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Review: God's Lesser Glory: the Diminished God of Open Theism

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God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism. By Bruce A. Ware. Wheaton: Crossway, 2000, 240 pp., \$15.99 paper.

Bruce Ware is Senior Associate Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Christian Theology at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Perhaps best known as co-editor (with Tom Schreiner) of *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will* (Baker, 1995) and *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace* (Baker, 2000), Ware, however, is anything but a "static" Calvinist. His 1984 Ph.D. dissertation at Fuller was "An Evangelical Reexamination of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," which research led to "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God" (*JETS* 29 [1986] 431–46). Thus, Ware has himself proposed creative adjustments to the "classical" theological formulation.

This is an exceedingly important volume. To our knowledge, the only previous book-length critique of the openness of God/freewill theism perspective is McGregor Wright's *No Room for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism* (IVP, 1996). This appeared prior to John Sanders's *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (IVP, 1998) and Greg Boyd's *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Baker, 2000), both of which have impacted the escalating debate.

God's Lesser Glory consists of three parts. The introduction, "Why You Should Be Concerned," addresses the "so what?" question by familiarizing readers with the mounting controversy surrounding open theism and the theological "hot spots" the book examines. Part one, "What Does Open Theism Propose?" builds directly on the introduction. Ware succinctly deals with the development of open theism as a theological framework and as a departure from the classical Arminian position (chap. 2), then addresses "The Perceived Benefits of Open Theism" (chap. 3).

Part Two, "What's Wrong with Open Theism's View of God?" responds to Boyd's *God of the Possible* and Sanders's *The God Who Risks*. In Chapter 4, "Assessing Open Theism's Denial of Exhaustive Divine Foreknowledge," Ware critiques both the exegetical procedure of open theism and its subsequent application to key Scriptural passages often touted by open theists as support for their position. Chapter 5 outlines a "Scriptural Affirmation of Exhaustive Divine Foreknowledge" as Ware presents careful discussions of select passages of Scripture, against which open theists are at pains to argue effectively. Chapter 6 then addresses a minimally noticed difficulty in open theism: "The God Who Risks and the Assault on God's Wisdom."

Part Three exposes the problematic practical ramifications of open theism. Ware discusses how this position harms the Christian's prayer life (chap. 7), results in diminished confidence in God's guidance (chap. 8), and creates outright despair in the midst of suffering and pain (chap. 9). Finally, in his conclusion "God's Greater Glory and Our Everlasting Good," Ware restates the weaknesses of open theism and reasserts the orthodox view of God's sovereignty.

As to its strengths: (1) The irenic and even-handed, yet concerned, tone of Ware's treatment strikes a commendable balance. (2) The sketch in the introductory chapter of how this controversy has developed provides a historical context needed by many readers. (3) Ware's exegesis has a *broader* range than that of Sanders and Boyd (e.g. careful discussions of such relevant aspects as Genesis 18, Joseph, Job, Isaiah 41–48, Daniel and prophecy in general), exposing their inconsistencies in (so-called "straight-forward") hermeneutics/exegesis and, in the process, securing exhaustive foreknowledge. This breadth fits in with the figures Ware cites in footnote 2 on p. 100, which seems to assert that passages favoring the classical view of God's foreknowledge outnumber the "apparent counter-evidence" passages 4,695 to 105. (4) Ware's exegesis also probes *deeper* than his openness counterparts (e.g. Genesis 3 and 22, plus 2 Kings 20), exposing the shallowness of their thinking by playing out its doctrinal and practical implications. (5) The dramatic openness overbalance to divine immanence is articulated

clearly. (6) The thorny problems openness theism creates for Christian living are effectively laid bare.

Though *God's Lesser Glory* contains no glaring "weaknesses," there are several areas we believe are underdeveloped or overlooked: (1) The exegesis and theological reflection still need to be broader and deeper. For example, Ware does not touch on Eph 1:4 or Rev 13:8, key passages for both Sanders and Boyd. In addition, Saul's rejection in God's plan (1 Samuel 15) could be handled in a more conclusive fashion by referring to Gen 49:10 and the family tree that crowns Ruth. (2) Though it is helpful for Ware to mention his nuanced relational understanding of divine immutability (see his 1986 *JETS* article), it deserves more in-depth explication, given that the relational angle is a cultural contact point openness is exploiting. (3) Speaking of culture, it is surprising that Ware does not critique the openness viewpoint against its postmodernist backdrop. Since openness writers are quick to accuse classical theists of drinking at the well of Greek philosophy, it is entirely fair to point out the polluted postmodernist air openness thinkers are breathing. (4) Amazingly, there is no mention of "sin" in the entire volume (note the "loud silence" in the index, p. 236). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that openness exponents seldom mention sin and Ware is answering their stated views. However, given that Ware reflects sensitivity to the elevation of man that is openness's other-side-of-the-coin to the humanizing of God, this is a notable "big picture" absence for a theologian of Ware's acumen.

In conclusion, given what is at stake, *God's Lesser Glory* has not received the visibility it deserves. As the readership of openness theism books (supporters, detractors and the ranks of the curious) grows with each successive volume, there must be solid answers readily available to the wide-ranging assertions and radical implications of this thought. Until other up-to-date and focused book-length critiques that are in process appear, Ware's treatment admirably meets those educational and apologetic needs.

Though not quite as readable as Boyd's *God of the Possible*, Ware's writing style is still accessible to readers ranging from scholars to pastors to seminary and Bible college students to high lay level (especially Sunday school and Bible study teachers). As the storm clouds of the first great evangelical theological controversy of the twenty-first century gather, *God's Lesser Glory* should be considered "required reading" in all these categories, on both sides of the dispute.

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