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Cover Art as Described by Dr. Robert a. Morey

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) is the artist who best expresses the worldview that is found in Process Theology, the Open View of God and Middle Knowledge. Pollock denied that the universe travels through time according to the predetermined plan of God. He hated the very idea that God had ordained whatsoever comes to pass. He believed that the course of the universe was based on pure chance and contingency. Nothing has to happen because the future is not fixed but open to an infinite number of possible universes. He chose to express this doctrine by producing what he claimed was chance-based art.

Pollock produced the painting on the cover with the claim that chance was the true artist. He suspended cans of paint over canvas. He punched holes in the bottom of the cans and set them swinging back and forth in such a manner that the paint dripped out in a chaotic manner. But, as Francis Schaeffer pointed out, since chance is a myth and Divine order is the foundation of the universe, it is not possible for art to be made by pure chance. As the cans swung back and forth their movements were predetermined by the laws of gravity. They did not float around the room in violation of those laws. The weight of the cans, the amount of force used to set them swinging, the direction in which they were swung, the kind of wire used, etc. all contributed to the patterns of paint on the canvas. Pollock's attempt to create chance-based art only served to illustrate that nothing happens by chance but, rather, all things unfold according to the Divine will.

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Introduction

There is a direct link between natural theology and the so-called “Open View of God.” In the last edition of the JBA, we stated that if man is the measure of all things, then he becomes the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. If this is so, then a domino effect is set in motion that does not end until God is whittled down to the image of finite man. In the end, man creates God!

That this dumbing down of God should be done by lesbian pastors in liberal churches is par for the course. But for this to be done in Evangelical colleges and seminaries is a sad commentary on the low level of theological education today.

I was amazed when a well-known “theologian” referred to the “Open View of God” as a new doctrine. He was as ignorant as his students that this erroneous idea has been alive and well in the world of the cults and the occult for thousands of years. He was shocked when I pointed out that the Jehovah’s Witnesses had picked up that heresy from the Unitarians.

In the book, *Battle of the Gods*, I trace the history of the idea that God is ignorant of the future from its origin in Greek paganism to its present popular form. It has been a darling of virtually every heretical and cultic group in Western history. It has never been part of Christianity and does not deserve to be classified as a “Christian” view as the following dialogue illustrates.

Theist: I thank you for being willing to debate the “Closed View of God.”

Processian: Excuse me, but my view is called the “Open View of God.”

Theist: But the “Open View of God” is the opposite of what you really believe. You do believe that the future is *closed* to God? Yes! Do you believe that the universe is *closed* to the sovereignty of God? Yes! That man’s will is *closed* to God’s control? Yes! You are also *closed* to Providence, predestination, election, the lost condition of the heathen and eternal conscious punishment in hell, aren’t you? Yes! So why not come clean and admit that you are slowing *closing* God out of His own universe? In the end, the universe will be a closed system with God on the outside looking in with despair and hopelessness as it spins out of control.

Processian: Well, yes God is closed to those things. But we need to emphasize the positive of what is open to God once you dump all those Calvinist doctrines. God is now open to an infinite number of possible universes. He is no longer bound in the chains of eternal decrees. Each new day is as exciting to God as it is to us. Neither of us knows what will happen during that day.

Theist: The god of processianism is indeed open to all kinds of new things that are not possible for the God of the Bible. Stephen Davis says in his book, *Logic and the Nature of God*, that “God can sin. Do you believe that?”

Processian: Since “freedom” is the power of contrary choice, then if God is really free, then he must be able to choose to sin.

Theist: Why do assume that freedom is “the power of contrary choice?” I never found that idea in the Bible.

Processian: You don't believe that freedom is the power of contrary choice? I never met anyone who denied it! This is new to me.

Theist: Your idea of freedom comes from pagan philosophy and not from Christ. Take the sin of lying. Davis says, "God can lie." But the Bible says, "God cannot lie." In other words, God does not have the power of contrary choice when it comes to lying. If God "cannot deny himself," then is God free according to your definition? No. You have a hard choice in front of you. Either you have to give up your pagan definition of freedom or you have to contradict Scripture.

Processian: You have a frozen, static god that is boring because he is incapable of being surprised by our actions or by his own actions. I prefer a dynamic god who is open to an infinite number of possible choices.

Theist: And you have a knee-jerk, finite, pagan deity who is an ignorant, bumbling, pathetic being unworthy of the name "God." Your god is only a figment of your own invention.

Processian: But I am just as much a Christian as you are!

Theist: No, by the test of Scripture and history, you are not a Christian in any sense I know of. I plead with you to turn from your idols and worship the true God. I am telling you the truth in love. You have fallen into a damnable heresy and you are in danger of eternal hell.

Now, we recognize that the above dialogue will anger "politically correct" humanists in and outside of the church. But Biblical apologetics has never been popular. So, don't sweat it! Take your lumps and go on doing God's work in the power of the Spirit. As long as you have the smile of God, you can ignore the frown of man.

Dr. Bob Morey

Does God Really Know the Future?

By Dr. Robert A. Morey

Introduction

It is amazing that one would have to defend the absolute Omniscience of God, seeing it is enshrined in every major creed of Christianity since the first century. Since the God of the Bible knows everything, this includes the future. But today the nature and extent of God's knowledge has been once again been cast into controversy.

This controversy is not some "ivory tower" issue such as counting the number of angels that can dance on the top of a pin. The Christian's confidence in the future turning out as God promised is the basis of the inspiration of Scripture, the sufficiency of the atonement, and the Christian life. The issue boils down to whether God controls the future or does the future control God? Is God a knee-jerk deity?

Three Tests of Truth

There are three clear tests of any view of the nature and extent of God's knowledge.

1. Does this view strengthen or weaken the biblical doctrine of the verbal, plenary, inerrant, infallible inspiration of the Bible?
2. Does this view strengthen or weaken the biblical doctrine of the substitutionary blood atonement of Christ on the cross for our sins?
3. Does this view strengthen or weaken the biblical doctrine that God is working all things out for His Glory and our good?

While there are many other tests that could be applied to this subject, these three are sufficient to doom any heretical or deviant view. Why? Any view of God which destroys His Word, casts doubt on Christ's atonement, and rebels against Divine Providence cannot be of God.

Dr. Carl F. Henry, in a powerful chapter entitled, "The Stunted God of Process Theology," sums up why Biblical theists are so hard on Process and Neoprocess theology.

Orthodox Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, deplore the way in which process thinkers reject the supernatural, spurn the objective reality of the Trinity, disavow the miraculous, and repudiate a Word of God mediated solely through Christ. They object to the elimination by most process theologians of Christ as the mediator through whom alone God speaks his word. Process theologians also assail the traditional instance on divine decrees and election, on *creatio ex nihilo*, on miraculous redemption and on biblical eschatology. In place of divine decree and foreordination, process thinkers stress divine persuasion; they subordinate history and eschatological finalities broadly to the endless love of God. So great is the gulf between the two systems of theology that both can hardly lay claim to the title "Christian."¹

If you think that Dr. Henry is too severe in his condemnation, Dr. Ronald Nash had this to say,

To its critics, process theology is the most dangerous heresy presently threatening the Christian Faith. Process theology does not not eliminate pagan ideas from the faith, its critics argue. Rather, Process thought is a total capitulation to paganism.² Here there is no middle ground...A being who is not essentially omnipotent or omniscient, who is not the sovereign and independent Creator, is neither worthy to receive our worship nor to bear the title "God."³

These modern theologians are echoing the warning sounded by Jonathan Edwards, the greatest intellect that America ever produced.

One would think it wholly needless to enter on such an argument with any that profess themselves Christians: but so it is; God's certain Foreknowledge of the free acts of moral agents, is denied by some that pretend to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God.⁴

Alfred North Whitehead

¹ *On Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pgs. 362–363.

² *ibid.*, from the Introduction.

³ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974) vol. I:30

Alfred North Whitehead was one of the most vicious anti-Christians of the 20th century. He claimed that the God of the Bible was his view of the devil and that Christianity, with its concept of sin, was one of the worse things that ever happened to humanity. Jesus himself was not very intelligent. When asked if he read the Bible, he responded that he preferred reading Plato.⁵

He taught that God was the soul of the world and the world was God's body. The two were in an eternal bi-polar relationship. You can't have one without the other. God could not know the future because it was open to unlimited possibilities. God was evolving along with the universe and, in the end, the heavens and the earth would beget God.

Some of Whitehead's followers included Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, David Griffin, Norman Pittenger, H. P. Owen, John Cobb, Jr., Nelson Pike, L. McCabe, and Lewis Ford. They have attacked fundamental Christianity and the Bible with great vigor. No wonder Dr. Bruce Demarest concluded,

A former student of Whitehead reported that the master once commented that Christian orthodoxy could not be reconciled with his philosophy. Moreover, Brown, James, and Reeves acknowledge that process theology bears affinities with Theravada Buddhism, the thought of Heraclitus, the Unitarian Socinus, and the idealist philosophies of Hegel, Schelling, and T. deChardin. By its own admission, then, process theology represents a departure from a theology that broadly could be called biblical and historic Christian.⁶

In Neo-Evangelical Circles

In Neo-evangelical circles, one finds the heretical theories of Whitehead taught by such people as Clark Pinnock⁷, Richard Rice⁸, Gregory Boyd,⁹ Stephen Davis¹⁰, Bruce Reichenbach¹¹, Gordon Olson,¹² H. Roy Elseth¹³, George Otis, Jr.¹⁴, and many others.

Neo-processians are absolutely dogmatic that their god *cannot* know the future. But while their god does not know or ordain the future, some of them think that they and others *can* know the future!

Richard Rice is a Seventh Day Adventist and was faced with the rude reality that, while he could deny that God knew the future, and still keep his job at a SDA university, if he dared to deny that Ellen G. White knew the future, he would soon be collecting unemployment checks.

⁵ See *Battle of the Gods*, for documentation on Whitehead.

⁶ On Process Theology, *ibid.* p. 78.

⁷ *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986)

⁸ Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Nashville: Review & Herald Pub., 1979)

⁹ Gregory Boyd, *Trinity In Process* (New York: Peter Lang)

¹⁰ Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, *ibid.*

¹¹ *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger, *ibid.*

¹² Gordon C. Olson, *The Truth Shall Set You Free* (Franklin Park, Ill: Bible Research Fellowship, 1980)

¹³ Howard Roy Elseth, *Did God Know?* (St. Paul, Minn: Calvary United Church, 1977)

¹⁴ George Otis, Jr., "The Foreknowledge of God," unpublished paper, 1941.

Thus in the first edition of his book, he argued that while God could not know the future, Ellen G. White did!¹⁵

Clark Pinnock is quite dogmatic that the future is not fixed and thus God cannot know it. But, at the same time, he claims that there is no eternal conscious punishment awaiting unbelievers in the future. Evidently, while God cannot know the future, Pinnock *knows* it! He knows that the future is *fixed* in that there is no future hell awaiting those who die without faith in Christ! Evidently, he knows *more* than his god.¹⁶

In one debate with an “evangelical” Neo-processionist, when I asked him why God cannot know the future, he responded, “Because the future is open to an infinite number of possible universes.” I replied, “Wonderful! Then this means that you admit the possibility of a universe in which God is sovereign over all things, the heathen are lost, and eternal conscious punishment awaits all who die without faith in Christ.” “Oh no,” he responded, “such a universe is not possible.” Evidently, the future is closed to anything he doesn’t like.

Principles of Approach

As we begin our study of the nature and extent of the knowledge of God, we must emphasize that we are not referring to our knowledge of God. Instead, we are referring to God’s knowledge of Himself and the universe He created. Does God know everything or are there some things which God cannot know?

It is thus very important that anyone who is going to discuss this issue “come clean” about the presuppositions he is bringing to the discussion. The failure to reveal the hidden principles that contextualize theological issues results in much confusion and self-contradiction. For this reason, we are going to lay out the principles that will guide us in our study of the nature and extent of the knowledge of God. To make them absolutely clear, we will contrast our principles with those of humanistic-based theologies.

The following chart reveals the presuppositions that guide most discussions of God’s knowledge. If one begins with the assumption of human autonomy, i.e. that man can by reason alone determine what God can or cannot know, then he will eventually end up reducing God to what *man* can or cannot know. In effect, he ends up making a god in his own image.

On the other hand, if we begin with God’s self-disclosure in Scripture, then we can have the certitude of absolute truth. Does this mean that we will be able to explain fully to everyone’s satisfaction “how” God can know such things as the future? No. But this does not bother us in the least because faith swims when reason can no longer touch the bottom.

¹⁵ Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Nashville: Review and Herald, 1979). Later reprinted by Bethany House in 1985 under the title, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*. The Bethany House edition dropped the section on Ellen G. White knowing the future.

¹⁶ See Pinnock’s article, “The Destruction of the Impenitent,” in the *Criswell Theological Journal*, Spring 1990, vol. 4, No. 2., pgs. 243f. I pointed out this contradiction in my book, *Battle of the Gods*, in the hope that Pinnock would respond in an intelligent manner. My remarks evidently hit home because Pinnock spent a great deal of time in his article in the *Criswell Theological Journal* attacking my character by using ad hominem slurs. I am still waiting to see if he will deal with the reality that he claims to know the future while denying that his god knows it. To obtain a copy of the book, *Battle of the Gods*, contact the C.I.A., PO Box 7447, Orange CA 92863.

If Scripture is the revelation of an Infinite Mind and man has a finite intellect, then the finite mind of man will not be capable of an infinite understanding of what is revealed. This is why Scripture tells us that many of the truths it reveals go beyond the finite capacity of the human mind. (Rom. 11:13; Eph. 3:19; Phil. 4:7; etc.)

