

Open Theism and the Assemblies of God:

A Personal Account of My Views on Open Theism

by

Thomas Belt

Assembly of God Missionary

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Forward

To the esteemed members of the Commission on Doctrinal Purity...

As a missionary to the Middle East, I've spent countless hours observing the way indigenous Arabic speaking peoples discuss the issues of the day over tea and coffee in sidewalk cafes. The passion with which they discuss matters important to them is evident in their body language. Hands waving, eyes intent, voice inflections and volume all betray an intense love for lively debate and interaction. Rarely do people in this part of the world adopt a neutral position about anything! I find this curiously similar to the discussion presently underway among Evangelicals over what has come to be labeled "open theism." Walk into any local Bible Study group, Sunday School class, or ministers conference and say the words "open theism" and you'll not likely need to change the topic of discussion for lack of interest or boredom. Open theism has people talking and doing so quite passionately.

It's a pleasure and a challenge to present on my own initiative this account of my views to the members of the Commission on Doctrinal Purity. This paper is a reworking of comments previously submitted to my home district, the Potomac District, in January 2002. My aim is to provide an account of the claims of open theism and to argue that this view, though it runs contrary to the historical consensus of believers, does not in fact compromise our fundamental truths, nor does it pose a threat to the essential unity of our Fellowship, our Pentecostal experience and theology of the Spirit, or our passion and vision as a missionary movement.

I read Dr. Edgar Lee's recent article in the August 2002 issue of *Enrichment Journal* with great interest. I'd like to express appreciation to the Board of Directors for addressing this issue and special thanks to Dr. Lee for his thought-provoking comments and kind personal correspondence. Though I as an open theist disagree with Dr. Lee on several key points regarding his appraisal of the open view, I was challenged by his arguments. In light of his article, then, as well as the increasing popularity of the open view and the intensity of the opposition it faces, I offer this account of my views in the hope of furthering discussion and research as well as securing our Fellowship's acceptance of the open view as one of several possible views on how God is believed to possess exhaustive foreknowledge of all things and what is the nature of the sovereignty which God exercises over creation in the fulfilling of his purposes.

One might inquire why, when the Assemblies of God has no official position regarding open theism, I feel it necessary to address my views to the Commission on Doctrinal Purity. I do so precisely *because* the Assemblies of God has no official position at this time and in the sincere desire to be one influence among many for encouraging our Fellowship to come out on the side of continuing dialogue, loving tolerance, and diversity in non-essentials.

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"Mr. Belt has written a clear summary of the openness position, articulated some of the main criticisms leveled against it, and provided cogent responses to these criticisms. He presents what 'mainstream' open theists affirm. He has done a fine job of articulating a statement with which I concur. As one of the leading scholars of the open model I'm delighted to recommend it to you."

John Sanders

Professor of Philosophy & Religion, Huntington College, and author of *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*.

"Tom Belt has done an excellent job in summarizing open theism. He has stated the view accurately and has corrected numerous misinterpretations and distortions by critics of the view. Where open theists differ among themselves on some points, he has noted this and has made a responsible choice among the differing interpretations. His work should be of great assistance to the Assemblies of God as they seek to understand and assess this movement."

William Hasker

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Huntington College, author of *God, Time, and Knowledge*, and editor of *Faith and Philosophy*.

"This essay by Belt is on target as far as I'm concerned and will help to explain what openness theism is about..."

Clark Pinnock

Professor of Systematic Theology, McMaster Divinity College, author of *A Wideness in God's Mercy, Flame of Love*, and coauthor of *The Openness of God*.

"What an excellent article: well-written, well-informed, and gracious in spirit."

David Basinger

Professor of Philosophy, Roberts Wesleyan College, author of *Divine Power in Process Theism: A Philosophical Critique*, and coauthor of *The Openness of God*.

"Over the last several years I have read or heard that we open theists deny God's omniscience and sovereignty. I've read we believe in a 'nail biting god' who can only hope for the best in the future. I've read we don't affirm inerrancy, we deny miracles, and we supposedly hold to a 'process' view of God. For an open theist such as myself, these charges are disconcerting. For, in point of fact, they have nothing to do with what open theists actually believe."

"Tom Belt's essay is a refreshing contrast to all of this. Mr. Belt understands open theism accurately - indeed, profoundly. With admirable clarity he shows that the uniqueness of the open view is not about the nature of God's foreknowledge, but about its understanding of reality as containing possibilities. He succinctly demonstrates that the open view is deeply rooted in Scripture and that it views God as having at least as much providential control in the world as classical Arminianism."

Gregory A. Boyd

Professor of Theology, Bethel College, and author of *God of the Possible, God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*, and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Worldview*.

Open Theism and the Assemblies of God

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What the open view is¹

Open theism attempts to articulate an understanding of God's relationship to creation that is biblically sound, philosophically convincing, and existentially fulfilling. In the simplest terms, the open view claims that the future is partly settled (that is, partly composed of certainties) and partly open (that is, partly composed of possibilities) and that God, being omniscient, knows it as such.

Traditional, or classical, theism has understood God's omniscience to mean God knows from eternity all that shall ever come to pass. In such a view the future is from eternity exhaustively *definite* (*settled* or *certain*) from God's point of view. He knows all of history as one *definite* story line. Calvinists have argued that the future is exhaustively settled in the *will* of God, i.e., God knows all that shall come to pass because he determines all that comes to pass. Arminians, on the other hand, have argued that the future is exhaustively settled in the *mind* of God, i.e., God does not predetermine all things but rather is eternally informed of all that will come to pass (either by virtue of timeless existence, some argue, or by virtue of middle knowledge, as argued by Molinists). Traditional Arminians argue that such foreknowledge provides God a providential advantage in ruling the world and achieving his purposes since it enables him to determine what his own actions are to be and so guarantee the desired outcomes. One such model of foreknowledge popular among Arminians, known as simple-foreknowledge, will be addressed later in this paper.

What is important to note for now, however, is that though Calvinists and Arminians disagree about how much of the future may be determined by God, both agree that God possesses "exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge" of the future (EDF). That is, God faces only "certainties" about what will happen as the future unfolds. He does not face any of the future as "possibly this may happen" or "possibly that may happen," for all of history eternally exists in his mind as "definitely this" and "definitely not that."

The open view suggests another model for understanding how and in what sense God knows the future exhaustively.² Though it agrees with Calvinists that God can and does unconditionally predetermine future events, it disagrees that God has decided to determine *all* the future in this way. It also disagrees with Arminians that God simply foreknows past, present, and future. Open theists agree that the future is as determined and settled as Scripture claims it is³ and as open and unresolved as Scripture claims it is. A fully biblical understanding of this issue, then, would affirm both motifs. The future is composed of *both* "certainties" and "possibilities," and God, being omniscient, knows it as such. The heart of the open view, then, is this belief that *God faces genuine possibilities*. Possibilities possess ontological status with God *as possibilities*.

What the open view is not

Does the belief that God faces possibilities as well as certainties mean God is less than omniscient? Some have insisted that this is exactly what the open view essentially amounts to, the denial of omniscience and the undermining of divine sovereignty.⁴

Allow me the opportunity to argue that this is not the case. The open view agrees with the orthodox belief that it is impossible that God should either fail to believe anything that is true or that he should believe any falsehood. In its scope God's knowledge is exhaustive, encompassing the totality of reality, and in its nature it is infallible. To doubt that open theists maintain this is to not understand the open view. Open theists insist that God is omniscient, meaning he knows all of reality exactly as it is. Is there any *other* way to know it? Certainly not. God's knowledge, in other words, is co-terminous with reality. Whatever reality is, God necessarily knows it perfectly. Whatever truths exist, God knows them perfectly. Whatever the future is, God knows it perfectly.

The question is not whether or not God is omniscient, the question is, *What is the nature of the reality which God omnisciently knows?* The point has nothing to do with the *scope* or *perfection* of God's knowledge, but rather with the *ontological status of the future*.⁵ Are possibilities real? Traditional theism (whether in its Calvinistic or Arminian form) denies that possibilities are real for God, for he eternally knows the future exhaustively as what *shall* come to pass and eternally possesses this knowledge as an immutable attribute. Open theists on the other hand insist (primarily on biblical grounds) that possibilities are real for God, not because God is other than omniscient, but because creation is other than exhaustively *definite*. Because creation is *dynamic* and not *static*, God is seen as *dynamically omniscient*. His knowledge of the universe changes as the universe changes.⁶ Besides being widely confirmed by science, such an understanding of creation, I believe, leads to an understanding of God and his relationship to us that is more exalted and awe-inspiring than the traditional view.

However, if the future already exists "out there" somewhere in some unknown dimension of time⁷, open theists agree of course that God would know it in that sense. On the other hand, if the future is unformed as such⁸, then our future free choices simply aren't there to view, and to suggest that such choices are not eternally known by God as what will *certainly* be is in no way a denial of his omniscience. Open theists might justifiably ask, presuming that creation *is* dynamic and possibilities *are* ontologically real, whether or not it is the traditional view that limits the scope and perfection of God's knowledge by denying that he knows creation as comprising both certainties and possibilities. This all underscores the open view contention that this debate is essentially not about the doctrine of God's knowledge but about the doctrine of creation. The open view argues that God is temporally eternal and not absolutely timeless⁹ and that our future free choices do not yet exist in any objective sense of the word for an omniscient being to know. Hence, God does not eternally know such choices as what "will" come to pass but as what "might and might not come to pass."¹⁰ We deny God knows such choices as definite only because we deny they exist as definite. Again, the argument is not related to differing definitions of omniscience, but to different understandings of the reality which God infallibly knows.

As for the claim that the open view entails the denial of divine sovereignty, open theists happily disagree (as do all Arminians) with the Calvinistic model that views God as all-determining and sovereignty as absolute and exhaustively meticulous control of the details of history. The Bible does not lead one to conclude that God exercises this kind of control over the world. On the open model, God exercises a general sovereignty over creation, allowing us freedom to say “no” as well as “yes” to his will.¹¹ This entails the fact that God might not always get what he wants (e.g., Lk 7.30; 13.34; 2Pt 3.9). True, God’s ultimate purposes for creation cannot be jeopardized by any one individual (because our freedom, though real, is finite), but God’s purposes for individuals can fail to come to pass if those individuals choose not to cooperate with God. With this much Arminians would agree. The open view continues, however, in insisting that human choices to cooperate or not cooperate cannot exist as a foregone conclusion in the mind of God (though they are eternally known to God as *possible* outcomes).

Along these lines, in my view Dr. Ed Lee fundamentally misunderstands the open view when he claims “...to suggest that God’s providence is only general in nature, or that God is reduced to changing His plans when His creatures act, or that there are events in the future that God does not know is a major departure from the classical theology of both Calvinism and Arminianism.”¹² This would indeed be a major fault if it open theists believed it. But open theists do not argue that God’s providence is “only” general in nature, or that God is “reduced” to changing his plans when creatures act, or that there “are” (that is, “there exist”) events in the future that God does not know. Arminianism has always believed God exercises a general rather than a meticulous sovereignty, and open theists agree with this. We also agree that God is not limited to exercising such general sovereignty. He is perfectly free to intervene miraculously on occasion in highly specific ways, controlling whatever minutia he wishes to control. We only disagree that this is the only, or even the characteristic way, God has chosen to relate to us.

Neither is God “reduced” to changing his mind when we act, as Lee suggests is the case with the open view. On the contrary, open theists only insist that God is *free* to change his mind *if* he wishes to. He is not bound or “reduced” to having to do so. Examples of this would include God changing his mind regarding his declared intention to destroy Israel in response to Moses’ intercession (Ex. 32.14), God’s decision to change his mind regarding Hezekiah’s fatal illness, “adding” fifteen years to his life in response to Hezekiah’s plea (1Ki 20.1-6), and God’s own declaration of his willingness to change previously declared plans and intentions in response to people (Jer. 18.1-10). See also Joel 2.12-13 which celebrates God’s willingness to change previously declared intentions in response to us as an attribute worthy of worship.

