

Notes: Introduction to Theology

Theology 201

Article 1

Why All Christians Should Care about Biblical Theology

Miles V. Van Pelt

Crucial for the Health of the Church

Biblical theology is crucial for the health of the church because the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). Additionally, this Word upon which the church is built is both living and life-giving (Ps. 119:25, 50; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12).

It is the record, the deposit, the testimony of God’s good news in Jesus Christ. It is a legal, objective, public document that describes and explains the covenantal relationship by which God has condescended and united himself to his people through Jesus Christ, our eternal high priest.

What Does Biblical Theology Do?

Simply put, the discipline of biblical theology works to make sense of God’s Word for God’s people. It does this by asking two basic questions:

What is the Bible about?

How does the Bible work?

Simply put, the discipline of biblical theology works to make sense of God’s Word for God’s people.

To answer these questions, we study the biblical text and, by way of submission to that text, allow it to establish its own theological categories and promote its own theological message.

Biblical theology also bridges the gap between exegesis (our study of texts) and systematic theology (our formulation of doctrine from the text). It provides context for exegesis, teeth for systematic theology, and depth for practical theology and Christian living.

While the answers to the two questions above are debated, Luke offers some help in Acts 28. At the end of this chapter, Luke summarizes Paul's two-year curriculum in the following manner:

From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. (Acts 28:23; see also 28:30-31)

If we pay attention, we will come to understand that Luke, through Paul, has provided us with the answers to these two fundamental questions.

What Is the Bible About?

First, what is the Bible about? It is about Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus functions as the theological center of biblical theology. He is the sum and substance of the biblical message. He is the goal, the point, and the significance of every text. He is God's gospel and, as the theological center, provides unity and meaning for all of the diversity found in the biblical record, from Levitical underwear in Exodus 39 to the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21-22.

The kingdom of God functions as the thematic framework for biblical theology. This is the theme within which all other themes exist and are united. It is the realm of the prophet, priest, and king; the place of wisdom and the scribe; the world of the apostles, and now elders and deacons in the church. Every biblical theme is a kingdom of God theme. If Jesus is the theological bull's eye on the biblical target, then the kingdom of God travels on the path of redemptive history to arrive at that target. If Jesus as the theological center gives meaning to the biblical message, then the kingdom of God as the thematic framework provides the context for that message.

How Does the Bible Work?

Now that we understand that the Bible is about Jesus and his kingdom, how then does the Bible work? It works in the categories of the Law and the Prophets or, in its full form, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings; see Luke 24:44).

Here, Luke is referring to the arrangement of the Old Testament in its original, three-fold division. These divisions are covenantal in nature, and they ultimately apply to both the Old and New Testaments as the covenantal structure of the Christian Bible.

In the Law, we have the covenant itself, filled with the life and teachings of the covenant mediators—Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament. In the Prophets, we have the history of the covenant and the prophetic interpretation of that history (covenant history). Finally, in the writings, we have those practical books that teach us how to think and live in light of the covenant (covenant life).

Much more work needs to be done trying to understand how the Bible works. This important question is often neglected in church life, and it has yet to receive adequate attention from biblical theologians. This chart helps to capture the unity and design of the Christian Bible from a covenantal, biblical theological perspective.

Thinking and Living Biblically

With the discipline of biblical theology, we come to understand that the Bible has a theological center, a thematic framework, and a covenantal structure.

When asked about the Bible's content, we can answer with confidence: Jesus and the kingdom of God.

When asked about the nature of the Bible, or how it works, our answer is simple: covenant.

This three-fold perspective for biblical theology provides unity and comprehends diversity. It sets us on the road to good, robust biblical thinking and living.

That's why biblical theology is crucial for the health of the church.

Miles V. Van Pelt Ph.D.

Article 2

Why Charismatics Need to Study Theology

1st September 2018 Lucy Peppiatt, who teaches at Westminster Theological Centre and is the author of *Unveiling Paul's Women*



A Charismatic Journey

I remember very clearly, in my 30's, realizing that I wanted to study theology at degree level. I had no idea that it would end with me doing a PhD, leading a college, writing books, and teaching. It hadn't been a "career move"! I thought I was studying theology so that I'd be a better co-pastor with my husband and because I loved it. I also thought then that these were good enough reasons for all that study and investment, and I still think they are.

I couldn't fail to notice, however, that I was in a minority in my church circles. In fact, I didn't personally know any other women (and knew only a handful of men) involved in our world of charismatic Christianity in the UK who were studying or had studied theology to PhD level. And the ones who had pursued higher degrees had done it as part of ministerial training. I was a layperson who didn't really think I was being 'trained.' I was simply learning, and loving it.

Historically, evangelical charismatics have carried a suspicion of formal theological education. The fears were that you might become too critical, too jaded, too cynical, too cerebral to be fit for anything practical, or worst of all, lose your faith. Negative experiences of young people going off to study theology at university, only to be deconstructed and left in pieces,

scared off the older generation all together and they warned young people not to pursue theology. Even I encountered this in my 30's from some well-meaning advisors. Thankfully, the mood has shifted a bit, both in the university and in the church. I meet more and more Christians in the evangelical charismatic world who really don't need to be persuaded that studying the Bible, Christian doctrine, and church history in an academic setting is a good thing! I also think that the academy has become more, not less, respectful of faith positions.

There's still more work to be done though, in persuading Christians that study and learning should be a normal part of their discipleship and growth in the faith. I don't really understand the resistance, but I still see it around me, so these are some of mine and others' thoughts on why all Christians should study some theology.

Perspectives: a professor

I listened to an interview recently with D. Stephen Long (Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University), who began by saying that the main reason to study theology, the science of God, is because the study of theology is 'a useless discipline.' He goes on to explain what he means by that. He's noticed over the years that, 'If I need to give students a reason why that matters, then often those reasons become more important than the subject matter itself.' The reason to study theology, the study of God, is to study God, and 'Knowledge of God is an end in itself, it is not a means to something else. ... As Augustine put it, "God is to be enjoyed, not used."'

His second reason though is that the uselessness has a 'use function.' (Useless doesn't mean pointless.) The contemplation of truth, beauty, and goodness is part of the essence of what makes us more human.

In addition to this, he notes that there's always been an awareness in the church that faith drives us to seek wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. This has been mine and countless others' experience. You can't know God and not want to know him more. Charismatics are great at singing about it — "I wanna know you more..." — not so great at engaging with the multiple ways that God has given us to do it!

The way to know God more in order to love him more, is to learn more about him. Of course that means seeking him and his presence in prayer, worship, and contemplation, and asking the Spirit to reveal the mysteries of God to our hearts, but it also means applying our minds in ways that we apply them to learning any subject: learning the original languages of the Bible, reading books, researching meaning, listening to teachers who are more learned than we are, asking questions, etc. The two pursuits should go together, and when they do, there are so many reasons why this helps us to be better Christians and more effective disciples.

Perspectives: a student

Out of interest I asked a bunch of charismatic Christians in their 20's who had either studied academic theology, or were in the process of studying, or were about to start studying, why they had chosen to do what they were doing. Here's what they came up with – and this is in no particular order.

It helps you to learn from others' mistakes.

It gives you the ability to speak more precisely and truthfully about God.

It challenges your assumptions, which strengthens your ability to rebut sceptics/skeptics.

It gives you an idea of what the non-negotiables of the Christian faith are.

It keeps you from error and believing nonsense.

It means you can study your own traditions and learn about where you fit in in church history.

It gives you the opportunity to think about the pastoral implications of what you believe.

The truth sets you free and studying good theology sets you free.

It enables you to have an answer for the hope that's within you.

It shapes your character because what we believe defines us.

It feeds your mind and your spirit.

It gives you more confidence when people ask you questions about the Bible and your faith.

The church has often abused its power. It's important for all people to know what they believe and not leave it up to the leaders.

You have a duty and obligation to study your faith.

It's arrogant to assume you know all there is to know already, or that it's irrelevant to you, or that it might be at your fingertips should you want it.

It takes discipline and work and that's a good thing.

It deepens our worship of God.

It can be deeply moving and illuminating (someone remembered a story of a young man who just wept in response to understanding the implications of the incarnation).

It gives you tools for further learning, you find out where to look for more information and who to turn to for answers.

It is inspiring to know the stories and thinking of so many men and women through the ages who have known Jesus.

It's humbling to find that there's so much to discover, to realize that you don't know it all, and that no, you weren't the first person to think that.

I think that was most of what they said. Clearly, these are the comments of young people who have been strengthened and equipped by their studies for mission and discipleship, not disempowered. They came up with loads more than I had first had in my little list. There are only two things I would add. In my experience, it helps you to know why you disagree with other Christians and so hopefully, to disagree better. And they implied this, but I want to spell it out—good theology leads you to love God and love your neighbor better.

Those are a lot of good reasons! I want to add another perspective and that is from my experience as both a theology student, now a teacher myself, and a pastor of young people.

Perspectives: a pastor

There is something that grows in Christians, which happened to me and I've seen in others, which is a hunger for depth and substance that can only be met by intentional and disciplined study. Of course you can read books on your own, but it's not the same as being in a classroom, learning from someone who knows more than you, whose faith you respect, and whose character you admire. There is something compelling, in a world where the Christian faith is so often disparaged or dismissed, about a man or woman who has turned their impressive intellect into seeking God, studying the scriptures, turning over stones, considering other possibilities, and coming up with reasoned, intelligent, and biblically based answers for why you should put your whole trust in the person of Jesus Christ and your whole life into his hands.

Further to that, there's a delight you experience when someone takes a Bible story and explains the background, or the meaning of a word that you wouldn't have known otherwise, when they use their scholarship to bring the Bible to life. Or when someone shows you God in a different light that suddenly makes so much more sense to you because you feel maybe you knew it deep down but you couldn't have articulated it. Or when someone tells you about a time in church history where you see exactly the same issues that you're facing going around again and it helps you to work out what you think and how you should respond. Or when you hear a theologian's comments on the society that you live in and you're able to step out of your culture for a second for a better and more enlightened perspective. Or when you read the writings of a Church Father or Mother on the nature of God that becomes an outpouring of praise and worship and you feel that too. If you're a Christian, it's about bringing all the aspects of your life together with time to reflect and think about who God is, why we think and do what we do, and how that might affect the world. It's the stuff of life.

I know that studying theology isn't always like that. Some books/authors can be dull, pompous, obscure, irritating, and just plain wrong ... but that is also half the fun of it! And I also know that if we had amazing teaching programmes in all our churches and all our conferences that we could maybe find those things there, but we all know that it's not like that. There's

a more serious side to this conversation because the truth is that I was bored and frustrated in the charismatic church. I was bored of the talks that were just one story after another. I was tired of repetitive and me-centred worship. I was frustrated by simplistic answers that I knew weren't well thought through and were going to be pastorally disastrous. I think I was in danger of mentally drifting off and becoming disengaged. Theology won me over and kept me in the centre of the church in a way that I needed.

One of my little group of 20's said that he'd been warned off thinking too much on the grounds that if you engage your mind, you short-circuit the work of the Spirit. He joked that his church culture had taught that we're transformed by the removal of our minds! We don't want this. We don't want a brain drain. We need to attract and to keep the curious, the questioners, the seekers, the hungry, the bored. We need to feed them, nurture them, and engage them. We need to realize that teenagers and young people need more than cool youth leaders and worship songs. They need depth and good answers to their questions. I hope that WTC will be part of a change in culture in the charismatic church where it will become the most natural thing in the world for Christians to be educated in their faith.

WTC

Why do people not study? There's always the time and money thing, and I get that, but I think there are two bigger barriers. The barriers I see most are that theological study is seen as either intimidating or irrelevant—the stumbling blocks of the under- and over-confident!

We are doing everything we can at WTC to eliminate the stumbling blocks. We've created a place where it's not intimidating, it's not irrelevant, and where it is affordable and accessible. We're trying to make sure that there are no more excuses, unless someone finds they are still too far from a Hub, and we're working on that.

I love our students and the enormous variety of people that turn up. All of them are Christians wanting to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of their faith, but for very different reasons. The majority of our students are from almost any sphere of work you could think of: the

health service, accountancy, caring, farming, business, the charity sector, etc. They generally say they 'want to go deeper with God.' Others want to study to enrich their ministries in the local church. Some are paid by the church, are church leaders, or are preparing for church leadership. Still others are in recovery from addiction or building a new life having served a prison sentence. It all makes for interesting discussion in the classroom!

