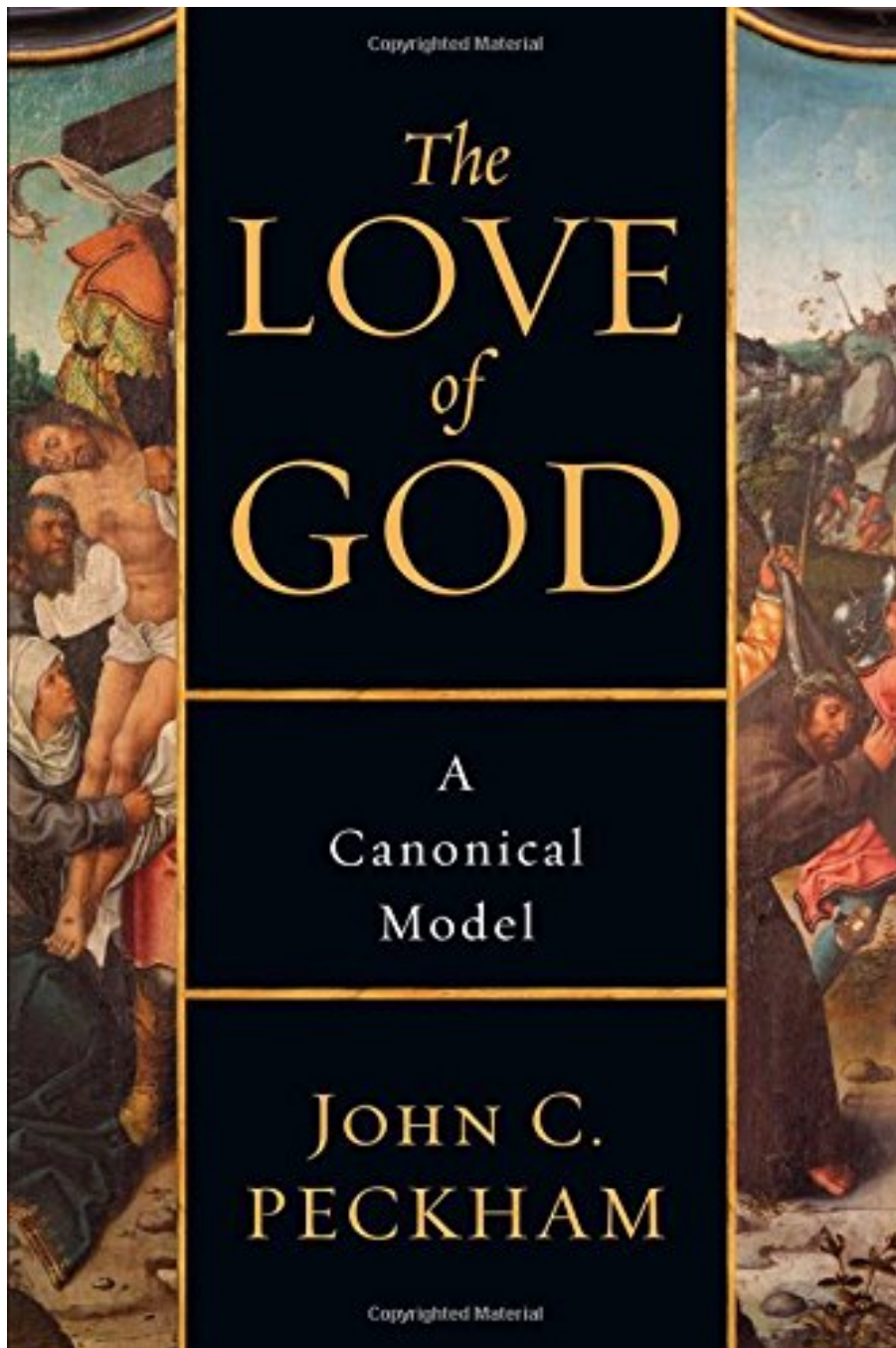


THE LOVE OF GOD: A CANONICAL MODEL BY JOHN C. PECKHAM



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Review

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"In view of the universal agreement that love is a crucially important attribute of God, it is astonishing that we so often are content to operate with conceptions of love that are hastily adopted, often from popular culture, without thorough consideration. John Peckham seeks to remedy this state of affairs with a thorough biblical examination of the love of God, bringing the text into dialogue with the multitude of popular conceptions of love. Strongly recommended for all who seek to understand how it is that God loves them." (William Hasker, emeritus professor of philosophy, Huntington College)