Lastly, Dr. Lee’s comment, “God knows every detail of the future...and does not have to change His plans with every human decision” again misunderstands the claims of the open view. No open theist claims that God “has” to change his plans with “every” human decision. The question is, Has God created the sort of world in which he is *free* to change his mind *if* he wishes, and secondly, what is implied about God’s knowledge of the future if God is believed to possess this freedom and described in Scripture as exercising it? No one is suggesting God has created the sort of world in which he “has” to change his mind with “every” human decision.

Let me offer an analogy of the present disagreement. Suppose you and I are standing in a large room full of several hundred people. You study the room and say that there are two hundred fifty people in attendance. I say there are only two hundred people present. What are we disagreeing about? We're disagreeing about how many people are in the room. But we both agree that God knows the exact number of people in the room. You believe God knows there are two hundred fifty people present while I believe God knows there are only two hundred people present. You believe God knows there are *more* people present than I do. Does this mean you believe God is omniscient and I do not? Does it mean you believe God is greater than I do because you believe he knows there are *more* people in the room than I do? Wouldn't it be silly of you to accuse me of taking away from God's glory and greatness because I disagree with you about how many people God knows are in the room?

This is analogous to the debate over omniscience. Despite claims to the contrary, it is not about whether God is God or whether or not God's omniscience is exhaustive in its scope or infallible in its operation. It is about the "everything" which we both agree God knows. It is about the "contents" of the room. Let's imagine the room is called "reality" and let's imagine that all past, present, and future realities are in the room. We may disagree about what future "reality" is or about the specific nature of these realities (are they contingent or not?), but we do not disagree that omniscience means God knows exactly what is there even if we may disagree. (This whole dialogue would be catapulted forward if opponents of the open view would grant that open theists believe what open theists themselves insist is the case, that God's omniscience is exhaustive in scope and perfect in its nature. This is not likely to happen, though, since branding open theists as "deniers of omniscience" helps discredit open theists among people who don't know better, which I fear is what the more vocal opponents of the open view are interested in.)

So what about the future? Does all that will ever come to pass exist in the room? Does the future in this definite sense exist "out there" in some dimension of time unknown to us? Does God see the future in a way analogous to how we see the past, as already definite? Most of us grew up believing this. But there are good reasons for us to reconsider whether or not this is really true. *The important thing to remember, however, is that both those who say the future (viz., all that will come to pass) is in the room and those who say it's not in the room in this sense (for the future is at least partly comprised of what "may and may not" come to pass) agree that since God is omniscient he knows exactly what's in the room.* Thus, in terms of the definition of "omniscience," including its exhaustive scope and its infallible nature, open theists are perfectly orthodox. The debate is about the nature and scope of *creation* and not about God's *knowledge*.¹³

The God-world relationship has "integrity"

God speaks of the future in terms of what "may" and "may not" happen. He "regrets," "grieves," and "changes his mind." He speaks conditionally of the future and experiences unfulfilled expectations.¹⁴ He can be prevailed upon in prayer and is open to (not "reduced" to) adopting new courses of action in response to changing circumstances. What are we to make of such descriptions of God? Admittedly, God does not "change like shifting shadows." *His character is unchanging and holy*, but Scripture certainly attests to his being virtuously flexible and open to change in his relations to creation and his response to us.

Among the most common arguments used against the open view is the claim that descriptions of God “changing his mind” and speaking of the future in terms of what “may” and “may not” happen are anthropomorphic or phenomenological and therefore describe God not as *he is* but only as *he appears* to us to be. Lee represents this approach:

The first group of texts cited [*those that suggest the future is to some extent open to possibilities*] that seem to show God dumbfounded before His creatures is most easily understood in the sense of God’s accommodating himself to limited human understanding. These texts employ gripping anthropomorphisms in which God is presented as though He was a human person in face-to-face relationships. In so doing, they also dramatically demonstrate that God wonderfully and personally relates to human beings in real time and space.

Allow me a couple of comments. First, the open view does not claim that openness passages ever portray God as “dumbfounded.” “Dumbfounded” means “so shocked that you cannot speak.” No open theist I have read or dialogue with has suggested such behavior may ever be appropriately attributed of God. In fact, such a belief is expressly ruled out by the open view. Secondly, open theists argue that the descriptions in question are not anthropomorphic in the strict literary sense as are descriptions of God’s “eyes,” “arms,” or “face.” But even if we grant that the descriptions in question are anthropomorphic in this sense, they nonetheless remain, as all anthropomorphisms do, “reality-depicting”¹⁵ descriptions of God.

Thus, even as a literary anthropomorphism, “God changes his mind” communicates some truth about the *divine side* of the God-world relationship.¹⁶ This relatedness possesses an *integrity* to it that is difficult if not impossible to account for if it is also true that God is incapable of changing his mind, experiencing unfulfilled expectations, or facing a partly open future as Scripture describes him. Such descriptions, whether strictly anthropomorphic or not, possess a two-way contingency that accounts for their revelatory character. Granted, God’s transcendence may certainly mean he is *more* than these descriptions reveal him to be (that is, God is not reduced to what these passages reveal), but neither is God *less* than or *contrary* to what these passages reveal him to be. The question is, What do these descriptions reveal about God?

Thirdly, I don’t see at all how the openness passages are, as Lee contends, “most easily” understood as literary anthropomorphisms. This seems to me to be a most difficult option to embrace. As anthropomorphisms, Lee suggests, such passages are existentially “gripping” (which I agree they are) and that God is “accommodating himself to our limited understanding.” But Lee immediately discredits this by claiming to possess an understanding of God that is sufficiently free from the limitations which, he admits, require God to use metaphorical speech in the first place.¹⁷ What then remains “gripping” about the Bible’s description of God as experiencing unfulfilled expectations (Is. 5.1-4; Jer. 3.6-7, 19-20) or of genuinely changing his mind? Once I claim to know the truth that these passages portray God as relating and acting in ways *not* possible for him, they no longer function to bring me into “wonderful and personal relationship.” I of course agree that such passages are gripping, but only if they are believed to be true. For relating personally requires that personal self-disclosures genuinely reveal what they claim to reveal about a person, otherwise the relationship is predicated on mere appearances and not on truth.

Thus, the intimacy with God which Lee correctly believes such passages invite us into is to be predicated upon their truthfully communicating something about the *divine* as well as the *human* side of the relationship.

More work needs to be done in the area of anthropomorphic language. The only concluding point which space allows me to mention here is that calling the Bible's open motif "anthropomorphic" doesn't really say anything to dismiss the open view. On the contrary, it creates its own set of problems for the traditional view.

What about simple-foreknowledge?¹⁸

What of the popular claim made by many Arminians that God simply "previews" (as it were) all of history? He doesn't determine or cause all that happens, he simply "sees" it timelessly. On this view, our choices are free in the libertarian sense (viz., we could do other than we do), but God sees them timelessly and so eternally knows all that will ever come to pass. This view of God's foreknowledge (rather than the Calvinistic view of an unconditional and all-determining divine decree) is that view most prominent among Assemblies of God ministers and laypersons. I'm personally unable to hold to such a view of God's foreknowledge for several reasons:

- First, it is incompatible with libertarian free will. Though there are those who argue that no contradiction exists in the claim that God eternally foreknows *as definite* our free choices, I'm inclined to side with those who argue otherwise.¹⁹
- Secondly, I believe it to be unscriptural. Scripture portrays God as sometimes "changing his mind" in response to human actions, expecting what does not come to pass (e.g., Isa. 5.1-4; Jer. 3.6-7, 19-20), speaking conditionally about the future (e.g., Ex. 13.17; Jer. 26), and testing people "to know" what is in their hearts. However, if the future is eternally settled in the mind of God, it becomes impossible, in my view, to understand such descriptions as truthful depictions of God's relatedness to us and we are left with no option but to view God's speaking in such ways as disingenuous.
- Thirdly, the simple-foreknowledge model affords no providential value whatsoever. If God timelessly knows all of history in the sense argued by advocates of simple-foreknowledge, then he knows *his own* as well as our choices, and he knows them in one single, timeless sweep. He does not acquire this knowledge in stages; he timelessly possesses it as an attribute. In this case, simple-foreknowledge provides God no providential advantage in governing the universe for the simple reason that God cannot intervene into the story line of history *on the basis of* such knowledge or access such knowledge in an attempt to determine what his own actions are to be. This includes attempting to prevent undesired events or to bring about what he does desire, warning and guiding people, and prophesying future events. What is foreknown, according to this view, is what *actually* happens and by definition is *already the result* of whatever has or has not been done to influence it. Such knowledge cannot then *also be the basis* of such interaction for the simple reason that this knowledge comes to God too late (logically speaking) for God to use in influencing outcomes.²⁰

For example, let us say God timelessly knows that Susan will be in a fatal car accident on her 21st birthday. Granted, this knowledge does not *cause* her death or determine her choice to go driving with her friends. We're only talking here about whether or not timelessly definite foreknowledge provides God a basis upon which he is able to act providentially. Can God use his knowledge of Susan's death to warn Susan not to go driving? Can God act in a miraculous way to prevent this accident? In fact, can God do anything *on the basis of* his knowledge that Susan *will die* to prevent her from dying? The answer to these questions is, of course, that God cannot intervene on the basis of simple-foreknowledge in order to prevent this event from happening. Since God's foreknowledge is infallible, what he foreknows will happen *will indeed happen*. Not even God can act in order to change what he infallibly knows will come to pass. *Simple-foreknowledge, if it existed, would be useless to God in preventing foreknown evil and other undesired events.*

The same thing applies to God's acting to bring about some event he wishes should happen. Why? Because by the time God foreknows what will happen, it's logically too late to make use of *this* knowledge in order to bring about *this* event. The foreknown event is already the *result* of whatever divine influence contributed to bringing it about. It cannot also be the *basis* of that influence. On the simple-foreknowledge view, everything that God knows he knows timelessly. He doesn't gain his knowledge of the future in stages. Therefore, if God were to timelessly possess exhaustively definite knowledge of past, present, and future, such knowledge could not provide him a basis upon which to determine how to act in ways *not also timelessly foreknown by him*. Thus, *there is nothing a God who possesses simple-foreknowledge can do that a God who does not possess such foreknowledge cannot also do.*²¹ In truth, whatever might be the reciprocal nature of the relationship between God's actions and ours within the foreknowledge of God, the simple-foreknowledge model offers us no help whatsoever in understanding it. In my exposure to advocates of simple-foreknowledge, it appears the chief reason they hold to this model is because of the perceived providential advantage they believe it gives God and the perceived basis for trust in God they believe it gives them. But once the providential uselessness of simple-foreknowledge is faced, and the providential advantage of infinite intelligence (to be discussed immediately) is understood, one can continue trusting God with the added benefit of not having to embrace beliefs which explain nothing.

- Lastly, the integrity of divine-human relations and God's knowledge of tensed facts require, in my view, the abandonment of the timeless view of God in favor of temporal eternity.²² God engages in real relations with a changing temporal world and so has perfect knowledge of tensed facts. These entail his being temporal. I would also argue, though the open view does not require it, that the integrity of God's triune personhood suggests there is in some sense of the words a "before" and an "after" that characterize God's own inner triune life irrespective of his relating to creation²³—the eternal, loving fellowship that exists between Father, Son, and Spirit and that constitutes God's own experience and enjoyment of himself. God is not an "eternal, unblinking, cosmic stare"²⁴; he is from eternity actively self-related and personal.

Who is really limiting God in this debate? God's "Infinite Intelligence"

Is not a God who faces "possibilities" as well as "certainties" less able to achieve what he wants? Is not such a God weakened in his ability to deal with his enemies and to overcome opposition? Is not such a God less great and glorious than one who faces only certainties about the future? Not at all. God's ability to deal with what happens is not in the least affected by the fact that he faces a future comprised of "possibilities" and "certainties" as opposed to one comprised exclusively of "certainties."