Is our appeal to the incomprehensibility of God a “cop out” as some humanistic theologians such as Clark Pinnock has charged? No. The doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God is the clear teaching of Scripture and we have yet to see any humanistic theologian even attempt to refute the exegetical evidence for it.¹⁷

Those who reject revealed truth because it does not “make sense” to them eventually end up in some form of atheism. Indeed, the highest conceit of man is to demand “how” and “why” Scripture is true before accepting it (Rom. 9:19–20). It reveals a commitment to the humanistic principle: *Man is the measure of all things - including God.*

The Christian View

The Humanistic Views

God’s self-disclosure in Holy Scripture is the only way we can have true knowledge of the nature and extent of God’s knowledge (1 Cor. 1:18–2:16).

Autonomous human reason unaided by divine revelation can discover the nature and extent of God’s knowledge.

Thus the nature and extent of God’s knowledge is the sole domain of special revelation and must be decided by Scripture alone. (*sola scriptura*: 1 Cor. 4:6)

Thus the nature and extent of God’s knowledge is not the sole domain of special revelation.

The only method by which we can ascertain the teaching of Scripture on God’s knowledge is the historical, grammatical, exegesis of relevant texts.

Philosophic reflection and argumentation is just as valid as biblical exegesis.

We must distinguish between primary texts and secondary texts.

- **“Primary texts” are those passages that have the nature and extent of God’s knowledge directly in view.**
- **“Secondary texts” are those passages that do not have God’s knowledge in direct view but may by inference bear on the subject.**

Secondary texts must be interpreted in the light of the teaching found in the primary texts.

Secondary texts cannot negate, overthrow or contradict the teaching found in the primary texts.

There is no need to resort to such distinctions. Secondary texts are just as valid for proof texting as are primary texts.

The speculations of philosophy (Christian or pagan) that either contradict or go beyond the teaching of the primary biblical texts must be rejected as spurious. “Let God be true and every man a liar.” (Rom. 3:4)

The speculations of philosophy (Christian or pagan) may modify or reject any aspect of divine revelation that is not in conformity to the opinions of the great philosophers. Humanistic philosophy is built on the false doctrine of the autonomy of human reason.

Scripture tells us that this is why philosophy never found God (1 Cor. 1:21).

If man is truly free, then he must not be limited by or to divine revelation. Man’s autonomous reason is sufficient to discover the nature and extent of God’s knowledge.

¹⁷ For a detailed exegetical demonstration of the incomprehensibility of God see my book: *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (World Pub. 1996), pgs. 73–84.

The incomprehensibility of God means that we will not be able to explain fully the “whys” and “hows” of the divine revelation of the nature and extent of the knowledge of God. We can modify or reject any aspect of the nature and extent of God’s knowledge that we cannot fully explain. If we cannot explain “how” God can know something, then we can deny that he knows it.

Biblical theologians do not accept the humanistic principle of human autonomy. They are committed to the opposite proposition: *God is the measure of all things - including man.* Without Divine Revelation, we can never know God. (Isa. 8:20)

The Vocabulary of God’s Knowledge

If the authors of Scripture, under Divine inspiration, believed that God’s knowledge could not be limited by anything, but was absolute Omniscience, how would they communicate that idea to their readers? This question must be answered before we even pick up the Bible. If we do not answer it, then we do not know what to look for and what to expect to find in Scripture.

If the authors of Scripture believed that God has knowledge of Himself and the world He created, we would expect to find them using those Hebrew and Greek words which would indicate to their readers that God has an intellect that is capable of understanding, comprehension and knowledge. In other words, we would expect to find that the God revealed in Scripture is a God of knowledge, not a god of ignorance.

Old Testament Vocabulary

In the Hebrew language there are several words that are used to speak of knowledge, understanding, and comprehension.

- A. The word **דָּן** is the most common word for understanding and knowledge in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is used of man’s knowledge and understanding hundreds of times. It is also applied to God to indicate that He has true knowledge of Himself and the world He created for His glory. (see: [Exo. 3:7, 19–20](#); [2 Sam. 7:20](#); [1 Kings. 8:39](#); [Job 23:10](#); [Psa. 31:7; 40:9; 69:5](#); [Jer. 1:5](#); etc.)
- B. The word **בִּין** is used to describe God’s knowledge in [Job 11:11; 28:23](#); [Psa. 5:1; 33:15; 139:2](#). The wicked deny that God “takes notice” of their sin in [Psa. 94:7b](#).
Neither shall the God of Jacob *notice it*.
- C. The word **דָּעָה** is used in [1 Sam. 2:3](#) in the phrase “Yahweh is a God of knowledge.” The wicked used this word when questioning whether God knows anything.
“How doth God know? ([Psa. 73:11a](#)).
- D. The word **הִזָּה** is used in [Psa. 11:4, 7](#) and [Psa. 17:2](#) to indicate that God “sees” all things.
- E. Another word for “consider,” “Behold,” and “see” is **רָאָה**. It is applied to God’s knowledge in [Gen. 29:32; 31:42](#); [Exo. 3:7; 4:31](#); [Psa. 9:14; 10:11; 25:18, 19; 84:10; 119:153,159](#). The wicked deny in [Psa. 94:7](#) that God really sees anything.
Yet they say, The LORD *shall not see*,
- F. In [Job 34:25](#), we are told that God “takes knowledge of” (**יִפְיֵר**) the works of man.
- G. The Psalmist declared in [Psa. 147:5](#), “His understanding is infinite”
- H. The biblical authors referred to “the eyes” of God to indicate that He sees all things. Nothing escapes His omniscient sight.

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth. ([2 Chron. 16:9](#))

For my eyes are upon all their ways; they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. (Jer. 16:17)

The eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro throughout the whole earth. (Zech. 4:10)

The authors of the Hebrew Scriptures used every word in their vocabulary to affirm that God has knowledge. The only ones who deny or question this are the wicked.

New Testament Vocabulary

When we turn to the New Testament, the same pattern is followed. The common Greek words for knowledge, understanding, and comprehension are applied to God without hesitation.

- A. The common Greek verb for “knowing” is γινώσκω. It is applied to God in Lk. 16:15; John 10:15; I Cor. 3:20; Gal. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:20 and 1 John 3:20.
- B. The noun γνῶσις is used for God’s knowledge in Rom. 11:33, where we are told that God’s γνῶσιν is incomprehensible.
- C. In Acts 15:18, God’s knowledge (γνώστα) is described as eternal (ἀπ’ αἰῶνος).
- D. Two different Greek words are used in the New Testament to signify God’s foreknowledge of the future. The noun πρόγνωσις (foreknowledge) is used in Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2. The verb προγινώσκω (to foreknow) is used in Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20.
- E. In Greek, the word for intellect or mind is νοῦς. It is used of God in Rom. 11:34 and 1 Cor. 2:16.
- F. The Greek verb οἶδα means “to know” and is used of God in 2 Cor. 11:11; 2 Cor. 12:3; 2 Pet. 2:9.
- G. The noetic sense of “seeing” is expressed by the Greek word βλέπω and is used in Mat. 6:6 to refer to God’s seeing us wherever we are.
- H. The authors of the New Testament, like the authors of the Old Testament, used every word that existed in the language of their day to convey the idea that God knows Himself and the world He made. When Paul encountered a situation which exceeded his capacity to understand, he would rest in the fact that “God knows” (2 Cor. 12:3). Paul makes it clear that God knows the truth even when we do not. See also 2 Cor. 11:11 where Paul appeals to the fact that “God knows.”

The Nature of God’s Knowledge

The nature of God’s knowledge is directly addressed in both Testaments. Instead of sitting in a dark room trying to figure out what He can or cannot know by our own limited intelligence, why not turn to the light of Scripture?

Perfect in Knowledge

First, God’s knowledge is תָּמִיד “perfect” according to Job 37:16.

The wondrous works of *Him who is perfect in knowledge.*

The perfection of God’s knowledge means that it is not deficient in anything for “he who is perfect is not lacking in anything.” (James 1:4).

God’s knowledge is thus *complete* and *nothing need be added to it*. This means that God’s knowledge is *self-existent* and *independent* of anything outside of His own divine nature. He

does not need to use logic or the scientific method to discover Truth. His knowledge is one, unified, single, perfect vision of all things from the end to the beginning of the creation from all eternity. Paul tells us that God is not in need of anything because He is perfect in every respect ([Acts 17:25](#)).

He Does Not Need Your Information

Because God's knowledge is perfect, He is not in need of any information from us.

Can any one teach God knowledge, Seeing He judgeth those that are high? ([Job 21:22](#))

In order for God to judge man on the Day of Judgment, He has to have perfect knowledge of all things. This is why God is not in need of someone to give Him counsel, which is information and advice. ([Rom. 11:34](#))

Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Who has become his adviser?

It Does Not Increase or Decrease

Since His knowledge is perfect, it cannot increase or decrease. It is complete and whole. He does not have to investigate to find out anything.

He sees iniquity *without investigation*. ([Job 11:11](#))

For *He does not have to wait for the results of a judicial investigation* to regard a man.

(Translation K&D, Job II:255–256) ([Job. 34:23](#))

He will break mighty men *without inquiry* and puts others in their place. ([Job 34:24](#))

It is Infinite

Since His knowledge is perfect, it is no surprise to us to find that it is *infinite* according to [Psa. 147:5](#).

His understanding is *infinite*.

Being “infinite” means that we cannot place any limitations on His knowledge. There is no “cutting off” place where we can say that His knowledge begins or ends.

It is Eternal

Since it is infinite, God's knowledge is *eternal*. In [Acts 15:18](#) James reminded the counsel that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church did not catch God by surprise. God had known ($\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\varsigma$) everything from eternity ($\acute{\alpha}\pi' \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma$). God does not have to wait until the end to see what will happen like we do. He knows “the end from the beginning” ([Isa. 46:10](#)).

It is Immutable

Being perfect, infinite and eternal, God's knowledge is *immutable* ([Mal. 3:6](#); [James 1:17](#)). Because it is immutable, God cannot make a mistake; He cannot lie; He does not change His mind.

God is not a man, that *he should lie*; neither the son of man, that *he should change His mind: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* (Num. 23:19)

And also the Strength of Israel *will not lie nor repent*: for he *is* not a man, that *he should change His mind*. (1 Sam. 15:29) the hope of eternal life that God, *who cannot lie*, promised before the world began (Tit. 1:2)

In the same way, when God wanted to make the *unchangeable character of his purpose* perfectly clear to the heirs of his promise, he guaranteed it with an oath so that by these two *unchangeable* things, in which it is *impossible for God to prove false*, we who have taken refuge in him might have a strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. (Heb. 6:17–18)

Several comments should be made on the passages above. First, the authors of Scripture repeatedly emphasize that God is not a man and thus His knowledge is not limited or flawed as man's knowledge. This is stressed in other passages as well.

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*. (1 Sam. 16:7) *Do You have eyes of flesh? or do You see as man sees? Are Your days as the days of man? Are Your years as man's days, that You have to inquire after my iniquity, and search after my sin?* (Job 10:4–7)

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8–9)

The main reason why humanists are always trying to limit the knowledge of God is to bring God down to the level of man. They have forgotten God's stern rebuke,

You thought that I was altogether such a one as yourself: But I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes. (Psa. 50:21)

Since God's knowledge is absolute and unlimited, He is incapable of lying. Notice that Heb. 6:17–18 clearly links together God's immutability and omniscience in such a way that you cannot have one without the other. Thus God's knowledge is *infallible* and cannot err in any sense.

It is Clear, Distinct, Certain and Orderly

Since God's knowledge is perfect in all aspects, it is *clear* instead of unclear, *distinct* instead of vague, *certain* instead of uncertain, and *orderly* instead of chaotic, for God is not a God of confusion but of harmony. (1 Cor. 14:33).

It is Infallible

Is God's knowledge an "iffy" thing that may or may not pan out as the future unfolds? Does the *infallibility* of God's knowledge means that the future must *necessarily* happen as He knows

it? In order for the future *necessarily* to happen as God sees it, must it be *certain, fixed, preordained, and predetermined* from eternity? Is anything left to luck or chance?

How can we answer such deep questions? *Sola Scriptura!* Scripture alone can give us God's answers to such questions. Why? First, human reason is not adequate to come up with an answer, for the world with all its philosophic reasoning and logic never knew the true God (1 Cor. 1:21). Second, Paul warns us that speculative theology, in which you try to figure out God by your own intellect instead of going to Scripture, produces nothing but pride and conceit.

Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn, "*Do not go beyond what is Written,*" that no one of you should be puffed up for the one against the other. (1 Cor. 4:6)

If the authors of Scripture believed that the future, including the decisions and works of man, is already *fixed, certain, preordained* and *predetermined*, and, at the same time, that man is *accountable* to God for his thoughts, words and deeds, how would they convey that idea to their readers? By what vocabulary? By what exegesis?

What if we find that they held to the *certainty* and *necessity* of the future and that man was *accountable* at the same time? Just because pagan Greek philosophy taught that man is not accountable if his actions are predetermined, are we to throw the Bible in the trash and follow the philosophers instead of Scripture? No.

First, did the authors of Scripture ever describe the future, including the acts of man, as "certain," "necessary," "determined," "fixed," "foreordained," or "appointed"? Did they ever say that future "must" happened? Is the future "certain?" Or, is it up to the roll of the dice in some kind of cosmic crap game?

The Story of Joseph

That this is what Moses understood is clear from his account of Joseph in Genesis chapters 38–50. The decision of his brothers to beat him and then sell him into slavery, the slave masters taking him to Egypt instead of some other country, the false rape charge made by Potiphar's wife, his prison experience, his rise to Pharaoh's side and the decision of Jacob to move to Egypt, were all these decisions and acts of all the people involved autonomous, i.e. independent of God? Can we really describe them in terms of mere coincidence and luck? Was Joseph just unlucky when he experienced bad things and lucky when he experienced good things? Was it merely by chance that the jailer liked him? Was it really a mere coincidence that Pharaoh made him second to himself?