"What strikes me about *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* is four things: its learning, sophistication, originality and comprehensiveness. Concerning its learning: the author is impressively conversant with almost all of the relevant literature, so far as I can see. Regarding its sophistication: the author displays a subtle and sophisticated grasp of the issues; he is sure-footed in theology, biblical interpretation and philosophical theology. That combination is hard to come by. Concerning its originality: rather than running with the crowd, the author questions common assumptions on a lot of points, on almost all of which, in my view, he is correct. And concerning its comprehensiveness: the author looks at God's love from a large number of different angles; every other treatment that I know of is 'pinched' by comparison. My judgment is that this promises to be a very influential book." (Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale University)

"Few beliefs about God are more distinctive of Christianity or more appreciated by Christians than the truth that 'God is love.' But not all Christians understand this statement in the same way. John Peckham focuses on God's love in the context of God's relationship with the world, and he describes clearly and carefully the

different conceptions of God's love that exist within the church. Though his main text is not difficult to read, the multitude of biblical references cited and the abundance and diversity of his references to the work of other scholars in his footnotes make this a highly valuable resource for further study. Peckham contributes very helpfully to our understanding of God's love through his presentation of the big picture he has constructed from careful theological interpretation of the Bible, viewed as a whole. His foreconditional-reciprocal model of divine love offers a mediating position between the transcendent-voluntarist model of classical theism and the immanent-experientialist model of process panentheism. This is a model in which God's love is volitional, evaluative, emotional, foreconditional and ideally reciprocal. Although I have arrived at a more monergistic model than Peckham has, I benefited from both his exegetical work and his reverent elucidation of how God loves and relates to the world. His book not only stimulated me intellectually; it often prompted me to worship. I commend it heartily to those who want to grow in their love of God through contemplating anew, and more deeply, what God has told us about his loving self in his inspired Word and demonstrated to us in his deeds supremely in Christ." (Terrance L. Tiessen, professor emeritus of systematic theology and ethics, Providence Theological Seminary, Canada)

"The Love of God: A Canonical Model makes an important contribution to issues that are of central concern to both biblical and systematic theology. John Peckham shows mastery of a wide array of biblical and theological literature and has impressively deployed such resources in this well informed and carefully nuanced and hermeneutically sophisticated work. Peckham is clearly committed to the authority of the biblical text and to letting it guide his conclusions. The 'foreconditional-reciprocal' model of God's love in relationship to the world that Peckham defends is a biblically illuminating and theologically attractive proposal that deserves serious consideration and makes a significant contribution to scholarly theological literature." (Jerry Walls, Houston Baptist University)

"A noteworthy contribution to contemporary reflections on God." (Richard Rice, Seminary Studies, 54, Spring 2016)

"Whether or not one chooses to pursue all the questions that The Love of God raises, the wealth of information it contains; the clarity of its presentations; and, above all, the lofty theme it pursues will prove valuable to a wide variety of readers." (Richard Rice, Ministry, January 2016)

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2015 Readers' Choice Award Winner - "For God so loved the world . . ." We believe these words, but what do they really mean? Does God choose to love, or does God love necessarily? Is God's love emotional? Does the love of God include desire or enjoyment? Is God's love conditional? Can God receive love from human beings? Attempts to answer these questions have produced sharply divided pictures of God's relationship to the world. One widely held position is that of classical theism, which understands God as necessary, self-sufficient, perfect, simple, timeless, immutable and impassible. In this view, God is entirely unaffected by the world and his love is thus unconditional, unilateral and arbitrary. In the twentieth century, process theologians replaced classical theism with an understanding of God as bound up essentially with the world and dependent on it. In this view God necessarily feels all feelings and loves all others, because they are included within himself. In *The Love of God*, John Peckham offers a comprehensive canonical interpretation of divine love in dialogue with, and at times in contrast to, both classical and process theism. God's love, he argues, is freely willed, evaluative, emotional and reciprocal, given before but not without conditions. According to Peckham's reading of Scripture, the God who loves the world is both perfect and passible, both self-sufficient and desirous of reciprocal relationships with each person, so that "whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

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the book is scripturally based, and shows a transparent use of sola, prima, and total scripture