These are mostly people who come just to study applied kingdom theology for life and work. But we're also branching out in 2019 to begin two new vocational programmes in 'Kingdom Theology and Student Ministry' and 'Kingdom Theology and Church Planting and Leadership.' These are exciting new ventures and will offer more focused training.

I've already said that I really don't understand why someone wouldn't want to study theology, but I hope that this post will help those who are wondering why you would, what you'd get out of it, and if it's for them. I hope in a small way I've described why studying and teaching theology, the science of God, is challenging, exciting, and endlessly fascinating.

Article 3

10 Things You Should Know about Biblical Theology

February 10, 2017 by: Chris Bruno

1. Biblical theology is different than systematic and historical theology.

When some hear “biblical theology,” they might assume that I’m talking about theology that is faithful to the Bible. While its goal is certainly to reflect biblical truth, the discipline of biblical theology is different from other theological methods. For example, the goal of systematic theology is to gather everything the Bible teaches about a particular topic or issue. For example, studying everything the Bible teaches about God or salvation would be doing systematic theology. When we are doing historical theology, our goal will be to understand how Christians throughout the centuries understood the Bible and theology. So we might study John Calvin’s doctrine of Christ. While both systematic and historical theology are important ways to study theology, biblical theology is a different and complementary theological discipline.

2. Biblical theology emphasizes God’s progressive revelation.

Rather than gathering everything the Bible says about a particular topic, the goal of biblical theology is to trace the progressive revelation of God and his saving plan. For example, in Genesis 3:15, God promised that the offspring of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent. But it is not immediately clear what this will look like. As this theme is progressively revealed, we find that this offspring of the woman is also the offspring of Abraham and the royal Son who comes from the tribe of Judah, Jesus the Messiah.

3. Biblical theology traces the storyline of the Bible.

Closely related to the previous point, the discipline of biblical theology also traces the unfolding story of the Bible. The Bible tells us one story about our Creator God, who made all things and rules over all. Our first parents, and all of us since then, rejected God’s good rule over them. But God promised to send a Savior—and the rest of the Old Testament after

Genesis 3 points forward to that coming Savior. In the New Testament, we learn that the Savior has come and redeemed a people, and that he is coming again one day to make all things new. We can sum up this story in five words: creation, fall, redemption, new creation. Tracing this story is the task of biblical theology.

The Bible tells us one story about our Creator God, who made all things and rules over all.

4. Biblical theology uses the categories that the writers of Scripture themselves used.

Rather than looking first to modern questions and categories, biblical theology pushes us toward the categories and symbols that the authors of Scripture used. For example, the backbone of the biblical storyline is the unfolding revelation of God's covenants with his people. However, in the modern world, we don't tend to use the category of covenant very often. Biblical theology helps us get back to the categories, symbols, and ways of thinking that the human authors of Scripture used.

5. Biblical theology values the unique contributions of each author and section of Scripture.

God revealed himself in the Scriptures over the course of about fifteen hundred years through around forty different authors. Each of those authors wrote in his own words and even had his own theological emphases and themes. While all of these complement each other, a great advantage of biblical theology is that it provides us with a method for studying and learning from each author of Scripture. It can be helpful to harmonize the Gospels, but we also have to remember that God did not give us one Gospel account. He gave us four, and each of those four add a rich contribution to our overall understanding of the whole.

6. Biblical theology also values the unity of the Bible.

While biblical theology can provide us with a great tool for understanding the theology of each author of Scripture, it also helps us to see the unity of the Bible in the midst of all of its human authors across the centuries. When we view the Bible as a series of fragmented stories spread across the

ages, then we fail to see the main point. As we trace the themes of the Bible that connect across the ages, we will see that the Bible tells us one story of one God who is committed to saving one people for his own glory.

7. Biblical theology teaches us to read the whole Bible with Christ at the center.

Since the Bible tells one story of the one God saving his people, we must also see Christ at the center of this story. One of the goals of biblical theology is learning to read the whole Bible as a book about Jesus. Not only must we see the whole Bible as a book about Jesus, but we must also understand how that story fits together. In Luke 24, Jesus corrects his disciples for failing to see that the unity of the Bible actually points to the centrality of Christ. He calls them foolish and slow of heart to believe the Bible because they did not understand that the whole Old Testament teaches that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer for our sins and then be exalted through his resurrection and ascension (Luke 24:25–27). Biblical theology helps us understand the proper Christocentric shape of the whole Bible.

8. Biblical theology shows us what it means to be a part of God's redeemed people.

I noted above that biblical theology teaches us the one story of the one God who redeems one people. This discipline helps us understand what it means to be a member of God's people. If we keep tracing the promise of redemption from Genesis 3:15, we find that this theme ultimately leads us to the Messiah Jesus. We also find that God's one people is not a single ethnic group or political nation. Instead, God's people are those who are united by faith to the one Savior. And God's people discover their mission by following in the steps of Jesus, who both redeems us and empowers us to continue his ongoing mission.

This accessible overview of biblical theology traces the development of sixteen key themes from Genesis to Revelation, showing how each theme contributes to the one main storyline of Scripture.

9. Biblical theology is essential for a truly Christian worldview.

Every worldview is really about identifying what story we live in. Our lives, our hopes, our plans for the future are all rooted in a much bigger story. Biblical theology helps us understand the story of the Bible clearly. If our story is a cycle of life, death, reincarnation, and rebirth, this will affect the way we treat others around us. If our story is part of a larger random pattern of unguided naturalistic evolution and eventual decay, this story will define the way we think about life and death. But if our story is part of the larger story of redemption—the story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation—then this will affect the way we think about everything around us.

10. Biblical theology leads to worship.

Biblical theology helps us see the glory of God across the Scriptures more clearly. As we see God’s sovereign plan of redemption unfold in the single unified story of the Bible, as we see his wise and loving hand guiding all of history to bring it to his intended goals, as we see the repeated patterns in Scripture that point us to Christ, this magnifies God and helps us see his great worth more clearly. As Paul traced the history of God’s plan of redemption in Romans 9–11, it inevitably led him toward worship of our great God:

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36)

So also for us, God’s glory must be the ultimate aim and goal of biblical theology.



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Article 4

History of Open Theology- August 27, 2015 by Greg Boyd

While the open view of the future has always been a very minor perspective, it has had its defenders throughout Church history and it has never been called “heresy” (until in mid 1990s when some started using this label).

According to some African American church leaders, it has been the predominant view in the African American Christian tradition (e.g., in *The Color of God: The Concept of God in Afro-American Thought* [Mercer Press, 1987]. Major Jones argues that the African Christian experience of oppression has enabled them to seize a dimension of the biblical portrait of God which the classical western tradition missed because of its overemphasis on control and its indebtedness to platonic philosophy).

More research needs to be done on the history of the open view, but my own research thus far has found advocates as far back as the fourth century (e.g., Calcidius). What’s most interesting about Calcidius is that his view is espoused in his *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, which was used extensively throughout the middle ages. Yet, so far as I’ve been able to discern, no middle scholar thought his view was heretical enough to comment on.

In the early eighteenth century, a man named Samuel Fancourt published an essay entitled *Concerning Liberty Grace and Prescience* which led to a good deal of discussion about the topic in England. His arguments largely parallel those used by Openness advocates today. Also, it appears that Andrew Ramsay, a contemporary of John Wesley, espoused the teaching that God doesn’t know the future strictly as a domain of settled facts.

The topic was much discussed in the nineteenth century, being advocated by the renowned Bible commentator Adam Clarke, the popular Methodist circuit preacher Billy Hubbard, and some within the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement such T.W. Brents, whose 1874 book *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* puts the Open View of the future on center stage. This book was widely used as a theology textbook in the Stone-Campbell

movement. On top of this, the Methodist professor and chancellor of Ohio Wesleyan University, L. D. McCabe, wrote several books espousing Open Theism on biblical as well as philosophical grounds.

At the turn of the century, the view was espoused by Finnis Dennings Dake, author of the famous and influential Dakes Annotated Bible. The view had occasional defenders throughout the twentieth century and became a standard teaching among the early founders of Youth With a Mission.

This is brief (very brief) history only hits the highlights. But it demonstrates that the open view of the future has been a part of historic orthodoxy. The modern expression, propelled in an accessible form through the publication of *The Openness of God* by Clark Pinnock and others, falls in line with Protestant thought of theological reform. The entire Protestant movement has been rooted in the conviction that the church always needs more reforming, and whether particular theological claims contribute to this ongoing reformation or not needs to be tested against Scripture.

Article 5

Summary of open theism (in Support)

March 11, 2016/2 Comments/in Open Theism /by John Sanders

Introduction

When I was a young Christian I was taught that our prayers of petition could influence what God decided to do. Not that God has to do what we ask, but that God graciously decides to take our concerns into account in formulating his responses (just as he did with Moses and others). However, in college I was assigned some standard evangelical theology books that described the nature of God as “impassible” (could not be affected by creatures in any way) and “strongly immutable” (could not change in any respect). My spiritual life was thrown into a quandary: either I had been incorrectly taught that my prayers could affect God or the theology books were wrong on these points. The search for a theology of prayer led me into other areas of providence and, ultimately, to the openness of God perspective.[1]

Summary of Openness of God

According to openness theology, the triune God of love has, in almighty power, created all that is and is sovereign over all. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally loved one another—love has always been an aspect of reality. Love had always been internal to God and in deciding to create others, the divine love flowed externally. In freedom God decided to create beings capable of experiencing his love and it was God’s desire for us to enter into reciprocal relations of love with God as well as with our fellow creatures. In creating us the divine intention was that we would come to experience the triune love and respond to it with love of our own and freely come to collaborate with God towards the achievement of his goals.

Second, God is almighty in that he has all the power necessary to deliver and care for us. However, God has chosen to not override our freewill and make us love (which would not be love anyway). Instead, God restrains the

full use of his power. God has not given up or lost power, he simply chooses not to always exercise it to its fullest extent.[2] God has, in sovereign freedom, decided to make some of his actions contingent upon our requests and actions. God elicits our free collaboration in his plans. Hence, God can be influenced by what we do and God truly responds to what we do. God genuinely interacts and enters into dynamic give-and-take relationships with us. That God changes in some respects implies that God is temporal, working with us in time. God, at least since creation, experiences duration.

God decided to make some of his decisions contingent upon our actions because God is love and love does not force its way (1 Cor. 13:4-7). This made it possible for us to misuse our freedom and commit sin which brought grief to God (Gen. 6:6). We experience something of what God does when we choose to have children. When you open yourself in this way you open yourself to suffering—you become vulnerable to being grieved. In spite of our sin God has chosen to endure our lack of love. However, divine forbearance does not mean that God is blind to the evil infecting us. Rather, God evaluates our situation and takes the steps necessary to try to prevent the beloved from destroying herself and bring about reconciliation. God's wisdom is adept at overcoming obstacles that hinder the divine project. God is competent and resourceful in working with recalcitrant sinners. Despite the fact that humanity failed to love God and others as God intended, God remains faithful to his intentions by enacting a plan of redemption.

Third, the only wise God has chosen to exercise general rather than meticulous providence, allowing space for us to operate and for God to be creative and resourceful in working with us. God has chosen not to control every detail that happens in our lives. Moreover, God has flexible strategies. Though the divine nature does not change, God reacts to contingencies, even adjusting his plans, if necessary, to take into account the decisions of his free creatures. God is endlessly resourceful and wise in working towards the fulfillment of his ultimate goals. Sometimes God unilaterally decides how to accomplish these goals but he usually elicits human cooperation such that it is both God and humanity who decide what

the future shall be. God's plan is not a detailed script or blueprint, but a broad intention that allows for a variety of options regarding precisely how his goals may be reached. What God and people do in history matters. If the Hebrew midwives had feared Pharaoh rather than God and killed the baby boys, then God would have responded accordingly and a different story would have emerged. Moses' refusal to return to Egypt prompted God to resort to plan B, allowing Aaron to do the public speaking instead of Moses (Ex. 4:14-16). What people do and whether they come to trust God makes a difference concerning what God does—God does not fake the story of human history.