Instead of sitting around speculating, let us turn to the testimony of Joseph to see what he believed.

But as for you, you thought to do evil against me; *but God meant it unto good*, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. (Gen. 50:20)

Can words be clearer? Did not Joseph believe that God planned *everything* including what his brothers did to him in order to save many people from starvation? That *everything* that happened to him happened *necessarily as part of God's plan*? Why did Potiphar like Joseph? Moses tells us,

And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD *caused* all that he did to prosper in his hand. (Gen. 39:3)

According to Moses, “Yahweh caused” everything Joseph did to prosper. Joseph believed that God was in control of the entire situation.

But did the belief that God planned the whole thing in any way lessen, negate or reduce the responsibility of all those involved? No. The brothers admitted that their decisions and actions that led to selling Joseph into slavery were wicked and evil. They knew that they were responsible for what they did. They knew that they deserved punishment.

So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray you now, *the transgression of your brothers, and their sin, for what they did unto you was evil*. And now, we beg you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept as they spoke unto him. (Gen. 50:17)

Joseph agreed that they had intended to do evil to him. BUT everything they did was also part of a bigger picture. Namely, the sovereign purpose and plan of God. As Joseph looked back at his life with all its ups and downs, he saw the hand of God behind it all.

Future Events Already Appointed

For the vision is yet for the *appointed time*, and it hasteth toward the end, and *shall not lie*: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will *certainly* come, it will not delay. (Hab. 2:3)

Since the captivity has been “appointed” by God, it will *certainly* come to pass in the future in exactly the way God said it would happen. If future events could turn out differently than the vision stated, then God would be guilty of telling *a lie*.

Are Future Events Fixed?

He answered them, “It is not for you to know what times or seasons *the Father has fixed* by His own authority. (Acts 1:7)

Jesus pointed out to the disciples that the future has already been “fixed” by the Father. The tense of the verb is a second aorist middle indicative and emphasizes the sovereignty of the Father over time.

For he *has fixed a day* when he is going to judge the world with justice through a man he has appointed. (Acts 17:31)

The Day of Judgment has already been fixed by the Father. It is an appointment that we all have to meet. But, is there not the possibility that something could happen that God did not foresee and that would cancel or change the Day of Judgment? No. It is “set in stone” and cannot tarry or be overthrown.

From one man he made every nation of humanity to live all over the earth, *fixing the seasons of the year and the boundaries they live in* (Acts 17:26)

If man were free in the Greek ideal of absolute human autonomy, then he would be absolutely free to choose when and where he lives. But Paul says that the time and place of your birth and your habitation is something that God determines and appoints before you were ever born.

Are Future Events Going to Happen Necessarily?

Did anyone ever do anything that was “necessary” for him to do it according to the preordained plan and purpose of God? This question is so important that only special revelation can answer it.

Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?
([Luke 24:26](#))

Was it *necessary* for Judas to betray Christ? For the Romans to deliver Him to death? For the Jewish leaders to demand His death? For the soldier to pierce His side with a spear? Did all the choices of everyone involved take place *necessarily*? Was it all mere coincidence? Was there a chance that He would not have been arrested, tried, tortured and crucified or did those things have to be done by all those involved because it was *necessary*? If they did things because they had to, i.e. it was *necessary*, were they held accountable to God for what they did? The present text and the next one answer these questions.

Brothers, *it was necessary for the Scripture to be fulfilled*, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about *Judas*, who was the guide to those who arrested Jesus. ([Acts 1:16](#))

Luke tells us that all the choices and decisions of man that came together to cause the death of Christ, including the decision of Judas to betray the Lord, were done *necessarily*.

Explaining and showing that *it was necessary* that the Christ *should suffer*, and *to rise again from the dead*; ([Acts 17:3](#))

Was Christ’s death at the hands of sinners a matter of bad luck; a chance happening; a mere coincidence? No. All those things happened because it was *necessary* for these things to take place. They were part of God’s eternal plan of the ages.

Are Future Events Ever Predetermined?

Do the biblical authors say that someone ever chose to do something that was *predetermined* that he should chose to do it?

For the Son of man is going away, *as it has been predetermined: but how terrible it will be for that man by whom He is betrayed!* ([Lk. 22:22](#))

When Judas chose to betray the Lord, was his choice *predetermined*? If Luke was inspired by God to write his Gospel account, then we have to accept the fact that he clearly stated that Judas’ betrayal was something that had been predetermined. But, we hasten to add, lest anyone foolishly think that this meant that Judas was not responsible for his actions, Luke adds, “woe unto that man through whom He is betrayed.” There is no indication in the text to suggest that

Luke had a problem believing that the choices and actions of Judas were determined and responsible at the same time. They were compatible and not contradictory,

him, being delivered up by the *predetermined* counsel and foreknowledge of God, you by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: ([Acts 2:23](#))

The men who crucified the Lord did not know that what they did was predetermined by God before time began. *They are responsible for what was predetermined for them to do.* Peter did not give any indication that he was bothered with these revealed truths. They were compatible in his eyes.

What About Predestination?

If the biblical authors believed that the future was predetermined, we would expect them to use such words as “predestination.” Did they ever use such terminology when describing the future acts of men?

For of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom You did anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, *to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council predestined to come to pass.* ([Acts 4:27–28](#))

Do you really believe that every word in the Bible is God’s Word? Then, regardless of how you feel about it, you have to accept the fact that such words as “predestination,” “election,” and “predetermined” are found in the Bible. Those who had a hand in putting to death the Son of God are held accountable for what they did and, at the same time, what they did was predestined by God from eternity that they should do it. The text cannot be dismissed by saying that God *knew* that they would do it. The word προόρισεν means to predestine or predetermine that certain things will be done in the future.

Must the Future Happen?

Does the Bible ever say that the future acts of a man “must” happen?

From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples, that He *must go* to Jerusalem, and *suffer many things* of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and *be killed*, and the third day *be raised up.* ([Matt. 16:21](#))

Jesus “must” go, suffer, die and be raised. Why? It was the Father’s plan for Him to die on the cross. The same statement is repeated in [Mark 8:31](#).

What about “end times” predictions? Will the future events happen because they *must* happen?

And you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See to it that you are not alarmed. *These things must take place;* but that’s not the end. ([Matt. 24:6](#))

The decisions and actions of men that are predicted in [Matt. 24](#) “must” happen as God says they will happen.

Is the Future Open to Change?

If the future were open to change, then the Bible could *not* describe future events as happening necessarily. But if it does speak of future events as necessarily happening, then this is clear indication that believed that the future was fixed.

Acts 23:11 “*you must testify* in Rome”

Acts 27:24 “*you must stand before the emperor*”

Paul was told that God had decided that he was going to witness to Caesar in Rome. The future had already been fixed and predetermined. Not even a shipwreck could prevent the trip to Rome. Paul was immortal until he had completed his destiny. These are but as few of the passages in the Bible that speak of future events, including the acts of man, as what “must” happen.

Are Future Events “Destined” By God?

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. Meanwhile, *all who had been destined to eternal life believed.* (Acts 13:48)

Luke clearly states that those who had been “destined to eternal life” believed. Their decision to believe is something that God “destined” them to do.

Are Future Events “Ordained” And “Preordained”?

Do the authors of the Bible ever trace man’s decisions and actions back to God’s preordination?

And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. *For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring disaster upon Absalom.* (2 Sam. 17:14)

This passage is remarkable. It answers the questions, “Why did Absalom and all the men of Israel *choose* not to listen to Athithophel when he was clearly the wisest counselor in their midst? Why did they *choose* to take Hushai’s advice instead? The text states that God caused them to choose Hushai because *He had ordained* to defeat Absolom. *They chose what He ordained them to choose.*

It is Incomprehensible to Man

Since God’s knowledge is perfect, infinite, eternal, and immutable, it is no surprise that it is also *incomprehensible*. How God can know the end from the beginning from eternity is beyond our capacity to understand or to explain. But this what the Bible teaches.

Have you not known? Have you not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? That *His understanding is incomprehensible?* (Isa. 40:28)

O how deep are God's riches, wisdom and knowledge! *How impossible to explain his judgments or to understand his ways!* (Rom. 11:33)

Does God Repent?

While these passages seem crystal clear to us, processions usually bring up those passages where we are told that God "repented." What about the passages where God is said in the King James Version to "repent" (Gen. 6:6–7; Exo. 32:14; Jud. 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; Psa. 106:45; Jer. 26:19; Joel 2:13; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9–10; 4:2)? Do these passages prove that the future is unknown to God? Do they prove that God changes His "mind," (i.e. eternal decrees) about the future?

First, if we take the King James Version translation and give it a literal interpretation, it would appear that God "repented" of sin. This would not bother Stephen Davis, associate professor of philosophy at Claremont College. He has argued that God can sin, God can lie, and even break his promises!¹⁹ But, luckily for us, He has not done these things so far.

But is this what these passages mean? Is there a GOD above God to whom He is accountable? To whom does God repent and whose forgiveness does He seek? The Bible clearly states in many places that "God *cannot* lie" (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2). He *cannot* even be tempted to sin, much less be guilty of sin (James 1:13). Thus whatever the KJV meant by the word "repent," the translators did not mean to imply that God sins and therefore needs repentance.

Second, the KJV is not consistent in its translation of the Hebrew word נָחַם as "repent." Elsewhere in Genesis it is translated:

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac *was comforted* after his mother's death. (Gen. 24:67)

And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah *was comforted*, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. (Gen. 38:12)

Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he *comforted* them, and spake kindly unto them. (Gen. 50:21)

Obviously, the word "repent" would not fit into the other places in Genesis where the Hebrew word is found. It is translated "to comfort." This reveals that the Hebrew word is an *emotive* term signifying *a change in feelings or emotion*. Gen. 6:6 is a good example.

And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (KJV)

Modern translations render the word נָחַם as follows:

RSV: was sorry

NKJ: was sorry

NRS: was sorry

NASB: was sorry

Moffat: was sorry

¹⁹ Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Eerdmans, 1983) pgs. 88, 96.

Torah: was saddened

Taylor: broke his heart

Why have modern translators changed “repented” to such emotive words as “sorry”? There are good reasons for what they did.

First, there is a parallelism in the Hebrew text that indicates what the word **וַיִּנָּח** means. The parallel word is **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** and is correctly translated “was grieved.” Thus the word **וַיִּנָּח** refers to the emotions or attitude of God, not His plans or intellect.

If this is true, then we would expect to find the ancient translations rendering the Hebrew word **וַיִּנָּח** as an emotive term.

The Septuagint: angry

Targum Neofiti 1: regret

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: regret

Syriac: grieve

Arabic: grieve

Latin Vulgate: regret (*paenituit*)

Keil and Delitzsch’s comment on [Gen. 6:6](#) is worth repeating.

The force of **וַיִּנָּח** “it *repented* the Lord,” may be gathered from the explanatory **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** “it grieved Him at his heart.” This shows that the repentance of God does not presuppose any variableness in His nature or His purpose. In this sense God never repents of anything ([1 Sam. 15:29](#)), (Calvin). The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man, and signifies that “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish.” (Calvin).²⁰

If the authors of Scripture believed that “x” will *certainly* happen in the future, they would express that idea by saying that “x” *shall* or *will* happen. They would have to use “shall” and “will” because they are part of the *language of certitude*. They could strengthen that idea by saying that “x” shall or will *surely* or *certainly* happen in the future.

If they went one step further and used *the language of necessity*, they would say that “x” *must* happen in the future. Thus if “x” *shall* and *must* happen in the future, then future events are both *certain* and *necessary*.

If they believed that the future events are neither certain nor necessary, they would avoid using such language as “shall,” “will” and “must.” To say that they used the language of certitude and necessity but did not believe in either is make them into fools or liars.

Is the Future Open to Infinite Possibilities?

²⁰ Ibid. How is it that Pinnock now leads the way toward embracing “process theism”? “I am sympathetic with a number of motifs in process theism. I, too, see reality as open, not closed. And I think of God as relating to events as they happen, not timelessly.” (“God Limits His Knowledge,” *Predestination and Free Will*, edited by David Basinger and Randall Basinger [Downers Gorge: Inter-Varsity, 1986], 147). See also *The Openness of God* (Downers Gorge: Inter-Varsity, 1994) for Pinnock’s admission that he finds much in “process theism” attractive and that he now shares with Cobb.

Is it possible for God to lie? For God to make a mistake? To break His promise? Is it possible that in the future God could become the devil and the devil become God? Can the devil win in the end? The humanist, given his worldview, must believe that all these things are possible. Anyone who says that the future is open to infinite possible worlds, would have to go down the same path of apostasy as Stephen Davis and Clark Pinnock.

According to the biblical worldview, it is *impossible* for God to lie (Tit. 1:3). God cannot fail to keep His word (Num. 23:19). He *cannot* deny His own nature (2 Tim. 2:13). The Lord will win, not the devil (Rev. 20:10). *The impossibility of God becoming the devil or lying is only possible because the future is NOT open to contingency (luck and chance). Only in a predetermined universe can we say that some things are NOT possible.*

Figurative Language

Scripture sometimes speaks to us in “figurative language” (John 16:25). Paul tells us that he spoke “in human terms” (Rom. 3:5). Why? “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh” (Rom. 6:19). Thus he did not hesitate to “speak in terms of human relationships” (Gal. 3:15).

This is not a “cop out.” Orthodox theologians have biblical precedent to interpret these secondary texts as the use of the *figurative language of human terminology*. Because we would have to go to Sodom to see if it were as bad as we have heard, God is pictured in this figurative sense as doing so.

The Extent of God’s Knowledge

Did the authors of Scripture believe that God’s knowledge was infinite in its extent and that nothing was closed to the knowledge of God? How would they convey this idea to their readers? By what vocabulary?