The answer lies in appreciating how very intelligent God is. God is *infinitely intelligent*. And if we dwell on this a bit we'll see how powerful an idea it is and appreciate its explanatory force. As an infinitely intelligent person, God would eternally foreknow all possibilities, all the possible story lines and trajectories, including all the possible responses he might give and all the possible counter-responses of people. Being infinitely intelligent, God is able to attend to a trillion such possibilities *as if each possibility was the only thing that could happen*.²⁵ When an event which was only possible becomes actual, open theists insist that God was perfectly and eternally aware that things might happen *this* way and so was perfectly and eternally prepared for *this*, no less prepared than if *this* was the *only* thing God had to contemplate from all eternity.

We humans possess finite intelligence. This means that our ability to think, plan, and prepare for the future is limited if we face possibilities as opposed to certainties. For example, if we have only one certainty to prepare for, that certainty receives 100% of our intelligence and attention. But suppose we have ten, fifty, or a hundred possibilities to contemplate. We are necessarily *less* prepared for them, for our intelligence is divided by ten, fifty, or a hundred. It becomes more difficult for us to attend to possibilities the greater their number because of our finiteness.

But God is *infinitely* intelligent, meaning his intelligence doesn't get "spread thin" or "divided among" all the possibilities he attends to. He can bring all his attention and preparation to bear on each one of any number of possibilities and not be any less prepared than if he were to anticipate only one certain outcome. Whether God eternally knows *X* as one certain outcome or whether he eternally foreknows that *X* is one of a million possible outcomes only one of which will happen, it makes no difference. God is equally prepared for *X* either way. Though we would be placed at a great disadvantage in such a circumstance, God is not. In the open view²⁶, then, God does not *under-know* the future, he *over-knows* it, quite contrary to what opponents of the open view argue. This is a crucial supporting argument open theists claim helps account for God's providential care of the world, but it is almost entirely overlooked by opponents of the open view.²⁷

Consider the game of chess as an analogy. Suppose I challenge Kasparov to a match. Kasparov doesn't possess definite foreknowledge of my moves, but he does possess knowledge of the *possible* moves I may make (and in certain circumstances throughout the match he will be able to predict with certainty some of my moves). Because he is far more intelligent than I am, he is able to anticipate and prepare ahead of time adequate responses to any move I may make. Is there then any question about who is in control of the game? Is there any question about who will win? None whatsoever. Kasparov is not put at any disadvantage whatsoever by having to consider possibilities as opposed to certainties. How much more would this be the case if, for example, I were challenging God

to a chess match? Who fears that God might lose the match if he were asked to attend to *possible* moves and responses in addition to *certain* moves and responses? Who is really limiting God in this debate?

Let us grant for the sake of argument, however, that Kasparov does possess a printout of the entire match, including all of my and his moves, in a manner analogous to simple-foreknowledge. Would *this* knowledge give Kasparov any advantage? Would he be able to make use of *this* knowledge in order to determine his moves ahead of time? The answer, of course, is no. There's absolutely no advantage to be gained by Kasparov (and some problems created) by his having *definite* foreknowledge of every move in the game. On the contrary, such knowledge could not at all explain how it is that Kasparov is able to *prepare* for the game or how he is able to *interact* during the game.

Does God play chess? There are three reasons for believing this is a good analogy of the way God relates to us:

- First, as we've already seen, if God possessed timeless knowledge of every move I make in life, it would do him no good. He could not use this knowledge to strategize, plan, or respond to any of my moves, for every move *he* ever makes is *equally foreknown* in the one timeless act of knowing. Timeless knowledge is providentially useless.
- Secondly, in the open view, possibilities give God room to move and act, room which timeless knowledge cannot provide. It accounts for how we actually live our lives and relate to God as well as for how God is able to act providentially in the world.
- Thirdly, God's glory and greatness are *increased* if we understand him as infinitely intelligent and facing a partly open future. Who is more glorious—a God who timelessly faces a future he can do nothing about, or a God who achieves his purposes by perfectly knowing and preparing for all possible futures? Who do we admire more—a chess player who plays you with a computer printout of all the moves you will make, or a chess player who, facing genuine novelty as the game proceeds, and perfectly attending to every possible move and the constantly changing probabilities, is nevertheless creative and resourceful enough to guarantee the final victory? I'm genuinely surprised that anyone, Pentecostals especially, would call into question the orthodoxy of somebody who chooses to believe the latter describes the greater God.

Lastly, as amazing as it may seem, the simple-foreknowledge model seems to me to be nothing more than pre-recorded open theism. Consider, the simple-foreknowledge model believes that we live in a world where God really responds to us, where we are really free to choose, where our prayers really make a difference to God, and where things might sometimes really be different than they are. Open theists also believe we live in *this* kind of world. The only difference is that advocates of simple-foreknowledge believe that everything about *this* world exists eternally in God's mind, and their trust in God's providential care rests in this being the case. But I ask, what difference would such knowledge make to God? What difference would it make to the world? What providential

advantage would God gain by possessing *this* kind of foreknowledge as opposed to knowledge of all possible story lines? None whatsoever. And if such knowledge is of no practical value to God, believing that he possesses such knowledge is of no practical value to us.

God created us for loving relationship

The open view follows rather naturally from the belief that God created humankind for loving relationship. By definition, love must be freely chosen. Thus, creating us with the capacity for saying “yes” to loving God also meant creating us with the capacity for saying “no” to God. If we can’t say “no” to God, we can’t love God either. Creating a world capable of genuine love and intimacy, therefore, involved a risk on God’s part, the risk that we might choose not to love him. On the open model, the choice to love or not to love God responsibly and with integrity cannot be predetermined by God (*contra* Calvin) nor can it be eternally foreknown as *certain* by God (*contra* Arminius).

Does God take risks? If freely chosen love is even part of why he chose to create, then by definition risk cannot be avoided. Is such love worth risking the eternal consequence of rejecting this love? We certainly believe the experience of *our* love worth this risk. Every day parents decide to have children in spite of the possibility that they won’t turn out as hoped and in so doing declare that they believe *love is worth the risk*. We have children in spite of knowing they “may” be raped, murdered, or worse still, become rapists or murderers. We have them in spite of the possibility they “may” refuse our and God’s love and suffer eternally for it. What right do we have to bring a life into the world facing such risks? Yet we have children. Why? We have them because we deem the possibility of genuine love worth the risk, and because of the possibilities of their bringing about good in the world. On what basis are we to declare God incapable of taking similar risks? Does his perfection demand it? Certainly not. Does simple-foreknowledge require or even make sense of it? Hardly. The only risk-free world for God is that posited by Calvin, one which is exhaustively and unconditionally determined by God’s will alone. In that world everything goes as planned.

The open view rejects the belief that God chose to create the sort of world posited by Calvin and argues instead that God faces a partly settled and a partly open future, in which our choices make a real difference (i.e., an undetermined difference) from God’s point of view to why events are sometimes not what they might otherwise have been, and in which our relationship of freely chosen love is a relationship of integrity and genuine give-and-take. Bottom line—God isn’t the only one deciding what happens. He sovereignly determined to create a world in which *some* of what happens would be left up to us and is put at no disadvantage whatsoever by foreknowing much, even the vast majority, of our contribution as *possible* outcomes rather than *certain* outcomes. Thus, we coauthor history with God, although in limited ways sovereignly determined by God, *yet as real for him as for us*. This is open theism.

What’s it matter? The practical implications of believing in a partly open future

I suppose it is the perceived practical implications of believing the future to be partly open which in the end tip the scale for or against the open view in many people’s minds. Can a God who ever faces possibilities, whose expectations sometimes do not come to pass, be

trusted to guide us? Can such a God be trusted to achieve his ultimate purposes? I think so. It was the practical implications of the open view which ultimately led me to adopt it. Space doesn't permit a thorough treatment of the practical implications of the open view, but I'd like to mention three.

First, consider the place and urgency of prayer. It is precisely here where God invites us to participate with him through petitionary prayer and obedience in accomplishing his purposes. For such prayer to have integrity to it, I believe, it must be the case that we genuinely influence the outcome of events. That is, many times the future God intends to actualize through us fails to come about as desired because we fail to respond as we might. The point is that things might genuinely have been different *from God's point of view* had people made different choices. But if the potential difference which prayer makes is as real for God as we believe it is for us, then God faces a future that is in some respects open and unresolved and has freely decided to allow us a part in resolving it. Open theists simply point out that it is not resolved *until we resolve it* and hence cannot be eternally foreknown in its resolved state.²⁸ Our lives make a difference to God and the world, and this difference possesses integrity for both God and us. In my view the open view makes best theological sense of this difference.

Secondly, consider how most, if not all, of us already live our lives. Christians universally live *as though* the open view were true. We believe that when we deliberate between two options we face genuine possibilities either of which "may" come to pass. We believe that when we fail to pray events God wishes to bring to pass sometimes do not come to pass (e.g., Ezek 22). This in itself is an admission of the intuitive belief that the future is partly open, that our choices many times bring about events that might just as easily not have come about. We believe that *some* events could have been other than they were and that our choices to cooperate with God or not through prayer and obedience are *at least sometimes* the ultimate explanation of why these events were not what they could have been, or of why they were what they might not have been. Our prayers and obedience to God are his means for transitioning such possibilities into realities.²⁹ The open view simply seeks to articulate a theology and an understanding of the future that accounts for what Christians universally experience and believe intuitively to be the case.³⁰

Thirdly, consider the important issue of guidance. What are we doing when we seek God for guidance? If we believe in a blueprint model of guidance, then we believe guidance is essentially an attempt to discover the contents of a "classified divine blueprint."³¹ Who we will marry, how many children we will have, what direction our education is to take, our vocation, where we take our vacations, whether we believe in open theism or not (!), all these and more are eternally mapped out, either by God's will (Calvinism) or in God's mind (Arminianism), on one divine blueprint. Guidance then amounts to asking God to reveal parts of this blueprint to us so that we stay on course. For Calvinists, in the end whatever course our lives take, guidance or no, that course reflects in every detail God's decreed will for us. Guidance (or the lack of it) is viewed as God's predetermined means for achieving predetermined ends. I'm aware there are Calvinists who claim to find this a meaningful model for relating to God and I am happy for them. I personally can't pretend to imagine relating to God or seeking his guidance on such grounds.

For Arminians who advocate a form of simple-foreknowledge, as most Assemblies of God ministers do, guidance is rendered incoherent on different grounds. Arminians concede that God's will is not always done. Some grant that gratuitous evil exists. All would insist that guidance plays a determinate role in bringing about events that might otherwise not have been. Still, the entirety of our lives in every detail is eternally known to God. Those advocating the simple-foreknowledge model insist that guidance be sought and that God be trusted precisely *because* he is believed to possess such knowledge. God, it is argued, can use this foreknowledge to guide us if we seek it. But as we've already seen, such a belief is misguided. No such guidance based on simple-foreknowledge is possible.

Mary seeks God's direction regarding a proposal of marriage. Should she marry Sam? Sam is a believer and, like Mary, wants to enter the ministry. Together they attend counseling. They pray and fast, desiring God's guidance. In the end, together with concerned friends and spiritual leaders, they come to the conviction that God's will is that they marry. Within a few years, however, Sam is unfaithful and abusive. Soon they divorce and Mary is left with a young baby to bring up on her own. What happened? For the consistent Calvinist, it cannot be possible that Mary missed God's decreed will for her life. Calvinists would tell Mary that God decreed this tragedy for a greater purpose, perhaps to teach her patience or to provided an opportunity for God to be glorified as just and holy when Sam is judged for doing this.³² Mary can take comfort in knowing that God guided her into this marriage for good reasons, even if she never knows what those reasons are.

