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Review: Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy

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communication of ideas—often to the chagrin of many of us who find some of his positions subversive to the church. The book therefore avoids a systemic flaw of many of the current “four views” books on theological disputes—namely, the problem of a skilled writer on one side of the question debating a less equipped opponent. The authors’ “debating” their own arguments neutralizes the possibility of such a frustration.

Though most readers will be familiar with the theological vantage point of Boyd and Eddy on many of these issues, conservative evangelicals will not find themselves cringing at the way their views are portrayed here. The authors do indeed “empathetically” present competing viewpoints—to the point that one almost wonders how Boyd can hold some of his “reformist” positions after presenting such a straightforward defense of classical Christian orthodoxy.

Nevertheless, the primary flaw of this volume is its very premise. The authors are unable to present an objective and “empathetic” view of the panorama of evangelical theological options, precisely because they must choose what are indeed evangelical theological options. This discussion over evangelical identity and doctrinal boundaries is, in fact, at the heart of many of the issues Boyd and Eddy present in the book. The authors note in the introduction that they seek only to discuss evangelical options, and thus do not include debates over issues such as transsubstantiation, earth worship, or universalism. The authors then, however, offer discussions of supposedly “intramural” disputes over issues on which evangelical theology has been united until the very recent past—issues such as the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the foreknowledge of God, and the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ.

Loosed from the confessional moorings of evangelical orthodoxy, Boyd and Eddy can judge what is within the tent of evangelical authenticity simply by discerning what parachurch evangelical publishers are currently willing to publish. This is an *ad hoc* creedalism that simply cannot sustain evangelical reflection on the issues before us—largely because it is no longer possible to distinguish between primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrinal matters, a distinction that even Boyd and Eddy maintain is necessary. In so doing, they treat issues that have been considered foundational to the meaning of the gospel itself—such as the atonement and the necessity of faith in Christ—in the same way that they treat genuinely intramural evangelical discussions on trichotomy versus dichotomy or immersion versus sprinkling.

In short, this book can serve as a helpful primer for professors as they seek to gauge whether they are fairly presenting alternative viewpoints in a classroom setting. It is probably not as helpful for theological students seeking to sort through the maze of current evangelical doctrinal debates. It is most helpful, however, for those who wish to see just how fractured and confused contemporary evangelical theology actually is. A book like this needs to be written as a resource for evangelicals seeking to understand the questions that divide them. Prior to this, however, must come a discussion about what is “evangelical” about evangelical theology, and just how wide the “spectrum” actually can be before “evangelicalism” no longer describes anything at all.

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Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy. By Gregory A. Boyd. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 468 pp., \$24.99 paper.

Greg Boyd is senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, and president of Christus Victor Ministries. He taught theology at Bethel College, St. Paul, from 1986 to 2002 and is known for his books *Letters from a Skeptic* (Chariot Victor,

1994), *God at War* (IVP, 1996), and the open theism primer, *The God of the Possible* (Baker, 2000).

Despite these very well-known publications, in order to understand why Boyd wrote *Satan and the Problem of Evil* and what he is trying to accomplish, one must consider a book that has possibly had the greatest influence on his career—his first. *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (Peter Lang, 1992) is the monograph version of Boyd's 1988 Princeton Seminary doctoral dissertation. Here we encounter Boyd's formative thought and grasp the philosophical/theological vision that has since focused much of his research and writing program. In his preface, Boyd explains both his philosophical and theological orientation: "This work is, in essence, an attempt to work out a trinitarian-process metaphysic. . . . It is our conviction that the fundamental vision of the process worldview, especially as espoused by Charles Hartshorne, is correct. But it is our conviction as well that the scriptural and traditional understanding of God as triune and antecedently actual within Godself is true, and is, in fact, a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. But, we contend, these two views, when understood within a proper framework, do not conflict" (p. i). Simply put, Boyd is constructing a "best of both worlds" approach, drawing from process and orthodox trinitarian thought. The methodology and the nature of the resulting view are both reminiscent of Barth's bold venture of choosing parts of classical liberalism and Reformed evangelicalism for his revolutionary theological *via media*, a synthesis that was still much more like liberalism than Reformation thinking.

The quotation above, and the playing out of this view in *Trinity and Process*, indicates that Greg Boyd has not been, as most evangelicals assume, an evangelical whose championing of open theism has prompted him to adjust away from evangelical views toward process thought in more recent years. Rather, at least since his dissertation research, he has been convinced that process thought (at least the kind promoted by Hartshorne) is, in the main, correct and only needs to be adjusted in a few areas toward evangelicalism.