Specific Illustrations

God’s knowledge of Himself:

- His eternal plans for man and the universe: 2 Kgs. 19:25; ; Jer. 29:11–12; Acts 1:7
- His future works are known to Him from eternity: Acts 15:18
- Exhaustive knowledge of each member of the Trinity of the other members of the Godhead: Mat. 11:27; John 7:29; 8:55; 17:25; 1 Cor. 2:10–11

God’s Knowledge of the Space/Time Universe

- All of history, the end from the beginning: Isa. 46:10
- Extends to the ends of the earth: Job 28:24
- Sees everything under the heavens: Job 28:24
- All possible events in the future: Isa. 48:18–19; Ezk. 37:3; Mat. 11:21–23
- When a sparrow falls to the ground: Mat. 10:29;
- He speaks of future events as if they already happened: Rom. 4:17; 8:30
- The number and names of the stars: Psa. 147:4
- All creatures: Heb. 4:13

- When He will judge the world: [Mat. 8:29](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [Rev. 14:7, 15](#)
- Foresees the future: [Gal. 3:8–9](#)
- Foreknows the future: [Acts 2:23](#); [Rom. 8:29](#); [1 Pet. 1–2, 18–20](#);

God's Knowledge of Man

- All men: [2 Sam. 7:20](#); [Psa. 33:13](#); [Jer. 15:15](#)
- The hearts of all men: [1 Sam. 16:7](#); [1 Kgs. 8:39](#); [Psa. 7:9](#); [17:2](#); [26:2](#); [139:2](#); [Jer. 11:20](#); [12:3](#); [17:10](#); [Lk. 16:15](#); [John 2:24](#); [21:17](#); [Acts 1:24](#); [Rom. 8:27](#); [Rev. 2:23](#)
- When a man will be born and when he will die: [Job 14:5](#); [21:21](#); [Psa. 31:15](#); [Mat. 26:18, 45](#); [Mk. 14:35, 41](#); [John 2:4](#); [7:6, 8, 30](#); [8:30](#); [12:27](#); [13:1](#); [Acts 17:26](#)
- Man ways: [Job 23:10](#); [34:21](#)
- Man's thoughts: [Psa. 139:2](#); [Ezk. 11:5](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)
- Man's meditations: [Psa. 5:1](#)
- Man's works: [Job 34:25](#); [Psa. 33:15](#); [Matt. 16:27](#)
- Man's sorrows: [Gen. 29:32](#); [31:42](#); [Exo. 3:7](#); [4:31](#); [Psa. 25:18–19](#); [31:7](#); [119:153](#);
- Every word man speaks: [Jer. 17:16](#);
- A man's future: [Exo. 3:19–20](#); [Jer. 18:22–23](#)
- How many hairs are his head: [Mat. 10:30](#)
- The folly of man: [Psa. 69:5](#)
- The wrongs of man: [Psa. 69:5](#)
- The wickedness of man: [Gen. 6:5](#)
- Our future needs and prayers before we ask: [Mat. 6:8](#)
- Every intent of the thoughts of man's heart: [Gen. 6:5](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)
- The shame of man: [Psa. 69:19](#)
- What man is made of: [Psa. 103:14](#)
- Man's actions: [Psa. 139:2–4](#)
- All about a man before he is born: [Jer. 1:5](#)

What about the future acts of man, good and evil? Does God know the future decisions and acts that we will do? The Scripture illustrates that God knows the good and evil that we will do from all eternity and even declares it in prophecy. The following is but a few samples of the *hundreds* of passages in which God reveals what men will think, say and do in the future:

- That in the future all the evil things that Joseph's brothers would do.
- Potiphar's wife and others would do to him would place him where he could save his family from starvation: [Gen. 50:20](#)
- That in the future Pharaoh would not obey Moses: [Exo. 7:3–5](#)
- That in the future Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Tyre: [Ezk. 26:1–14](#)
- That in the future Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Egypt: [Ezk. 30:10](#)
- That in the future Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Judah: [Jer. 25:9](#)
- That in the future Judah's captivity would last seventy years: [Jer. 25:11](#)
- That in the future Babylon would fall in seventy years: [Jer. 25:12](#)
- That in the future Cyrus would rebuild Jerusalem: [Isa. 44:28–45:1](#)
- That in the future Judas would betray Jesus: [Psa. 41:9](#); [Lk. 22:21–22](#); [John 6:64](#); [13:18, 19, 21, 26, 27](#)
- That in the future Peter would deny Him three times: [Mat. 26:34](#)

- That in the future the Jews, the Romans, Herod, and Pontius Pilate would murder Jesus:
[Acts 4:27–28](#)

We have examined in some detail what the authors of Scripture said about the nature and extent of God’s knowledge. We found them saying what they would have to say in order to convey the idea that God’s omniscience is absolute and unlimited by anything past, present or future.

Those who disagree have a great task set before them. If the authors of Scripture believed that God did NOT know the past, present or future, how would they express that idea to their readers? By what vocabulary? By what biblical illustrations?

They will have to come up with multiple biblical passages that clearly state: “He does NOT know everything” or “I the Lord do NOT know.” Let them follow the same procedure as we have followed and marshal their exegetical evidence. They will have to produce primary passages in which the knowledge of God is clearly in focus and that knowledge is specifically limited. Let us now turn to those who deny the omniscience of God.

Christ Did Not Die for You or Your Sins

What are the implications of the idea that God does not know the future? Did He know that Christ would die on the cross? Clark Pinnock, Roy Elseth, Richard Rice and others say that God cannot know the future. What does this mean? God not know that Jesus would die on the cross! Since God did not know the future, particularly the free acts of man such as his sins, then did Jesus know of you and die for your sins when He hung on the tree? No. Jesus did not know of you or your sins because *they were in the future*. Any doctrine that denies that “Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3), denies the heart of the gospel and falls under the condemnation of Gal. 1:8.

Conclusion

In this brief study of the nature and extent of God’s knowledge, we have demonstrated that God knows *all* things including the *future*. His foreknowledge is certain and infallible because it flows from His eternal decrees.

Resources

For those who wish to investigate the subject of God’s knowledge in greater depth, the following works are helpful.

Books Which Promote the Biblical View of God and Man and Refute Process Theology and Middle Knowledge.

David Banister and Random Banister, eds., *Predestination and Freewill* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986). The chapters by John Feinberg and Norman Geisler.

William Bates, *The Harmony of the Divine Attributes in the Contrivance and Accomplishment of Man’s Redemption* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Pub. 1985)

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977). See pgs. 66–69.

G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962). See chapter nine.

Harry Buis, *Historic Protestantism and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958)

D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981)

Gordon Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1961)

Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) See vol. VI. Pgs.440–441.

Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures In Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972). See pgs. 154–164.

The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974). See vol. I, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry Into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will*, particularly Part II, Sections XI–XIII.

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, (NY:Macmillan, 1987). See: vol. 7, pgs 338–339.

Royce Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983)

The Grace of God and The Bondage of the Will, eds. Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995). See vol. 2, pgs. 429–497 for a detailed refutation of Middle Knowledge.

James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1926)

Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word: 1976). See vols. V and VI where he refutes process theology and Middle Knowledge.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: James Clarke, 1960). See vol. I, pgs. 398–401.

Robert A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods* (1989: C.I.A., PO Box 7447, Orange, CA)

_____, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minn: Bethany House, 1982)

_____, *The Nature and Extent of God’s Knowledge*, (1999: C.I.A., PO Box 7447, Orange, CA)

_____, *Studies In the Atonement* (1989: C.I.A., PO Box 7447, Orange, CA, 1989)

Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). See pgs. 62–66.

John Piper, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983)

On Process Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) See the chapters by Nash, Gruenler, Henry, Bloesch, Demarest, Peterson, Holmes, Craig, Clarke, and Morris.

N. L. Rice, *God Sovereign and Man Free: Or the Doctrine of Divine Foreordination and Man’s Free Agency, Stated, Illustrated, and Proved from the Scriptures* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Pub., 1985.

Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1976), *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968)

Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA:Judson Press, 1976)

Francis Turrentin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Harmony, NJ: P & R, 1992), I:212–220.

Robert K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong With Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996)

Books Which Promote the Doctrine of Human Autonomy

David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Freewill* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986). The chapters by Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock.

Frank Beckwith, *The Mormon Concept of God* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991). See pgs. 11–13.

Gregory Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995),

_____ *God at War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997),

_____ *Jesus Under Siege* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1995),

_____ *Letters From a Skeptic* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Books, 1994), *Trinity In Process* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992)

William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). See also his chapter in Pinnock’s book, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) and several chapters in Nash’s book, *On Process Theology*.

Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983)

The Grace of God, the Will of Man, ed. Clark Pinnock, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989)

Roy Elseth, *Did God Know?* (St. Paul, Minn: Calvary United Church, 1977). See pgs. 97, 123–125. He argues that history is *not* the unfolding of God’s plan; that prophecy can fail; that God had nothing to do with the death of Christ. God’s plan, according to him, did not have Jesus dying on the cross!

Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1988)

George Otis, Jr., *Sharing Your Faith* (Chicago: Bible Reseach Fellowship, 1976)

_____, “The Foreknowledge of God,” unpublished paper, 1941.

Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974)

Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Nashville: Review and Herald, 1979). Later reprinted by Bethany House in 1985 under the title, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*. The Bethany House edition dropped the section on Ellen G. White knowing the future. Rice argues that God did not know that Christ would die.

God in the Image and Likeness of Adam—Clark Pinnock’s Use of Scripture in His Argument: “God Limits His Knowledge”

by A. B. Caneday

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When David Kelsey wrote *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, his design was to study theologians’ “methods,” not their “theological methodology.” Thus, he distinguished between “use” of and “interpretation” of scripture.¹ He studiously avoided the area of hermeneutics and interpretation as he examined what theologians do as they pursue their craft. His attempted “theological neutrality” has been properly questioned.²

¹ See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 7, 9.

However, Kelsey has created a model which may be employed, with some modification, to evaluate how theologians use scripture in theological argument. For the purpose of this essay, I modify Kelsey's four questions³ to consist of two

(1) What does it mean for the Bible to be authoritative? What is the role of biblical authority in theology?

(2) How is the Bible to be used in theological argument? In daily life? In the life of the community? That is, How is scripture brought to bear upon theological proposals so as to authorize them?

This modified structure seeks to answer a larger question: What does it mean to be biblical when doing theology?

This essay employs these questions to examine how Clark H. Pinnock uses scripture in his essay, "God Limits His Knowledge."⁴ Pinnock's essay is especially suitable for this study because only a year earlier, in 1985, he published his essay: "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology."⁵ Therefore, his later essay may be examined against his own claims of how he employs scripture in theological argument to determine whether his actual use of scripture is congruent with his doctrine of scripture.

I. Method of Approach

Unlike Kelsey's investigation, the questions posed above address theological prolegomena or methodology. Thus, this essay consists of two parts corresponding to the questions:

(1) Theological Methodology [The role of biblical authority in Pinnock's theological method]; and

(2) Theological Argument [The role of scripture in Pinnock's theological argument].

II. Pinnock's Theological Method and Argument

A. Theological Methodology: Role of Biblical Authority

What does it mean for the Bible to be authoritative? What is the role of biblical authority in theology? These two questions, in particular the second, are ones which are now being addressed by theologians in "theological prolegomena." They are questions which deal with preliminary issues of theological method. It is necessary, first, to probe these questions concerning methodology' in order to uncover how Pinnock employs the Bible in theological argument.

1. Biblical Authority: The Major Presupposition

³ Kelsey, *Use of Scripture*, 3–4.

⁴ In David Basinger and Randall Basinger, *Predestination and Freewill: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 141–62.

⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology. Evangelical Options*, ed. by Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 18–34.

Pinnock identifies himself with Protestant orthodoxy which E. J. Camell defined as “that branch of Christendom which limits the ground of religious authority to the Bible.”⁶ Thus, Pinnock lays claim to this as the major theological presupposition which undergirds both his approach to and use of the Bible. Though his belief in the inerrancy of scripture has been challenged,⁷ Pinnock affirms belief in the infallibility of scripture as the “pillar which supports our theology.”⁸ He claims to accept scripture as the prescriptive pattern and rule for doing theology just as it is the canon for faith and practice,⁹ for “theological novelty” does not blend well with a high view of scripture.”¹⁰ Pinnock states plainly, “Adherence to the Bible for me means acquiescence to all its teachings and a refusal to allow any rival to stand above it, whether tradition, reason, culture, science, or opinion.”¹¹

Pinnock’s affirmation that the authority of scripture serves the role as the standard for all theological expression is followed by negative clarifications. He points out that his own theological method stands apart from modern theology’s method which has shifted away from the locus of authority in the written Word of God toward placing it in human experience and

⁶ Ibid., 18. Quoted from E. J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 13.

⁷ See Rex A. Koivisto, “Clark Pinnock and Inerrancy: A Change in Truth Theory?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981), 139–51.

⁸ Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 18. For a more thorough discussion of his view of Scripture see *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984). In the conclusion he explains why he accepts inerrancy as an appropriate expression concerning the quality of Scripture: “The burden of the term inerrancy is to preserve the principle of the Reformation that Scripture can be trusted in what it teaches and relied upon as the infallible norm of the church...”

The point to grasp is that inerrancy is a term with strength and flexibility. We need it because it highlights the conviction that the Bible tells the truth when it speaks. In another place, Pinnock asks, “How can I be taken seriously when I endorse inerrancy in the closing pages of the book [The Scripture Principle], after having savaged the idea in so many pages earlier? The answer lies in the ambiguity of the term.” See Clark H. Pinnock, “Reflections on The Scripture Principle,” *TSF Bulletin* 9:4 (1986), 11.