For the Arminian advocate of simple-foreknowledge, things do not fare much better, for this outcome was eternally foreknown by God. This is the future God infallibly knows will happen. God knows Sam will backslide, become abusive to Mary, and eventually betray her. Can God advise Mary *not* to take Sam as her husband on the basis of this knowledge? He cannot. What are we then to expect in terms of guidance, that is, wisdom in choosing between options, if we believe God possesses only knowledge of what *shall* happen and deny that he possesses knowledge of what *might* and *might not* happen? As we have already seen, simple-foreknowledge is providentially useless. God cannot lead Mary *not* to marry Sam on the basis of his foreknowledge that she will marry Sam and that Sam will become abusive and unfaithful. It is equally impossible to claim that God "permitted" this marriage to go through *on the basis* of foreknowing it. Guidance on the Arminian/simple-foreknowledge model then is reduced to believing that God uses foreknowledge of we *shall* and *shall not* do, of what *shall* and *shall not* happen, to lead us to do or not to do that which is foreknown. Besides being incoherent, there is no room for actual guidance.

An advocate of simple-foreknowledge can counsel Mary to take consolation in the fact that God eternally knew this would happen. We can hold her hand and support her now, but we cannot meaningfully explain to her that God genuinely believed things could have turned out differently. Some may suggest that there exists some reason, perhaps the service of some higher "ultimate good," for God's specifically allowing this to happen. If she thinks things through, however, Mary will discover that simple-foreknowledge provides her little consolation. Why? Because if simple-foreknowledge were true, the question of God's specifically "allowing" this tragedy (as if he could have "prevented" it) cannot meaningfully

be asked. On this model of foreknowledge, God neither allows nor prevents on the basis of what is foreknown; he simply “knows.”³³

What would an open theist tell Mary? He would tell her that real possibilities exist from God’s point of view. One possibility God foreknew, presumably by far the most probable outcome, was that Sam would continue to grow in his faith and become a godly partner. The other possibility known to God was that Sam would regress in his spiritual life and become an abusive and unfaithful husband. Both were genuine possibilities known to God (and should have been recognized as such by Mary). God’s advice to Mary and Sam at the time was most wise because it had the greatest possibility of producing the greatest possible good in the world. But possibilities are, after all, possibilities even for God. An open theist would suggest to Mary that her divorce does not mean God’s guidance was mistaken³⁴, neither should she assume that God’s giving her the green light to marry Sam was either his guarantee that all would go smoothly or God’s way of bringing about whatever greater good he believed her certain divorce would serve. Just because we sometimes interpret God’s guidance as indicating a risk-free future doesn’t mean God’s “yes” is confirmation of this.

An open theist would tell Mary that God always knew Sam was free to follow the path of self-destruction. That Sam chose this path over faithfulness to his wife grieves God as much as it does Mary. The divorce did not have to happen, neither did God foresee it as *definite*. Nor did God *allow* her marriage to crash and burn in order to teach her patience or to contribute to some hidden higher purpose. God hates divorce, and we have every biblical reason for believing God did everything he could to lead Sam away from this sinful choice. An open theist would then tell Mary that God is loving, creative, and resourceful enough to recast from the wreckage of her pain and suffering a new future, a plan B, a latter temple more glorious than the first, if she cooperates with him. God is at work in her circumstance for good. God can do this because there is no eternal blueprint which describes in every detail the path Mary’s life must or even will take.

In the open view, guidance is not an attempt to peer into the crystal ball of an exhaustively definite future, or to pry into a divine blueprint containing the details of our every move. Such a view of foreknowledge actually precludes genuine guidance, guidance that presents us with *real* options each one of which holds out to us genuinely alternative futures. This sort of guidance by definition requires that the future be open at least with respect to that regarding which we seek guidance. Open theists ask us to reconsider what biblical guidance is and what we may and may not legitimately seek guidance for. If we believe guidance amounts to seeking absolute assurances that our marriages will not end in divorce, that the children we’re considering having will not go to prison or turn their backs on God, or that our retirement investments will not dry up, then we’re in for disappointments. Such guarantees are not to be had in the real world. We ought to develop an understanding of God’s relationship with us and guidance of our lives that at least attempts to account for the risk-filled world in which we actually live. God did not create a risk-free world, the sort of world in which guarantees regarding our future are always possible.

This does not mean God doesn’t have plans, doesn’t intend us to do certain things or go certain places, or that he is sitting quietly on the sidelines of world history waiting for us

to tell him what to do (as some have incorrectly understood the open view). Indeed, we do seek to know God's heart and mind for our lives. God is not without preferences or plans. It only means that his plans and intentions about a great many things are not eternally present in blueprint form and that they are not always fulfilled. Guidance, therefore, should not necessarily be understood "before the fact" as guaranteeing particular outcomes if only God's directions are followed, nor should such guidance be understood "after the fact" as necessarily indicating that the tragic way things sometimes turn out is "God's will" after all.

Abandoning the blueprint method of guidance also means that sometimes we may face equally workable options, any one of which God would be happy for us to take because he's equally capable of bringing about his purposes for us regardless of which we choose. Such freedom is sometimes available. If I wish to drive from my home to my office I have several equally good ways of getting there. I doubt that God has one avenue eternally mapped out in his mind as the one I shall take. Likewise, God's purposes for our lives may sometimes permit any number of avenues to fulfillment. God is secure and resourceful enough to leave some things open to us.

Of course, open theists do indeed celebrate the fact that God is great enough to guarantee particular outcomes when he wishes to do so (not because he eternally foreknows them via simple-foreknowledge, but because he's decided not to countenance objections to his will in such cases). The question is, Does God relate to us exclusively, or even characteristically, in such deterministic ways? Not if love is even part of the reason why he created us. Love requires freedom, and freedom entails risk, even for God. Our seeking guidance from and trust in God rest on his loving and faithful *character* demonstrated throughout history, chiefly in Christ's death for us, and not in particular theories of foreknowledge about which any of us may be mistaken. I look at God on the cross for me, God pursuing me, God's infinite love for me, and I say to myself, "I can trust a God like *this*." I don't need to know that such a God possesses exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge in order to trust him.

Regardless of whether one rejects the open view or not, tragedies such as Mary's are experienced by people every day, even by those who faithfully follow God's guidance. So what's this tell us? It tells us that God's guidance, even if perfectly followed for a lifetime, would not prevent such tragedies. The question is how we deal with such disappointment and suffering. And here, in my view, neither Calvinism nor classical Arminianism offers any more consolation than the open view. In fact, the simple-foreknowledge (Arminian) view provides the weakest basis upon which believers may find consolation and be encouraged to trust God for two reasons. First, God cannot guide us on the basis of simple-foreknowledge. On this model, what is foreknown is by definition already the *result* of whatever guidance was or was not sought. Secondly, it leaves God foreknowing evil he does *not* will but which he can do nothing to prevent.

The appeal to antinomy

Some today encourage us simply to affirm, without attempting to resolve, the contradiction that God eternally foreknows as certain (or as some would argue, as unconditionally determined) all that comes to pass but that humans are nevertheless free and morally responsible for what they do. Some openly affirm that Calvinism and Arminianism are both equally true and we should affirm the claims of both. God eternally knows all that shall

come to pass but also genuinely regrets, changes his mind, and experiences unfulfilled expectations. Open theists are sometimes accused of having sold out to rationalism, of having reduced God to the categories of human logic, and of being unwilling to look into the mirror and embrace their own limitations.

The doctrine of the Trinity is often appealed to as an example of a case in which we already affirm a self-contradictory belief. On this view, claiming that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons who nevertheless eternally possess one undivided nature thus constituting one God is thought to be self-contradictory; that is, the Trinity constitutes an antinomy. It's then argued that since we affirm antinomy in the doctrine of the Trinity, why insist that antinomy be avoided with regard to divine sovereignty and human freedom? Let's admit both are true: God eternally knows as certain all history, human choices included, and we are also free and morally responsible for our actions. It is admitted that this presents *us* with a contradiction, but it makes perfect sense to God. There it is. We must deal with it.

Whether or not we should affirm self-contradictory beliefs is a crucial question. I submit that mystery is one thing and self-contradiction is quite another, and that the latter has no place in Christian theology.³⁵ Scripture nowhere encourages us to affirm or bow our knee to self-contradictory claims. I can think of several reasons why dismissing with logical coherence is a fatal step to take. First, the logically impossible cannot be *meaningfully* embraced by us or attributed to God. God cannot make a square circle or a married bachelor, and we do not make God greater or more glorious by insisting that he can perform such actions. More importantly, we cannot meaningfully relate to such claims. They have no meaning for us. Thus, there is no cash value to be had, existentially speaking, in embracing such claims. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, for example, *are* meaningful doctrines. Though they are indeed mysterious, they are not self-contradictory. They are not the logical equivalent of square circles or married bachelors. In order for the Trinity to constitute an antinomy of this sort, what would need to be asserted is belief in "one God and three Gods." Such a belief would *then* provide an antinomy that logically parallels the Calvinist's claim that "God unconditionally determines our choices and we are justly held responsible for them" and the Arminian claim that "God eternally foreknows *as certain* the free choices we will make." The doctrine of the Trinity, however, does not claim this and thus does not provide us with an example of the sort of thing some urge us to affirm with respect to God's sovereignty and human freedom.

Secondly, if we seek to speak meaningfully of God and to meaningfully articulate God's self-revelation, logical coherence must be maintained. The alternative is agnosticism. If we admit logically self-contradictory claims, then we abandon one of the necessary criteria of meaning. We also would have little basis upon which to combat false teachings (like open theism!) on the basis that they don't make sense.³⁶

Therefore, thirdly, as I argued earlier, God's transcendence may certainly mean he is *more* than the openness passages reveal him to be, but if we are to maintain that Scripture "reveals" God to us it must also be that God is not *less* than or *contrary* to what these passages reveal him to be. Open theists don't claim to possess an exhaustive understanding of the Triune nature of God or the incarnation. God is certainly beyond our

comprehension. What is claimed is only that what God has chosen to reveal *to us* cannot meaningfully be embraced or expressed *by us* in self-contradictory terms.

Lastly, open theists don't doubt that life is full of mystery or that the complexities of our world are often incomprehensible to us. Often times we are left with no explanation for our circumstances and simply have to trust God. The open view is not an attempt to remove such mystery from life or a refusal to embrace our limitations. It is rather an attempt to seek to define and live with that mystery more biblically.

CONCLUSION

To briefly summarize, then:

- ***Open theism understands*** the future as *partly settled* and *partly open*. Both the genuinely determinate and the genuinely indeterminate exist and God knows them as such. Both motifs are described in Scripture and together constitute the dynamic sort of future which God perfectly knows.
- ***Open theism insists*** that God is omniscient, meaning his knowledge is co-terminus with reality. It is neither the *nature* nor *scope* of God's omniscience which the open view questions. It is rather the *nature* and *scope* of creation itself, the object of God's omniscient knowledge, which open theists seek to understand more accurately.
- ***Open theism affirms*** God's sovereign rule over creation but understands this not as meticulous control of every detail of history. God can and does determine minutia, but does not do so exclusively. His ultimate purposes for creation are settled and non-negotiable, but the routes to fulfilling these purposes are *sometimes* open. God is confident, wise, and resourceful enough to accomplish his ultimate ends without having to determine the minutia of history. Some routes to accomplishing these ends are open precisely because it is God's wish that they be determined through our choosing to partner with him.
- ***Open theism believes*** that God has sovereignly chosen to create a world in which human beings are granted libertarian free will. This means that God may not always get what he wants, for we may choose not to realize his purposes for us. Such a world, however, is the only kind of world in which love is possible. In addition, God's relationship to us possesses an integrity to it which is impossible to account for on the belief that he either causes all things or eternally foreknows them as certain.
- ***Open theism denies*** that God is absolutely timeless, immutable, and impassible. God experiences the flow of time, undergoes changing states of mind and emotion, interacts with us in genuine give-and-take relationships, and is open to change (not in his essential nature, but in his relationship to creation).
- ***Open theism argues*** that self-determining free choices cannot be eternally foreknown as certain, though God, being infinitely intelligent, eternally knows all

possibilities and thus all possible choices we may ever make. As such, God is able to attend to an infinite number of possible story lines, perfectly anticipating each possibility as if it were the only thing that could have happened. God is not so insecure and unintelligent a Sovereign that the accomplishing of his ultimate purposes requires that he be limited to having to attend to only one certain route to the fulfillment of these purposes as opposed to several possible routes to their fulfillment.

