

## Book Review:

### *The God Who Trusts: A Relational Theology of Divine Faith, Hope, and Love*

By Wm. Curtis Holtzen

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. 280 Pages.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Hogue

The God Who Trusts is a theological treatise that develops the idea of an open and relational theology. Wm. Curtis Holtzen is a Philosophy and Theology Professor at Hope International University and is the talented writer who authored the work. The introductory chapter begins by raising a difficult theological question: does God have faith? Rather than simply saying, “No” and shutting the book, I felt the strange urge to ignore the more reformed philosophical thoughts that I frequently entertain and give consideration to Holtzen’s bold statement. Perhaps God does have this characteristic? I apprehensively continued reading, trusting that Holtzen would not leave me adrift somewhere between Arminius and Calvin.

Holtzen’s introduction forthrightly states his a priori positions, which have been argued earlier by open and relational theists William Placher and John Sanders.<sup>1</sup> For those readers entering the conversation on open theism, it is the belief that all future events are not completely determined but are open to change according to choices of God and humans. Relational theology and open theology fit well together, as relational theology believes that God is a relational being and created humans for the purpose of making loving relationships. Holtzen immediately addresses some arguments of those who may reject these propositions out of hand, but also refers to Placher and Sanders in areas he believes they have already addressed. His purpose is not to thoroughly defend open and relational theism, but to expand the idea of God’s vulnerability and risk to include trust, belief, faith and hope. If the open theists are correct, Holtzen

argues these other additional attributes are necessarily implied. God’s kingdom building activities include his acts of faith in us, his willing human partners, and we have a key role in His work.

The following chapters are Holtzen’s arguments for the belief that God trusts. In Chapter 2, Holtzen parses out his concept of faith. He argues that faith is the dynamic intersection of belief, trust, hope, and loving devotion. If any of these components are missing, faith does not exist. In the remainder of the book, Holtzen endeavors to show that God has the prerequisite attributes for having his own faith. Chapter 3 looks to the biblical metaphors of God as a loving being, pointing to the idea that love and faith must coexist. Chapter 4 describes the open theists position of God’s omniscience and how God may also believe people may act in ways he expects. Chapter 5 explores the idea of trust as risk, and how the Bible describes God as bestowing trust on people. Chapter 6 centers on the topic of hope, building on the open theists position that humans are free moral agents. Hope is an attribute of God and he hopes that people will respond to his offer of salvation. Chapter 7 looks at Christ’s incarnation as an example of mutual trust and faith within the Godhead. God in essence trusts that the finished work of Christ is sufficient to bring about positive relational responses from humans back to God. Chapter 8 concludes Holtzen’s work by positing that if God has the above characteristics, then his faith is a fitting example for humans to emulate.

Holtzen’s work has a logical flow and is surprisingly readable for persons at an undergraduate level or higher.

<sup>1</sup> Placher, William C. *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1994. See also Sanders, John. *The*

*God who Risks: A Theology of Providence*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2007.

One of the book's weakness is the lack of attention to the implication these ideas could have on ministry practices, of which several come to mind. Partnering with God in ministry and failing to achieve his desired outcomes for any number of reasons would leave a minister morally culpable—not a comfortable notion, especially with eternal destinations of people are in the balance. *The God Who Trusts* is a courageous work that adds to the on-going conversation about the nature of God's partnership with people.