⁹ Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 18–19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Ibid., 19. Pinnock contends, “Although my approach is identical to the basic structure of classical Protestants of the past, it is also marked by conscious awareness and opposition to the enormous ideation shift which has occurred in modern theology affecting this and all topics of theology. It is a shift in theological method from locating the basis of authority in the objective written Word of God to placing it in human reason and experience - The shift has created a great antithesis in the church between classical Christians who desire, as I do, to remain faithful to the faith once delivered and religious liberals by whatever name who seem intent on endlessly revising the message until it seems relevant to the modern person.” If I may express a note of incredulity at this point, I trust that my doubt will be accepted as reasonable in view of Pinnock’s theological shift away from classical Protestantism that was clearly already in progress when he wrote these words.

reason.¹² rejects the revisionist theology of religious liberals and the objections that his own theological method fails to do justice to the historical character of scripture.”¹³

2. *Revelation Is A Coherent Unit*

Since systematic theology pursues a grasp of the whole of the biblical teaching one is not at liberty to ignore any part of it. When doing theology, the theologian has no right “to pick and choose between biblical doctrines.”¹⁴ Reductionism has no rightful role in theology. Nor does the theologian have the right to place in opposition one part of the Bible against another.¹⁵ The reason he rejects such an approach: “I simply presuppose its falsity on the grounds of my confidence in scripture, the inspiration of which carries with it an assumption of its unity and coherence.”¹⁶ Theology that intends to systematize the whole must read “each text in the canonical context and resist an atomistic approach.”¹⁷ Pinnock observes,

The doctrine of inspiration implies belief in the coherence, if not tight uniformity, of Scripture and commits us to the quest for canonical wholeness. I am convinced that everything in Scripture is meant to be there and to have value. The challenge is to discover what truth and usefulness there is in it for us.¹⁸

3. *Contextualization and The Role of Reason*

Pinnock rejects modern theology’s attempt to “conform theology to our situation.”¹⁹ Through the desire to be relevant many theologians have secularized the gospel. Faithfulness to the Word of God has been abandoned by many in favor of accommodation. Specifically, Pinnock states, “Cobb’s use of process thought cannot be explained in terms of biblical reflection but must be explained in terms of the influence of secular modernity.”²⁰

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ Ibid., 20–21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25. Pinnock states, “Obviously I am not free to pick and choose between biblical doctrines as he [the liberal Gordon Kaufman] is. I am not free to perform the theological reduction that marks the shift to humanity in religious liberalism.”

¹⁵ The example Pinnock cites is J. Christian Beker’s reading of the Pauline corpus in which he places Paul in opposition to the larger portion of the Pauline letters. See Beker’s, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

¹⁶ Ibid. “It would interest me more to learn, however, just how scholarship which does not assume coherence in the Scriptures can credibly be called Christian scholarship.” Pinnock’s essay is punctuated with frequent derogatory “asides” aimed at theologians to the left of him.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

²⁰ Ibid. How is it that Pinnock now leads the way toward embracing “process theism”? “I am sympathetic with a number of motifs in process theism. I, too, see reality as open, not closed. And I think of God as relating to events as they happen, not timelessly.” (“God Limits His Knowledge,” *Predestination and Free Will*, edited by David Basinger and Randall Basinger [Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1986], 147). See also *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove:

Human opinions and speculations of reason must be resisted as resolutely as the Reformers withstood the mistaken opinions of Roman Catholic theology in their day. For the Bible already speaks the mind of God. What divine revelation does not disclose cannot be incorporated into theology as truth. “Only what is taught in Scripture is binding on the conscience.”²¹

When Pinnock discusses the role that reason plays in theology, he broaches the subject of his theological argument to be considered in the second half of this essay. He suggests, “Reason may tell me... that God knows the future exhaustively, then every detail of it is fixed and certain and the freedom most humans believe they have (and which Scripture itself seems to say that we have) is an illusion.”²² He continues, “Biblical teaching about the divine foreknowledge appears to contradict biblical teaching about human freedom, and it is nigh unto impossible to see how the puzzle can be resolved rationally.”²³ Pinnock reasons, since the scripture writers affirm both “divine foreknowledge” and “human freedom,” even in close juxtaposition, without sensing that they are mutually exclusive or contradictory, it is the duty of the theologian to accept both without seizing upon one to the exclusion of the other.²⁴ Instead, the wise theologian accepts the tensions which are present in the Bible and learns “to resist the temptation from reason to tamper with them. ... I cannot tamper with the data as regards divine sovereignty and human freedom just because it would be easier if one were at liberty to do so.”²⁵ Reason is a God-given faculty which is of great usefulness in exegesis and theology. However, it must be kept in its ministerial role and not allowed to rise to a magisterial role.²⁶

4. The Role of Tradition

Like reason, tradition must be subjected to the authority of revelation. Yet, it must be granted that tradition does influence individuals when they read the Bible. Traditions provide contexts in which Scriptural knowledge is pursued. Tradition in its servant role alerts theologians to heresy. Yet, it must be kept in its ministerial role, for it cannot function on the same plane as scripture.²⁷

Inter-Varsity, 1994) for Pinnock’s admission that he finds much in “process theism” attractive and that he now shares with Cobb.

²¹ Ibid., 30. “We take our stand against all those who infringe upon the authority of the Bible and the liberty of God’s people by imposing on the church their opinions as if they were final and enjoyed a status above God’s Word.”

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Ibid. Pinnock observes, “This drives us back to a more precise definition of freedom, to speculations about time and timelessness, to problems of theodicy, to discussions about God’s will(s), and the like. The whole issue has been debated practically nonstop for hundreds of years and resists a final word.”

²⁴ Ibid. “The writers simply do not seem to feel that the two notions are mutually exclusive, but instead they place the two ideas in juxtaposition at every turn and seem indifferent to our intellectual dilemmas.”

²⁵ Ibid., 31–32.

²⁶ Ibid., 33. “Reason is a faculty of great usefulness to theology and exegesis. Occasionally it rises up to challenge Scripture and when it does we ought to put it in its place, its place being a supportive, ministerial, non-legislative one.”

²⁷ Ibid., 34 “When I confront heretical teachers who advance their novelties in the name of some lost-sight-of exegetical insight (and which of them does not?), the creeds of the church

5. The Task of Theology

Theology demands “exegetical excellence.”²⁸ Pinnock rejects “proof-texting,” for he argues that when the Bible is cited in support of some theological or ethical proposal, it must be “apt, intelligent, and discerning,” otherwise, one is guilty of “exegetical malpractice.”²⁹

Theologians must be wary lest they twist scripture to serve their own interests and preferred views.³⁰ Theology must also be characterized with a search for interrelationships among concepts, since the proper work of theology involves a search for coherence and intelligibility. Much more than analysis is involved in the task of theology; there is also a need for synthesis. The discipline of doing theology is organic in character so that a particular view adopted in one area affects others as well.³¹

Theology must also be constructed in such a way that it is open to revision, for scripture is too “richly textured and inexhaustible” for any one system to speak in a final way all that the Bible speaks.³² At the same time theology must not attempt to advance beyond the limits of the Bible. “We cannot go beyond the evidence.”³³ Further-more, “We cannot invent new data or eliminate any. . . . We may even have to accept antinomies which offend the rational impulse.”³⁴ Scripture may not always satisfy human curiosity which presses for answers in areas where evidence is not provided.

Pertinent to the following discussion, it is significant to observe that Pinnock’s theological method is developed around coherence but does not necessarily involve non-contradiction,

universal, though not infallible, both provide temporary respite by alerting me to the time-honored convictions of multitudes of believing persons before my time and make me pause before accepting innovations.”

²⁸ Ibid., 22

²⁹ Ibid., 22. “When I cite the Bible in support of some theological or ethical truth, it is essential that the citation be apt, intelligent, and discerning. I do not want to be sued by the Scriptures for exegetical malpractice.”

³⁰ Ibid. Pinnock observes that both Satan and false teachers are “quite prepared for and adept at twisting the Scriptures to serve their own ends, and no one is immune from doing the same thing.”

³¹ Ibid., 26–27.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 28. Once again incredulity must be indulged here, for Pinnock’s theological work seems regularly to press beyond the biblical evidence as he speculates concerning God’s knowledge of the future, God’s sovereign control over all things, the destiny of the unevangelized, etc.

³⁴ Ibid. In view of Pinnock’s essay, “God Limits His Knowledge,” it seems odd that he refers here to D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), when he speaks of accepting unexplainable elements of the Bible. He cites Carson’s work positively, as if he shares Carson’s theological understanding of the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. One may wonder whether Pinnock actually read Carson’s book because, while Pinnock adopts “antinomy” as an apt description of the relation between divine sovereignty and human accountability, Carson does not use the term “antinomy” to describe the relationship. See D. A. Carson’s discussion of his reasoning in *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990): note 13, 268.

unless he uses “antinomy” as J. I. Packer does—“an appearance of contradiction.”³⁵ Though the Bible is “intelligible,” “coherent” and a “tight unity,” he can speak of “contradiction” and “antinomy” existing in the Bible.³⁶ He suggests an example of this in particular: the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

B. Theological Argument: The Role of Scripture

Having established from Pinnock’s essay on theological methodology how he perceives the Bible to be authoritative and what role biblical authority has in theology, it is proper to examine how he employs the Bible in theological argument. How does Pinnock bring scripture to bear upon his theological proposals so as to authorize them? These questions are now addressed to his essay, “God Limits His Knowledge.”

1. Pinnock’s Theological Argument

Pinnock begins his essay by presenting a biblical tension: “Some passages can be read to support God’s determining all things. Others, with equal strength, stress the significant freedom of human beings. A tension is allowed to stand in the biblical text; a definitive resolution is nowhere attempted.”³⁷ He poses the question: “Ought we even to attempt.”³⁸

He rejects J. I. Packer’s contention that with regard to the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility theologians must “suppress the imperious demands of reason and submit to the antinomy.”³⁹ Pinnock believes that there are three levels of human reason which demand a resolution: (1) thinking Christians who are unaccustomed to accepting contradictions in the Bible;⁴⁰ (2) skeptics who wonder at the coherence of Christian theism;⁴¹ and

³⁵ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961), 18ff. Packer cites *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* but modifies the given definition with the word “appearance.” He states, “For the whole point of an antinomy—in theology, at any rate—is that it is not a real contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable” (p.18).

³⁶ In view of his essay, “God Limits His Knowledge” (published only a year later), it seems incredible that Pinnock is actually using “antinomy” as Packer does to denote merely “an appearance of contradiction” (see note above) Pinnock had already edited *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany house, 1975), which shows no interest in holding divine sovereignty and human responsibility as either Packer or Carson do.

³⁷ Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” *Predestination and Freewill*, 143.

³⁸ Ibid. He cites J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1961), as an example of one who concludes that both truths ought to be accepted on the authority of the Bible with no attempt made to resolve the dilemma.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Pinnock says, “On one level, thinking Christians who are unaccustomed to accepting contradictions in the Bible generally will ask whether they should accept this contradiction at face value as they are urged to do” (“God Limits His Knowledge,” p.144). Pinnock ignores Packer’s carefully defined use of “antinomy” as “an appearance of contradiction.” Instead, Pinnock takes “antinomy” in the usual sense of real contradiction.

(3) believers who are practical want to know why God planned evil or how they can be truly free if God planned everything.

The itch to understand better the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom will not go away.... But do not despair. There is a way to understand the relationship which satisfies both scriptural data and the requirements of intelligence, a model which does not have to posit a basic contradiction between sovereignty and freedom.⁴²

Pinnock explicitly presents his resolution of the dilemma as biblical, for he says it “satisfies scriptural data.” However, he is already departing from his own stated methodology in which he allows for what he calls “Antinomy: a conflict which is insoluble in the light of available knowledge.”

Pinnock’s resolution of this theological dilemma may be summarized by selecting his expressions:

As Creator of the world God is sovereign in the fundamental sense.... But God’s sovereignty does not have to mean what some theists.... claim, namely, the power to determine each detail in the history of the world.... On the contrary, sovereignty means the power to create any possible universe, including one in which significantly free agents are involved.... His sovereignty is not the all-determining kind, but an omni competent kind.... He does not control everything that occurs. God honors the degree of relative autonomy which he grants the world. He can (bring his will to pass in the world) because of his ability to anticipate the obstructions the creatures can throw in his way and respond to each new challenge in an effective manner.... God is dependent on the world, at least in the sense of knowing about it.... The Bible gives us the picture, not of an all-determining God, but of one who gives room to human beings and accepts the consequences, good and bad.... We may speak of a voluntary self-limitation of God in the decision to create our kind of world.... Actions that are infallibly foreknown or timelessly known cannot be free in the required biblical sense.... But if this is so, in what sense is God omniscient? God is omniscient in the sense that he knows everything which can be known, just as God is omnipotent in the sense that he can do everything that can be done.... God can surmise what you will do next Friday, but cannot know it for certain

⁴¹ Ibid. Pinnock states, “On a second level, skeptics will ask whether Christian theism is coherent when it affirms sovereignty and freedom at the same time. They will not be impressed if they are told it is an antinomy” (p.144). Pinnock strains credulity here. When is he to be taken seriously? Are we to believe his word here or in his essay “Uow I Use the Bible in Doing Theology”? The real antinomy is between Pinnock’s statements, for earlier he says, “Biblical teaching about divine foreknowledge appears to contradict biblical teaching about human freedom, and it is nigh unto impossible to see how the puzzle can be resolved rationally. The writers simply do not seem to feel that the two notions are mutually exclusive, but instead they place the two ideas in juxtaposition at every turn and seem indifferent to our intellectual dilemmas... The mark of a wise and sound theologian is to let the tensions which exist in the Bible stay there and to resist the temptation from reason to tamper with them. In this particular case, the metaphysical competence of our reason is humbled. I cannot tamper with the data as regards divine sovereignty and human freedom just because it would be easier if one were at liberty to do so” (“How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology,” 143A4).