Evangelical leaders sign joint statement

Some evangelical leaders have become convinced that some “ultra-conservative” evangelical scholars want to exclude open theists from the wider evangelical family. In response, Baylor University’s theologian Roger Olson, Jonathan Wilson of Westmont College, and Stanley Grenz of Regent College have together drafted “The Word Made Fresh: A Call For a Renewal of the Evangelical Spirit.” Some 110 evangelical scholars have signed the document, calling upon evangelicals everywhere to reaffirm their core beliefs in the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the reality of the new birth.³⁷

Has the open view been historically popular? Not at all. But why should this bother Pentecostals who are already familiar with embracing positions and experiences which ran contrary to the prevailing consensus? Our theological tradition is extremely important, but it is not infallible. We only ascribe to Scripture itself such authority. Our systematic formulations are not above error and must be open to reform. For this reason alone we must at least grant the possibility that tradition could be wrong on this matter.

Is the open view a new creation of Clark Pinnock or motivated by process theology? This can hardly be maintained. Neither Pinnock nor Whitehead were even born when the well-known Methodist Rev. Lorenzo McCabe advocated the open view in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and engaged Methodists on this question, or when the evangelist Billy Hibbard or the Bible commentator Adam Clarke advocated a partly open future. Nor did anyone accuse Calcidius, the fifth-century Christian theologian, of being a heretic when he advocated the open view in precisely the same terms as is being argued by open theists today.³⁸

How much weight should we give, for example, to the creeds of the seven ecumenical councils on this matter? What do they say regarding the Church’s understanding of God’s knowledge of the future? Do they establish any one view as “the” traditional view? They do not. Neither the Apostles’, Nicean, Revised Nicean, Chalcedonian, nor Athanasian creeds, indeed not one of all the affirmations of the seven councils have a single word regarding God’s foreknowledge or the nature of his omniscience.³⁹ It is impossible to argue that the ancient creeds of the church establish as “the” orthodox position any one particular view on the precise manner in which God was believed to possess knowledge of all things.⁴⁰

What should the Assemblies of God do?

Open theism is apparently here to stay. It is becoming increasingly popular, especially among Pentecostals and Charismatics. What should the Assemblies of God do? What we should not do is immediately ban the open view, ask open theists to keep their views to themselves, or dismiss open theists from our Fellowship. Let’s talk, pray, and research. If

there are ministers among us who are deeply offended by any in our constituency or any of our credentialed ministers embracing the open view on the grounds that it is inconsistent with our fundamental truths, it is incumbent upon these persons to show how the open view transgresses our Statement of Faith. Can this be demonstrated? My voice is only one, but I believe the open view is perfectly consistent with our Statement of Fundamental Truths, which neither states nor implies anything about “how” God must be believed to know all things, though *that* God knows all things is certainly entailed in the Statement. The precise nature of the “all things” (whether exhaustively *definite* or not) is an issue neither our Statement nor the ecumenical creeds speaks to. We should leave this matter to the good consciences of our ministers and encourage rather than forbid lively discussion. As for me, I believe that in embracing the open view I have settled into a view of God, life, and ministry that is liberating, empowering, intellectually credible, and at least as biblically plausible as that based on either the Calvinistic or classical Arminian understanding of divine foreknowledge and providence.

I don't entertain the fantasy that the Assemblies of God will officially advocate the open view, but I do hope that we will at least allow it alongside other existing views⁴¹ as a permissible explanation of how God may be believed to possess exhaustive foreknowledge of all things and to exercise sovereignty over creation, a sovereignty that is loving, creative, just, all-encompassing and infinitely intelligent, resourceful beyond measure, and more than adequate to guarantee the ultimate fulfillment of his purposes and the final victory of his kingdom. Such a God is certainly worthy of our worship and our deepest devotion and I commend him without reservation to the leadership of the Assemblies of God as well as to my colleagues in ministry.

Postscript

Since the summer of 2000 it has been my pleasure to discuss the open view on a regular basis with friends, pastors, missionaries, and students both in and outside my own denominational fellowship. My convictions have only become more settled. Though I have not essentially changed my views from those expressed in this paper, I have attempted to refine certain arguments and definitions. My most recent thoughts appear in “Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future” (co-authored with Alan Rhoda and

Greg Boyd, forthcoming in *Faith and Philosophy*) at <http://www.alanrhoda.net/papers/opentheism.pdf>.

Tom Belt
Minneapolis, MN
Christmas, 2005

¹ The scope of this paper is necessarily limited. I provide no discussion of specific "openness" passages, choosing instead to deal with overarching issues. Immediately following this paper I've included five appendices [not included with online versions of this paper] which include material covering many of the biblical passages and responses written by open theists. I have also avoided here engaging specific arguments posed by Calvinists in this debate since deterministic explanations are not widely believed by Assemblies of God members anyhow. I take into account the fact that the Assemblies of God has traditionally held to the simple-foreknowledge, or Arminian, model of divine foreknowledge. I have also not dealt with issues of theodicy and only briefly comment on scientific evidence which suggests that created order is itself partly deterministic and partly indeterministic. I'd also like to acknowledge the influence Greg Boyd has had in my understanding the open view. Much of my argumentation comes from dialoguing with him over the past two years.

² Open theism does not deny that God possesses "exhaustive foreknowledge" of the future. What is denied is that such foreknowledge is exhaustively *definite*, that is, that it consists exclusively of knowledge of what "shall" happen. The open view adds to this the belief that God's foreknowledge also comprises knowledge of what "may" happen. This is crucial to keep in mind. Dr. Edgar Lee's comment, "The Openness of God from a Pentecostal Perspective," in *Enrichment Journal* (Volume VII, No. III: August 2002), that the open view "sweep[s] away God's comprehensive foreknowledge with a few hard-to-interpret texts" [italics mine] is inaccurate. Not only does the open view not deny "comprehensive foreknowledge," but the number of passages in Scripture suggesting a partly open future is hardly "few," as the emerging literature clearly shows. For example, John Sanders' *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) has nearly 100 pages of biblical support for the open view. See also Appendix 5.

Openness authors have not always articulated their views clearly. In his first book on the subject, for example, Clark Pinnock appears to deny "exhaustive foreknowledge" and suggests that God is often ignorant of what will happen ("Systematic Theology" in Pinnock, et. al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 121-124, when in fact neither is true of open theism. In his latest book, *The Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), Pinnock qualifies this; God is *never* ignorant. However, at places Pinnock is still less than careful. He concedes, for example, that open theists deny "exhaustive divine foreknowledge." Granted, in context Pinnock is referring to the classical understanding of this as exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge, but the lack of consistency of terms doesn't help. John Frame chides John Sanders for claiming in *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), p. 132, that God makes "mistakes". Actually, Sanders immediately qualified what he meant by this statement (something Frame decided not to tell his readers). Still, I wonder if it's best to use terms that require constant qualification in order to avoid both the ideas most commonly associated with such terms and the inability of some opponents of the open view to objectively articulate an opposing view to the satisfaction of those who hold it (something usually assumed in academic dialogue).

It's not surprising that open theists will need some time to refine their articulation of the view. Calvinists and Arminians have had a several hundred years' head start! What remains true, however, is that readers who care to form an accurate understanding of the open view certainly have enough opportunity to do so, which makes anti-openness books like *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001) truly disappointing to read. The contributors of this volume seem to have gone out of their way to misunderstand and misconstrue the open view. The most careful articulation of the open view and its implications by an open theist is that of Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001). From the start Boyd has been careful to distinguish "exhaustive foreknowledge" (which is affirmed by the open view) and "exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge" (which is

denied). Boyd also points out that "mistakes" are not attributable to God's infallible knowledge when this knowledge is correctly understood as encompassing possible as well as certain outcomes. See Boyd's reply to Bruce Ware in "Response to Bruce Ware's 'Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries: Is Open Theism Evangelical?'" *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, Summer 2002 which appears in Appendix 2 following this paper. The most careful and objective evaluation of the open view by a one who disagrees with the view is that of Calvinist Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Tiessen's objectivity proves that it is possible to understand the open view and still disagree with it.

³ Either by God or by already existing factors.

⁴ This appears to include Dr. Edgar Lee's *Enrichment Journal* article as well.

⁵ It has been suggested that I am redefining *creation* in order to get at redefining *omniscience* and that dispensing with omniscience is really what open theism is after. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

⁶ Does the belief that God's knowledge changes with a changing universe entail that God "discovers" or "learns"? Open theists answer this differently. All agree that God cannot "learn" in the sense of moving from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. Applied to God, this would amount to a denial that his knowledge is *co-terminous* with reality. Hence, I deny that God either discovers or learns, although I affirm the belief that God's knowledge changes with a changing universe. Being perfectly omniscient, God knows possibilities for what they are. As these possibilities are resolved into settled realities in the course of time, God keeps *infallible*, *unmediated*, and *co-terminous* account of the state of reality. Omniscience is not sacrificed or even compromised.

The question is, What kind of universe did God choose to create? One which is genuinely open to change and true becoming (e.g., the dynamic or tensed theory of time, known also as the A-theory of time), or one which precludes genuine novelty and indeterministic openness (e.g., the static or tenseless theory of time, also known as the B-theory of time)? Open theists agree God was free to create either kind of world but that the Bible, reason, and experience combine to strongly suggest he chose the former. Lee's suggestion that the open view is "guided by a particular modern philosophy of time" is misleading. First, it is the B-theory of time (rejected by the open view) which is the more modern. Though the dynamic theory of time has certainly found fresh expression (and confirmation) in recent times with the advent of modern chaos theory and quantum mechanics, it is hardly new. Secondly, for open theists the line of reasoning runs *from* the biblical *to* the scientific, not the other way around. That is, open theists are not "guided" by a commitment to a particular scientific view to interpret Scripture in openness fashion. Rather, having found the biblical reasons for open theism independently convincing, the A-theory of time and the insights of chaos theory and quantum mechanics are believed to confirm this. See William Lane Craig's (not an open theist) excellent discussion of the Special and General theories of relativity and his defence of the dynamic theory of time in *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001). Craig's discussion of Relativity and its implications for God's relationship to time is truly insightful. See also *God & Time, Four Views*, ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) for differing theological views.

Regarding the scientific evidence, Greg Boyd, cf. his *Christus Victor* website (www.gregboyd.org), summarizes: "Quantum physics suggests that Einstein was mistaken in his classical-philosophical conclusion that the distinction between the past, present and future is an illusion. Nothing short of an empirically groundless, metaphysically mechanistic assumption kept him, and some other physicists, from affirming that the apparent indeterminacy of reality at a quantum level is in fact real (viz. ontological).

"But this means that time is real and thus that the 'apparent' distinction between the past as a realm of definite realities and the future as a realm of indefinite probabilities is real. Prior to a 'quantum event' (viz. the observed behavior of a quantum particle in an experimental situation) there is only a range ('wave packet') of possibilities: during the quantum event the wave packet collapses down to one. After 'the event' there is one definite outcome which could not have been predicted with certainty ahead of time.

"If this is true of reality, it must be true of God's knowledge of reality as well, for God's omniscience is by definition exhaustive and perfectly accurate. In this view, the unpredictability of the future and the unchangeability of the past constitute two sides of the same metaphysical coin: they are both necessary facts. Scientist-theologian John Polkinghorne summarizes this well in his book *Science and Providence* when he notes that considerations of the role of indeterminacy in quantum physics "...emphasize how different time is from space [and] how seriously we must take its unfolding as a process of genuine becoming. The future is not already formed ahead of us, waiting to reveal itself to our exploration, as the fixed contours of a valley reveal themselves to the traveller who makes his ways through them. The future is in part our creation: its shape is responsive to our molding, as the clay is formed by the sculptor

to create his irreducibly new thing, which is his work of art. If even the omnipotent God cannot act to change the past, it does not seem any more conceivable that the omniscient God can know with certainty the unformed future.'