Finally, the omniscient God knows all that is logically possible to know. I call this "dynamic omniscience" in that God knows the past and present with exhaustive definite knowledge and knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open). God's knowledge of the future contains knowledge of what God has decided to bring about unilaterally (that which is definite), knowledge of possibilities (that which is indefinite) and those events that are determined to occur (e. g. an asteroid hitting a planet). Hence, the future is partly open or indefinite and partly closed or definite. God is not caught off-guard since he has foresight, anticipating what we will do. Also, it is not the case that just anything may happen, for God has acted in history to bring about events in order to achieve his unchanging purpose. Graciously, however, God invites us to collaborate with him to bring the open part of the future into being.

The Watershed Divide

Open theism arises out of the freewill theistic tradition of the church which goes back to the early church fathers. Freewill theists share a family resemblance when it comes to theologies of salvation, providence, anthropology, and impetratory prayer (God responds to our prayers). In fact, open theists have nothing to add to the vast majority of theological stances taken (such as conditional election) or explanations of various biblical texts propounded by their freewill theistic forebears. The "Hatfield" freewill theistic family has been in a feud with the "McCoy" theological deterministic family for sixteen hundred years.

The watershed divide separating these two families is whether or not one affirms that God is ever affected by and responds to what we do. Does God tightly control everything such that what God wants is never thwarted in the least detail? Does God ever take risks? Is God ever affected by what we do or does everything work out precisely as God eternally foreordained? Freewill theists such as John Wesley and C. S. Lewis are on one side of this divide and theological determinists such as John Calvin and John Piper are on the other.

Theological determinists affirm that God exercises meticulous providence, controlling everything that happens down to the smallest detail. Consequently, the divine initiatives in every instance are always fulfilled—God never takes risks. Humans have compatibilistic freedom (you are free so long as you act on your strongest desire) so God is able to guarantee that whatever he wants done will be done by ensuring that each of us always has the particular desire God wants us to have at any moment. Those theological determinists who care about logical consistency hold that God is strongly immutable (never changes in any respect such as in emotions) and strongly impassible (never affected by us). Regarding prayers of petition, Jonathan Edwards stated this position correctly when he said, “speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers. . . . he is self-moved. . . . God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be antecedent to the bestowment of mercy; and he is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though he were prevailed upon by prayer.”[3]

Freewill theists believe that God granted humans libertarian freedom (you could have done otherwise than you did in the same circumstances) such that God does not meticulously control everything that happens. Hence, God cannot guarantee that everything will go precisely the way he would like. Because of sin, creation has miscarried: there is no “happy fall” (O felix culpa) into sin. For freewill theists God is weakly immutable in that the character of God does not change, but God can have changing plans, thoughts and emotions. God is also weakly impassible because God is

affected by and responds to our prayers and actions though he is not overwhelmed by emotions as we are apt to be.[4] Dallas Willard puts it well: “God’s response to our prayers is not a charade. He does not pretend he is answering our prayers when he is only doing what he was going to do anyway. Our requests really do make a difference in what God does or does not do.”[5]

Open theists think that two beliefs, customarily affirmed by freewill theists, need to be modified in order to improve the biblical fidelity and rational coherence of freewill theism. Both areas concern God’s relationship to time. A longstanding debate among freewill theists has been whether God is atemporal or temporal. The majority view has been that God is timelessly eternal, that God either does not experience time at all (timeless) or that God experiences all time at once (simultaneity). A minority of freewill theists have said God experiences temporal succession: God is everlasting in that he always was, is, and will be. Open theists side with this minority view within the freewill family.

The second disagreement is about whether God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge of future contingent events. Though all freewill theists affirm divine omniscience (God knows all that is knowable) they disagree about what is knowable. They differ over foreknowledge, not omniscience. Most freewill theists affirm what is known as “simple foreknowledge” by which God so-to-speak “looks ahead” and “sees” in exhaustive detail exactly what we are going to do in the future. Open theists affirm dynamic omniscience in which God also “observes” what we do but does so temporally rather than timelessly.[6] Both views agree that whatever is knowable, God knows it. They disagree as to what is knowable.

Support for Open Theism

Open theists provide a wide array of biblical and theological reasons in support of divine temporality and dynamic omniscience. Due to space limitations, only an exceedingly brief overview of these reasons is possible. [7] Before we examine the biblical material let me state at the outset that other well informed Christians interpret these texts differently, so a straightforward appeal to scriptural teaching will not settle the matter.[8]

The Bible portrays God as authentically responding to people.

God had the prophet Isaiah announce to King Hezekiah that he would not recover from his illness. However, Hezekiah prayed and God responded by sending Isaiah back to announce that God had changed his mind, Hezekiah would recover and not die (2 Kings 20). Such texts reveal divine flexibility utilizing various ways of achieving his agenda depending upon human responses.

Something of the same is found in the New Testament. Jesus is said to heal a paralyzed man because of the faith of his friends (Mark 2:5). He responded to the faith of this small community by granting their request. People's faith, or lack of it, deeply affected Jesus and his ministry. Mark says that Jesus could not perform many miracles in Nazareth due to the lack of faith by the people in the community (6:5-6). As James says, we have not because we ask not (4:2).

Genesis 6:6 says that God was grieved because humans continually sinned. Why would God grieve if God always knew exactly what humans were going to do? It makes no sense to say that a timeless being experiences grief. Also, the biblical writers, when describing God's speeches, use words such as "perhaps" and "maybe." God says "perhaps" the people will listen to my prophet and "maybe" they will turn from their idols (e. g. Ezek. 12:1-3; Jer. 26:2-3). Furthermore, God makes utterances like, "if you repent then I will let you remain in the land" (Jer. 7:5). Such "if" language—the invitation to change—is not genuine if God already knew they would not repent. Nicholas Wolterstorff says that if God does not relate the way the Bible describes in the texts cited above then we "would have to regard the biblical speech about God as at best one long sequence of metaphors pointing to a reality for which they are singularly inept, and as at worst, one long sequence of falsehoods." [9]

Other support is derived from those predictions in scripture which either do not come to pass at all (Jonah 3:4; 2 Kings 20:1) or do not come to pass exactly as foretold. For example, Ezekiel declares the destruction of the city of Tyre (Ezek 26). Even allowing for hyperbole, two aspects of the prophecy are clear: (1) King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is specifically

named as God's intended agent to destroy Tyre and (2) the city would be utterly destroyed and would never be inhabited again. However, God himself admits that the prophecy failed and so he revised it (29:17-20). God acknowledges that Nebuchadnezzar tried very hard to take the city but was unsuccessful so God said that instead of Tyre he would give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as payment for his services (which never come to pass either).

In his study of this prophecy Kris Udd asks: "Why would God declare the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, if his foreknowledge meant that he knew when giving the prophecy that it would not come true?"[10] Proponents of dynamic omniscience explain such "failed" prophecies as divine intentions that are implicitly conditional (if God decides not to act unilaterally). Thomas Renz puts it well when he says, "prophetic predictions are not historiography before the event but a proclamation of God's purposes" which are flexible and revisable in light of changing human situations.[11] Consequently, God did not deceive nor was he wrong since he was not declaring what would in fact be the case but what he desired to be the case.

For open theists predictions fall into one of the following three categories. (1) God may utter predictions based on his determination to unilaterally bring an event about. In this case, the issue is whether God has the power to do it, not whether he has foreknowledge. For example, God promises to bring about the eschaton. (2) God may predict a future event based on inferences from his exhaustive knowledge of past and present. In this type of prediction God states what he believes is the most probable state of affairs to materialize. A case of this type is the prediction of the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. (3) Most predictions are conditional in nature even if not stated conditionally.[12] God declares that some event will happen if or unless certain other events come to pass. For example, God repeatedly seeks a change of behavior from people (Jonah; Jer. 15; and Ezek. 12:1-3).

The Bible portrays God as testing people in order to discover what they will do.

God puts Abraham to the test and afterward says, “now I know that you fear me” (Gen. 22:12). God puts the people of Israel to the test to find out what they will do (Ex. 15:25; Deut. 13:3). After the sin of the golden calf God asked the people to “put off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you” (Ex. 33:5). Why test them if God eternally knew with certainty exactly how the people would respond? One could say the testing was only for the benefit of the people since it added nothing to God’s knowledge but that is not what the texts themselves say.

The Bible portrays God as changing his mind as he relates to his creatures.

God announced his intention to destroy the people of Israel and start over again with Moses but Moses said that he did not want to do that and so God did not do what he had said he was going to do (Ex 32). Also, God’s original plan was to have Saul and his descendants as kings forever in Israel (1 Sam. 13:13). In other words, there would have been no “Davidic” kingship. Latter, due to Saul’s sin, God changes his mind and rejects Saul and his line (1 Sam. 15:11, 35).[13] If God always knew that he was never going to have Saul’s line be kings, was God deceitful?

There is a give-and-take quality to these texts. If God is affected by creatures and is responsive as these texts indicate then God has a before and after—succession—in his experience. This means that God is temporal and has a history.

Open theists believe there are two motifs of scripture regarding divine knowledge of the future. The texts cited above fall into the motif of the open future category where God is portrayed as not possessing exhaustive knowledge of the future.[14] In the motif of the settled future God is portrayed as guaranteeing a specific event will take place (e. g. the Babylonian exile, Isaiah 42:9). If God decides to unconditionally guarantee that some event will happen then that future event is definite and God knows it as such. Since most events are not determined by God (he has given us freedom) these are indefinite and God knows them as indefinite (possibilities). Both motifs are true. God can declare the future with certainty regarding those events that are determined and God can be grieved, change his mind, or opt for plan B about those future events that

are indefinite. Hence, divine omniscience contains both definite and indefinite beliefs.

Space does not permit a discussion of these points in relation to Jesus. Suffice it to say that we believe these same relational qualities are exemplified in the life of our Lord and this is important because the clearest manifestation of what God is like was embodied in Jesus (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

Theological Support

Maintaining the Core Beliefs of Freewill Theism

At its core freewill theism affirms that God is a personal agent who experiences dynamic give-and-take relationships with his creatures. Open theists hold that divine timelessness and simple foreknowledge are incompatible with the core doctrines of freewill theism.

There are two major theories of time: the dynamic view and the stasis view. [15] For the dynamic theory, the present or now has a special ontological status because it exists in a way that past and future do not. The past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist. Though we speak about “the future” as though it were an entity it is really a conceptualization we use to understand our lives. The stasis theory, on the other hand, holds that the past, present and future all have equal ontological status since all events of the past never go out of existence and all the events of the future never come into existence. Rather, every event exists always because every moment of time is just as ontologically real as any other moment.

Today, the majority of philosophers hold that divine timelessness requires the stasis theory of time and since the stasis theory implies determinism (because there are no open possibilities), then freewill theists cannot affirm divine timelessness.[16] Another significant problem is that a timeless being cannot be said to plan, deliberate, have changing emotions, adjust his plans, anticipate, respond or change his mind.[17] All such actions require a before and an after.

The dynamic and stasis theories of time have very different understandings of the ontological status of the future and this has immense significance for

the foreknowledge discussion. If the future already ontologically exists (is real) then God must know it but if it does not exist then there is literally “no thing” to know. If the future is not real then God’s knowledge is not “limited.” Open theists affirm the dynamic theory of time.

As with timelessness, the theory of simple foreknowledge has problems accounting for give-and-take relations with God. According to the theory of simple foreknowledge God “sees” all of what is actually going to happen, not what might or might not happen. If so, then how can God be said to interact, respond, suffer, or change his mind? If God actually changes his mind or goes to plan B because humans failed to do what he expected them to do then it cannot be the case that God had certain and comprehensive foreknowledge of the future. The idea that God is affected by and responds to our prayers and actions is undermined if God has exhaustive definite prescience. Consequently, open theists claim that divine temporality and dynamic omniscience better uphold the core beliefs of freewill theism.

Overview of the Debate on Open Theism in Evangelicalism

Let me provide a brief overview of the history of the debate within evangelicalism. For many years the core ideas of openness had been buried in academic journals and I thought it was time to bring them to the attention of a broader public so I organized a team and we published *The Openness of God*. That the book had immediate impact is indicated by the fact that it placed eighth in the Christianity Today book of the year awards and that in January of 1995, Christianity Today reviewed the book with not just one but four reviewers.[18] The lead review asked some good questions and was generally favorable but the other three absolutely trashed the book. One of the latter said that if only we had known of Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy we would never have produced such nonsense. In 1998 I published *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* which presented the fullest case to date of the biblical, theological and philosophical bases for open theism.