⁴² Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 144. His statement implies that Packer believes that there is a “basic contradiction between sovereignty and freedom.”

because you have not done it yet.... According to the Bible, God anticipates the future in a way analogous to our own experience.⁴³

2. A Critique of Pinnock's Theological Method and Argument

The principal purpose of this critique is not to evaluate Pinnock's view of God's omniscience theologically and biblically, though this is a substantive and legitimate concern. Rather, the primary interest is to evaluate his argument methodologically, that is how he argues and in particular how he employs scriptural authority in his argument. At crucial junctures, in the course of Pinnock's argument to demonstrate how his model satisfies both "scriptural data and intelligence," Scriptural argument is conspicuously absent. At other points his argument is cast in such a way that there may only be allusion to scripture by way of metaphor. Nevertheless, he affirms repeatedly that his view is biblical so that it is open to scrutiny to determine how he brings the Bible as scripture to bear upon his argument and whether his argument actually is congruent with his stated theological methodology.

Before Pinnock appeals to scripture in his argument, he appeals to logic. He presupposes the significant freedom of humanity and argues that God's sovereignty must be qualified by creaturely freedom.⁴⁴ A dozen times or more throughout the essay Pinnock employs "significant freedom" or a similar expression to depict human freedom. What he means by "significant freedom" is never clearly defined. Failure to define his terminology contradicts his own statement that the biblical juxtaposition of divine sovereignty and human freedom with evident indifference to "our intellectual dilemmas" should drive "us back to a more precise definition of freedom."⁴⁵ Pinnock's a priori appeal to his assumed definition of human freedom as "significantly free agents" serves as the starting point to which all his other arguments are brought to agree.⁴⁶

Having posited by reason what he calls "the gift of freedom in the strong sense,"⁴⁷ Pinnock then appeals to two main categories of scripture for support of his logical argument:

- (1). those which address humanity's freedom, and
- (2). those which address God's creature-likeness both in influence and in knowledge.

⁴³ Ibid., 144–57. All these are direct quotes from Pinnock. Words drawn from the contexts are employed for transitional continuity and are indicated by italics.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 145–46.

⁴⁵ Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," 31.

⁴⁶ It becomes apparent how Pinnock uses the expression "significant freedom" concerning humans when he defines divine sovereignty. "God's sovereignty does not have to mean what some theists and atheists claim, namely, the power to determine each detail in the history of the world... On the contrary, sovereignty means the power to create any possible universe, including one in which significant free agents are involved. Such a universe would owe its existence entirely to God's will, but what happens might or might not conform to God's intentions and values.

⁴⁷ God gives a degree of reality and power to the creation and does not retain a monopoly of power for himself His sovereignty is not the all-determining kind, but an omniscient kind. God is certainly able to deal with any circumstances which might arise, and nothing can possibly defeat or destroy God. But he does not control everything that occurs. God honors the degree of relative autonomy which he grants the world" ("God Limits His Knowledge," 145–46).

First, Pinnock appeals to particular passages of scripture ([Gen 1:27–2:8](#); [2:15–17](#); [Lk 7:30](#)) to buttress his proposition concerning significant human freedom which is not only self-determining but able either to respond to or refuse to love God and thus enter into a partnership with God. He concludes from humanity’s freedom to respond either negatively or positively toward God that “The response of faith and love cannot be forced.”⁴⁸ Pinnock believes that logically this human freedom of choice “requires us to reconsider the conventional view of the omniscience of God.”⁴⁹ “It makes no sense to say that we act freely if we are in fact doing what God from eternity predestined us to do. Both reason and the Bible find no sense in that proposition.”⁵⁰ What Pinnock affirms in the former essay⁵¹ he now rejects. While he claimed the need to be content with the biblical tension of divine sovereignty and human freedom, now he cuts the tension by redefining both to conform to human reason. The theological propositions of divine sovereignty and human freedom must be coherent. Pinnock reasons, “There is no room for the kind of freedom the Bible speaks of if there is a God who knows and/or controls all things in a timeless present.”⁵² So, “if history is infallibly known [by God] and [divinely established as] certain from all eternity, then [human] freedom is an illusion.”⁵³ Pinnock gives an illusion of biblical support for his proposition by using Adam’s sin to prove his point.

But it is only illusory, for Pinnock’s argument hardly finds proof in the biblical text; rather, it depends completely upon his own definition of “divine sovereignty” and “significant human freedom.”⁵⁴ The Pinnock who claims that tradition serves to “confront heretical teachers who advance their novelties in the name of some lost-sight-of exegetical insights”⁵⁵ runs headlong into theological novelty and essentially admits it.

In saying this I stand against classical theism which has tried to argue that God can control and foresee all things in a world where humans are free. Freedom, however, can exist in this context only in a verbal sense. There is no room for the kind of freedom the Bible speaks of if there is a God who knows and/or controls all things in a timeless present. Freedom means that reality is open in a way it cannot be open for such classical theism.⁵⁶

Pinnock’s second line of argument is to draw upon biblical authority to demonstrate how God’s sovereignty and omniscience are restricted by humanity’s significant freedom. He appeals to six scriptural motifs to show how God interfaces with significantly free humans. First, when humanity rebels against God, he let’s them go their own way, but appeals to them and waits for them to return ([Lk 15:11–32](#)). Second, the motif of the kingdom of God shows “the nature of

⁴⁸ Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 147.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* He conveniently ignores [Romans 9:19ff](#) and other crucial biblical texts.

⁵² “We must not seize the sovereignty pole and block out the human freedom pole, or vice versa, which would violate the Bible’s integrity” (“How I Use the Bible,” 31).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Pinnock reasons, “If history is infallibly known and certain from all eternity, then freedom is an illusion. For example, Adam could not have done otherwise than he did when he sinned. But in biblical thinking had there not been a genuine possibility for Adam to have done what was right in that instance, he would not have been a free agent at all” (“God Limits His Knowledge,” 150–51).

⁵⁶ Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 34.

God's rule as that which allows opposition to itself and works with and around the challenges it meets."⁵⁷ Third, he appeals to the motif of prayer to show "that God summons us into partnership with himself in running the universe. His plan is open. God actually accepts the influence of our prayers in making up his mind. Prayer proves that... future events are not predetermined and fixed. If you believe that prayer changes things, my whole position is established."⁵⁸ Fourth, he employs the motif of the potter ([Jeremiah 18](#)) to show that the Bible portrays God in "a very dynamic way."⁵⁹ For, because the shape of the pottery was spoiled the potter thought about starting over. Like the potter, God appeals to Israel showing "that it is an open question what he will do with them. But Pinnock completely ignores Paul's use of Jeremiah's potter motif in [Romans 9:19](#) Pinnock selects his fifth motif from [Genesis 22:12](#) where God tests Abraham and from [Jonah 3:10](#) where God threatens Ninevah with destruction and then relents. Pinnock employs these to buttress his proposal that "According to the bible, God anticipates the future in a way analogous to our own experience."⁶¹

Sixth, Pinnock asks, "What about predictive prophecy? Doesn't it prove that God knows everything about the future?"⁶² He answers, "No, it does not. A very high percentage of prophecy can be accounted for by one of three factors: the announcement ahead of time of what God intends to do, conditional prophecies which leave the outcome open, and predictions based on God's exhaustive knowledge of the past and present."⁶³ This sixth argument, though claiming biblical authority, produces none.

There are several occurrences where appeal to biblical authority is conspicuously absent from Pinnock's argument. On occasions scriptural authority is selectively passed over, precisely because it contradicts his argument. For example, he argues, "The Bible gives us the picture, not of an all-determining God, but of one who gives room to human beings and accepts the consequences, good and bad, of that policy."⁶⁴ Along the same line he argues that "Classical theism assumes that God's will is always and invariably done. But this is not a Scriptural assumption."⁶⁵ In these proposals he has selectively avoided [Ephesians 1:11](#) and similar passages which must be addressed in the purview of his propositions if he expects to have coherence. Again, he proposes, "It is surely not possible to believe that God secretly planned our rebelling

⁵⁷ Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," is 151.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁹ How can Pinnock be so dismissive of the long history of Christian theology in which thousands have argued precisely the opposite? Consider Packer who argues, "I do not intend to spend any time at proving to you the general truth that God is sovereign in His world. There is no need; for I know that, if you are a Christian, you believe this already. How do I know? Because I know that, if you are a Christian, you pray; and the recognition of God's sovereignty is the basis of your prayers" (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 11).

⁶¹ Ibid., 157.

⁶² Ibid. Here is the essence of Pinnock's error with regard to God. Contrary to the Bible's insistence that God is the measure of humanity, humanity is the reference point for Pinnock's thoughts about God. Pinnock's error exceeds humanity's error in Eden, for while Adam and Eve sinned by wanting to become as God, Pinnock sins by forming god in the image and likeness of Adam.

⁶³ Ibid., 157–58.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 151.

against him. Certainly our rebellion is proof that our actions are not determined but significantly free.”⁶⁶ But once again, he has selectively ignored [Romans 9:1–23](#), [Acts 4:27ff](#), and passages of a similar nature. Pinnock confesses, in conclusion, the Bible contains thousands of verses. I am not claiming that there are none that could be cited which might embarrass my view or any other view about the sovereignty of God and human freedom. I am only claiming that the overwhelming impression the Bible leaves us with is one of significant human freedom and dynamic divine sovereignty.⁶⁷

III. Conclusions

How does Pinnock employ the Bible in his theological argument? How does Pinnock bring scripture to bear upon his theological proposals so as to authorize them? He does so very directly. He appeals to specific passages of scripture to authorize his propositions. However, his appeals are highly selective and dubious. He contradicts his stated theological methodology in several places. His novel theological proposals concerning God’s knowledge seem to contradict his statement; “A high doctrine of Scripture and theological novelty do not go well together.”⁶⁸ He forces scripture to conform to his coherence theory of truth. Though he professes that reason must have only a ministerial role, he has elevated it to a magisterial function in his argument. Despite his claims that “antinomies” may have to be accepted,⁶⁹ and his specific mention that the biblical teaching on divine sovereignty and human freedom must not be reduced to simplistic solutions that tamper with the scriptural data,⁷⁰ he violates his own method. His thought is reductionistic. He has forced complex issues into a simplistic model by denying and ignoring a massive category of biblical data. He has committed the fallacy of the excluded middle by appealing to selective evidence.⁷¹

This essay structured the two governing questions of to answer a larger question: What does it mean to be biblical when doing theology? Specifically, are Pinnock’s theological proposals in his essay (“God Limits His Knowledge”) biblical? Clearly, Pinnock indicts himself for by his own claims in “How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology” he fails. Why? It is because he has not followed through on what he perceives his task to be: “I understand my task to be an explication of the deposit of faith in the Bible leading on to a serious attempt to communicate it in a relevant way to the people of my generation.”⁷² And again he states, “Adherence to the Bible for me means acquiescence to all its teachings.”⁷³ Thus, in accord with his own words, it can be reasonably said that Pinnock fails to be biblical in his theological proposals to the degree that he fails to explicate what is deposited in scripture concerning his own propositions.

Thus, Pinnock commits a theological error akin to the sin in Eden. Against the Bible’s insistence that God is the measure of humanity, for Pinnock, humanity is the reference point for his comprehension of God. Though he professes to limit the ground of religious authority for

⁶⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁸ Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 20

⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁷¹ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, 1984), 98f.

⁷² Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 18.

⁷³ Pinnock, “How I Use the Bible,” 18.

doing theology to the Bible, Pinnock builds his argument that “God Limits His Knowledge” upon human reasoning that measures God by the analogy of humanity. Thus, because the Bible does not function as the sole ground of Pinnock’s theological propositions, he forms God in the image and likeness of Adam.

An Evangelical Appraisal of Greek Philosophy in General and Aristotle in Particular

By Dr. Robert Morey

Introduction

Evangelical Christians have historically held fast to the principle of *sola scriptura* as defined by the Protestant Reformers. The truth about God, man, sin and salvation has been revealed in the Bible *alone*. The self-revelation of God in Scripture is thus the final court of appeal in all matters of faith and practice. To “go beyond what is Written” leads to conceit and pride (1 Cor. 4:6).

While Roman Catholics base their theology on a combination of the Bible and pagan philosophers, particularly Aristotle, the Reformers were men of the Book. They knew that Rom. 1 teaches that natural theology is useless because sinful man suppresses any truth he might have derived from the creation around him or the conscience within him. Man shuts his eyes and plugs his ears and then wonders why he does not see the light or hears the music of God’s existence and attributes. Thus sinful man naturally goes into idolatry as Paul illustrates in that chapter.

Evangelicals follow the same path as the Early Church Fathers who denounced Greek philosophers (such as Plato and Aristotle) as demon-possessed. They boldly proclaimed that Christ and Jerusalem had nothing to do with Baal and Athens. As I demonstrated in the book, *Battle of the Gods*, the early Christians had nothing but contempt for pagan theology and philosophy.

The Early Church was Jewish in origin and reflected the orthodox Jewish hostility toward heathen religions. One will search in vain to find a single prophet of God in the OT who showed any appreciation for heathen religions or philosophies. The Gentiles and their religions were all condemned as idolatrous and demonic in worship (Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:36–37). The Apostles followed the prophets and thus repeated the same condemnation (1 Cor. 10:20; Gal. 4:8; Rev. 9:20).

What about the Lord Jesus? Surely He must have said something to indicate that God appreciated all the pagan philosophers. Alas, Jesus was just as exclusive as the prophets before Him and the apostles after Him. His words to the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), clearly means that salvation is not from the Greeks, Romans, Indians, Chinese, Africans, Europeans, as well as the Samaritans. Jesus’ words in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me” forever dooms all the ecumenical delusions of such apostates as Peter Kreeft.