"It could be argued that science is forever changing and thus what seems like a certain conclusion today might be revised by new discoveries tomorrow. True enough. Too much should not be wagered on the vicissitudes of scientific discovery. At the same time, we can't ignore the findings of science on this account. At the very least, any who would want to continue to hold to the eternal definiteness of the future (in the mind of God) and thus to the non-ontological nature of quantum indeterminacy must now bear the scientific burden of proof."

See also John Polkinghorne, "The Quantum World," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); I. Prigogine and M. Sanglier, *The Laws of Nature and Human Conduct* (Brussels: Task Force of Research Information and the Study of Science, 1985); I. Prigogine, *From Being to Becoming* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980); I. Stewart, *Does God Play Dice? The Mathematics of Chaos* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); and D. J. Bartholemew, *God of Chance* (London: SCM Press, 1984); P. Coveney and R. Highfield, *The Arrow of Time* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1990); L. Glass and M. Mackey, *From Clocks to Chaos: The Rhythms of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Giuseppe Del Re, *The Cosmic Dance: Science Discovers the Mysterious Harmony of the Universe* (Temple Foundation Press, 2000).

⁷ See Hugh Ross in *Beyond the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1986). Ross argues that God exists in a form of hyper-time in which our past, present, and future exist simultaneously in equal definiteness and so are available for viewing by a being (God) not limited to our time dimension, a view argued by William Lane Craig to be both scientifically and philosophically problematic; see Craig's *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001). But as we shall see later in this paper, even if Ross were correct, such extra-dimensionality would not provide God a basis upon which he could act providentially in the world. Ross' views do nothing to explain the *reciprocal* nature of the relationship between God's actions and our own.

⁸ Or if the future is not exhaustively determined by God.

⁹ A view in which open theists are joined by several moderate Calvinists and many Arminians. Traditional theism, following Aquinas and others, has held that God is absolutely timeless, entailing the belief that he cannot experience changing states of mind or emotion. God is both immutable and impassible. This timeless view of God has come under heavy attack in recent years however by both Calvinists and Arminians (i.e., on the Calvinist side by John Feinberg and on the Arminian-Molinist side by William Lane Craig, both of whom disagree with the open view though both believe that God is temporally eternal). Thus, the denial that God is timeless has existed for some time among evangelicals and is not unique to the open view. Also see footnotes 22 and 23. This is not an open view issue.

¹⁰ Though God is, as is argued below, *infinitely intelligent* and thus eternally foreknows all possible choices we may make. Such infinite intelligence greatly contributes to our understanding of God's providential rule.

¹¹ Some have pointed out that the entire debate surrounding the open view turns very little on the kind of *knowledge* God is believed to possess and almost entirely on the kind of *sovereignty* God is believed to exercise. I concur with Boyd's comment, "It is difficult to imagine a weaker view of God's sovereignty than that which views him as capable only of deterministic ways of relating to creation," in *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001). A good teacher may be "in control" of her class without causally determining everything students do (contra theological determinism) or knowing ahead of time everything they will do (contra Arminianism). There is no reason for supposing God's providence requires exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge as opposed to exhaustive knowledge of *both* certainties and possibilities. If I were to challenge Kasparov in a game of chess, my being free to move in ways not foreknown as certain by Kasparov would hardly call into question his being in control of the game. Kasparov is in control by virtue of his superior knowledge of all *possible* moves I may make and his ability to be open to more than one route to victory.

¹² "The Openness of God from a Pentecostal Perspective," *Enrichment Journal* (Volume VII, No. III: August 2002).

¹³ Heated debate over this issue in history, for example between Thomism and Molinism, focused not on whether or not God was omniscient but on what the nature of reality was. Of what did reality, future reality, consist? The precedent already exists for the present debate. Why should open theists be singled out now and accused of undermining "omniscience" by questioning whether or not the reality which God knows is exhaustively definite or partly definite and partly contingent?

This is as good a place as any to insert a comment about open theists' belief that Greek philosophy is largely responsible for the classical doctrines of God's immutability, simplicity, impassibility, etc.. Lee

writes: "Then, *on these assumptions* [i.e., that the Western classical theological tradition was influenced for the worse by Greek philosophy; italics mine], the openness project gathers a number of passages from the Bible that show God relating to people in ways that seem to contradict classical theological categories." Permit me three comments. First, it is not "on the assumption" that the Western theological tradition has been influenced for the worse by Greek philosophy that open theism then proceeds with anything. The influence of Greek philosophy upon the classical theological tradition is nowhere "assumed" by open theists. It is everywhere "argued" by open theists. They may be wrong about history at this point. The evidence is there to interact with. But one cannot claim that open theists simply "assume" anything along these lines.

Secondly, Lee argues that open theists start with the belief that Greek philosophical notions of perfection influenced Christian theology and only *then* move on in search of biblical arguments in an attempt to confirm this belief. That is, open theists are believed to be motivated by assumptions regarding Greek philosophy to reinterpret Scripture. But the line of argument runs in quite the opposite direction, namely, *from* the conviction (on purely biblical grounds and quite independent of historical questions) that the Bible and certain classical doctrines of God are at odds *to* the historical question of what might account for classical theism's having arrived at this place. The historical *follows* rather than *precedes* the biblical and is only an attempt to account for how the Church came to view God in such terms, not an attempt to prove open theism's reading of the Bible. Actually, whether or not classical theology was adversely influenced as is argued by open theists is an interesting point of history (or not), but it ultimately says nothing about whether or not open theism itself is biblical.

Thirdly, open theists are often thought to be arguing for the wholesale corruption of theology by Greek philosophy. But this is not the case. All theologies interact with their environment. In the case of early Christian theologians, Greek philosophy was both a blessing and a curse. It provided them with an avenue for articulating the gospel in already understandable terms. Nobody questions this was legitimate. But in the give-and-take of this relationship, Christian theology was also influenced in adopting the Hellenistic notion of perfection as timeless, unchanging, and impassible. These are not biblical notions of perfection.

Open theists are also accused of following the lead of unbiblical philosophical assumptions. Open theist John Sanders, "Is Open Theism Evangelical?" (Plenary address at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 15, 2001), responds, "Our critics repeatedly accuse us of capitulating to non-biblical thought forms. The implication is that our critics are free from philosophical and cultural influences. Though many evangelical works on hermeneutics and theology cautiously admit that all of us are conditioned by our social locations and traditions, this notion plays no substantive role in our theology or handling of scripture. In my writings I have emphasized the influence of Greek philosophy upon Christian thinking about God because it is either ignored or even outright denied by evangelical theologians. Millard Erickson is one of the few who openly admits the significant role Greek philosophy has had in shaping our views of God and that these views, he says, may contain a large amount of Greek thought read into the biblical text. Erickson, however, goes on to chastise me for not admitting that I am influenced by philosophical forces as well. This is fair and I do admit that this is the case. If we will all admit to philosophical and cultural influences in our theologizing, then we can proceed to productive dialog about which ones are better than others. It simply will not do to have one side claiming that their opponents are no longer virgins when it comes to cultural conditioning. Nobody in the entire history of Christian theology is a virgin when it comes to cultural and philosophical influence on our theology."

¹⁴ See Appendixes 1 and 5 for examples of these.

¹⁵ A phrase coined by J. Martin, "The Use of Metaphor as a Conceptual Vehicle in Religious Language," (Ph.D. diss., Oxford, 1982).

¹⁶ Anthropomorphism is a form a metaphorical speech that attributes human physical characteristics to God or depicts God in roles obviously not literally possible for him (e.g., as a father, husband, and shepherd). As such it is a non-literal way of communicating something real or truthful about God. For example, "God's eyes roam to and fro" is anthropomorphic language. Does God have literal (i.e., physical) eyes? Open theists agree he does not. But the *truth* to which this non-literal form of speech refers is, all agree, very much *literally true*. It is literally true that God possesses intimate and exhaustive knowledge of all things and (I would add) that we are incapable of escaping the notice of such knowledge. This is what Scripture means when it speaks of God's "eyes."

Carry this over to the description of God as "changing his mind," of speaking of the future as what "may" or "may not" be, or of experiencing the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations. Open theists deny that these are anthropomorphic in the strict literary sense. There's certainly nothing in the relevant contexts that suggests they are. And if it be granted that such language is anthropomorphic, problems arise and we are still delivered, albeit by a different route, to the open view. For what is "God changes his

mind" an anthropomorphism of? To what does it refer? What truth about God does it *reveal*? If God's "eyes" reveals to us his intimate and unmediated knowledge of all things, and if his "right arm" reveals his incomparable power to accomplish what he wills, what does Scripture's claim that "God changed his mind" reveal about God *if it is also true that God cannot change his mind*? I submit that no meaning is possible in such a case. At least no one to date has managed to offer a convincing argument for what such passages *reveal* about God if God does not in fact ever change his intentions, will, or mind.

Opponents of the open view are quick to dismiss our understanding of such passages, but none seem to feel it necessary to say precisely what these passages *do* mean other than to claim, "They are obviously anthropomorphic." Yes, but what do they *mean*? What truths regarding the *divine* side of the God-world relationship are revealed in such passages? In my view, opponents of the open view mistakenly take "non-literal" (i.e., anthropomorphic) to mean "untrue" when the anthropomorphism in question betokens an open future or introduces contingency into God. The classical view's inability to account meaningfully for Scripture's open motif on the supposition that it is anthropomorphic can be seen in Douglas M. Jones' chapter "Metaphor in Exile," in *Bound Only Once* (Moscow, Id: Canon Press, 2001), pp. 31-51. In the end, Jones and the classical view simply do not know what these passages *reveal* about God. For excellent discussions of metaphor and the limitations of God-talk, see Vincent Brummer's chapter "Can we speak about God?" in his *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Terence Fretheim's excellent discussion of metaphor in *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). In my view, one's approach to metaphor is more fundamental than anything else in determining where one comes out on this issue.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), 1.17.13, argued the same approach. In treating passages which describe God as changing his mind, Calvin explains that the Bible speaks this way "because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state." Such descriptions are accommodations to our limited understanding. God "represent[s] himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us." God seems to change his mind, regret decisions, and experience unfulfilled expectations, but "neither his plan nor his will is reversed, nor his volition altered." Greg Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," *Divine Foreknowledge*, eds. James Beilby and Paul Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 38, responds:

"Calvin's argument is inconsistent, however. He apparently believes that *his* 'weakness' does not preclude *him* from 'attaining to' God's 'exalted state.' In other words, Calvin exempts himself from his explanation of why God must use anthropomorphic language (viz., that our weaknesses cannot attain to God's exalted state). And from this exempt position he then represents God to us *as he truly is* as opposed to the way *God represents himself* in Scripture (viz., 'according to our weakness' and as he 'seems to us')."

Boyd's response is decisive. Let me add three responses of my own. First, relegating openness passages to the category of anthropomorphic and phenomenological language simply begs the question. One must still say what these anthropomorphisms reveal about God. It will not do to claim that as anthropomorphisms openness passages all reveal God as "relating intimately to us in time and space *as if*" changing his mind, regretting previous decisions, etc., while qualifying these by affirming the contrary. One could argue that this locates the meaning of such passages entirely in the *mere fact* of their being anthropomorphic and not in what the words themselves actually say, in which case there would be no difference whatsoever *in meaning* between any two openness passages whether God is described as changing his mind or experiencing unfulfilled expectations. Neither one of these two reveals something about God which the other does not also equally reveal, for the meaning is not in the words but in the mere fact that God is described "anthropomorphically." This reveals a weakness in the claim that the openness passages all anthropomorphically mean the same thing: They are all equally permitted to say God is personally related to us in time and space but forbidden to say anything *individually unique* about "how" God is related to us. This is the problem. If we claim that such passages depict God as acting and relating in ways *not* possible for him, by what hermeneutic then can we still claim that they reveal *anything* about God, much less that they reveal him as intimately and personally related to us? I'm still developing this argument and so can't pursue it here, but this weakness of the anthropomorphic approach is clear and needs to be addressed.