By Amazon Customer

In the midst of a diatribe between two prominent models of divine love: transcendent-voluntarist model, and immanent-experientialist model, which pretend to hold the belt of truth, Dr. Peckham situates between these two opponents, thus pursuing a thorough understanding of their reasons, and further contrasting these two models with a third model known as foreconditional-reciprocal. Dr. Peckham does this undertake by systematically evaluating five questions around which the whole debate hinges, and such questions are: 1. Does God choose to love some or all? 2. Does God only bestow value, or can He appraise, appreciate and receive value? 3. Does God love include affection and emotionality? 4. Is Divine love conditional or unconditional? And 5. Can God and human be involved in a reciprocal love relationship? Dr. Peckham starts his quest for answers stating that his research will be based on three anchors which are: first, a high view of the Canon Text as revealed by God, therefore infallible, second, the view of the Canon Text as a dual authorship, and as an indivisible divine-human entity of revelation and inspiration, and third, a grammatical-historical exegesis procedure, a sound search that will ultimately lead to reliable scriptural-based answers. According to the author of the book *The Love of God*, there are five aspects of divine love, such as: volitional, evaluative, emotional, foreconditional, and reciprocal. The investigation starts by a analysis of semantics in both OT, and NT for the term translated as love and concludes that The Bible favors a foreconditional-reciprocal model where Divine love in relation to the world is "voluntary but not arbitrary", even more, God takes evaluative delights and pleasure in, creatures. However it is also true that under negative circumstances, God "may be displeased, vexed, and grieved." God also is presented in the Scriptures as "affectionate and loving . . . affected by the world in feeling joy and delights in goodness, yet

sorrow, passion and intense anger at evil” Peckham remarks that according to the Bible, God is “emotional, but not merely emotional” qualitatively passible, volitional and even evaluative. The foreconditional-reciprocal model, According to the author, advocates for a Divine love, which is “ideally reciprocal, yet asymmetrical” universally enabling a reciprocal natural response, and concludes that this reciprocal Divine-Human love encompasses all the other aspects of Divine love.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Professorial and Passionate

By Michael Philliber

Some theological subjects are highly controversial within Christianity, such as election, predestination, and sacramentology, to name a few. But then others would appear to be fairly straightforward, uncontroversial and standard fare; the love of God, for example. But John H. Peckham, associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy at the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, reveals the storm that swirls around this subject in his new 297 page paperback, “The Love of God: A Canonical Model”. The book is noticeably intended for academic circles, but written simply enough that a patient reader of whatever educational attainment can engage with it.

The first indication that “The Love of God” is going to be seriously scholastic is when the reader glances through the book and notices mounds of footnotes that mind-numbingly thunder across the bottom of every page. The 1,025 footnotes can be as short as a one-line notation, and as full bodied as five complete paragraphs. If the annotations were removed the book would drop in size by a third! And yet these arduous addendums on each leaf hide tasty tidbits and insightful interruptions. To get through the book profitably, the reader may have to be selective as to when he picks through the footnotes, and gloss over the rest.

Peckham’s nine chapters are packed with biblical references and scenes to make the case that the Biblical God has emotions and that these emotions are real. And from within this mix of emotions, God loves with a real love. For the author that means that God’s love for the world is freely given, not essential to his being or necessary to his existence. But also that God’s love for humankind is not unilaterally willed but “requires the free response of humans to God’s freely given love. Thus neither God nor humans love each other by necessity” (114). The author takes on two camps of thought, what he denominates the transcendent-voluntarist and the immanent-experientialist camps, and plots out his third way, the foreconditional-reciprocal model.

The transcendent-volitional arrangement holds that God needs nothing, lacks nothing, does not desire or receive anything for his on advantage. When it comes to God’s love, he is impassible (without passions), so that his love is an act of his will, not to scratch some itch he has or fill up any lack (16-26). God’s love “is freely, sovereignly willed and unmotivated beneficence. God freely bestows love on all but also decides to love only some unto salvation (election love)” (89).

In the immanent-experientialist configuration God is in the process of becoming within relationships; the knower is changed by what is known. God is partially dependent and independent, being determined and self-determining; he is the moved-mover, the feeler of all feelings. Therefore, with regard to love, God is continually growing and enjoying the ever-increasing value of the world (26-31). Since God’s love is essential to himself, ontologically necessary, then his love is “universal as sympathetic, indeterministic relationship” (89).

The author’s standpoint reaches out to draw in aspects of both outlooks, guided through the grid of Scripture, to form his own synthesis. The foreconditional-reciprocal platform posits that within the God-human relationship “God’s love is (1) voluntary but not based solely on his will, (2) evaluative and deeply interested

in the world, (3) profoundly emotional and passible, (4) foreconditional, but not unmerited, and (5) ideally reciprocal, that is, love relationship is universally available yet particularly enjoyed by those who freely reciprocate God's love" (247). God has voluntarily bound his own interests, both his joy and suffering, to the welfare of the world; but he remains independent of any relationship, being perfect and self-sufficient, not growing from his relationship, and not in need of this or any other world. Nevertheless he "desires a reciprocal love relationship with each person" (278).