In a February 1998 article in Christianity Today, Tom Oden wrote: “The fantasy that God is ignorant of the future is a heresy that must be rejected. .

. ."[19] John Piper, a prominent pastor in the Baptist General Conference (BGC), used Oden's hersey comment to argue that Greg Boyd, a professor of theology at Bethel College in Saint Paul and pastor in the BGC, should be fired from the college and his pastoral credentials revoked. A great deal of time and energy was spent in this attempt. A board of inquiry was formed that ultimately found Boyd within the boundaries of BGC doctrine. At the 1999 and 2000 annual meetings of the BGC resolutions were introduced to remove Boyd but they failed.

The Calvinist critics of openness had some success in the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1999 they introduced a resolution on divine foreknowledge that the delegates approved to include as a revision to the Baptist Faith and Standard. In 2000 the SBC approved the following: God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. However, these changes were not ratified by a number of state conventions, most notably the Texas convention, which is the largest. Responding to the 1999 SBC resolution, Christianity Today (February 7, 2000) published the editorial "God vs. God," exhorting the critics of open theism to continue to debate rather than seek political means to squelch it. Evangelical critics of open theism were outraged at the editorial, questioning whether Christianity Today could be trusted any longer.

This same aspersion was cast upon Baker and InterVarsity Presses when they decided to publish more books by open theists. One high-profile critic, who has several books published with Baker, threatened to withdraw all his books if Baker went ahead with its plans to publish Greg Boyd's *God of the Possible*. They published the book. This provoked the neo-fundamentalist magazine, *World*, to publish a scathing attack on open theism and Baker Books. Virulent and inaccurate critiques of openness appeared in the September 1999 issue of *Modern Reformation* with the theme: "God in Our Image" and in the March 2001 issue of *Christianity Today* titled "God at Risk."

However, in May and June of 2001 *Christianity Today* published a series of e-mail exchanges on openness between Chris Hall and me titled "Does God Know Your Next Move?" This finally allowed a proponent of openness

to explain the position to a large evangelical readership. The editors at the magazine must be given credit for allowing this theological debate to continue in the face of intense pressure to cut it off at the knees.

Other critiques of openness appeared in the winter 2002 edition of *Contact*, the news magazine of Gordon-Conwell Seminary and in the March 2003 issue of *Moody* magazine.

In 2001 some pastors in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (UB), a dwindling denomination that owns Huntington College, organized an attempt to have me removed from the college. A board of inquiry constituted of Trustees and faculty found that my writings did not conflict with the College's statement of faith.

During this time opponents of openness sought to get open theists expelled from membership in the Evangelical Theological Society (a predominately white, male, Calvinistic rather than Reformed, conservative evangelical, group that desires to speak for all evangelicalism). At the 2000 annual meeting the Executive Committee announced that the theme for the following year, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries" would include an examination of open theism. At the 2001 meeting over three dozen papers were read on openness. At an ad hoc business meeting the majority of the membership endorsed the following resolution: "We believe the Bible clearly teaches (emphasis mine) that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all events past, present and future, including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents." The June 2002 issue of the journal of the society was dedicated to a discussion of open theism.

At the 2002 meeting Roger Nicole, one of the founding members of the society, formally charged Clark Pinnock and me with violating the doctrinal statement of the society by our denial that God possessed exhaustive definite foreknowledge. He charged that this implied that we denied the truth of scripture—his main argument was that we held that God could change his mind. The members voted to have the Executive Committee hold a formal hearing, which was done in October of 2003. The Committee decided that Pinnock was not guilty of the charge but that I was. The reason centered on the truth value of statements about the future actions of

free creatures. I said they are only probabilities, not certainties because the future did not exist. For them, any biblical statement about the future must be true in the sense that it is a certain fact to occur. It seems to me that such a view presupposes the stasis theory of time which open theists reject. The Committee exonerated Pinnock because when asked about his stand on this matter he replied that he did not know much about such philosophical intricacies. Shortly before the 2003 annual meeting the faculty of the Southern Baptist seminaries passed resolutions against open theism. At the November ETS meeting a lengthy special business meeting was held. The Presidents of the Southern Baptist seminaries showed up and spoke strongly against open theism. The vote of the membership was 67% to retain Pinnock while 63% voted to remove me. However, this fell short of the required two-thirds needed for expulsion. I think the vote represents the fact that Executive Committee voted for Pinnock and against me due to the philosophical issues. One way to read this vote is that 1/3 of the members voted to expel us no matter what the recommendation of the Executive Committee was, another third voted to keep us no matter what the recommendation of the Executive Committee was, and the final third were swing votes that went with the recommendation of the Executive Committee. Hence, the ETS is very split on the matter.

All of this fanned the flames of turmoil among the Board of Trustees at Huntington College. The push to get rid of me was led by Calvinist pastors on the Board as well as by a Trustee who was the former Academic Dean at Moody Bible Institute. Though the United Brethren denomination was historically Arminian, it was the Calvinist pastors of the five largest congregations who called the shots. They worked hard to deny me tenure. The President argued that my work far exceeded the criteria for tenure and that the Bishop of the denomination at the time of my hire had given his approval. The College administration expended a great deal of time coping with the numerous political maneuvers of these folks. Several high profile evangelicals such as Richard Mouw and David Neff wrote the Trustees of the college on my behalf and the honor society students at Huntington formed a group to draw attention to the fact that the College's published educational philosophy stated that "controversy [is] a normal and healthy

part of its life as a university.” However, when college enrollment dipped the President told the faculty and the Board that though the main reason was the previous increase in tuition by about 10% in one year (this made Huntington only slightly less expensive than Calvin and Wheaton but without the academic reputation), he added, based on “anecdotal evidence,” that one of the reasons for the downturn was the “controversy surrounding Dr. Sanders.” Thus, the die was cast for my ouster.

After the Board pulled the plug the President informed the faculty of the decision. When asked whether other faculty who affirmed open theism would also be fired the President told the faculty that no other open theists would be fired since “you can be an open theist and teach at Huntington College, you just cannot be a well known one.” Consequently, the basis for my termination was not doctrinal but notoriety.

Clearly, open theism has become a hot topic within evangelicalism. I am aware of nineteen books from evangelical publishers alone, dozens of journal articles, and over seventy conference papers. That open theism has struck a raw nerve with neoevangelical Calvinists (the movement which came out of Fundamentalism in the 1940’s) can be seen in the titles of the books against open theism: *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*; *The Battle for God*; *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*; *God’s Lesser Glory: the Diminished God of Open Theism*; *No Other God*, and, from one of my former professors, *Creating God in the Image of Man*.

All is not bleak on the horizon, however, for the openness of God is gaining a hearing in Reformed, Wesleyan and Pentecostal circles where a genuine discussion takes place. Open theists do not claim to be able to prove their view or that the model is problem free. What we desire is dialogue to see whether or not this understanding of God is really helpful.

Key issues in the debate

One of the benefits arising from the openness debate is that a host of important issues have arisen, most of which had not been seriously discussed among evangelicals.

Philosophical Questions

The debate raised questions about nature of time itself as well as God's relation to time. This led to the publication of *God and Time: Four Views* (IVP). Also, the decades of work by members of the Society of Christian Philosophers on the divine attributes (e.g. simplicity, immutability, atemporality and omniscience) was introduced to a wider readership. The debate over foreknowledge resulted in the publication of *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (IVP). These books have evangelical proponents of each view expounding and defending the position so the different views get a fair hearing. Evangelical theologians and pastors finally have to face up to some of the philosophical assumptions behind their theological stances.

How do we decide what God is like?

Another issue that has surfaced is the interplay between natural theology and biblical theology. Evangelicals have typically claimed to simply get their views straight from the Bible, unencumbered by social or historical location. The notion that certain aspects of their doctrine of God were at all influenced by philosophy was not on their radar screen until open theism came along. For instance, that a philosophical heritage had anything to do with the conclusion that God was timeless was not mentioned. Evangelicals were unaware that philosophy colored their interpretation of the few biblical texts they used to support divine atemporality. Now, however, evangelicals are trying to sort out the proper relations between biblical and philosophical theologies. Today I find some evangelical theologians, such as Millard Erickson, admitting that every theology is influenced by philosophy. After explaining the philosophical and hermeneutical assumptions of classical and open theists Amos Yong concludes: "Each system interprets the Bible consistently and coherently within its presuppositional framework. . . . factors extraneous to the Bible itself determines how one reads and interprets the biblical text. . . with regard to the doctrine of divine omniscience in particular." [20] The full import of this has not yet sunk in. Evangelicals have regularly criticized liberal theologians for allowing philosophical commitments to govern their reading of scripture. But if evangelicals do this as well then what does this do to the presumed

“objective” interpretation of scripture that most evangelicals think they possess? Ultimately, this means that there is no definitive way to settle the matter and this shakes the strong epistemological foundationalism of many evangelicals.

The Nature of Language about God

Evangelicals who affirm classical theism admit that there are passages of scripture where it looks as though God has emotional reactions, or that God does something in response to prayer, or even that God tests people to learn whether they will obey, but they insist that such texts are “anthropomorphisms” and do not mean what they say. Why should we interpret them as anthropomorphisms instead of straightforwardly as is customary in evangelicalism? Because, we are told these texts are metaphorical, not literal. One thing to notice here is that these evangelicals are unaware that the very literal/metaphorical distinction is a product of philosophical discourse.[21] The very categories they use for biblical interpretation are shaped by philosophy of language.

Hermeneutical issues

Even granting the validity of the literal/metaphorical distinction, why are these expressions metaphorical? The answer is that if we took the biblical expressions such as God changing his mind literally, then we would be “reducing God to human proportions.”[22] Calvinist philosopher Paul Helm argues that the “clear,” “strong” and literal texts of scripture can be distinguished from the “unclear,” “weaker,” and anthropomorphic.[23] For Helm, the three biblical texts that say God does not change (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29, Mal. 3:6) are the strong, clear texts that provide the truth about what God is really like. The dozens of passages where God is said to “change his mind” says Helm, are the unclear texts that must be subordinated to the clear ones. However, this begs the question for it assumes that a particular model of God is the correct one and the texts that support this model are the literal and clear passages.

The Nature of Biblical Prophecy

Many evangelicals view biblical prophecies as accurate predictions of what will happen and this is then used to prove the divine authorship of the Bible. Open theism raises questions about the nature of the future and points out the numerous biblical prophecies that either did not come to pass at all or did not occur in the way foretold. What exactly is the nature of biblical prophecies and, in particular, how do we decide which ones are conditional and which are unconditional?

Different Forms of Spirituality

Forms of piety differ greatly among Christians. Various faith communities emphasize different kinds of prayer, worship, and have divergent understandings of what it means to live the Christian life. Different forms of piety give rise to different understandings of the divine nature and God's relationship to the world. The open theism debate has helped bring this factor to light.

Sola Scriptura and the Role of Tradition in Theology

The inability to settle this matter with a simple appeal to the Bible has led many critics of open theism to appeal to church tradition as a way of determining what theological perspectives are acceptable. Needless to say, it has been uncommon for evangelicals to cite "the tradition" as a trump card to settle theological disputes. It has amazed me to hear Southern Baptists, in particular, vituperate against open theism by shouting, "But it's not traditional!" This brings forth a number of interesting issues. For one, just what exactly is "the" tradition? Has there really been a singular tradition on topics such as anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology or ecclesiology? Thomas Oden's strong use of tradition led him to say that open theism is a "heresy" because dynamic omniscience is not in line with the theological consensus of the first eight centuries. According to this criterion, however, much of what came out of the Protestant Reformation is heresy and much of what evangelicals believe would fail the test as well. For example, I do not think dispensationalism was part of the early consensus.

How do Evangelicals Settle Theological Disputes?