Secondly, the whole approach to Scripture's open motif as anthropomorphic can be turned on itself and shown to prove too much. How does one know, for example, that "God loves" is not equally as anthropomorphic as "God regrets"? Both are straightforward descriptions of God. On what basis does one distinguish "God loves" as literal and "God regrets" as anthropomorphic if not presuppositions about what is and is not appropriate for God? Perhaps "God loves us" is also an accommodation to our limited

understanding designed to depict God "as if" he loved us when in fact he is as incapable of loving as he is of regretting decisions he made. In reply, open theists point out that we rightly understand "God loves" to mean something *analogous to what we mean* when we humans love (without the attending imperfections of course). Otherwise we have no basis upon which to ascribe meaning to the Bible's claim that God loves us. Open theists simply argue that "God regrets" and "God expected what did not come to pass" are also to be understood as meaning something *analogous to what we mean* when we claim to regret decisions and experience the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations (without the attending imperfections of course). Otherwise we have no basis upon which to ascribe meaning to the Bible's claim that God regrets or expects what does not come to pass. If, however, God is believed to be incapable of facing the sort of open future implied by Scripture's descriptions of him as regretting decisions, expecting to come to pass what does not in fact come to pass, etc., then the concepts of "unfulfilled expectations," "changes of mind," and "genuine regret" do not in the least apply to God, at least not in a way that we can understand. And if such categories do not apply to God in a way we can understand, it is impossible to argue that they "reveal" God to us.

Lastly, such an approach is particularly damaging to Pentecostal spirituality which has always believed God is both experienced and affected by us, something difficult to account for if we also maintain that the openness passages describe God as acting and relating to us in ways *not* possible for him.

¹⁸ For a presentation of the simple-foreknowledge view of the future, see David Hunt's chapter "The Simple-Foreknowledge View" in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

¹⁹ See footnote 28 and Appendix 3. The best arguments for the incompatibility of exhaustively definite foreknowledge and libertarian free will have historically come from Calvinists, who simply respond to this incompatibility differently than open theists. Calvinists maintain exhaustively definite foreknowledge and deny libertarian free will, while open theists maintain libertarian free will and deny exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge (though not *exhaustive foreknowledge*).

²⁰ Hunt articulates this objection to simple-foreknowledge clearly but then attempts (unsuccessfully) to deflect it, cf. Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View," *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

²¹ For an argument for the uselessness of simple-foreknowledge based on God's work with Old Testament prophets, see John Sanders, "Why Simple Foreknowledge Offers No More Providential Control than the Openness of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1997): 26-40, the main arguments of which are summarized in his *The God Who Risks*, pp. 200-206. See also William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (1989).

If we conclude (against Calvin) that God has not causally determined all history and (with Arminians) that God timelessly possesses simple-foreknowledge of the future, then we are left with a God who is prisoner to his own knowledge, like the fabled Cassandra, condemned to know the future but unable to do anything about it (or with it).

²² For an excellent presentation of various views on God's relationship to time, see *God and Time: Four Views*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) and William Craig's *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001). For a philosophical treatment of God's temporal vs. atemporal eternity as well as arguments for the incompatibility of libertarian free will and exhaustively definite foreknowledge, see Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (1989). The belief in God's *temporally eternal* existence is not unique to open theism. There exist both moderate Calvinists and Arminian-Molinists who hold to this view of God's existence.

²³ It is often objected that since "time" was created along with the physical universe and God existed before creation, God must be absolutely timeless and immutable. The question of God's relationship to time is still being discussed among open theists. Bill Craig, not an open theist, has an excellent survey of the issues (see previous footnote). Craig argues that "timelessness" and "temporality" are both *contingent attributes* of God and that God is timeless in the absence of creation but temporal since creation. He also argues (as do open theists and some Calvinists) that the claim that God is *both* timeless and temporally involved in the world is incoherent and self-contradictory and so meaningless.

Open theists grant that "time" *as we measure it* is an attribute of creation. Some open theists prefer instead to employ the notions of "pure duration" or "sequence" to describe God's eternal experience of his own life as Father, Son, and Spirit in the absence of creation. Other open theists prefer to use the word "time" but qualify it nonetheless. All open theists, however, and some who are not open theists, deny the possibility of *atemporal personhood* and thus the claim that God (the most maximally personal being in the universe) is absolutely timeless and immutable even in the absence of creation.

In the end it matters not what God is in the absence of a created world. It remains the case that *since creation* God experiences the flow of time, undergoes changing states of mind and emotion, and

relates to us from within time. If opponents of the open view want to insist that there remains a sense in which God is timeless by virtue of his transcending creation (a question many open theists continue to discuss), this should not be understood as *undermining the integrity of the sense in which God is revealed in Scripture as relating to us now, as genuinely open to change, and as facing a partly open future.*

²⁴ Dallas Willard's poignant phrase in *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 244.

²⁵ I'm indebted to Greg Boyd for the *Infinite Intelligence* argument.

²⁶ As well as Molinism, but not the classical tradition.

²⁷ Not only does Lee's *Enrichment Journal* article entirely overlook this crucial aspect of the open view, but as I understand him, he incorrectly denies that the open view affirms God's knowledge of all we may "possibly" do or decide. He writes, "It is further assumed [by the open view] that God cannot know all the contingent, or potential decisions and actions of human beings and angels." But of course the open view *does* affirm God's knowledge of "potential decisions and actions" (both human and angelic). This is what the entire debate is about! It is rather Lee, along with the entire classical tradition, who assumes God cannot possess knowledge of "possibilities" and thus denies that God ever knows future decisions and actions *as what may "potentially" or "possibly" be*. In classical theism no contingency attaches to God's knowledge of future choices. He knows only what "shall" happen as the future unfolds. Of course, we may believe our choices to be genuinely contingent, but if reality is what God believes it to be (which is most certainly entailed in his being omniscient!), and if God's beliefs regarding the future are exhaustively definite (viz., defined exclusively in terms of what "shall" and "shall not" happen as opposed to encompassing in addition what "may" and "may not" happen), then we are simply mistaken in believing our choices to be genuinely (viz., ontologically) contingent, in which case our sense of freedom is a mere illusion. It exists only because of human epistemological limitations and possesses no ontological status with God.

If, however, Lee means to say that the open view denies that God knows *as definite* "all the future contingent, or potential decisions and actions of human beings and angels," then he's certainly correct. We do deny this. But it remains the case that the "contingency" Lee speaks of attaches not to *God's* knowledge of these choices but rather to *our* (mistaken) belief that we are free to do other than we do. If no contingency attaches to God's knowledge of our choices then those choices are not contingent. This goes without saying. God's knowledge and beliefs, not ours, are infallible and accord with what is *real*. That is, reality (including our choices) is what God believes it to be, not necessarily what we believe it to be. In order for our sense of freedom to do other than we do to reflect reality, then, God must believe us free to do other than we do, i.e., God must face genuine possibilities.

²⁸ Self-determining freedom means, obviously enough, that the "self" determines those choices that flow from it and for which it is held accountable. In other words, the determinateness of our actions rests in us. But if the determinateness of our choices is known to God from eternity (which is the classical view), then it eternally precedes us, in which case it does not originate with us (since we are not eternal) and we are not free in the libertarian sense. This does not mean that libertarian choices are not influenced by factors outside the self or are completely random. It means only that the self is the final arbiter in choosing. It is the self which gives definiteness to its choices. It is often objected, e.g., Bill Craig in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), that exhaustively definite foreknowledge and self-determining free will are compatible. Craig, p. 126, argues: "So what is the argument that allegedly demonstrates the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom? Letting *x* stand for any event, the basic form of the argument is as follows:

- (1) Necessarily, if God foreknows *x*, then *x* will happen.
- (2) God foreknows *x*.
- (3) Therefore, *x* will necessarily happen.

Since *x* happens necessarily, it is not a contingent event...The problem with the above form of the argument is that it is just logically fallacious."

Craig is absolutely correct. God's knowledge of the future does not cause the future to be. But open theists have never argued that it does. In the same volume, p. 191, Greg Boyd responds: "[But]...exposing the fallacy of this argument doesn't go far in proving that libertarian freedom is compatible with exhaustively definite foreknowledge. For the 'necessity' that renders [exhaustively definite foreknowledge] problematic is not a logical necessity, but an 'accidental' or 'historical' necessity. This is the kind of necessity possessed by past events. Though past events are *logically* contingent, they are *historically* necessary, for they cannot *now* be other than they are. ...If God eternally foreknows future free acts, then future free acts are 'historically' or 'accidentally' necessary. Among all the unalterable facts of the past is the content of what God infallibly believes *shall come to pass in the future*. The

definiteness of the future is part of the (now necessary) definiteness of the past. Hence...if God possesses exhaustively definite foreknowledge, we can exercise no more libertarian freedom with regard to our future acts than we can with regard to any past fact. Both are 'accidentally necessary'."

The point which open theists make, then, is not that exhaustively definite foreknowledge of future free acts entails that those acts are determined *by God*. All we seek to argue is that such knowledge shows that *WE are not the ones determining those choices*. That's all that's needed to demonstrate incompatibility. Whether God or some other force unknown to us is responsible for rendering our choices determinate/definite in the mind of God is beside the point. It remains true that if our choices are eternally foreknown *as definite*, we are not the authors of those choices. See also Boyd's philosophical arguments for the incompatibility of exhaustively definite foreknowledge (EDF) and self-determining free will in Appendix 3 following this paper.

²⁹ As opposed to the Calvinistic claim that our prayers are merely God's "predetermined means to predetermined ends." How meaningful and reassuring is that?

³⁰ Tagging onto the previous footnote—Calvinists in fact deny that our lack of prayer is ever responsible for things being other than they might have been. Indeed, in a deterministic world there can be no such thing as a "failure" to pray. On the other hand, on the view that God simply foreknows as certain all that happens without determining it (i.e., Arminianism) it can never be the case from God's point of view that events may genuinely be other than they are.

³¹ Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 175.

³² This was Jonathan Edwards' view.

³³ David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 55, says it well, "Since there can never be a time when a God who possesses complete SFK [simple-foreknowledge] does not know all that will occur, and since foreknowledge can be utilized in a providentially beneficial manner only if there is a time at which what is foreknown can influence a divine decision that is itself not also already foreknown, there can exist no conceivable context in which SFK would enable God to make providentially beneficial decisions that he would not be able to make without this knowledge."

³⁴ See Greg Boyd's response to Bruce Ware in the Summer 2002 issue of the *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* found in Appendix 2 following this paper. Boyd responds to Ware's accusation that open theism believes God makes "mistakes."

³⁵ See David Basinger's challenge to the appeal to antinomy in "Biblical Paradox: Does Revelation Challenge Logic?" *JETS* 30/2 (1987) pp. 206-222, John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 34-38, and Vincent Brummer, *Speaking of a Personal God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-32. Some suggest that science provides examples of antinomy, or self-contradictory claims. J. I. Packer, for example, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1961), pp. 20, 24, suggests that the nature of light, being both particle and wave, is a clear example of such antinomy. Reason suggests that we ought to reject either that light is wave or particle, but the evidence constrains us to affirm two incompatible truths and live with the tension. Packer suggests that we should then have no qualms about affirming mutually incompatible truths in Scripture.