We now return to the question of how Boyd's stated view in *Trinity and Process* largely explains why he wrote *Satan and the Problem of Evil* and what he is trying to accomplish. Two answers present themselves: because of the ways in which Boyd's views are like process thought and priorities; and because of the ways in which they are still like orthodox Trinitarian thought. To give two examples: (1) *Satan and the Problem of Evil* is a theodicy. Process thinkers are significantly preoccupied with giving an answer to the problem of evil, and Boyd follows suit. (2) Both *Satan and the Problem of Evil* and open theism begin with love as the "be-all-and-end-all" characteristic of God's character because that is exactly where process begins and how it prioritizes God's characteristics.

On the other hand, there are three elements in the title of Boyd's book that set his view apart from being simply reprocessed process thought: Though both are mentioned sparingly in the book, "Satan" and "warfare," reflect Boyd's belief in personal evil and rebellion against God, aspects of his openness theodicy that he has (rightly) adjusted from process thought's inflexible naturalism. Furthermore, "trinitarian" is also in contrast to process views of God, none of which comes closer to biblical trinitarianism than the semantics game of an economic trinity.

At the end of the day, however, in spite of whatever evangelical-sounding notes Boyd strikes along the way, his view and this book are still considerably closer theologically to process thought than evangelicalism. The remainder of this review will briefly track the resulting shape, strengths, and weaknesses of Boyd's proposed trinitarian-process theodicy, closing with a perspective for those considering reading *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.

In overview, the book divides into two main parts: Part one (chs. 1–6) lays out six trinitarian warfare theses that comprise the framework of Boyd's theodicy. These are: (1) love must be freely chosen; (2) love entails risk (à la Sanders's *The God Who Risks*); (3) love and freedom entail that we are responsible for one another; (4) the power to influence for the worse is proportionate to the power to influence for the better; (5) within limits, freedom must be irrevocable; and (6) this limitation is not infinite, for our capacity to choose freely is not endless. Boyd asserts that these six theses add up to a compelling explanation for the knotty problem of how evil exists in a world created by a good God.

In Part two (chs. 7–12), Boyd applies his construct to critical issues for any theodicy such as prayer, natural evil, and hell (to which he dedicates two chapters, focusing largely on his adjusted Barthian concept of hell being *Das Nichtige*, "the nothingness"). The remaining material is made up of five appendixes, a long glossary, a very useful bibliography, and two indexes.

This is an unusually difficult book to which to assign strengths and weaknesses; such evaluation depends almost entirely on one's entry viewpoint. On the one hand, if readers share Boyd's semi-process/openness presuppositions, his ambitious theodicy will come off as strong (i.e. rational) and of great significance. Again, if readers are in his camp or do not notice his unproven assumptions of God's self-limiting ultra-immanence and man's minimized sinfulness, they likely will end up exactly where he is trying to take them. In a word, if the eccentric premises of open theism make sense to readers, the construction of Boyd's logic probably will as well.

On the other hand, if readers don't accept Boyd's foundational stance, the superstructure built on it, while flashy, is ultimately a virtual house of cards. That is especially true of the material on hell. Furthermore, his essay on chance in the fourth appendix is vaguely entitled "Theology." It is, like the book's body, *philosophical theology*, now reflecting on chance. It is theology-like only in that God is mentioned a few times, Job is referred to, and there are biblical proof-texts in one footnote.

In conclusion, as evidenced by the clear and popular style of *The God of the Possible* and the fact that his pulpit ministry has added to the growth of Woodland Hills Church, Greg Boyd is a master communicator. That style, however, is seldom in evidence in *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, primarily because of its heavy philosophical tone. Though highly provocative in content, it still will prove difficult reading for all but the philosophically-oriented or those fascinated with finding out how well open theism fares in trying to best pure process thinkers at building a better mousetrap (i.e. theodicy). However, in a classic philosopher vs. non-philosopher disconnect, the majority will either resign in frustration before finishing or put the book aside in dissatisfaction at having to take on 450-plus pages of material, when Boyd's message could reasonably have been presented in half that amount.

Oddly enough, Boyd could have readily built upon the momentum of *The God of the Possible* and likely drawn a sizeable number of adherents (instead of a relative handful of the philosophically infatuated) to the openness fold by offering a readable theodicy. However, he aggressively attempts to write a *magnum opus* process-like theodicy. Apparently, to Boyd, the convincing of an occasional philosopher (whether evangelical or process, since his "neither fish nor fowl" view implies an apologetic to both) is worth the sacrifice of shooting over the head of, or even baffling, the mass of non-specialists.

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