Accusing fellow evangelicals of heresy has been a customary tactic of evangelicals. Despite pleas from his fellow evangelicals J. Gresham Machen refused to make room for premillennialism in his movement.[24] Instead, he said it is “a very serious heresy.” Given the popularity of the Left Behind series, this has become one lucrative heresy! Cornelius Van Til called Gordon Clark a heretic and E. J. Carnell called Fundamentalists “heretics.” Evangelicals have demonized one another over a host of issues rendering Gary Dorrien’s comment fitting: “The irony of evangelicalism is that while it contains an essentially contested family of theologies, it has been poorly suited to affirm pluralism of any kind.”[25]

Because of open theism, once again evangelicals are confronted with the issue of how to handle differences in theology. If the debate cannot be settled by appeal to scripture or tradition then other means must be found to “remove this cancer from our midst.” Evangelicalism is a populist movement, lacking any central source of authority. In such a setting practicing dialogical virtues is not the fastest way to settle theological disputes. In order to get one’s way it is a common tactic to caricature the other view or label it with names that no upstanding evangelical would be associated with or simply use ad hominem. For example, one Calvinist academic wrote that the reason I developed a warped view of God is because I failed to properly cope with my brother’s tragic death. Open theists have been accused of worshipping a “finite god” and a “user-friendly” God. Some say we are Socinian. Others label us process theologians but the process folks say we are really just classical theists.[26] Nobody wants us. The sons of openness have nowhere to lay our heads.

Why the brouhaha?

Why have Calvinist evangelicals reacted so strongly? One reason is that issues raised by the debate undermine the sense of certainty that some evangelicals desire to obtain in exegesis and theology. This leads to a crisis of authority. Who is right? How do we settle what is correct? Who has the right to determine what is acceptable for evangelicals to believe? It is at this juncture that the issue of control over institutions (publishing houses, colleges, etc.) arises.

Another reason is that open theists have presented the most acute criticism of, and alternative to, theological determinism in quite some time. Open theists have exposed the inability of the God of theological determinism to respond to what we do or be affected by our prayers. An unresponsive God is a hard sell in the evangelical pew. It is no surprise that virtually all of the virulent rhetoric has come from Calvinist evangelicals. It should be noted, however, that Reformed theology is much broader and richer than this form of Calvinism. In fact, some significant Reformed thinkers are proponents of divine temporality and dynamic omniscience (e. g. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Hendrikus Berkhof, Adrio König, and Vincent Brümmer).

Conclusion

At the end of his 1995 review of *The Openness of God in Christianity Today*, Roger Olson asked whether American evangelicals have “come of age enough to avoid heresy charges and breast-beating jeremiads in response to a new doctrinal proposal that is so conscientiously based on biblical reflection rather than on rebellious accommodation to modern thought? This may be the test.” It seems to me that evangelical theologians have failed this exam. Arthur Holmes once said that one of the reasons he studied philosophy rather than theology was that doing theology at an evangelical institution was too dangerous. William Hasker, a prominent open theist, taught philosophy at Huntington College for over thirty years but he was not fired. Evangelical philosophers are granted “idiosyncrasy credits” whereas theologians are kept on a tight leash at evangelical schools. Olson recently said that “At the moment most of the creative theological reflection and construction being done by evangelical theologians is taking place—and for the foreseeable future will be taking place—outside the power centers of conservative, establishment evangelical theological life.”[27]

[1] For a wide array of information on openness theology see www.opentheism.info.

[2] Some open theists speak of God’s “self-limitation” in this regard but it is preferable to say God “restrains” the use of his power.

[3] Edwards, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," Works of Jonathan Edwards, Edward Hickman ed. in 2 volumes (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 2, 115-6 (emphasis mine).

[4] Most of the early church fathers were freewill theists who affirmed weak immutability and weak impassibility. See the outstanding study by Paul Gavriilyuk *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* The Oxford Early Christian Studies series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 244. Willard comments about divine foreknowledge on pages 244-253.

[6] Many critics of open theism have failed to understand this connection to the freewill tradition, claiming that the watershed is between those who affirm exhaustive definite foreknowledge and those who do not. They claim that proponents of dynamic omniscience cannot be considered "Arminian" since Arminians affirm simple foreknowledge. Though this is a difference between the views it is not the crucial difference. For elaboration on the fundamental similarities between simple foreknowledge and dynamic omniscience see Steven M. Studebaker, "The Mode of Divine Knowledge in Reformation Arminianism and Open Theism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47.3 (September, 2004): 469-480; and John Sanders, "Open Theism: a Radical Revision or Miniscule Modification of Arminianism?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38.2 (Fall 2003): 69-102.

[7] For more see Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, revised edition, chapters three and four; Richard Rice, "Biblical Support," in Clark Pinnock et. al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional View of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 22-50; Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 53-87.

[8] For elaboration on this point see my "How Do We Decide What God is Like?" in *And God saw that it was good: Essays on Creation and God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim*, ed. Fred Gaiser, (Word and World

supplement, 2006) and John Sanders and Chris Hall, *Does God Have a Future? A Debate on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003) 124-129.

[9] Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good*, ed. C. J. Orlebeke and L. B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 181-203.

[10] Kris Udd, "Prediction and Foreknowledge in Ezekiel's Prophecy Against Tyre," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56.1 (2005): p. 35. See also, Thomas Renz, "Proclaiming the Future: History and Theology in Prophecies Against Tyre," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 (2000): 17-58.

[11] Renz, "Proclaiming the Future," 17.

[12] This is the view of Walter Kaiser and Moises Silva. See their *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 148-9.

[13] See Terence Fretheim, "Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 47, no. 4 (Oct. 1985): 595-602.

[14] I believe the biblical language about God is best understood as conceptual metaphors and are not to be taken literally. For explanation see the revised edition of my *God Who Risks*, chapter 2. On conceptual metaphor theory see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[15] For a discussion of these theories as they relate to God see Gregory Ganssle ed., *God & Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

[16] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Unqualified Divine Temporality," Gregory Ganssle ed., *God & Time: Four Views*, 187-213.

[17] This is shown by Norman Kretzman and Eleonore Stump, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458. There are those, however, who claim that a timeless God can experience changing emotions and give-and-

take relations. They do not care if this is logically contradictory (A and non A). Some object that the application of human logic to our understanding of God places limits on God. By using human reasoning we do not claim to understand everything about God. There is room for mystery and paradox in our theologizing but logical contradictions pop the circuit breakers of our mind, shutting off any understanding of the divine. For further discussion see my “Mystery and Nonsense” in *God Who Risks*, revised edition, (2.4).

[18] Also, it is now in its twelfth printing indicating that it continues to have an impact.

[19] *Christianity Today*, (February 2, 1998): p. 46.

[20] Yong, “Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents: Weighing the Presuppositional Issues in the Contemporary Debate,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26.3 (2002): 263. Yong does not take sides in the debate and his is one of the best explanations of the underlying presuppositions.

[21] Evangelicals have not seriously engaged theories of metaphor, such as cognitive linguistics.

[22] For a full response to this charge see my “Reducing God to Human Proportions” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark Pinnock*, eds. Anthony Cross and Stanley Porter (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 111-126.

[23] P. Helm, *The Providence of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), pp. 51-4.

[24] For this and the following see Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 27, 31, 41, 59, 69, and 73.

[25] Dorrien, *Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, p. 3. In my opinion, is that branch of evangelicalism that arose out of fundamentalism that is ill-suited because a key characteristic of these “neoevangelicals” is that, epistemically, they cannot be wrong about what they believe.

[26] See David Ray Griffen’s comments in *Searching for an Adequate God*, pp. 14-24.

[27] Roger Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 65

Article 6

Case Against Open theism

An Examination Of Open Theism By: Gregg Cantelmo

Introduction

Throughout history, man has struggled to understand God and has presented in the marketplace of religions and ideas distinct characteristics or worldviews of God from traditional theism to atheism.¹ Within the past twenty-five years a number of philosophers and theologians, from a classical theistic tradition, have presented a new model of understanding God which has increasingly found its way into mainstream evangelical churches and publications. The most popular and least pejorative name for this new view is “open theism” or “free-will theism.”²

Open theism is concerned with how God experiences the world. It asks and attempts to answer the questions, “What does God know?” and “When does He know it?” The essence of the questions open theists ask are not dealing with how God knows the future, but if he knows it at all.³ An early proponent of open theism said, “God experienced the events of the world He has created. . .as they happen, rather than all at once in some timeless, eternal perception. This also means that not even God knows the future in all its details.”⁴ Open theists maintain that God does not know what a given human being will do until he acts. They refer to such human actions as “possibilities.”⁵ Because God remains unaware of human possibilities, the future remains “open” in His mind. This means that rather than God knowing all things, He is in the process of learning new things as they take place.⁶ This is a significant redefinition of the classical doctrine of God’s omniscience.⁷ The open theist’s view of omniscience is that God has complete knowledge of the past and the present, but not the future⁸ What God does know of the future is in reference to what he knows of “present dispositions, proclivities, inclinations, intentions and probabilities as well as they can be known.”⁹

Along with the doctrine of omniscience, open theism questions and redefines a number of historical and theological formulations of the attributes of God.

Independence. Grudem defines God's independence as, "God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy."¹⁰ Open theism teaches that God is dependent on the world in certain respects.¹¹

Immutability. Classical theology defines God's immutability as, "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."¹² Open theism teaches God is, "...open to new experiences, has a capacity for novelty and is open to reality, which itself is open to change."¹³ Trying to have it both ways open theism says, "God is immutable in essence and in his trustworthiness over time, but in other respects God changes."¹⁴

Eternality. Classical theism states, "God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time."¹⁵ Open theism teaches that, "God is a temporal agent. He is above time in the sense that he is above finite experience and measurement of time but he is not beyond "before and after" or beyond sequence of events. Scripture presents God as temporally everlasting, not timelessly eternal....Clearly God is temporally related to creatures and projects himself and his actions along a temporal path."¹⁶

Omnipresence. Classical theology teaches that just as God is unlimited or infinite with respect to time, so God is unlimited with respect to space. God's omnipresence may be defined as, "God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places."¹⁷ A leading proponent of open theism says, "I do not feel obliged to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it....The only persons we encounter are embodied persons and, if God is not embodied, it may prove difficult to understand how God is a person....Embodiment may be the way

in which the transcendent God is able to be immanent and why God is presented in such terms.”¹⁸

Unity. The unity of God in classical theology is defined as, “God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different time.”¹⁹ This is also called in theology the “simplicity” of God, meaning that God is not composed of parts and cautioning against singling out any one attribute of God as more important than all the others. This will be examined when the hermeneutics of open theism is discussed. Open theism reveals that, “The doctrine of divine simplicity, so crucial to the classical understanding of God, has been abandoned by a strong majority of Christian philosophers, though it still has a small band of defenders.”²⁰ Clark Pinnock, having abandoned this doctrine says, “Let us not treat the attributes of God independently of the Bible but view the biblical metaphors as reality-depicting descriptions of the living God, whose very being is self-giving love.”²¹

Omnipotence. Classical theism defines God’s omnipotence in reference to His own power to do what he decides to do. It states, “God’s omnipotence means that God is able to do all his holy will.”²² On the other hand open theism states that “we must not define omnipotence as the power to determine everything but rather as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises.”²³ Pinnock openly states that, “God cannot just do anything he wants, when he wants to....His power can, at least temporarily, be blocked and his will not be done in the short term.”²⁴

History

While it is viewed that open theism is a debate about divine foreknowledge, it is evident that open theism is a grand reworking of historic and orthodox theology. Only a handful of God’s attributes have been addressed thus far, but an historical and theological investigation of open theism shows that it is clearly a comprehensive and aberrant paradigm of God. It is acknowledged that classical theism has been more prevalent throughout church history. Gregory Boyd himself admits that the classical view “has always been the majority view of the church.”²⁵ While church history is not the final arbitrator of theological truth, it is significant that even among

theologians who differ on a variety of other doctrinal issues they have been consistent in their belief in the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God. Millard Erickson points out that while there has been considerable difference about how God knows the future, there has not been difference about whether he knows the future.²⁶

One of the problems for the traditional view is that no council or ecumenical creed has ever condemned or ruled on this issue. For the open theists this allows them to come to their conclusions without having to feel that they are departing from historic and orthodox Christian doctrine.²⁷ The reality is that while there have some teachers throughout church history that have held a view of less than exhaustive definite foreknowledge, they were so obscure or outright heretical in other areas that they posed no threat nor necessitated a ruling from an orthodox council.²⁸