By the end of the book it becomes clearly obvious that one of the author's main programs is to enter the old "Arminian-Calvinist" fray and come out clearly on the side of indeterminism, as he might call it. Peckham clearly states that, "the foreconditional-reciprocal model interprets the canonical evidence to mean that humans are called (invited) by God to be part of his elect but that humans possess the God-given ability to accept or reject God's call and, consequently, love relationship with God" (108). This is a subtle theme that weaves through each chapter becoming more noticeable by the end of the book.

"The Love of God" is an in-depth study of the emotionality of God, his relationship to the world, and the love of God. It's profitability is that it stimulates a renewed interest in rethinking what is meant by the impassibility of God, and especially what do we mean when we talk about "God so loved the world." It is a worthwhile read, with the few exceptions already noted, and would make excellent material for seminary classes. I recommend the book.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A Deep Look at God's Love

By Mike Robinson

The Bible declares: "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). The biblical God is love. He has loved, through all eternity, as the Father loved the Son and the Holy Spirit. Love flows to man from God's nature because love is an eternal attribute of the true God. God as Father offers free grace and eternal love to sinners. This is a mystery that John Peckham explores in precise detail utilizing analytical theology with a breadth most students will appreciate.

"God is love" (1 John 4:9).

God's love is established on His nature. His ontic character does not change. Considering that God's love is bound to His character and being, His love is tied to His changelessness, sovereignty, and goodness. God declares His love for His covenant children, a love which will never change because God never changes. He is not the ultimate source of eternal love—the true God is the God of love and because He does not change and He is faithful. He will love those who are His forever and ever.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Professor Peckham answers questions such as:

- What does it mean that God loves people?
- Is God's love necessarily part of His ontology?
- Is God's love impassible or emotional?
- How do people love God and how does it affect Him?
- Does the love of God include longing or gratification?
- Is God's love always unconditional?

It is not simply that God “loves,” but that He is love itself. Love is His very ontology. But what that means and how that applies to humanity is what Peckham explores. Questions touching whether the love of God for His people is as eternal as the eternity of His being—in other words is it as everlasting as His uncreated being? Is it an immovable aspect of His eternal and infinite ontology? Perichoresis is a theological term concerning the doctrine of the Trinity that specifies the intimate union, mutual indwelling, and mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in relation to one another within the one God—The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually have eternally loved each other. Hence, love is eternal and an eternal aspect of God’s being. William Harrell observed, “The immeasurable, unchangeable, and unconditional love of God is something that is wonderful and precious beyond our abilities to assess. We who are the objects of that divine love are infinitely more treasured by our heavenly Father than we can know.”

I affirm that an important aspect of God’s nature is that God Himself is eternal, and God is love—since God Himself had no beginning, His love never had a beginning. Yahweh’s love is never altered. Human love at times fails. We may not hold, hug, and care for a family member during a spell of annoyance or selfishness; one may even walk out on one’s family. Some folks may have a little toddler come up and surprise them, and plant a big kiss on their cheek, but sometimes they might nudge the little one away because people can change and experience moodiness. God is a whole Trinity, in which the three Persons indwell each other in love. And because of that the Lord of Scripture loves His children from everlasting to everlasting. He does not change.

Even though I uphold strict classical theism as I profess that God has aseity and He is necessary, perfect, impassible, simple, atemporal, immutable, and holy, I still enjoyed this work. I contend that God has the classical (biblical) attributes without being capricious, arbitrary, and cold.

Professor John Peckham’s “The Love of God” is a rich tapestry of impressive scholarship from the pen of a fine theologian and scholar. Peckham defends his position by employing theological, philosophical, and ontologically approaches that attempt to make God’s love more comprehensible and thus more human. I may disagree with some of his conclusions, but I found this volume useful and intriguing, it addresses a wide range of topics concerning true “agape” and the love of God.

This is an important volume for ministers, seminary students, and scholars, yet it is written in a readable style that makes it accessible for the non-specialist.

Review by Mike Robinson author of “The Essential Trinity” available on Amazon.

