

AlbertMohler.com

Four Views of God? Another Look at the Baylor Study

Friday, October 8, 2010

Does America worship four different gods? Cathy Lynn Grossman of *USA Today* gives considerable attention to a recent study undertaken by two sociologists at Baylor University. The professors, Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, report their findings in a new book, *America's Four Gods: What We Say About God — And What That Says About Us*.

The angle *USA Today* took is both predictable and interesting. With an important election date before us and with any number of issues dividing Americans, any argument that puts these questions into clearer focus is likely to gain attention. Froese and Bader argue that Americans cluster around four different understandings of God. They identify these “four gods” as the “Authoritarian God,” the “Benevolent God,” the “Critical God,” and the ‘Distant God.’

You can pretty much figure this scheme out for yourself, but the Authoritarian God is a deity of divine judgment, revealed truth, and moral precepts. The Benevolent God is loving and non-judgmental. The Critical God is a deity of delayed judgment and little engagement with the world. The Distant God is the god of Deism — a deity who created the world but is really a distant force in the cosmos.

Now, the front-page placement of the story in *USA Today* can be traced to what Froese and Bader assert are the likely moral and political postures taken by those who believe in each of these four gods. In the main, the big issues divide those who follow the Authoritarian God and the Benevolent God.

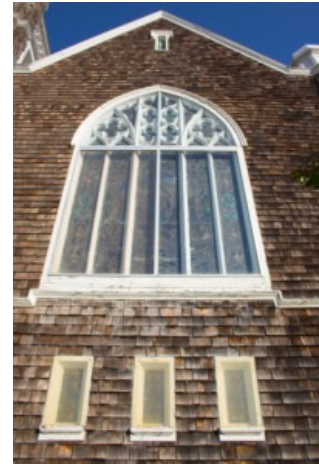
The big theological problem with this scheme is that it is a pure abstraction. The God of the Bible is unquestionably authoritative, but He is also loving, merciful, and truly benevolent. He is transcendent, but He also actively rules over his creation and creatures. No theologian would argue against the notion that an individual's concept of God is largely determinative of all subsequent thought and mental operations. But the easy division of America's religious diversity into these four arbitrary categories is more unhelpful than helpful.

Hats off to *USA Today* for its coverage of this research and book. The front-page exposure of this story indicates that this paper still believes that theological issues are important and worthy of primary attention.

We will not answer to four gods, but to the triune God of the Bible. This new research out of Baylor is interesting, but more for its political and social implications than for any serious theological consideration.

I will take a closer look at this new book in coming days.

Cathy Lynn Grossman, “[How America Sees God](#),” *USA Today*, Thursday, October 7, 2010.



Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.