While modern Romanists, Protestant liberals, Witches, and New Agers join in an ecumenical frenzy of exalting pagan philosophy, Evangelicals exalt the Word of God. They know that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Bible alone.

With these few introductory words, the following statement represents the historic Evangelical position.

Since no one seeks after the God who is there, all natural religion has its origin in man's suppression of and rebellion against natural revelation. Greek philosophy is just as apostate as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Animism. The gods of the Greek philosophers were demonic in origin and idolatrous in nature. The Greek philosophers never found the true God. Their theology sprang from their worship of the creation instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever. Their foolish hearts were darkened as they gave themselves to vain speculations and immoral practices. Their so-called "proofs" for the existence of their false deities do not lead to the one true God of Scripture. Since they do not speak according to the Law and the prophets, they have no light.

The Pagan Philosopher Aristotle

What then shall we say about Aristotle (387–322 BC)? He is rightly called, "The High Priest of Empiricism." (John Gates, *Adventures in the History of Philosophy: An Introduction from a Christian Viewpoint*. [Zondervon:1961] p. 27). Any standard reference work on the history of philosophy, secular or Christian, will document that Aristotle believed that all knowledge comes to us via the five senses. This automatically excludes any and all forms of supernaturalism, Christianity included.

Not only is his epistemology anti-Christian, Aristotle's views on all other subjects are just as pernicious. His metaphysical dichotomy of "form/essence" produced the heresy of the secular/sacred dichotomy that kept papist priests in power for centuries. The idea that the form of something need not correspond to its essence, not only renders knowledge impossible, but it provided the philosophic framework in which the blasphemy of the popish error of transubstantiation in the Mass developed. His ethical relativism was based on a pleasure/pain sliding scale that has no room for the Ten Commandments.

Humanistic "evangelical" philosophers pretend that Aristotle believed in the one true God found in the Bible. But anyone who actually reads the works of Aristotle knows that he was a polytheist. Among the gods and goddesses he worshipped, Aristotle paid homage to a supreme deity whom he defined as "thought thinking itself."

How anyone can confuse the Triune God of Scripture with an abstract divine principle of "thought thinking itself" is beyond us. Aristotle's supreme deity thinks only on itself. How one can reconcile this god with [John 3:16](#) remains a mystery.

Any Christian who is under the delusion that pagan philosophy is the foundation for Christian philosophy, is either grossly ignorant or mentally impaired. There is no other foundation that can be laid except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The Mystery of Middle Knowledge

By R. K. McGregor Wright, ThM, PhD

Part 1

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE THEORY

During the last ten years or so, the steady twentieth-century departure from the well-tryed doctrines of the protestant Reformation has been carried on as much by evangelical Arminians as by the Liberals of the past. We will be examining why this is so in this first paper of two at this conference. I want to consider a particular development in the discipline of Apologetics, with which I have been forced to deal despite its relative intricacy, because despite its claim to reconciling God's absolute sovereignty with an autonomist theory of free will, it actually contributes by a slow and inexorable drift, to what has been correctly labeled "finite godism," an unpleasant but accurate term identifying the conclusion (if not the claim) that God must actually be a finite and so limited being, rather than the robust Omni-potent, Omni-scient, Omni-present and Omni-sapient being set forth in the system of Truth contained in the Scriptures. This conclusion is primarily the case because it's primary task is the attempt to justify belief in libertarian free will.

Lest anyone imagine that the doctrine of Middle Knowledge is something the Bible writers, much less the Reformers, would have recognized as plausible, we should first note that there is no hint of this curious theory in the Bible, nor in the post-apostolic church fathers, nor anywhere else until similar views were considered and rejected by Duns Scotus about twenty-five years after the death of Aquinas. It then reappeared in full flourish under the hand of the Jesuit Luis de Molina, who may have got it from one of his teachers who was apparently afraid to publish it because he thought it was wholly new, and anyway, it flew in the face of the dominant theology of the day, which took its cue from Thomas Aquinas.

Today, Evangelicals are being regaled with what for us are fresh new theories about the meaning of free will. Dr. Clark Pinnock and his friends want to replace the historic Christian doctrine of God's attributes with their own "openness" view of God. In this theory, God is viewed as having limited knowledge of the future simply (and quite reasonably) because he could not in the nature of the case, have accurate knowledge of future events, depending (as so many of them do) on human autonomous choices. The point here is that a future contingent event depending on an undetermined event cannot be known with certainty, and the action of an autonomous will is just such an undetermined event.

This of course was recognized in the Middle Ages by people like Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Both agreed in their own way however, that both doctrines of divine sovereignty *and* an autonomous free will in man had to be held. If this was an apparent contradiction, well and good. Both doctrines were found in the early church fathers and therefore had to be held as part of the apostolic tradition. These two doctrines had to be held as a "divine Mystery of revelation," and only a heretic would deny either one of them.

"Reconciling" The Contradictions

One of the most curious developments in recent Evangelical thought has been the revival of this ancient attempt to "reconcile" the Bible's doctrine of full divine sovereignty with the "libertarian" theory of free will defined as "the freedom of indifference." The purpose of this

paper is to simply outline the origins of this theory in the history of the Church's grappling with the problem, and to suggest that there are causes and motivations involved in this revival which go far beyond the simple concern to give Christianity a means of solving an otherwise intractable dilemma in Christian Apologetics. Important insights can be gained by investigating the origins of things we have taken for granted. That is one of the main reasons for studying things historically, and one of the main reasons so many people don't have any idea why they believe the way they do in so many evangelical churches. They do not bother to look into any history. But history is where we came from; it's *why* we are *what* we are... And tradition is only understood from the standpoint of its historical development. Much the same goes for philosophical opinions.

The Question of Authority

Protestants in particular, are often very conscious that much that they have been told (and indeed acculturated) to accept as Christian tradition, can often be found first in the surrounding pagan environment, having been baptized into Christian service long ago and under very dubious circumstances, perhaps long before the Reformation. This is the reason that Protestantism has spoken often of a principle of reforming the church called *sola Scriptura*, or "Scripture Alone," by which we mean not that the Bible contains the only truth about reality, or that church tradition is of no value, but simply that God has given us in his infallible inscripturated Word, all the revealed truth *that is absolutely necessary for salvation*. That is, the Bible alone contains what God uses to supernaturally enliven and intellectually inform the mind and to bind the conscience in matters of faith and life. Protestants start with that inspired text as the inerrant source of *necessary* propositional truth. Then with the due use of the appropriate means, including not only obvious things like translations and a willingness to do some homework on the original languages, but also the academic disciplines of history and philosophy, to say nothing of systematic theology and the results of almost 2000 years of the promised teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, the believer who wants to do God's will, can know of the doctrine whether it is from God, or whether someone is just making it up. We know that this is true because Jesus himself said so in [John 7:17](#). Apparently impossible problems have eventually yielded to real and workable solutions in the past, and philosophy is just one of the intellectual gifts that God has used. Nobody should imagine that the work of philosophers is useless or irrelevant to the life of the Church at large, however misleading some of them have certainly been. Great and real progress has been made in the past as godly and devoted saints have struggled with problems arising from the faithful reading of the Word of God, and from the continuing task of making that Word both clear and relevant in particular situations through the preaching of that Word.

We are concerned here also with more controversial questions. We will observe how presuppositions control our thinking, how believers get involved in programs of syncretism, in which biblical material is firmly wedded to nonchristian theories in the supposed interest of reaching the serious thinker for Christ, and of "building a bridge" to the unbelieving mind over which the Gospel of Christ might safely travel. We will look also at the beginnings of wholly *un-*evangelical influences, indeed pagan influences, on the proclamation of the Gospel in past ages, and at the cheerful willingness of apparently sincere apologists to look to and even depend on theories designed originally by their inventors with the express purpose of undermining and neutralizing the achievements of the Reformation, apparently hoping that these sources could somehow be used in the service of Christ, to prepare the unredeemed heart to accept Christ as its

Savior. I will argue that this is precisely what we see in the recent interest in the old Middle Knowledge theory. But first, we will need some definitions.

Some Definitions

By *divine sovereignty* we shall mean the very strong doctrine of creatorial Omnipotence which the Bible uniformly ascribes to God. The Bible says repeatedly that God is the ultimate cause of everything that happens in his wholly dependent creation. The world is what it is because God and his eternal purposes are what they are. Both large events like the Flood of Noah and tiny events deemed insignificant by us, like the death of a sparrow, are all ascribed finally to God in the Bible. This specifically includes so-called “chance” events, and also human choices. Numerous examples of both of these are specifically ascribed to God’s decree and predetermining will by the Bible writers, as are some of the most horrifying evils that have ever occurred, including the judicial murder of God’s own Son. You have heard lectures already on some of this biblical evidence for God’s full sovereignty as Creator and sustainer of the world.

By *free will* we shall mean *not* the view of the Reformers (Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, and the reformed confessions generally), that the will of fallen people is by nature enslaved to sin, so that they willingly act in harmony with their comprehensive ethical corruption or depravity, and cannot by themselves respond spiritually to the grace of God, *but the theory that in order to be human at all, people fallen or regenerate must be equally able to choose either way in any case of opposite alternatives set before them.* This “libertarian” theory of free will is roughly equivalent to the Greek idea that the soul is equally able to choose one way as well as the other, being autonomous from external control, and specifically, autonomous from divine predetermination of any kind. This supposed ability of our wills to choose with equal facility either of any two alternatives presented to it by the mind, is the essence of the “liberty of indifference,” the free will theory which Aquinas found in the early post-apostolic fathers, and which Catholics, Pelagians, Arminians, and modern Evangelicals generally, think is the basis of our humanness and responsibility.

Origins in the Church

When we read those early church fathers who were closest to the Apostles (called the “Apostolic Fathers”), we quickly discover that these documents contain statements and interpretations of key passages in the Bible which might have come from a modern Arminian, and others that might have been written by a Calvinist. These contrasting views only intensify as we read down to Augustine’s day, when the incompatibility of God’s sovereignty with free will became clear to Pelagius. He attacked some statements in Augustine’s writings that he thought undermined human responsibility. He thought that every man was his own Adam, with complete free will, with no deleterious influence on our human decision-making ability emanating from the Fall, and if born-again believers wanted to make the effort, they could keep God’s Law perfectly. Our free will guaranteed that, and this free will was the basis of our responsibility. God provided a universal saving grace which was intended to save nobody by itself, *until supplemented by our human freewill response.*

St. Augustine in his extensive “anti-pelagian” writings, demolished Pelagianism so thoroughly both exegetically and philosophically, that in 431 A.D. the Third Council of Ephesus condemned it as a heresy and the orthodox church has never formally returned to it. From the

fifth century to the Reformation, the Catholic Church was essentially Augustinian, and St. Augustine was treated as the greatest teaching father of the patristic age. His writings inspired the great mediaeval synthesis between Nature and Grace of which Thomas Aquinas was the prime expositor. The Reformers of course, were Augustinian to a man. In fact, it can reasonably be argued that the Reformation was the final breaking apart of the inner tensions within Catholic Augustinianism, tensions caused by a high doctrine of grace and predestination (amounting to a form of Calvinism) on the one hand, and an incipient Semi-pelagianism involved in dependence on sacramental grace (amounting to a form of Arminianism) on the other. The Reformers attacked this Semi-pelagianism rather vigorously. Both Luther and Calvin wrote books refuting the free will theory.

And what exactly, was *Semi-pelagianism*? It was a reaction against Augustine's increasing theological consistency, starting in the last years before his death in 430 A.D. In the last three years of his life he began a detailed refutation of Semi-pelagianism as it was developing in the works of Julian of Eclanum and John Cassian. The only books he completed in this area were *On The Predestination of the Saints*, and *About The Gift Of Perseverance* (428 and 429), beginning what looks very much like the first two of a series on what were later called the "five points" of Calvinism. In these works, as in his *Retractions*, he tightened up his denial of free will in the face of divine sovereignty, and virtually admits that he was inconsistent in trying to reconcile them in his earlier writings. In other words, the more he proceeded into his critique of Semi-pelagianism, the more "Calvinistic" he became. This was the reason that first Luther and then Calvin, both took time out to demolish freewillism once and for all (Luther in 1524, and Calvin in 1545 and 1552). They both took their cue from Augustine, who they were happy to agree was the greatest teacher of theology that the early church produced. But unlike the Catholic Church, they were under no obligation to an infallible Tradition handed down apart from the Bible, and so were free to critique free will in terms of the Bible alone as their final authority. And they took this task very seriously.

The Pelagians then proceeded to adjust their errors to accommodate the condemnation of Pelagius himself in 431. Some of them came to agree with Augustine's doctrine of how original sin influenced free will, and the need for prevenient grace. But they continued to maintain that the *beginnings of our response* to saving grace remained within the capacity of the free will, and they also decided that God's election of some to be saved was really based on God's foreknowledge of who would believe and who then continue to persevere in Grace. In such representatives as John Cassian, we begin to see the distinctive doctrines we call Arminianism today. This controversy continued for another hundred years after Augustine's death, but the Semi-pelagians were finally condemned as heretical by the Synod of Orange in 529 A.D. This synod was then elevated to the status of an ecumenical Council by the approval of Pope Boniface II in the following year. The Eastern Orthodox churches refused to follow the Western Church in its increasing Augustinianism, and have remained with John Cassian to this day.

Thereafter, Augustinianism rapidly became the framework for the Catholic doctrines of grace and predestination in the Middle Ages. But apart from the failed attempt of a monk called Gottschalk to reform the consolidation of Augustinian thinking in the ninth century, and the efforts of the Jansenists in the 1600s to reintroduce Augustinian standards of piety and theological consistency (that looked to the Jesuits like some kind of crypto-Calvinism), serious Augustinianism rapidly declined in Catholic circles after the Reformation. The Catholics finally were forced to recognize that the fountainhead of Protestant predestinarian theology was actually their greatest theologian St. Augustine, and the papal encyclical *Unigenitus* of 1713 not only

condemned Jansenism but much of Augustinian thought as well. Since then Augustine has been relegated to the status of just another church father, instead of functioning as the great inspirational well of Catholic truth that he was felt to be before the Reformation. As a result, most Catholic theology has been more or less semi-pelagian in practice, until modern Liberalism took over after Vatican II.

