

EXCERPT

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***The God Who Trusts***  
*A Relational Theology of Divine Faith, Hope, and Love*

December 10, 2019 | \$28, 280 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5255-0

Wm. Curtis Holtzen (DTh, University of South Africa) is a professor of philosophy and theology at Hope International University. He is the coeditor of *Connecting Faith and Science: Philosophical and Theological Inquiries*, *In Spirit and In Truth: Philosophical Reflections on Liturgy and Worship*, and *By Faith and Reason: The Essential Keith Ward*.

## God Is a Being of Faith

What does it mean to say that God is perfect? Or that God is a being of maximal greatness? These are questions theologians enjoy pondering. To suggest that God is a perfect being is to say, at the very least, that God possesses qualities that are better for God to have than to lack. That is, if God were missing these qualities God could certainly be great, but not the greatest possible being. Each theologian may affirm slightly different qualities, but all, I believe, would assert that any list would be incomplete if it did not include that God is maximally powerful, knowledgeable, and good. Further complicating matters, even when theologians agree on these great-making qualities, they disagree on just what each means or entails. I would like to suggest that just as holiness, love, and relationality are great-making qualities, so too is faith. Not merely that God is faithful, but that God has faith. God trusts, hopes, believes.

This book argues that if God is authentically relational and humans significantly free, then God is a being of faith. More precisely, if God is genuinely loving, relational, and morally good, while humans are free to accept or reject God's invitation to be partners in the creation of a beautiful world and divine kingdom, then faith, both human and divine, is necessary. Faith not only makes partnership possible but it perfects love itself, for love without faith is distant, one-sided, giving, but not necessarily receiving. It is because God has faith in us that God has not given up on this world. God believes that we are redeemable, trusts us as covenant partners, and hopes that all will accept the invitation of salvation. The love of God entails that God desires and works for the good of all persons, and what greater good is there than maturity in Christ? What greater good is there than that we become virtuous and trustworthy servants? God's love for us means that God desires to make us mature, that is, trustworthy beings. Just as God is faithful—worthy of our faith—God seeks to bring us all to Christlikeness: worthy of God's faith.

Theologians have begun to speak more and more of God being vulnerable and taking risks. William Placher asks us to suppose that God is not a deity who triumphs through raw power but that "more than anything else, freely loves, and in that love is willing to be vulnerable and willing to risk suffering." Notably, John Sanders in *The God Who Risks*, seeks to offer a coherent "model of divine risktaking . . . conceptualizing divine providence as taking certain kinds of risks." Sanders argues that not only is God vulnerable, but God is even "more vulnerable than we are because God cannot count on our faithfulness in the way we may count on his steadfast love." However, Sanders and Placher, like many others who affirm God's risk-taking and vulnerability, stop short of saying that God is a being of faith. Over the past few decades open and relational theologians have made the case that God faces a significantly open future, invites free beings to love and be loved, and to partner with God in the creation of a good and beautiful world. However, to my knowledge, none of these theologians have said that if this is true then God necessarily has faith in these free beings.

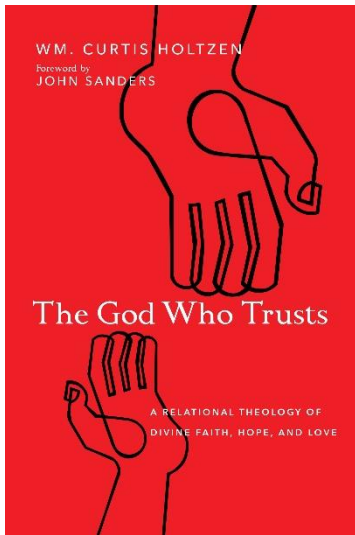
This book seeks to correct this oversight and connect the dots that so many theologians have left unconnected. I hope to demonstrate that if certain beliefs about God are true, then it is necessary we affirm that God is a being, even the greatest possible being, of faith.

—Taken from chapter one, "Considering a God Who Trusts"



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### ***The God Who Trusts***

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The Bible resounds with affirmations that God is faithful and trustworthy. But might he also exhibit faith and trust? Wm. Curtis Holtzen contends that because God is a being of relational love and exists in relationship with humans, then God is a God who trusts. Holtzen argues that understanding the relationship between divine trust and human faith can give us a fuller, truer picture of who God is and who we are.

