



Ron Highfield (PhD, Rice University) is professor of religion at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. He is the author of *Great is the Lord: Theology for the Praise of God, Barth and Rahner: Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of Sin and Evil, God, Freedom & Human Dignity* and coauthor (with Gregory Boyd, William Lane Craig and Paul Helseth) of *Four Views on Divine Providence*. His published chapters and articles have covered subjects ranging from theological anthropology to open theism to Christian higher education.

Removing Anxiety and Fatalism from the Discussion of Providence

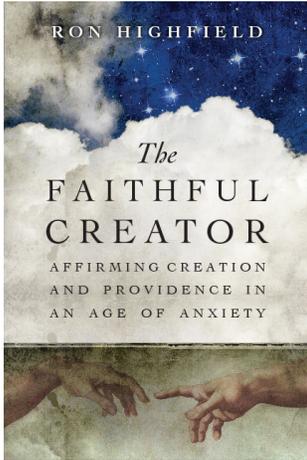
What made you want to write a book about creation when so many people are tackling this topic?

Ron Highfield: Reading contemporary evangelical books on creation or providence leaves me unsatisfied. It seems that these books fall into two camps: openness and determinist. In both openness and determinist theologies, I detect a desire to make God's way of acting in the world understandable in human terms. Openness theologians limit God by the same forces that limit human beings and some determinists expand the analogy of the way human beings control things to include God but make God's control perfect. Openness theology leaves in doubt God's power to make things work out for our good, and some forms of determinism, in reaction to openness thought, leave themselves open the charge of making God responsible for evil and depriving human beings of freedom and responsibility.

Both openness and determinism can evoke negative moods in contemplating God's relation to our lives. Openness can lead to anxiety about such an open future and the alien forces that have a say in the way things turn out. Determinism can lead to subjective fatalism, helplessness and even defiance. I wanted to write a book that affirms the core truth in both even though I cannot reconcile them perfectly on a rational level. In this book I urge us to reject attempts at rational comprehension of God's ways and point us back to the faith of Jesus in his Father's care and to faith in the resurrected and triumphant Jesus. In this way we can remove the grounds for anxiety and fatalism.

How does your book contribute to this vast and often controversial topic?

Highfield: In this book I pursue my long-held intuition that understanding providence requires thinking about creation and providence together and that many books on providence do not take this relationship into account. I am passionate about providing a corrective for this common mistake. *The Faithful Creator* develops an understanding of divine action (or what I call "the God-creature" relation) that applies both to creation and providence. In clarifying God's act of creating the world, I conclude that we cannot grasp in human terms the "how" of this act. But many theologians who agree that we cannot understand the "how" of creation depart from this rule when speaking of providence; they propose philosophical or scientific theories about how God acts in providence. In contrast, *The Faithful Creator* consistently rejects any philosophical theory about how God interacts with the world in providence. Instead, I rely on a trinitarian understanding of divine action to express God's action in the world. My second passion for the book is this: by keeping the focus on the gracious God-creature relation throughout the book, I develop a view of creation and providence that guards the love and transcendence of God, provokes praise



The Faithful Creator: Affirming Creation and Providence in an Age of Anxiety

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"The Faithful Creator is an extraordinarily rich scholarly treatment of the subjects of divine creation and providence.

Highfield situates the doctrine of providence where it belongs – as an outworking of the doctrine of divine creation, which in turn is grounded in the triune nature of God. And the discussion culminates in a wise and extensive treatment of the diverse ways in which the problem of evil threatens to undermine our belief in divine faithfulness. . . . This study demands consideration by those on all sides of the providence debate."

– James S. Spiegel, Taylor University

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and gratitude to the Creator, and enables us to face life's troubles with confidence and hope.

In what specific ways is your book unique?

Highfield: What sets my book apart from many books on creation and providence is its rigorous insistence on the unity of God's action in relation to the world – in creation, providence, reconciliation and redemption.

- It corrects the mistakes of those theologies that view God's relationship and way of acting as changing through time.
- It develops a view of divine action that preserves God's transcendence in relation to creation and applies it to the debate about the relation between science and theology and between the action of creatures and God's action in providence.
- It proposes a provocative model for the harmony of a strong view of divine transcendence and control of creation with human freedom. And it takes a distinctive approach to the problem of evil, especially what the book calls "the rhetorical argument from evil."
- This book deals with issues of recent and current interest and controversy among evangelical and conservative believers. I analyze and critique open theism and Molinism and defend a strong view of divine providence.

But in doing this I engage in a much wider conversation than the typical evangelical theologian—I look at ancient Greek philosophy, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux and modern Thomists. I also bring in such modern theologians from outside the evangelical circle as Karl Barth, Robert Jenson and Jürgen Moltmann. In short, I defend a strong view of divine transcendence in creation and providence that finds ecumenical support.

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