In an interesting admission Boyd acknowledges that, “Until the time of the Socinians, the belief that God’s omniscience included all future events was not generally questioned.”²⁹ If there is any historical precedent from church history to open theism it is the 16th century heresy of Socinianism, developed by Fausto Socinus. Socinus denied the triunity of God, the deity of Christ, and a substitutionary atonement, among other essentials of the faith. This theological tradition was later manifest as Unitarianism. On God’s omniscience he reasoned, “Since, then, there is not reason, no passage of Scripture, from which it can be clearly gathered that God knew all things which happened before they happened, we must conclude that we are by no means to assent such a foreknowledge of God....”³⁰ This sounds very similar to the openness view that God’s knowledge is significantly dependent upon the decisions that man makes. Gregory Boyd says, “God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He created these people and they, in turn create their decisions.”³¹

Open theists also maintain that there is little support for their view in church history because the church has been influenced by Greek philosophy rather than the Scriptures for the past two thousand years. Boyd states, “... from Plato, Aristotle and the subsequent Hellenistic tradition, the church arrived at the notion that God was altogether unmoved, impassible,

immutable, nontemporal and purely actual.”³² Open theists uniformly teach that the church fathers were so influenced by Greek philosophy when they formulated their theology, that the church’s historical and theological understanding of God reflects a more philosophical understanding than a biblical one.³³ Carl Henry rightfully noted, “It is true that medieval theologians were aware of the teaching of certain Greek philosophers in discussing God’s immutability.... They noted Plato’s argument that change in a supremely perfect being constitutes corruption, deterioration and loss of perfection.... The fact is, however, that the Hebrew-Christian belief in God’s immutability arose independently of Greek philosophy; it stemmed from revelational sources rather than from speculative conjecture.”³⁴ The early church Fathers often wrote against pagan philosophy and stressed biblical support for their writings. “They quoted the New Testament alone more than thirty-six thousand times, omitting from all reference only eleven verses.”³⁵

While open theists accuse the historic church of developing its theology from a philosophical bias, it seems that openness theology is far more a philosophical position itself than a biblical one. Open theist Richard Rice says, “Impressive philosophical evidence supports the open view of God and reality.”³⁶ Along with Boyd’s published works, a major portion of his Internet web site, Christus Victor Ministries, is dedicated to the philosophical support of open view theism.³⁷ Even back in January of 1995, Christianity Today magazine printed a series of articles on open theism with the heading “Has God Been Held Hostage by Philosophy?” The predominant answer from most of the contributors was yes.³⁸ InterVarsity Press, a popular publisher of open theism theology, recently published two books in the Calvinist/Arminian debate.³⁹ While the Arminian position historically does not hold to open theism and necessarily does not hold to open theism, the authors defending Arminianism leaned strongly toward openness in their discussion of human freedom and the majority of the books defense was found in philosophical reasoning rather than in biblical support.⁴⁰

Hermeneutics⁴¹

Rules of interpretation lie at the root of any theological conclusions based on the reading and study of the Bible. Nineteenth-century Methodist Episcopalian, Milton Spenser Terry, said of the goal of hermeneutics, "...we are always to make a discriminating use of sound hermeneutical principles. We must not study them in the light of modern systems of divinity, but should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers, and study to obtain the impression their words would naturally have made upon the minds of the first readers.... Still less should we allow ourselves to be influenced by any presumptions of what the Scriptures ought to teach."⁴² The hermeneutics of the open theists bring to the Scriptures their presumptions of what Scripture ought to teach and then proceed to teach it. Therefore it is helpful to understand the methods employed by open theists in interpreting the Bible.

Narrative Priority. Most of the biblical case for open theism comes from narrative-type passages. Those are the passages that through story describe what God does. Primacy is given to narrative descriptions rather than didactic teaching. Pinnock clearly says, "In terms of biblical interpretation, I give particular weight to narrative and the language of personal relationships in it....The biblical narrative reveals the nature of God's sovereignty."⁴³ This means that those passages that describe what God does are given greater interpretative weight than those passages that describe what God is like. I agree with Erickson who says, "I would propose that the general rule to be followed is that the teachings about what God is like should be the explanation of what he appears to be doing in a given situation."⁴⁴ Rather than using narrative passages to understand and develop a doctrine of God's sovereignty, one should look to passages such as Romans 9 whose purpose is to teach that doctrine. This holds true as well with the doctrine of foreknowledge.⁴⁵ A common example of this poor hermeneutic is the open theist's use of 1 Samuel 15. Open theists emphasize the narrative portions of this chapter involving God regretting that He has made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11, 35) while marginalizing the didactic portion that clearly teaches that God is not like a man that he should change His mind (1 Sam. 15:29).⁴⁶

Interpretive Center. An interpretive center is the designating of one portion of Scripture as a basis for interpreting other sections of Scripture. A verse or concept is used as the lens through which all other passages are understood.⁴⁷ The interpretive center used by open theists in defining their picture of God is 1 John 4:8 which says “God is love.” Richard Rice says, “From a Christian perspective, love is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God...The statement God is love is as close as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality.”⁴⁸ After devoting several pages to explain the importance of this theme he states, “Consequently, when we enumerate God’s qualities, we must not only include love; to be faithful to the Bible we must put love at the head of the list.”⁴⁹ He then goes on to say, “A doctrine of God that is faithful to the Bible must show that all of God’s characteristics derive from love.”⁵⁰ Boyd, Sanders, and Pinnock also support the primacy of God’s love as the interpretive center for open theism.⁵¹ The reason for this is that open theists believe the concept of divine foreknowledge is inconsistent with the concept of divine love as expressed in human freedom. Rice says, “To attribute supreme love to God, therefore, we should think of Him as supremely responsive to the experiences of His creatures.”⁵² Not only does His love make God “responsive” to man, but open theists claim it also makes Him more “sensitive.”⁵³ In this they are claiming that the classical theists view of God is rigid, stern, uninvolved, and insensitive.

Classical theism differs in both methodology and conclusions. If 1 John 4:8 is the locus classicus of biblical interpretation, then many passages dealing with God’s attributes are deprived of their significance. When constructing any doctrine it is important that every passage of Scripture have equal weight. While the Bible says much about the love of God, it also says that God is holy (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16), to be feared (Prov. 1:7), is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5), and is a God of wrath who avenges (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:20). All of God’s attributes deserve equal place alongside love in describing who God is.

Discourse analysis. The case for openness rests on a running survey of biblical passages. Thomas states, “This technique seeks a larger picture in a passage before investigating the details. In fact, it disparages traditional

methods that investigate the details first, before proceeding to the larger picture.”⁵⁴ Thomas has coined this “hermeneutical hopscotch,” meaning the practice of hopping from one carefully selected part of a larger section of Scripture to another.⁵⁵ By selecting only parts that support a predetermined opinion, this method can demonstrate just about anything the interpreter desires to prove. For instance, Boyd begins with Genesis 6:6, and says, “The Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” He then uses this to prove that God did not know in advance that humans would come to this wicked state.⁵⁶ Then he does the same thing with 1 Samuel 15:11, ³⁵ (previously mentioned), and draws the same conclusion about God’s ignorance of the future. He also cites Numbers 14:11 and Hosea 8:5 where God asks questions about the future. Most commentators interpret these verses as rhetorical questions, but Boyd, after acknowledging rhetorical questions as a possibility, concludes that the questions God ask must reflect his lack of knowledge about the duration of Israel’s stubbornness.⁵⁷ He then continues to string together such passages, picking only the instances that support his case. Sanders does the same thing, only in more detail, as he selectively goes through Genesis.⁵⁸ In doing this they simultaneously ignore the verses from this same block of material that seemingly contradicts the openness position.⁵⁹

Much more can be said in reference to the hermeneutics of open theism. There seems to be a lack of understanding the nature of progressive revelation in that they seem to attach greater weight to Old Testament passages than they do to New Testament passages.⁶⁰ Obscure and infrequent passages are also given precedence over clear and recurring passages.⁶¹

Handling of Scriptural Support

Both classical and open theists appeal to Scripture to support their positions. As we have seen, how one interprets these passages makes all the difference in the position one holds.

Limited Foreknowledge. When open theists do appeal to Scripture, they gravitate toward passages that on the surface appear to limit God’s

omniscience. These passages can be grouped into five categories: God's repentance, God's testing of Israel, failed prophecies, God's questions, and God's admission that some ideas never entered his mind.⁶²

The first group of passages are those where God expresses regret or repentance. Genesis 6:6-7 is commonly brought up, as well as 1 Samuel 15:11, 35. In reference to the 1 Samuel passages Boyd says, "God changed his mind about Saul...but this was not God's ideal will. He did it as a necessary and just response to Saul's own free decisions.... It seems clear that if God can hope for one outcome only to be disappointed by another, it must be possible for humans to thwart his will in some instances."⁶³ Open theists contend that these passages teach God's limited foreknowledge because how could God feel sorrow for something if He knew in advance what was going to happen?⁶⁴ The truth is that these two points are not necessarily connected as it is possible to know something in advance and yet still feel remorse when that event transpires. Erickson points out that we all know one day our parents will die and yet we still experience remorse when that sad day arrives.⁶⁵ It has also been suggested that word "repent" or "regret" in the niphal stem can carry the semantic meaning of "to experience emotional pain."⁶⁶ Commentator Dale Ralph Davis says of 1 Sam. 15, "Verse 11 does not intend to suggest Yahweh's fickleness of purpose but his sorrow over sin; it does not depict Yahweh flustered over lack of foresight but Yahweh grieved over lack of obedience....We need to know that the God of the Bible is no cold slab of concrete impervious to our carefully defended apostasies."⁶⁷

The second group of passages involves God testing Israel (Deut. 8:2; 13:3; Judg. 3:4). Open theists contend that it was necessary for God to test the nation so that He could learn what they would do under certain circumstances.⁶⁸ This is clearly bringing one's preunderstanding to the text. Keil and Delitzsch maintain that the test was actually for the purpose of Israel's humbling rather than God's learning. They contend that God was testing His people for the purpose of publicly revealing the genuine condition of their hearts.⁶⁹

The third group of passages involves allegedly failed prophecies. Open theists argue that there are various predictions found throughout the Bible

that were never fulfilled exactly as predicted. Sanders ask, "Is it possible for God to have mistaken beliefs about the future? The traditional theological answer is that God cannot, but there are several biblical texts that seem to affirm that what God thought would happen did not come about...."70 One such passage is Genesis 37:9-11, which is a prediction that Joseph's parents would bow down to Joseph. Open theists contend that this prophecy was not fulfilled in the exact detail because Joseph's parents never end up bowing down to him.71 A similar prediction is found in Acts 21:11 where Agabus predicts that the Jews would bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles. Sanders argues that this passage was not fulfilled in specific detail because it was actually the Roman rather than the Jews that bound Paul (Acts 21:33).72 Another supposedly failed prophecy is found in Matthew 24:2 where Christ predicts that not one stone would be left on another when the temple is destroyed. Pinnock claims that the prophecy failed to be fulfilled precisely because some stones were left upon the others when the temple was destroyed.73 What Pinnock has said here is that Jesus was wrong in what he predicted, which calls into question the very nature of an inerrant Scripture.

Classical theists have historically interpreted these passages in ways that do not call into question God's foreknowledge. For both Gen. 37:9-11 and Acts 21:11 the Bible never says that these prophecies were not fulfilled exactly as predicted. Erickson points out that Scripture remains silent regarding how and when an exact fulfillment took place.74 Regarding Matthew 24:2, other solutions exist besides the conclusion that Christ made a failed prediction. Christ could have been using hyperbole to indicate the totality of the destruction.75 It has also been suggested that the historical and eschatological elements of prophecy are intertwined in which the destruction in 70 A.D. points to a future fulfillment and serves as a symbol of the far event.76

The fourth group of passages involves situations where God asks a question. For example in Numbers 14:11, He asks, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?" Boyd contends that God asked questions of this nature in order to express his uncertainty regarding

the future.⁷⁷ Again this seems to impose one's preunderstanding upon the text. It would be more consistent with the biblical narrative to interpret this passage in a similar way as when God asked Adam in the garden, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). God was not playing hide-in-seek, but rather desiring Adam to acknowledge his sinful act and repent. In the same manner God asked the questions of Numbers 14:11 to elicit a response of repentance from the rebellious people of Israel.