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"What strikes me about *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* is four things: its learning, sophistication, originality and comprehensiveness. Concerning its learning: the author is impressively conversant with almost all of the relevant literature, so far as I can see. Regarding its sophistication: the author displays a subtle and sophisticated grasp of the issues; he is sure-footed in theology, biblical interpretation and philosophical theology. That combination is hard to come by. Concerning its originality: rather than running with the crowd, the author questions common assumptions on a lot of points, on almost all of which, in my view, he is correct. And concerning its comprehensiveness: the author looks at God's love from a large number of different angles; every other treatment that I know of is 'pinched' by comparison. My judgment is that this promises to be a very influential book." (Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale University)

"Few beliefs about God are more distinctive of Christianity or more appreciated by Christians than the truth that 'God is love.' But not all Christians understand this statement in the same way. John Peckham focuses on God's love in the context of God's relationship with the world, and he describes clearly and carefully the different conceptions of God's love that exist within the church. Though his main text is not difficult to read, the multitude of biblical references cited and the abundance and diversity of his references to the work of

other scholars in his footnotes make this a highly valuable resource for further study. Peckham contributes very helpfully to our understanding of God's love through his presentation of the big picture he has constructed from careful theological interpretation of the Bible, viewed as a whole. His foreconditional-reciprocal model of divine love offers a mediating position between the transcendent-voluntarist model of classical theism and the immanent-experientialist model of process pantheism. This is a model in which God's love is volitional, evaluative, emotional, foreconditional and ideally reciprocal. Although I have arrived at a more monergistic model than Peckham has, I benefited from both his exegetical work and his reverent elucidation of how God loves and relates to the world. His book not only stimulated me intellectually; it often prompted me to worship. I commend it heartily to those who want to grow in their love of God through contemplating anew, and more deeply, what God has told us about his loving self in his inspired Word and demonstrated to us in his deeds supremely in Christ." (Terrance L. Tiessen, professor emeritus of systematic theology and ethics, Providence Theological Seminary, Canada)

"The Love of God: A Canonical Model makes an important contribution to issues that are of central concern to both biblical and systematic theology. John Peckham shows mastery of a wide array of biblical and theological literature and has impressively deployed such resources in this well informed and carefully nuanced and hermeneutically sophisticated work. Peckham is clearly committed to the authority of the biblical text and to letting it guide his conclusions. The 'foreconditional-reciprocal' model of God's love in relationship to the world that Peckham defends is a biblically illuminating and theologically attractive proposal that deserves serious consideration and makes a significant contribution to scholarly theological literature." (Jerry Walls, Houston Baptist University)

"A noteworthy contribution to contemporary reflections on God." (Richard Rice, Seminary Studies, 54, Spring 2016)

"Whether or not one chooses to pursue all the questions that The Love of God raises, the wealth of information it contains; the clarity of its presentations; and, above all, the lofty theme it pursues will prove valuable to a wide variety of readers." (Richard Rice, Ministry, January 2016)

"The Love of God is an in-depth study of the emotionality of God, his relationship to the world, and the love of God. Its profitability is that it stimulates a renewed interest in rethinking what is meant by the impassibility of God, and especially what do we mean when we talk about 'God so loved the world.' It is a worthwhile read." (Michael Philliber, Deus Misereatur, December 5, 2015)

"Many people talk about how to do 'theological interpretation of Scripture,' but John Peckham actually does it in this book. He does it in a well-informed and thoughtful way, and he helps us gain a clearer and more biblical vision of the great love of the triune God." (Thomas H. McCall, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

"John Peckham brilliantly reassesses the concept of God's love, which is foundational for the theological framework of the entire Bible. Employing mastery of wide-ranging sources and keen, balanced logic, he shows how layers of philosophical and traditional assumptions and notions have come to filter and obscure the biblical perspective. Implications of this study for major aspects of Christian theology are profound. No doubt some scholars will resist Peckham's challenge to commonly held views, but none can justifiably ignore it." (Roy Gane, professor of Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern languages, Andrews University)

"To my knowledge, no other book on the subject of divine love tackles such an all-encompassing range of issues, lays such a solid biblical foundation for the argumentation, dares to question with such insightfulness many long-held assumptions about God's love that need revision, presents such cogent and erudite discussion

of relevant philosophical/theological questions, and provides a model for divine love consciously derived from a sola Scriptura canonical perspective." (Richard M. Davidson, J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation, Andrews University)

About the Author

John C. Peckham (PhD, Andrews University) is associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is the author of *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* and has published articles on issues of systematic theology and canon in journals such as *Trinity Journal*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* and *Themelios*.

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