



# *Contents*

Contributors	vii
List of Abbreviations	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 — Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God	5
Chapter 2 — Responses to Paul Helm	53
Chapter 3 — A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God	76
Chapter 4 — Responses to Bruce A. Ware	121
Chapter 5 — The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God	148
Chapter 6 — Responses to Roger E. Olson	173
Chapter 7 — Divine Providence and the Openness of God	196
Chapter 8 — Responses to John Sanders	241
Author Index	259
Subject Index	263
Scripture Index	269

---

# *Introduction*

---

BRUCE A. WARE

Recent decades have witnessed a renewed and vigorous interest in the doctrine of God within evangelical theology. Theologians from the broad evangelical spectrum have produced both differing and innovative reformulations in understanding just who God is and how he relates to the world he has made. Only a moment's reflection makes clear that revisiting this doctrine amounts to a reconsideration of the foundations of the Christian worldview itself, taken at its largest and most comprehensive level. Everything in theology and life is affected by just how one understands the nature of God himself and the nature of God's relationship with the created order, particularly with his own people. A. W. Tozer could not have been more to the point: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Therefore, evangelical pastors, Christian leaders, and educated and concerned laypersons would benefit much from being aware of some of these proposed understandings of the God of the Bible coming from different evangelical scholars and communities.

The purpose of this book is to put before readers a sampling of some of the most important proposals for understanding the doctrine of God from within evangelical theology. Certainly the four positions described and defended in this book do not

exhaust the work being done, but these chapters provide a helpful understanding of key points along the spectrum of viewpoints that evangelical theologians are currently advocating. A careful reading of these chapters will go a long way to informing readers of some of the most prominent proposals of the doctrine of God offered today within the broad movement known as evangelicalism.

The design of this book is to offer two pairs of viewpoints on how God and his relations to the world should be understood, one pair of chapters coming largely from the Reformed camp, and the other pair from the movement of free will theism, more commonly thought of as the broad Arminian camp. Of course, both within Reformed and Arminian traditions, significant differences can be detected, such that neither camp is by any means monolithic. Because of this, we thought it best to represent both a more classical or traditional Reformed and Arminian perspective while also presenting more modified versions of each of these traditions as these have been developed in recent years. One will find, then, two Reformed perspectives and two free will theist (Arminian) perspectives in the four chapters of this book. In each case the defenses of the traditional views are coupled with some innovative modifications of these traditions which, while still Reformed and Arminian respectively, represent something of a modification of aspects of each of these traditions.

Paul Helm leads off the book, arguing for a classical Reformed understanding of the doctrine of God and of divine providence. He puts forward his A-team representatives in support of his Reformed understanding, purporting to show how Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas argued for and prepared the way for expanded developments in Calvin and others who followed him. As indicative of the heart of the Reformed understanding of God, Helm focuses attention on the concept of predestination in his endeavor to demonstrate a uniform understanding in the doctrine of God through the whole history of the church that was embraced and advanced within the Reformed tradition. In light of this proposal, Helm then finds troubling all three other

perspectives presented in this volume, seeing each of them, to lesser or greater extent, to deviate from this uniform classical tradition. In the latter part of his chapter, Helm then endeavors to show what he sees as some of the deficiencies of these other views, all of which depart, as he understands it, from the historical doctrine of God embraced in the Reformed tradition.

My own contribution endeavors to be faithful to the Reformed tradition, and in this respect I affirm much of what Helm has argued. But my deeper concern is faithfulness to the biblical revelation of God, which must ultimately direct the doctrines that we advance within the evangelical church. Ultimate allegiance to Scripture means that we must be willing to modify the traditions we inherit even while respecting greatly their wisdom and insight. My own Reformed model shows some modifications of divine attributes such as immutability and eternity and makes use of what appears in Scripture to be examples of divine middle knowledge in endeavoring to represent Scripture's portrayal of God's own nature and of the ways in which he relates to his human creation. Readers will find fundamental commitments of the Reformed doctrine of God are retained along with some significant modifications, all in an endeavor to be as faithful as I can be to the whole of God's self-revelation.

Roger Olson presents a clear and forthright case for a classical Arminian, or free will theist, understanding of God and his relations to the world. Olson endeavors to explain and defend a truly classical free will theist perspective rooted in the teaching of Jacob Arminius and John Wesley while acknowledging that other viable variations have been proposed in more recent years. For Olson a commitment to the love of God for the world that he has freely made, along with a recognition of God's sovereign decision to grant his moral creatures libertarian freedom, ultimately grounds the classical Arminian tradition in upholding its understanding of God and divine providence. Olson defends his perspective against a number of criticisms and provides biblical, historical, and philosophical support for his classical free will perspective of God.

Finally, in his chapter John Sanders provides one of the clearest short defenses available anywhere of what has come to be known as the open theist perspective of God and divine providence. Sanders highlights many significant points of common commitment with the broader Arminian tradition, endeavoring to demonstrate the legitimacy of his perspective as one that is rightly and genuinely within the free will theist tradition. But he also describes some of the reasons his openness view has departed both from the broader classical theist and, more narrowly, from the classic Arminian understandings of God. Providing sustained biblical and philosophical argumentation, Sanders argues forcefully for his perspective, answering many objections along the way. He ends with a short section in which he reflects on the debate of the past decade and tries to clear up some of the confusion, as he has seen it.

Readers, then, will find here a stimulating set of chapters, all of which are meant both to inform them of the contours of some of the discussion on the doctrine of God within evangelical theology and to provide argumentation they can assess in their own endeavors to understand the God of the Bible rightly. Clearly not all of the views reflected in this book can be correct. They disagree with one another at some fundamental levels. But the reader will be instructed and encouraged to think more carefully and to consider factors he may have otherwise overlooked by a careful probing of these four perspectives on God and his relations to our world. May God be merciful to us all and use resources like this one to guide us ultimately to know the truth, which alone can set each and all of us free.