The fifth group of passages used by open theists involves God seeing Israel's idolatry and noting that it never entered His mind that Israel would behave in this manner. For example, Jeremiah 7:31 says, "They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind." Here, according to Boyd, is a case of God's being unable to know what was to happen.⁷⁸ Erickson states that God's saying that their behavior did not come into His mind should be understood, not as a declarative sentence, but as an expression of rebuke. He says, "When one says, 'I never thought you would do that!' it often is a means of indicating how 'unthinkable' the action is."⁷⁹ The purpose of such language is to express outrage and scandal. Another problem with Boyd's interpretation of this passage is that hundreds of years earlier God has warned Israel against committing this specific evil act (Deut. 12:31). If open theists are correct in their reading of the Jeremiah passage, then not only is God limited in His foreknowledge and foresight, but He is also forgetful about what He has specifically forbidden in the past.⁸⁰

Exhaustive Foreknowledge. The biblical passages that favor the classical theist position far outweigh those of the open theist. Of the 4,800 passages that bear upon divine omniscience and especially, divine foreknowledge, only 105, or 2.1875 percent, directly argue for the open theist position.⁸¹ An especially difficult passage for the open theist is Psalm 139, which declares God's exhaustive knowledge of the psalmist. Verse 4 declares that God knows his speech even before there is a word on his tongue. This means that God is aware of the human contingency of the spoken word even before the human decision to speak takes place. In verse 16 the

psalmist declares that God was aware of all of his days before one of them came to be.⁸²

The richest and strongest portion of Scripture supporting God's knowledge of the future is Isaiah 40-48. The text is repetitive in its message that the God of Israel is known as the true and living God in contrast to idols, and this is evident on the basis that the true God knows and declares the future before it occurs. The false gods neither know nor declare any such thing. Ware makes three important observations of these Isaiah texts. First that the context of any and all of the specific predictions within these texts is one of general claims of broad foreknowledge. Second, that all of the specific predictions given by God in these texts involve, for their fulfillment, the future free choices and actions of human agents. Third, that God has chosen to vindicate himself as God by declaring what the future will be.⁸³

Another text supporting the classical position is found in Daniel 11 where Daniel makes specific predictions about a number of future events. Ware declares, "So many details, involving future free choices, with such precision—this is truly overwhelming evidence, in one chapter of the Bible, of the reality of God's foreknowledge."⁸⁴

A New Testament passage that clearly demonstrates the classical view is Matthew 26:33-35, 69-75. In this passage Jesus predicts Peter's future denial. Open theists explain the passage in terms of Christ predicting what Peter would do on the basis of His present knowledge of Peter's character. This means that Christ used his exhaustive present knowledge of Peter to make an educated guess as to what Peter would do in the future.⁸⁵ Such an explanation is unsatisfactory and seems to be disingenuous as well. How could present knowledge of someone's character lead to specific prediction of a threefold denial? And how could Christ without an exhaustive knowledge of human contingencies have known that Peter would deny Him not fewer than or more than three times, but exactly three times?⁸⁶ Add to that the exact time of the day the denial would take place and the free actions of the cock crowing. This crows in the face of open theists like Boyd and Sanders who say, "The promises of God should be understood as part of the divine project rather than as some eternal

blueprint, a project in which God has not scripted the way everything in human history will go. God has a goal, but the routes remain open.”⁸⁷

The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation describes God as acting according to a predetermined plan. He is never surprised and takes no risk. History flows along a predetermined path.⁸⁸ The Scriptures make reference to God’s taking counsel as He plans the future.⁸⁹ Galatians 3:8-9 clearly states that God “foresees” the future. And the fact that God foresees the future means that God foreknows the future. This foreknowledge is not uncertain or mutable. It is true and infallible knowledge. The Apostle Paul spoke of God’s “foreknowing,” “predestining,” “electing,” “justifying,” and “glorifying” sinners, and with no apology for God’s actions (Romans 8:29-30). Dr. Robert Morey states, “While the word foreknow means much more than bare pre-knowledge in Romans 8:29, it cannot mean anything less. The use of the word whom instead of what, means that it is not faith that is foreknown but the people of God, the elect.”⁹⁰

In 1 Peter 1:18-20, Peter states that Christ’s death was “foreknown before the foundation of the world.” To say that Christ’s death was not know by God means that it was not planned by God. Hebrews 6:17 explains that God’s purpose is “unchangeable.” And since God’s purpose is “eternal” (Eph. 3:11), we can declare that it is “immutable” and “unchangeable.” The truth of Scripture is that God can intervene in history, and that is exactly what He did when He planned, decreed, and determined before the foundation of the world that his Son should die for sinners (Revelation 13:8).

Humble Applications

Having looked at the debate from the perspective of history, hermeneutics, and the handling of Scripture, I would now like to make some humble applications. While there are some positive aspects of open theism,⁹¹ there is also cause for great concern.

Effects on Systematic Theology. There are two concerns here. The first is that when one doctrine in a systematic theology is reinterpreted, it impacts all other doctrines. No one area of systematic theology can be developed in isolation.⁹² Boyd’s claim that, “Next to the central doctrines of the Christian

faith, the issue of whether the future is exhaustively settled or partially open is relatively unimportant”⁹³ is just not true because it necessitates a reinterpretation of those central doctrines. For instance in hamartiology, some open theists teach that God did not expect Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden.⁹⁴ In soteriological eschatology Sanders maintains, “there is nothing specifically said in the Old Testament that would have led one to predict a dying and raised Messiah.”⁹⁵ In personal eschatology, annihilationism and post-mortem salvation are common among open theists.⁹⁶ In Christology another open theist claims that, “at the Incarnation God undertook the risk that his Son would fail in His struggle with temptation.”⁹⁷ That means that Christ could have sinned which impacts the doctrine of the impeccability of Christ. And this very real possibility ran the “risk of permanently disastrous consequences to the Godhead itself.”⁹⁸

The second concern in the area of the theology of open theism is the influence of process theology. While not going as far as Charles Hartshorne, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Alfred North Whitehead have gone, most every open theist uses the language of process theology and some even acknowledge its developmental roots in their thinking.⁹⁹ Open theism has clearly evolved in the last thirty years. Nancy Pearcey has said, “Clearly, one reason for challenging evolutionary science is that otherwise we may find our churches and seminaries teaching evolutionary theology.”¹⁰⁰ Process theology seems to easily fall into that category of theology, and open theism is dangerously close.

Trustworthiness of God. An old cartoon pictures God in heaven looking down on earth with His telescope to discover what will happen next. The God of open theism is a God who can only react to the actions of mere mortals. While open theism attempts to provide answers and comfort to the problem of suffering,¹⁰¹ its picture of God is one that creates more sympathy than security. While God knows what could happen, He doesn’t know will happen until it happens. When a drunk is weaving along the highway at an excessive speed, God has no more knowledge of what that driver will do than the police officer that is chasing him. God doesn’t know if there will be an accident or not. Neither does He know if you or a loved one will be the victim of the drunk’s free actions. So God does not know who

will live or die today. That is not a God who engenders trust, hope, and security. There is no comfort in open theism's God who is waiting to respond. Jeremiah 10:12 says, "But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding." God's power (omnipotence) is directly linked to his wisdom and understanding (omniscience).

In open theism there is also the perception that all suffering and evil is the result of evil free agents and bad things just happen with no divine plan. This brings no comfort, whereas the Scriptures speak of those who "suffer according to the will of God" and who "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Pet. 4:19). This tells us that God's divine will does intersect with our suffering, it is no surprise to Him, and He may even will it for our benefit and His greater glory.

Trustworthiness of God's Word. Although many open theists claim to believe the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, this is inconsistent with their basic teaching. If God cannot know the future infallibly, then the predictions in the Bible that involve free acts cannot be infallible. Some of them may be wrong and we have no way of knowing which ones. Sanders says, "God is yet working to fulfill his promises and bring his project to fruition. The eschaton will surprise us because it is not set in concrete; it is not unfolding according to a prescribed script."¹⁰² And the "prescribed script" he refers to is what we understand to be predictive prophecy as declared in the Bible. Open theists claim that much of prophecy is conditional involving free choices that cannot be known,¹⁰³ yet the very nature and wonder of prophecy is its specificity.¹⁰⁴ And if all prophecy involving libertarian freedom is conditional, then there could not be any test for a false prophecy as the Old Testament prescribes in Deut. 18:22. All of this would seem to say that there is no sure prophetic word and that the Scriptures cannot say with authority what the future holds.

Prayer and Guidance. At first it seems that open theism has the upper hand when it comes to prayer because emphasis is put on God reacting to our reactions and requests. Sanders says, "Our prayers make a difference to God because of the personal relationship God enters into with us. God chooses to make himself dependent on us for certain things."¹⁰⁵ This

raises concern on a number of levels, but in regards to prayer it elevates our role in moving the hand of God and the importance prayer should have in our life.¹⁰⁶ But if God does not know the future, and if because of libertarian freedom there is no guarantee that He will be able to answer certain types of prayers, prayer itself is undermined.¹⁰⁷ If God does not know free human actions in advance, how can He know what would be the best course of action to follow? And if God does not know the best course of action for us to follow how can He guide us? And if He does guide us, how can we know it will be good guidance?¹⁰⁸ When faced with uncertainty, I have often found great comfort in saying that I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future. An open theist cannot say that.

Authority. In the first part of the nineteenth century, well known Scottish churchman Andrew Bonar wrote, "There is a natural aversion to authority, even the authority of God in the heart of man. And hence it has been that, both then and now, there have been zealous men who have loudly protested against those doctrines of grace usually called Calvinistic doctrines, pretending that the souls of men are by these doctrines lulled into sleep as far as regards the responsibility."¹⁰⁹ Though the particular doctrines are different, there is continuity in motive and outcome, and what he says sounds a lot like open theism. Everything about open theism, its beginning point, philosophical arguments, scriptural interpretations, and practical concerns, elevate and defend the autonomy of man over the authority and sovereignty of God. Bloesch says of God as presented in the open theist's worldview, "This is a far cry from the God of Calvin and Luther who is ever active in all things and events, steering everything toward a foreordained goal and purpose."¹¹⁰ And I would suggest that this is a far cry from the God of the Bible.

Though God's sovereignty conflicts with our autonomy, it in no way diminishes the value and role of our earthly walk with God. Just as the Scriptures begin with God and His sovereignty and creative authority over creation, so should theology begin with God and His sovereignty and creative authority. Whereas the Scriptures elevate God, open theism elevates man.¹¹¹ The many difficulties open theism presents on the

theological landscape come not from God's lack of knowledge concerning man, but from man's finite limited understanding of an infinite and awesome God. Of God we affirm with the Apostle Paul, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:36).

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1 Norman L. Geisler and William Watkins have categorized and described seven major views of God as theism, deism, pantheism, panentheism, finite godism, polytheism, and atheism in their books *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) and more briefly in Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).

2 The leading and most popular proponents of open theism include David Basinger, Gregory Boyd, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, and John Sanders.

3 Millard Erickson has outlined various ways in which the church has understood the foreknowledge of God. "Simple foreknowledge" is the idea that God simply "sees" the future as he stands outside of time looking on. "Middle knowledge" states that God knows not only all that will be, but all the other possibilities in every possible world. Then there are the views of Calvinism, which hold that God knows everything that will happen because he has chosen what is to occur and brings it about. The title of this most recent book on open theism also reflects the questions posed in this debate. See Erickson's book, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

4 Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1981), 10. Rice is a popular open theist who continues to write in evangelical publications. This early book from Bethany House, an evangelical publisher, was originally published by Review and Herald out of Nashville (1979) under the title of *The Openness of God*. Review and Herald is a Seventh-Day Adventist publisher and Rice was an associate professor of theology at Loma Linda University, one of the top Adventist schools. Other than the original title, there is no mention of this or Rice's theological background in the Bethany House edition.

5 Gregory Boyd states that the open view, "...affirms that the future decisions of self-determining agents are only possibilities until agents freely actualize them. In this view, therefore, the future is partly comprised of possibilities. And since God knows all things perfectly—just as they are, and not otherwise—God knows the future as partly comprised of possibilities." Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 90-91.