## God Our Example

"One mark of a great and rare book is that it demonstrates the central importance of a question nobody else was even asking. This, in a nutshell, is what *The God Who Trusts* does. I had never before wondered if trust and faith might be attributes of God. When I finished this work, I wondered how I had not thought about that before. In this well-written and hugely insightful book, Curtis Holtzen makes a compelling case that trust is not only an attribute of God, it's an attribute that has significant implications for our understanding of, and relationship with, God. I dare all thoughtful, open-minded Christians to read this book!"

—Greg Boyd, senior pastor, Woodland Hills Church, president, Reknew Ministries, author of *God at War*

"Curtis Holtzen is one of the most courageous and perceptive critics of classical theism. This book is Holtzen at his absolute best. If love always hopes, if it always trusts, he asks, *What does it mean for a God who is love?* It means that God also hopes, also trusts, and also has faith. Holtzen offers a profound, unsettling theology for unsettling times. It's a theology that asks us to cling to a God who embraces the mess, lives in the mess, and confronts the mess with us."

—Roberto Sirvent, author of *Embracing Vulnerability: Human and Divine*

"A God who trusts? Why does this simple phrase sound so radically novel and yet biblically consonant? Curtis Holtzen argues that our believing that God has faith helps us understand a host of ideas central to the Christian faith. To develop his argument, Holtzen addressed key doctrines, thinkers, and intuitions. This book offers a new, powerful, and, I think, true contribution to contemporary theology!"

—Thomas Jay Oord, author of *God Can't* and *The Uncontrolling Love of God*

"In this beautifully written book, Dr. Holtzen argues that the apparently shocking statement that God has faith, hope, and trust is both biblical and reasonable. It is a fine contribution to an important modern school of evangelical theology."

—Keith Ward, regius professor of divinity emeritus, Oxford University

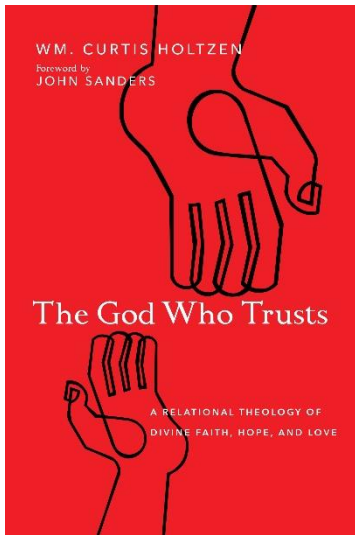
"Curtis Holtzen argues that the faith of God in humans is an aspect, an outcome, and an extension of God's great love for us. While most theists affirm that God's deep abiding love for humans is a constant of God's character, Holtzen also shows that God's faith in humans is dependent upon the understanding that the future, by definition, is open to God. This is more controversial but clearly substantiated by the author, relying on the Bible, reason, and experience. While faithfulness is a divine trait on which theists agree, God's faith in humans depends on God's hope that they will prove to be worthy of faith. This is a risk. Humans who choose to place faith in God rely on evidence from the past and personal experience that God is trustworthy. Does God have the evidence and experience to place faith in humans that goes



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beyond hope, that goes beyond God's recognition that they have the ability to be cooperative covenant partners? Jesus proved God's faith in him to be well founded, as did others before him. Nonetheless, this is a risky venture. God is a God who risks. This innovative contribution to theology thus affirms not only the hope and faith of God but also the courage of God."

—Karen Strand Winslow, professor of biblical studies at Azusa Pacific Seminary

"According to *The God Who Trusts*, God's care for creation involves not only sensitivity and risk but a deep longing that it will become everything God hopes for it. With its expansive description of divine faith, Holtzen's portrayal of God enhances and complements those of other open theists, such as *The Most Moved Mover* (Clark Pinnock) and *The God Who Risks* (John Sanders). His project also exemplifies theological reflection at its best. He offers an interesting and original thesis, engages the views of others with informed sensitivity, thoughtfully considers pertinent biblical passages, and provides well-developed arguments for his positions—all in clear and accessible language. Students and experienced scholars alike will benefit from this work, and many readers will find it inspiring."

—Richard Rice, professor of religion at Loma Linda University, author of *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*

"Wm. Curtis Holtzen has crafted not just an important book but also a necessary one for anyone desiring to understand the essential attributes of God. This vital work fills an expansive gap in the field of relational theology and is required reading for those with similar theological inquiries. Holtzen's sharp mind is on full display with his cogent arguments, making a most interesting and pleasurable read."

—Matthew Nelson Hill, author of *Evolution and Holiness: Sociobiology, Altruism, and the Quest for Wesleyan Perfection*



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