Is Packer correct? Does the nature of light provide us with a scientific equivalent of a square circle or a married bachelor? Not everyone agrees. David Basinger, "Biblical Paradox," writes, "...this [Packer's] analogy is dubious. It is certainly true that in science (and other areas) we sometimes come to the point where the evidence appears to equally support two incompatible theories or statements. In the nature of light controversy, for example, physicists have stated that light sometimes displays wave-like properties and sometimes displays particle-like properties—that is, they have stated that some properties of light are best explained by a wave hypothesis while other properties of light are best explained by a particle hypothesis. And it is certainly true that in such cases we ought not arbitrarily reject one in favor of the other just to resolve the tension. Moreover, for instrumental reasons it may well be justifiable for scientists to assume as a working hypothesis in specific contexts that one or both are true. But theoretical scientists have never made the claim, as the theologians of paradox seem to with respect to Biblical truths, that two incompatible propositions can in fact be simultaneously true. Physicists, for example, have never claimed that light is in fact simultaneously both wholly particle and wholly wave, where 'wave' and 'particle' are defined in such a way that the terms are contradictory. The claim of the scientist, rather, is only that there is at times no good basis for considering either of two seemingly incompatible propositions false. And this is a much different, weaker claim than its alleged theological counterpart (given our current interpretation). For only the claim that two incompatible propositions are in fact simultaneously true threatens the meaning of the concepts involved." See also A. Baez, *The New*

College Physics (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1967), pp. 233-241, and T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), who with other scientists believes that "light is a self-consistent entity different from both waves and particles," p. 114. What is interesting is that those who insist we affirm against reason the evidence of science that light is both wave and particle are themselves unwilling to accept against their reason the evidence of science (e.g., the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle) that reality is both partly deterministic and partly indeterministic, partly determined by existing factors and partly open to genuine novelty and true becoming.

³⁶ It is difficult to understand why those who claim we should not attempt to resolve the self-contradiction present in the beliefs that a) God eternally and unconditionally predetermines all things and also justly holds us responsible for our choices (i.e., Calvinism) or that b) God eternally foreknows our free choices (i.e., classic Arminianism), object to the open view on the basis that in their view it makes self-contradictory claims! It is difficult to avoid concluding that "antinomy" (so-called "mystery" by theologians of antinomy) often becomes a dumping ground for parts of a system of belief which simply don't work. One may wonder, assuming that God intends us to understand what he means to communicate, and assuming that God is the consummate communicator (rather than an inept one), why self-contradictory beliefs are ever made a test of fellowship or credentials. Surely the basis of fellowship and cooperative ministry ought to be what *can* be affirmed with reason and understanding about God, not what *cannot* be meaningfully affirmed about him. To make the affirmation of admittedly self-contradictory truth claims a test of one's orthodoxy is, in my view, injurious to the unity of the Body of Christ and an abuse of leadership.

³⁷ The document is discussed by Timothy Morgan in *Christianity Today* (June 10, 2002 issue), and the document itself along with a list of the names of those who signed it can be found at www.thewordmadefresh.com. The document states:

"To be evangelical is to be committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ – the Word incarnate – in all areas of life and to the supreme authority of the canonical Scriptures – the written Word – in all matters of faith and practice. To be evangelical also entails being characterized by an irenic, Christlike spirit of love toward those with whom we disagree and a cautious openness to the reform of tradition as the Spirit leads us to fresh understandings of the Word that are even more faithful to the entirety of God's revelation. We oppose unfettered theological experimentation and accommodation to culture that threatens the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we also deplore a present tendency among some evangelicals to define the boundaries of evangelical faith and life too narrowly. For this reason, we call upon evangelical leaders and thinkers to make room for reverent exploration of new ideas and reconsideration of old ones without assuming too quickly that we know what Scripture clearly does and does not teach.

Throughout history, evangelicals have courageously stood against attempts to compromise biblical faith. Unfortunately, passionate resistance to error has repeatedly also led to militant, separatistic habits of mind and heart from which evangelicals in the mid-twentieth century struggled to free the movement. We are concerned that some claimants to the evangelical heritage appear to be falling back into some of the more onerous attitudes of fundamentalism. Out of this concern, we call all evangelicals to acknowledge the value of the kind of genuine diversity and fresh reflection, grounded in the written Word and centered on the incarnate Word, that has always been the hallmark of the true evangelical spirit.

To this end, we call all evangelical leaders and thinkers not to reject out of hand constructive theological proposals that are reverently rooted in biblical reflection, even when they challenge aspects of what some consider to be the 'received evangelical tradition.' Rather than a sign of decline, constructive theological endeavour and rigorous debate about theological issues are marks of evangelical theological vitality. Premature closure of dialogue and debate by means of condemnations and threats of exclusion, in contrast, disrupts community and often quenches the Spirit who brings new life and leads us toward an even more faithful reading of God's Word. Therefore, we admonish all evangelicals to resist attempts to propagate rigid definitions of evangelicalism that result in unnecessary alienation and exclusion...."

³⁸ The open view appeared long before process theology, so the former can hardly require the latter. See Lorenzo D. McCabe, *Divine Nescience of Future Contingencies a Necessity* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1882) and *The Foreknowledge of God* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1897). Besides being a theologian, McCabe was also a professor of mathematics and mechanical philosophy at Ohio Wesleyan University. In the opening chapter of *The Foreknowledge of God* he writes, "The design of this treatise is to deny and disprove the commonly received doctrine that God, from all eternity, foreknew whatsoever has come to

pass. This doctrine, it seems to me, is contrary to reason and Scripture, and is in the highest degree dishonouring to the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity.”

The preacher Billy Hibbard was also an advocate of a partly open future, as was the well-known Bible commentator Dr. Adam Clarke. Clarke (1760-1832) was one of the most influential Methodists to follow John Wesley. He was of course a contemporary of Wesley. Clarke served as President of the Wesleyan Conference and his writings were particularly influential in the development of the doctrine of sanctification in the American Holiness movement. His eight-volume Bible Commentary which defined Methodist scholarship remains revered today. Clarke was an open theist. Note the following comments: In his *Commentary of Hosea* (chapter 14), he writes, “All this is easily accounted for on the doctrine of the contingency of events, i.e., the poising of a multitude of events on the possibility of being and not being, and leaving the will of man to turn the scale; and that God will not foreknow a thing as absolutely certain, which his will has determined to make contingent, a doctrine against which some solemn men have blasphemed, and philosophic infidels declaimed, but without which fate and dire necessity must be the universal governors, prayer be a useless meddling, and Providence nothing but the ineluctable adamantine chain of unchangeable events...” Further, in his *Commentary* of 1 Samuel 23, Clarke writes, “...there is such a thing as contingency in human affairs; that is, God has poised many things between a possibility of being and not being, leaving it to the will of the creature to turn the scale.” In his *Commentary on Acts* he adds, “God has ordained some things as *absolutely certain*; these he knows as *absolutely certain*. He has ordained other things as *contingent*: these he knows as *contingent*. It would be absurd to say that he foreknows a thing as only *contingent* which he has made *absolutely certain*. And it would be as absurd to say that he foreknows a thing to be *absolutely certain* which, in his own eternal counsel, he has made contingent” [italics mine]. The open view (though not known by that name as such) was taught and discussed by Methodists without any accusations of being “deviant” or “unorthodox.” Actually, Clarke (and presumably others) would have thought those who affirmed exhaustively definite foreknowledge somewhat unorthodox. Oh how full-circle we have come!

For Calcidius’ views, see J. Den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate: His Doctrine and Sources* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1977) and Calcidius, *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus Commentarioque instructus*, ed. J. H. Waszink, 2nd ed., vol 4 of *Plato Latinus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975). Calcidius writes, “God knows all things...according to [their] nature....His knowledge of uncertain things is indeed necessary, [viz.] His knowledge that these things are uncertain and their course contingent...yet they are themselves possible in both directions rather than subject to necessity. So contingent things are not inflexibly arranged and determined from the beginning with the sole exception of the very fact that they must be uncertain and depend upon a contingent course.” A very popular and well-respected Evangelical author and teacher today, Dallas Willard is also an advocate of the open view, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), pp. 244-246.

Though open theism and process theism both share a belief that the future is partly open to possibilities, they disagree on fundamental claims regarding God’s nature, creation *ex nihilo*, and God’s providential activity in the world. Let us not make the mistake of dismissing the open view on the basis of guilt by association. Certainly there have been persons in history believed to be heretics who held to a belief in a partly open future (e.g., Socinus). But not all persons holding to a belief in a partly open future were considered heretical. Socinus believed in other things besides an open future which may rightly be condemned. But surely we and Socinus agree on *some* things that do not make us heretics simply for having them in common with Socinus.

John Sanders, “Is Open Theism Evangelical?,” writes, “This same guilt by association move is made when openness is claimed to be process theology because both views share a couple of points in common....Those who claim openness is simply process theology need to read what process theologians are saying about openness. David Ray Griffin, a prominent process theologian, says that he cannot stomach open theism any more than he can classical theism because openness is just too similar to the classical view and thus not worthy of God.” Classical theologians call advocates of open theism process theists while process theists view advocates of open theism as too like classical theists!

³⁹ John Sanders, “Is Open Theism Evangelical?,” writes, “The definition of the seventh ecumenical council, called Second Nicea reads: ‘Following the royal pathway and the *divinely inspired authority of our holy fathers* [emphasis mine] and the traditions of the Catholic Church, we define with all certitude and accuracy that the venerable and holy images are to be set up in the holy churches of God in houses, and by the roadside images of Jesus Christ, our undefiled Lady, the *theotokos*, of the honorable angels and of all saints and holy men. In accordance with ancient pious custom, incense and lights may be offered to images, as they are to the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, to the book of the Gospels and to other holy objects.’ There is so much for Protestants in general and Baptists in particular to choke on here as to warrant a theological Heimlich maneuver.... The Council declares that we are to perform these

practices but it is clear that most of us do not. On what grounds do we reject the authority of this Council? It claims that the holy fathers were 'divinely inspired'! Were they divinely inspired about divine immutability, impassibility and icons? If so, evangelicals are rejecting divine inspiration. Luther declared: 'My soul abhors the *homoousios*.' Is Luther therefore damned? Evangelical theologian David Wells [a vocal opponent of open theism] asserts that the Creeds are often wrong. He says, for instance, that the Nicene Creed contains Origenist concepts and that Chalcedon conferred on Mary the title 'Mother of God.' The council said that this teaching was to be held inviolable so Wells is rejecting the inviolable teaching of the seventh ecumenical council. Is Wells a heretic? Must we follow the canons of the seven councils? If so, then the following apply to us: we are to stand, not kneel when praying on the Lord's day; a woman under the age of forty cannot become a deaconess and if, after becoming one, she 'despises the grace of God' and marries, she shall be anathematized; if you do not salute the icons you are anathematized; if you do not accept the gospels and the holy relics of the martyrs you are anathematized; Jews who convert must put away all Jewish customs including the Sabbath or they are not to be allowed to take communion. Are those who do not follow all the teachings of these seven councils heretics?"

⁴⁰ There is, of course, one council which specifically addresses these issues—Dort!

⁴¹ I don't mean by this permitting credentialed ministers to embrace the open view privately but forbidding them to speak, teach, or otherwise voice their beliefs publicly. This is not a workable arrangement at all. The open view is not an obscure eschatological belief about the precise timing of the bowls of wrath spoken of in Revelation which have nothing to do with impacting life and ministry now. The open view does impact one's entire worldview, leaving its imprint on one's discipling, counselling, and guidance of others as well as one's understanding of the place and urgency of prayer and other matters of practical importance. We cannot expect those of our ministers who embrace the open view to put it on a shelf and keep it to themselves. We should of course expect them not to make the open view a matter of contentious debate while seeking to proselytize others. But I would say the same thing about a minister who was unable to avoid making any teaching *not disapproved* by the General Presbytery an issue of contentious debate. Should we counsel the minister or outlaw his belief? Counsel the minister; he's the problem. In the end, the General Presbytery and Commission on Doctrinal Purity should know that the fires of contentious debate are far more likely to be stoked and fed by those who dislike the open view and feel themselves called of God to silence it than by open theists themselves.