6 Richard Rice says in his chapter "Biblical Support for a New Perspective" in Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 16 the following, "God's knowledge of the world is also dynamic rather than static. Instead of perceiving the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know events as they take place. He learns something from what transpires."

7 "God's knowledge may be defined as follows: God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 190.

8 There is a large debate about the nature of time and God's relation to it. Open theist fall into the position called "presentism" which holds that the future does not yet exist to be known. The future is in the realm of the possible and the probable. Philosopher William Hasker states, "the central idea concerning God's knowledge of the future...can be simply stated: God knows everything about the future which it is logically possible for him to know." William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell

University Press, 1989), 187. Hasker began constructing this worldview in his book, *Metaphysics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), 29-50.

9 Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 100.

10 Grudem, 160.

11 "Since it [open theism] sees God as dependent on the world in certain respects, the open view of God differs from much conventional theology. Yet we believe that this dependence does not detract from God's greatness, it only enhances it." Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective"; in Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 16.

12 "Since it [open theism] sees God as dependent on the world in certain respects, the open view of God differs from much conventional theology. Yet we believe that this dependence does not detract from God's greatness, it only enhances it." Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective"; in Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 16.

13 Grudem, 163.

14 Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 41.

15 Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," *The Openness of God*, 117.

16 Grudem, 168.

17 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 96-97.

18 Grudem, 173.

19 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 34-35.

20 Grudem, 177.

21 William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective", in Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, 127.

22 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 27.

23 Grudem, 216.

24 Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, 114.

25 Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 10. Later in this same work he states, "I must concede that the open view has been relatively rare in church history" (115).

26 Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 248.

27 Boyd says, "We are not addressing anything central to the traditional definition of orthodoxy, so it seems some flexibility might be warranted." Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 116. Is not the very nature of the attributes of God central to the traditional definition of orthodoxy?

28 Erickson states that such aberrant teaching "was never a sufficiently popular view that the church found it necessary to address it in an official way." Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 249.

29 Gregory A. Boyd, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Long Publishing, Inc. 1992), 296-297, quoted in Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 115. Dipolar theism presents God as both absolute and relative, abstract and concrete, eternal and temporal, necessary and contingent, infinite and finite. It is another name for process theology and, though open theists do not go as far as process theists, they have many common tenets.

30 *Praelectionis Theologicae* 11 (1627); 38, as quoted by Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (reprint; Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992)1:208 quoted by Richard L. Mayhue, "The Impossibility of God of the Possible." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall, 2001). This connection to Socinianism has also been noted by John Piper in his article titled "Some Early Baptist Confessions of Faith Explicitly Disowned the "Openness" View" available online; desiringgod.org/library/topics/foreknowledge/early_baptist.html. In that article Piper makes the

observations that: 1) The view of God's foreknowledge espoused today by openness theology is similar to that espoused by Socinianism, even though not all of the unorthodox views of Socinianism are embraced by openness theology. 2) The limited view of God's foreknowledge was rejected by all orthodox bodies in the history of the church including our Baptist forefathers. 3) This doctrinal issue was regarded by seventeenth-century Baptists as important enough in their day to repudiate explicitly in their affirmation of faith. And 4) It is not unbaptistic or narrow to do the same today.

31 Gregory A. Boyd and Edward K. Boyd, *Letters From a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994), 30.

32 Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 67.

33 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115; Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," *The Openness of God*, 117; Sanders, *Historical Considerations*, in *The Openness of God*, 59-60.

34 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority V.1* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 286.

35 Geisler and House, *The Battle for God*, 90. For an excellent discussion of the philosophical influence on openness theology also see Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 133-161.

36 Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*, 32.

37 Accessed August, 2004 at <http://www.gregboyd.org/gbfront/index.asp?PageID=518>.

38 Roger Olson, Douglas F. Kelly, Timothy George, and Alister E. McGrath. "Has God Been Held Hostage by Philosophy?" *Christianity Today* 39, no. 1 (January 9, 1995), 30-34. This article can also be accessed at <http://christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/119/52.0.html>.

39 Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) and Robert A. Peterson and Michael

D. Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

40 The contrast between the aforementioned books is profoundly seen in their use of philosophy and use of Scripture. Walls and Dongell emphasize philosophy and use its vocabulary, whereas Peterson and Williams emphasize Scripture and use its vocabulary. While it is a leap to open theism from either system, the jump is much farther for the Calvinist than for the Arminian.

41 “Hermeneutics may be defined briefly as the theory of interpretation.... Biblical hermeneutics concerns the interpretation, understanding, and appropriation of biblical text.... It is more than a mechanical application of purely scientific principles and raises prior and more fundamental questions about the very nature of language, meaning, communication and understanding.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J.I. Packer .ed, *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988. S.v. “Hermeneutics,” by A. C. Thiselton. Though Thiselton advocates the preunderstanding of the interpreter as the beginning point in interpretation, in his book *Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), I believe it is important to maintain objective standards rather than subjective ones when interpreting the Bible. Therefore proper and objective hermeneutics are best obtained with the grammatico-historical method, which says that the only meaning that one may ascribe to the text is that which its human author intended, as one is able to reconstruct it in the historical context and with ordinary rules of grammar.

42 Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, 2d ed. (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 153-54.

43 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 20,45.

44 Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 74.

45 Open theists like to use Genesis 22:12 to teach a view of a God with limited and finite foreknowledge who is in the process of learning, but they do so at the expense of a didactic passage like Psalm 147:5 that clearly states of God, “His understanding is infinite.”

46 Erickson uses strong language when he says that the open theists use the narrative passages to override the “plain meaning” of the didactic. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 75.

47 Paul W. Felix defines this same error as “...a clear text, and interpretive center, a theological and hermeneutical key, a ‘locus classicus,’ a defining passage, a starting point that serves as a filter...” as he talks about evangelical feminists and their use of Galatians 3:28. Paul W. Felix, Sr., “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall, 1994), 166-67.

48 Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective” in, *The Openness of God*, 18.

49 *Ibid.*, 21

50 *Ibid.*

51 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 111; Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” in *The Openness of God*, 100; and Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 114. In one of Boyd’s newer books he says, “God’s greatness is most fundamentally about love. God created the world out of love and for the purpose of love. And this requires that he created free agents. There can be no love without risk.” Gregory A. Boyd, *Is God To Blame?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 76.

52 Richard Rice, *God’s Foreknowledge & Man’s Free Will*, 29.

53 *Ibid.*, 30.

54 Robert L. Thomas, “The Hermeneutics of Open Theism.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall, 2001), 189. Thomas has written extensively on the grammatico-historical method in his work, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

55 *Ibid.*

56 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 55.

57 *Ibid.*, 58-59.

58 John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 41-55.

59 Genesis 18:14, which teaches God's omnipotence and Genesis 50:20, which teaches divine sovereignty, are two examples.

60 For an excellent discussion see Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 82-83.

61 *Ibid.*, 80-82.

62 *Ibid.*, 17-38.

63 Boyd, *Is God To Blame?*, 69.

64 Gregory Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 45.

65 Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 22.

66 Listed in the translator note for Gen. 6:6 in *The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2003). Can also be accessed at </netbible2/index.php?book=gen&chapter=6&verse=6&submit=lookup+verse>.

67 Dale Ralph Davis, *Looking on the Heart: Expositions of the Book of 1 Samuel* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 19.

68 Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," 32.

69 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 330.

70 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 205.

71 *Ibid.*, 75

72 *Ibid.*

73 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 51.

74 Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 28.

75 William Hendriksen, Matthew, vol. 1 of New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 850.

76 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew, vol. 1 of The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 772.

77 Boyd, God of the Possible, 58-59.

78 Ibid., 61-62.

79 Erickson, What Does God Know and When Does He Know It, 32.

80 Bruce A. Ware, God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 77-80.

81 Assuming the data is correct in Ware, God's Lesser Glory, 100, n. 7 and Erickson, What Does God Know and When Does He Know It, 81-82.

82 Ware, God's Lesser Glory, 123.

83 Ibid., 102-121.

84 Ibid., 127.

85 Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," 20.

86 Ware, God's Lesser Glory, 128.

87 Sanders, The God Who Risks, 127. Boyd's book *Is God To Blame?* continues to use the term "blueprint worldview" to describe the classical position, especially of the Calvinistic perspective. His position is called the "warfare worldview." Also used in Boyd's *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) and *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), where he develops a view that not all events in history have a divine purpose, but occur as a result of the existence of a "myriad of free agents, some human, some angelic, and many of the evil" (53). He is writing a new book for InterVarsity titled *The Myth of the Blueprint*. I have talked to the publisher and there is no date as of now (September, 2004) for its publication, but it is forthcoming. In reference to the blueprint worldview Erickson says, "It should be observed that the idea that this is what traditional theism holds is itself something of a myth." *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 255.

88 2 Chronicles 25:14-23; Psalms 33:6-12; Isaiah 14:24-27; 23:1-9; Jeremiah 49:20-22; 50:45-46; Acts 2:23.

89 Psalms 33:10-11; Jeremiah 32:16-20; Ephesians 1:11-12.

90 Robert A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods* (Southbridge, Mass: Crown, 1989), 288.

91 The most positive aspects of open theism are all the things its adherents hold in common with classical theism. Such things as creation ex nihilo, affirmation of miracles, emphasis on God's relateability with creation, and defense of free choice against forms of determinism. These are commendable. At the same time its errors bring it dangerously close to condemnation. For a kind, but critical, evaluation that is balanced see Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, 237-257.

92 Pinnock himself recognizes that "no doctrine is more central than the nature of God. It deeply affects our understanding of the incarnation, grace, creation, election, sovereignty and salvation." "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 8.

93 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 8.

94 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 45-49.

95 *Ibid.*, 133.

96 John Sanders, ed., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 21-55.

97 Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*, 43.

98 *Ibid.*

99 Pinnock confesses that there are things about process theism that he finds attractive and convictions that he holds in common. *Most Moved Mover*, 141-144. There he says, "I find the dialectic in its doctrine of God helpful, for example the idea that God is necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite," 143. That is process theism.

100 Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 236. The footnote to her

statement expresses concern with the relationship of open theism to process theology (426, n. 35).

101 Boyd, *Is God To Blame?*, and many others.

102 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 125.

103 Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 50.

104 In just one day we see the specific fulfillment of the prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, Psa. 41:9 cp. Mark 14:10; price paid for His betrayal was foretold, Zech. 11:12 cp. Matt. 26:15; how Judas would use the betrayal money, Zech. 11:13 cp. Matt. 27:3-7, prophecy of Christ's scourging, Isa. 50:6 cp. Matt. 27:26, 30; prophecy of the parting of Christ's garment, Psa 22:18 cp. John 19:34, prophecy of our Savior's crucifixion, Isa. 53:5,6,10 cp. Luke 23:33 and John 19:16 to name just a few.

105 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 271. This would seem to imply that God is not wholly sovereign over human activity.

106 David Basinger acknowledges that he "naturally finds prayers requesting even noncoercive divine influence in the lives of others to be very problematic." "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God*, 161.

107 Boyd states, "If everything is eternally settled ahead of time either in the will or the mind of God, as the blueprint model of providence holds, then it is difficult to explain the urgency and efficacy that Scripture attributes to prayer." *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 230.

108 David Basinger says in this matter, "There are certain risks involved. Things do not always turn out as expected or desired. But the God to whom we are committed is always walking beside us, experiencing what we are experiencing when we are experiencing it, always willing to help to the extent consistent with our status as responsible creations of his." "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God*, 176. Donald Bloesch says of the role of God in open theism, "He guides us toward what is best for us, but he does not ensure that we will finally attain what is best. The emphasis is on what man can do to create a better life and a better world. God assists us

and guides us, but he allows us to determine our own destiny.” Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 256.

109 Marjory Bonar, ed. Andrew A. Bonar: *Diary and Life* (Reprint; Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1960), 529.

110 Bloesch, 256.

111 To elevate man ultimately lowers God. Timothy George speaks of “the vague hope that somehow good will triumph over evil,” and he makes this comment: “But the ‘open God’ cannot guarantee that it will. He can only struggle with us against the chaos and keep on trying harder.” “Has God Been Held Hostage by Philosophy?” *Christianity Today* 39, no. 1 (January 9, 1995), 34.