

Book Reviews

God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism. By Bruce A. Ware. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001, 240 pp., \$15.99, paper.

The origin of this book is traceable to three lectures given at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, in 1999. The aim of this book by Southern Seminary's Bruce Ware is to set out the basic tenets of open theism and to evaluate them. Open theism is the view that specific, complete divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible. This means that God only has partial knowledge and control of the future, so that the future is open, at least to some extent. The task of this book is accomplished in three main sections.

Part One is a summary of the central beliefs of open theism and their supporting evidence. Open theists believe that the classical Arminian understanding of divine providence is inadequate. The classical understanding of God's complete knowledge of the future is without ground. Further, they hold that such knowledge of the future is incompatible with human freedom. Finally, simple foreknowledge of the future is no benefit to God in controlling that future. Ware follows this with an excursus on middle knowledge.

The support for such a view of God is found along five lines of argument. First, this is the only way in which the divine-human relationships portrayed in the Bible can be meaningful. Second, God has created creatures who are genuinely free and thus beyond his complete control. God has taken significant risks in the creation of such a world. Third, biblical state-

ments about the repentance of God do not have to be taken as anthropomorphisms; rather, they may be taken as cases of genuine repentance in light of new information. Fourth, open theism is able to understand straightforwardly statements in Scripture that God reassesses his plan in the light of new and unforeseen developments. Fifth, God's response to human suffering and pain is genuine. He wishes things would be otherwise.

Part Two is an evaluation of the biblical, theological, and philosophical arguments for open theism. Ware argues that the Bible teaches that God has exhaustive, comprehensive knowledge of all things including the future, that he is not a risk taker but has all things under his control, and that these truths are the ground for claiming that God is all-wise.

Part Three examines the consequences of open theism on a believer's daily life in three areas: prayer, direction and guidance, and pain and suffering. Defenders of open theism claim that their understanding of God has benefits for each of these areas of a believer's daily life. Ware argues that that is not the case. Perceived benefits do not exist. As a matter of fact, the real benefits are on the side of the classical view of God. Ultimately, open theism diminishes the glory of God.

How successful is Dr. Ware in showing that open theism ought to be a concern to those desirous of sound theology? Undoubtedly one's preunderstanding will influence one's assessment of this question. I am in theological agreement with Ware, so I find what he has to say both correct and convincing. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who

is interested in knowing what open theism is and what objections might be raised to it. I do think, however, that it is possible to set out at least three issues on which open theism depends. First, open theists depend on a certain view of human freedom called *libertarian* freedom. On this view of freedom, for an act to be free the agent must have contra-causal power. That is, the agent must be able either to do or refrain from that act. It is insufficient for the agent simply to will it. If God knows the future, including free acts, then either the agent must do what God knows or it is within the agent's power to cause God to have a false belief. Open theists, middle knowledge proponents, and classical Arminians all hold this view of human freedom. Compatibilist freedom is the alternative. It is the view that specific sovereignty or providence is compatible with human freedom. For an act to be free all that is necessary is that it be willed by the agent without external constraint. From a philosophical perspective either is possible. In my judgment compatibilist freedom is required from a biblical point of view.

Second, does the Bible teach that God has exhaustive knowledge, not only of the past and the present, but also of the future? Another way of putting this is, how does the Bible define omniscience? For the future to be open God must not know a good deal of the future. Furthermore, biblical prophecy in many cases must be reinterpreted. I find these reinterpretations to be entirely inadequate.

Third, one must decide the adequacy of classical Arminianism. Open theism is a radical revision of Arminianism in the light of the aforementioned problems. On this matter I think that open theists are right about the problem, but wrong in

their solutions. It is for that reason that I favor a Reformed understanding of divine providence, as does this helpful book by Bruce Ware. I hope the book enjoys a wide readership.

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World Christian Encyclopedia. Second edition. Edited by David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, vol. 1 vi + 823 pp., vol. 2 xii + 876 pp., \$295.00.

When the first edition of this work appeared in 1982, it was lauded as a monumental achievement of research, useful for mission strategists, church historians, and teachers of world religions and cults. My copy was bought for me by my wife as an anniversary present (that's a wife who understands a theologian!), and I made extensive use of it over the years, especially after I began teaching world religions and cults.

The problem with such a book, of course, is that it soon becomes dated, requiring a new edition (and a new investment). This new edition is about twice the size of the original, and is loaded with new features, such as an atlas, and special sections in which information can be seen at a glance (needed in a work so voluminous) on religions of the world ("Religiometrics"), cultures of the world ("Ethnosphere"), language profiles ("Linguametrics"), and overviews of major cities ("Metroscan"), and provinces ("Provincescan"). Whatever one may think of the postmodern neologisms used to designate these categories, the respective sections are quite helpful.

In addition, all of the demographic data have been brought up to date. The volume follows a country-by-country survey of living conditions, lifestyle, religious orientation, Christian impact, types of churches, and so on of each country and territory in the world. The information is presented in graphic form, and is easy to read and digest, though the type is small—a complimentary magnifying glass would have been nice. Each section ends with a brief discussion of “Future trends and prospects.”

It is hard to overemphasize the value of such a work. All libraries will need immediately to obtain this important new tool, as will many individuals who teach in the areas of missions, world religions, church history, and cults. Put in your request for next year’s Christmas present early, or skip a couple of dozen lunches till you can afford to pick this one up.

Chad Owen Brand