

Young, Deanna M. *Unblaming God: Interpreting the Old Testament Through the Lens of Jesus*. Grasmere: SacraSage Press, 2023, 164 pp.

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Deanna M. Young writes *Unblaming God* from a pastoral perspective. She begins her book by describing her interaction with John, a man that came to her church. He was in distress – even though he and his wife were “good Christians”, she developed cancer and passed away. Then, he moved for work only to be told they could not hire him due to a loan that was defaulted on by his now late wife. As more and more went wrong for this young man, he was devastated and was ready to end his life. Young recalls this story as the impetus for her book. This book is written to answer these quintessential questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? And why does Jesus seem so different from God?

Young approaches this question from an Open and Relational Theological (ORT) framework. She begins with laying out the argument for God’s love as more than an attribute, rather love being the essence of God. Second, she reframes classical notions of God – omnipotence, omniscience, timelessness, immutability, and impassibility – through the ORT lens. Finally, she revisits touchstone biblical stories that deal with theodicy, including the Flood, the sacrifice of Issac, the Canaanite Conquest narrative, and the story of Job.

God as Love is not a new idea to Young. While it can be found throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the reframing of the idea that God is the same as Love is a central tenet of ORT. For Young, when talking about God, you should be able to replace the word with ‘Love’ without distorting the meaning of love (p. 14). God as steadfast love, found in the Hebrew Bible over one hundred times, is defined as “love [that] is unwavering, resolute, persistent, committed, dedicated, loyal, dependable, faithful, devoted love” (p. 15).

Young employs *essential kenosis* as the definition of love and the inability of God to go against that love. Because God must be self-giving, God cannot control and must be “others-empowering” (p. 21). This love is on display as Jesus is the human embodiment of God and “God’s self-giving was not a choice God made but necessarily who God is. God wouldn’t be love if God were not self-giving” (p. 21). Love is not an attribute of God that can be subservient to power or used to further Their sovereignty. Love is synonymous with God and therefore is self-giving and cooperative.

Open and Relational Theology reframes many of the classical notions of God, including Their power, agency, and knowledge. Young uses the framework of

*amipotence*, defined by Thomas Oord as “divine strength working positively at all times and places” (Oord, 2021, p. 81). God’s power is subservient to Their love and works through Their creation to bring about the good They desire. However, Love cannot be controlling. Love lures us to participate in Their work but cannot override our own agency.

Our agency is preserved but God’s is made to change. Divine Providence must be dealt with if we are to believe that God requires Creation to participate in Their work. Rather than God being the “Unmoved Mover”, God is reactive to Their Creation. Young reframes God’s timelessness, immutability, and impassibility through ORT. While God may be eternal, we experience God in our own time and space. Jesus was bound in time as he was on earth, was in relationship with real people in time and experienced real emotions of love, joy, and sorrow. Jesus experienced real pain, fear, and abandonment while on the cross.

God is also reacting to events as they happen in scripture. God is not aware of the creation of the golden calf as Moses is on Mt. Siani (Ex. 32). God tells Moses he will destroy the people, but Moses is able to change God’s mind (Ex. 32:7-14). This puts impassibility to the test but also calls into question what God knows. “God knows everything that is knowable – everything in the past and present. But God does not know those things that are not yet knowable – the future” (pp. 25-26). Because we are in constant relation to a God that is not controlling, the future is ours to create with Love.

Young uses these lenses to look at the Flood story, the sacrifice of Issac, the Canaanite Conquest, and the story of Job, then reframes them. While she does not make note of this, I believe she is using these stories and reinterpreting them in such a way that the reframing of one story could also be used to reframe the others. For example, she notes that the Flood story could be a parable, used like the parables of Jesus to address a deeper topic in a way that the audience would understand (pp. 67-68). While she doesn’t say this outright, couldn’t the Canaanite Conquest be interpreted along the same lines? She hints at this when she says “The last comment regarding redaction may give us some insight into the why or the purpose of the story. If the Israelites were in Babylonian exile not knowing when or if they would ever return to their homeland, holding out a carrot of hope to them would be helpful for them to keep the faith.” (p. 101).

Young relies heavily on Open and Relational theology in reframing the stories in the Hebrew scripture. While this may be new to some readers and may be difficult to fully accept as it is not a traditional view of God’s omnipotence, she provides a strong case in favor of accepting her conclusions in the first chapter. She presents logical arguments to explain the problem of combining traditional omnipotence with the view that God is love and draws on theologians to further bolster her position. Her approach is informed while also being accessible.

The purpose of this book is to answer two questions that Christians in modernity wrestle with. Why does God allow suffering, and why is God so different from Jesus? By using ORT and *amipotence* to reevaluate the Hebrew Scriptures, Deanna Young is able to provide a new way of understanding difficult stories which are not compatible with the God we see in Jesus. Not only does Young provide a coherent argument for

ORT and amipotence, she does so in a way that is interesting to the academic conversation while still being accessible to a broader audience.

### **References**

Oord, T. J. (2021). *Open and Relational Theology, An Introduction to Life-Changing Ideas*. Grasmere: SacraSage Press.

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