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## Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God

Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer

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This volume contains the papers presented at the Sixth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference as well as an introductory essay by the editor, Kevin J. Vanhoozer. In his interesting essay, Vanhoozer introduces the issues regarding the concept of divine love in terms of what he calls a 'paradigm revolution' in theology. In classical theism the sovereignty of God was central to the way God was understood. In this context the love of God was seen as agape in the sense of sovereign and unconditioned benevolence. Vanhoozer points out that many modern theologians have come to doubt the adequacy of this view of God and have argued for a more relational form of theology in which love rather than unconditioned sovereignty becomes central to our understanding of God. Here love is to be understood as a reciprocal relationship in which God does not merely love us but also desires that we should freely reciprocate his love. God does not merely care for us benevolently but also cares about how we freely respond to his love. God suffers when his love for us remains unrequited and therefore incomplete.

In his contribution to the volume Gary D. Badcock discusses Anders Nygren's view that divine love is pure agape as opposed to the platonic eros which is characteristic of human love. He also refers to the way in which C.S. Lewis describes this distinction as one between gift love and need love. Badcock disagrees with Nygren's view that divine love is pure agape and argues that God also needs human goodness or potential goodness. To deny this would be to deny the meaning of the doctrine of creation.

Geoffrey Grogan discusses divine love from the point of view of biblical theology. After raising some methodological considerations concerning biblical theology, he traces the various ways in which, according to the Bible, God shows his benevolent love to humanity and to the world.

Lewis Ayers presents an exposition of the homilies on I John in which Augustine reflects on the love of God. Ayers points out repeatedly that Augustine's argument in these homilies is rather dense. Unfortunately Ayers does not always succeed in making these dense arguments clearer to the reader.

The contributions of Trevor Hart and Alan Torrance deal only tangentially with the love of God, and focus mainly on the semantic problems of talking about God in general and of his love in particular. If God is wholly other from his creation, how can we talk about him if our words derive their meaning from our

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talk about created reality? These papers contribute usefully to the classical debate on this issue.

In the first half of his contribution, Tony Lane discusses the reasons why the wrath of God is a neglected theme in contemporary theology. He then goes on to argue that 'the wrath of God should be seen as an aspect of his love, as a consequence of his love'.

Paul Helm discusses divine love in the sense of benevolence and enquires whether God's benevolence is equally distributed among all people. He concludes that God cannot be and therefore is not equally benevolent toward every human being.

David Fergusson argues that Calvin's doctrine of double predestination and Karl Barth's defence of universal salvation both fail because they deny human freedom to either accept or reject the gift of divine love. In this way they overlook the fact that love is by definition free. 'God does not wish our love to be coerced. Were it so, it would not truly be love, for love must be freely given and received.'

The final contribution to the volume is a sermon by Roy Clements on the love of God in Hosea 11.

Although this volume contains a number of interesting papers, it suffers from the difficulty of many conference volumes, viz. that the papers lack unity and often deal only indirectly with the conference theme. It is a pity that the papers do not connect more explicitly with the theme developed in Vanhoozer's interesting introduction. Some of the papers give the impression that Vanhoozer's 'paradigm revolution' never occurred!