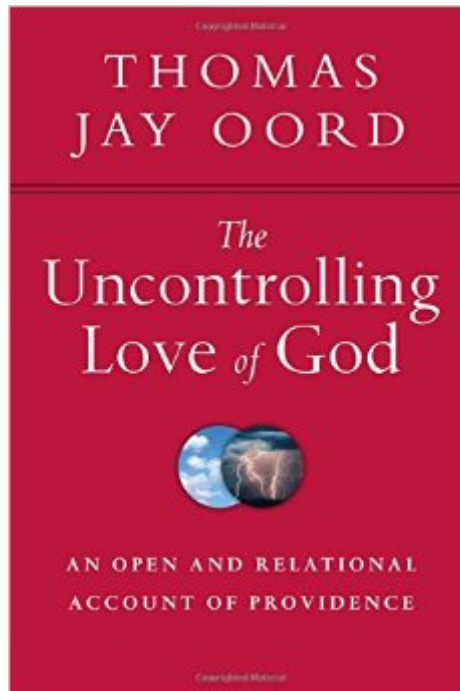


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The Uncontrolling Love Of God: An Open And Relational Account Of Providence



Synopsis

Rarely does a new theological position emerge to account well for life in the world, including not only goodness and beauty but also tragedy and randomness. Drawing from Scripture, science, philosophy and various theological traditions, Thomas Jay Oord offers a novel theology of providenceâessential kenosisâthat emphasizes God's inherently noncoercive love in relation to creation. The Uncontrolling Love of God provides a clear and powerful answer to the problem of evil, the problem of chance, and how God acts providentially in the world.

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Customer Reviews

Oord explains God's action in the world in a way that acknowledges human freedom without limiting God's ability to provide salvation. The Uncontrolling Love of God presents a succinct and non-technical application of Oord's earlier and more technical works on his theology of love. He accomplishes his goal of making sense of randomness and evil in light of my conviction that a loving and powerful God exists and acts providentially. (19). Uncontrolling Love of God masterfully considers complex scientific, philosophical, and theological issues in a manner that is readily understandable for non-specialists. Oord draws on personal experience to show how abstract ideas have concrete application. His commitment to a personal God plays an important role in his discussion of God as self-giving love. Oord's non-technical presentation enables people to think carefully about God's presence in the world. His terminology does not require either a dictionary or extensive training in theology, science, or philosophy. Further, his examples of destructive events are events that are both well known and similar to many

experiences that others have had. He appeals to ordinary experiences of freedom, evil, and moral expectations to develop his argument and makes crucial references to Biblical passages and the tradition of Christian thought. While logical consistency is important for his argument, he does not develop that point in a technical manner. Oord invites all people to respond to God's presentation of possibilities for realizing the kingdom of God. As an open and relational thinker, Oord makes important contributions to thinking about God's actions in the world. He begins by describing four disasters that raise questions about where God was during these events and why God did not keep those disasters from happening. In Chapter two, Oord defines randomness as events without a cause and contrasts it to regularity. Both randomness and regularity characterize the world that God created. Chapter 3 moves on to account for human freedom to cause disasters. Using science, theology, and philosophy, he concludes that evolution from self-organization to agency coupled with an increase in complexity led to free will. Freedom is not unlimited but does exist. The existence of goodness leads to chapter 4 summarizing models of God's providence. These models range from God being in complete control to God acting as an impersonal force creating and sustaining creation. In chapter 5, Oord treats the open and relational understanding of providence, which he sees as generally the most adequate understanding. But, as helpful as an open and relational understanding may be, it still raises problems for understanding God's activity in the world. The desire to avoid the world conditioning God leads to asserting that divine sovereignty precedes divine love in God's decision-making. If God could control events even though God chooses not to, God has some responsibility for evil because God could have prevented evil. Oord develops his own form of open and relational theology of essential kenosis in chapter 7. Essential kenosis emphasizes God's self-giving rather than God's voluntary self-limitation. God's nature as love is a necessary aspect of God's unchanging nature that makes it possible to trust God without reservation. The priority of the divine nature over God's will means that God is not responsible for evil caused by free choice because God as uncontrolling love cannot create beings that are not free to do evil. Oord recognizes that God as uncontrolling love seems to indicate that God cannot act in the world so he turns to the question of miracles in his final chapter. Miracles happen through God's uncontrolling love by means of God's presentation of new possibilities and the cooperation of creatures with God's love.

"The Uncontrolling Love of God" is an accessible, logically-developed and engrossing look at God's providential working in history, nature, and humanity from the perspective that His essential nature

of love is something He cannot contradict. Coming from deep roots in the Wesleyan-Arminian stream of Christianity myself, with charismatic leanings, and now having joined an evangelical church influenced by Reformed theology, I came to this book with questions about providence, free will, making sense of evil and suffering, etc. I agree with Thomas Jay Oord that his "essential kenosis" teaching "helps make sense of our lives," of history and the Bible. I find much about Open and Relational theology appealing. I think in these days we need the hope and creativity it invites us to. Could it be God is speaking to us through the discoveries of science, philosophy, and theology to help us break out of our defensive, protective, fearful stances and respond to the invitation to cooperate with our intensely personal God to create and experience inner and outer wholeness, shalom--God's kingdom come? Some readers will swallow hard when reading Oord's view of God's foreknowledge. But as I read and prayerfully considered, I found in it an invitation to participate with God in accomplishing His purposes. Another concept that many Christians are struggling with is the scientific theory of evolution. It feels intimidating and overwhelming at first to think of billions of years of history and that some things in nature and life may have developed by chance. But when you see that God's love gives freedom to all and even works through random events, always calling forth goodness and newness, a picture comes clear of the Creator lovingly involved with his creation. God is so much closer and yet so much bigger than we realize. As I read "The Uncontrolling Love of God" I kept wondering what the author thought of miracles--God's gracious intervention in nature and human affairs. I was delighted to read the final chapter in the book in which Oord explains miracles according to "Essential Kenosis." He doesn't explain them away. He affirms miracles. I found his scriptural explanation quite appealing. However, I have two other questions not answered in the book: How do angels and the unseen spiritual world fit in this theology? And what about prophecy? Obviously I need to read more of Oord and other teachers of Open and Relational theology. I plan to do that. I will also watch for more practical out-workings of this teaching. For instance, reading this book has already influenced how I pray and look for answers to prayer. How will it influence how preachers preach, how Christians live daily, how we train our children, how we interact with our culture and environment? Get this book and read it prayerfully. (The author provided me with an advance electronic version of this book in exchange for my honest review.)

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