So where did the Middle Knowledge theory come from? And what is it “mid-way” between?

Thomists and Molinists

By the era of the Reformation, the Dominicans were strongly Augustinian because they were Thomists, while they accused the Franciscans of Semi-pelagianism. Since the Reformers were thoroughly predestinarian and denied free will in the libertarian sense, someone had to step in and save Catholicism from the logical results of taking St. Augustine’s doctrine of sovereign grace too seriously.

The hero who stepped into this gap was Luis de Molina, a Spanish Jesuit who decided that to save the Catholic view of grace, it was necessary to reconcile the previously unreconcilable doctrines of absolute divine sovereign grace *versus* a libertarian free will with each other. Thomas Aquinas had left the situation in tension as a “divine mystery” of the Catholic Faith, but Molina explained in his own writings that something new was needed in order to refute the attacks of Martin Luther and John Calvin on the idea of a libertarian or autonomous Free Will. In the next paper, I will explain what was wrong philosophically with trying to reconcile libertarian freewillism with God’s sovereignty. In Molina’s day however, it seemed that the doctrines of predestination and free will in Augustine led necessarily to either the Calvinism or the Arminianism of the Protestants, and neither were a satisfactory option for a Jesuit trained in the thinking of the great Thomas Aquinas. De Molina therefore looked for a new way to reconcile absolute predestination with an absolute autonomy of the will, rather than inviting a choice between them, as the Protestants Calvin and Luther demanded we do.

So Luis de Molina claimed to be a faithful Thomist who simply wanted to offset the strength of the Reformer’s Augustinian predestinarianism, thereby wrecking the views of Luther, and more especially of John Calvin, who the Jesuits had early focused on as being their real intellectual enemy. De Molina saw that in Aquinas’ view of how grace worked there was a serious question of consistency. Thomas had asserted both a free will *and* strict election and predestination as articles of Catholic Faith which he thought emanated from the apostolic age. Neither could be questioned, so they should be held in tension as a “mystery of the Faith.” The Reformers had repudiated the free will theory as incompatible with a real doctrine of grace, and they had treated its denial as essential to the Gospel. Of course Luther and Calvin and all the others spoke of our having “free will,” but instead of free will as a metaphysical autonomy, they affirmed a “freedom of spontaneity” in which the will could only act in harmony with the character or “nature” of the person choosing. The will was not a separate mechanism in the head, but a true manifestation of the character.

According to the Reformers, the wills of fallen sinners were in bondage to their sin-nature. They were not autonomously free to believe (or even understand) the Gospel without God’s regenerative grace intervening. Augustine had called this “prevenient grace” and so did the Thomists. That is, the Catholic position since 529 at Ephesus was that regenerating grace had to *precede* the exercise of saving faith, not follow it. Today we think of the notion that regeneration must come before the exercise of saving faith as a distinctively Calvinist doctrine in contrast

with Arminianism, but it was in fact a standard Catholic doctrine for a thousand years before the Reformation.

Middle Knowledge?

Molinism however, postulated a theory of God's "middle" knowledge, so-called because it was supposed to stand midway between God's exhaustive knowledge of all future events as they will *in fact occur*, and his foreknowledge of future *contingent choices* to be made arising from an autonomously free will. This was supposed to allow God to foresee who will come to faith by their free will under the circumstances he predetermines out of all the possible states of affairs that he omnisciently knows could possibly exist, without thereby undermining either God's sovereign predestination *or* our (libertarian) free will. This "middle" knowledge was not his knowledge of everything that would actually occur, nor his foreknowledge of exactly who would in fact come to faith, but *it was his knowledge of how each of us would exercise our autonomous wills under all possible sets of circumstances*. The idea was that God could then choose to actualize (*i.e.*, to create) the world he wanted to exist in order to *both* guarantee the salvation of the Elect, *and also* preserve their freewill (*i.e.*, fully autonomous) decisions. There is not much doubt that de Molina really thought that he was producing a new form of more consistent Thomism by this philosophical move.

Now because I believe that God's Omniscience requires that he does indeed have exhaustive knowledge of all possible choices we might conceivably make under all possible conditions, I agree with de Molina that God has this kind of knowledge. The question we will agitate in the next paper will be about exactly *how* God could have knowledge of such future contingent events. It is at this point that I think Molinism collapses as an accurate account of God's knowledge, not because I think that God has knowledge of all possible worlds in which future choices might be made. I take that as virtually self-evident. God's knowledge of all pure possibility must necessarily be as exhaustive as all his other knowing of created reality.

We shall see in the next paper whether this is an intelligibly coherent idea or not. For now, it is only necessary to observe the historical point, that de Molina was simply trying to avoid an inconsistency in Aquinas that he had inherited from the earlier Augustine, and which the Reformers had taken advantage of to give up the free will theory. But does he really succeed in avoiding the heresy of Semi-pelagianism that the Catholic Church had finally condemned as a heresy at the Synod of Orange in 529 A.D.? I think not, and neither did the Thomists he was trying to impress.

The Thomists Respond

The Thomists looked at Molinism with a jaundiced eye. To begin with, this whole discussion had been worked over before. This was nothing new to them, even if it seemed like a new discovery to Luis de Molina. The whole argument had already been considered and refuted by none other than John Duns Scotus a mere twenty-five years after Aquinas had died. The Thomists therefore drew to some degree on Duns Scotus in order to refute de Molina. They were not of course interested in advertising Scotus' own refutations of their pet theologian, but they did notice that involved in Scotus' criticisms of Aquinas there was also implied a response to Molinism. And any stick the Dominicans could find to beat the Jesuits with was sure to be used by somebody. The rivalry between these two teaching orders was pretty considerable in those

days, when compared with the more liberal and friendly approach of catholic orders to each other in our own day. The Dominicans and the Jesuits do not think of each other as bitter rivals any more.

In the course of his consideration of the attributes of God, Duns Scotus had shifted the Thomists' emphasis on the Knowledge of God to the Will of God. Thomas had spoken of the priority of God's intellect over against his will, and this involved the consideration that God's knowing preceded his willing. This is the Thomist doctrine of "the priority of the Intellect," over against Scotus' "priority of the Will." It seemed to Duns that the Thomists kept the knowledge of God separate from his willing in an artificial way. The upshot was that Scotus emphasized what we might call God's "willing knowledge," so that God could not know something as real without also willing it to exist as real. In fact, the "reality" of anything God thought of as possibly existing could only move from possibility to actuality by the will of God, by which the act of Creation occurred. Anything really existing, whether in the present or the future, could only be real because God's willing knowledge made it so. For Duns, the will of God was so important that it had to be considered in every discussion of how God did anything, including his knowing.

The Thomists looked at this and saw that this consideration made de Molina's "middle knowledge" theory impossible as a solution to the sovereignty *versus* free will controversy. We will see why this was so in more detail in the second lecture, but here we must observe that the Thomists rejected Molinism for reasons they saw made the theory *destroy* free will. Remember that the whole point of the exercise was to *reconcile an apparent contradiction* between divine sovereignty and free will, so any demonstration which showed that de Molina not only did *not* reconcile the two, but that in fact his theory destroyed free will *made de Molina a heretic*. As understood by the mediaeval church, free will was *de fide*. That is, it was a necessary article of the catholic Faith. *Free will was a dogma that could not be questioned*. You were allowed to call it "a divine mystery," but you could not *deny* either side of the dilemma involved.

As a matter of fact, there came a point in the controversy when as many as 22 separate propositions found in de Molina's works were actually *condemned* by a special congregation of cardinals called together for this very purpose by the Pope. But no final pronouncement was confirmed, and even today, Molinism is a permissible opinion within the framework of otherwise Thomist catholic thought.

A False Dilemma

This is all very well for someone who stands in the orthodox catholic thomistic position. But why pray, should anyone think it worthwhile to reconcile the Bible's doctrine of full divine sovereignty with free will considered as the "liberty of indifference"? No such theory is found in the Bible after all. It is like trying to reconcile the Trinity with the existence of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Why bother? From a Christian standpoint these three Hindu gods do not even exist. You cannot "reconcile" something that exists with something that is not even there! Well, it is the same with libertarian free will. No proof of its existence has ever been offered, even by Arminians or Catholics. It's just a dogma pure and simple.

Calvinist Evangelicals in particular, should not become entangled in a program designed to "reconcile" Arminianism with Calvinism. Arminianism presupposes the pagan myth of an autonomous free will. No such animal exists. Dressing it up in pious ambiguities about "responsibility" and "significant choices" and the "integrity of the individual," etc., etc., just won't do. The free will theory is not a biblical idea at all.

We know exactly where this notion of a free will came from; there is no mystery here. The early church fathers found themselves struggling with the materialistic cosmic determinism of the Stoics on the one hand, and the appeal to a background of pure atomistic chance by the Epicureans on the other. In order to steer a safe middle course between these two erroneous views, they opted for an idea transmitted by both Stoics and Epicureans to the discussions of the second and third centuries from the history of Greek ethical views about human nature, the doctrine of an autonomously Free Will. But this meant that they were relying on the pagan concept of free will over against the pagan concept of a materialistic determinism on the one hand, and an equally pagan concept of a primeval Chaos on the other. One can readily understand why they did this. They correctly perceived that an autonomous free will was incompatible with determinism, that it refuted materialism, and made the notion of a background Chaos unnecessary. For the early fathers these looked like solid gains.

The Cost of Syncretism

But there is always a price to pay for a philosophical short cut. The assumption of an autonomist free will carried with it further implications which undermined Christianity at other points. To begin with, the Bible said nothing of free will. It spoke of Freedom in several readily understandable senses, and it used several words for the Will. But there were no verses supporting any kind of freewill theory.

The standard word which came to be used for “free will” (*autexousia*, the self-determining power), was not even found in the Bible.

To make free will plausible as a fact of christian theology, one had to accept it as *a pure assumption*, a presupposition which should not be questioned, since it cannot be rationally proved, claim with the Stoics and Epicureans that *responsibility* was based on free will, treat it as a basic quality of *what it meant to be human*, quote verses from the Bible in which human choices were commanded or recorded, and treat these *as if* they referred to free will, assume it to be so perfectly *obvious* that only a crazy person would question it, and finally, appeal to it as *the only solution to the problem of Evil* existing in a world made by a good God.

All these things were done by the church fathers of the age preceding Augustine, and they are still being done by Evangelicals today. They are in fact, the special province of Arminianism and of the apologetic methodology dependent on it, and of any other form of popular freewillism. They constitute the primary intellectual barrier between modern Evangelicalism and the theology of the Reformers and the Puritans.

Presuppositional Suicide

The Apostle Paul warned his charges that Greek philosophy represented a world view incompatible with the world view of the Bible (as in [Acts 17](#) and [1 Cor 1–3](#)). He warned them and us, that “the wisdom of this world” was incapable of giving us any reliable information about God, yielded self-contradictory ideas of human nature, and was incapable of a rational interpretation of human experience of the Cosmos. It could not even wean the Athenians away from idolatry, which the philosophers despised.

In his famous confrontation with the Greco-Roman world of philosophy and religion at Athens, Paul took pains to show that the reason they could not make a dent in Greek idolatry was because the philosophers were themselves idolatrous. They worshiped and served the creature,

the Cosmos, Being-in-general, and not the God of the Bible, the Creator who was really “there.” Their presuppositional reference-point was not the God of the Bible, and therefore it could not bear the weight of a rationally coherent interpretation of human experience. It could not even give an intelligible account of the problem of pantheism *versus* polytheism. If you start with the wrong presuppositional reference point, no amount of Logic, and no consideration of “the Facts” will be any help at all, in the long run. Presuppositions are like the International Rules in the game of chess. These rules determine what counts as a possible move all across the board. If you change the rules you are no longer playing chess by definition. Presuppositions are like these rules. They control what is *possible* in any argument depending on them. If the believer starts by combining Christian truth with presuppositions incompatible with the Bible’s view of God, the result will inevitably become increasingly unlike the contents of the Bible itself, the more consistent one tries to be. Eventually, it will, like all non-christian systems, disintegrate under the weight of its own internal tensions, and be replaced in the flow of philosophical thought by some new theory.

Syncretism an Apologetic Cul-de-Sac

Why then would a Bible-believing Christian want to reinterpret human nature, the work of salvation, the nature of the Cosmos, and finally the biblical attributes of God Himself, in terms of a pagan presupposition for which no rationally-argued proof has ever been offered? Yet this is what the believer in autonomist free will is actually doing. In their favor, it can only be observed that sincerely wanting to reconcile two things they believe to be true, they have strong motivation to continually resurrect theories like Molinism as possible options. The idea in practice resembles someone who is convinced that pure arsenic oxide will kill anyone who takes it, so decides to combine it with milk and a good meal, in the hope that in a less pure form it will do more good than harm. The realistic response to this sort of thinking is that *the mere presence* of arsenic oxide will kill you *however carefully* it is combined with otherwise good food. The crazy presupposition that if “properly administered,” arsenic oxide will improve the food situation must be itself challenged. The poison must be recognized and wholly excluded. This move is not negotiable if we want to stay alive....

We need to recall that a presupposition cannot in the nature of the case be “proved.” If it could be proved it would be a *conclusion* derived from previously assumed presuppositions, not a presupposition. Presuppositions must be “chosen,” not “proved.” And no system of interpretation can derive its own axioms. The Christian of course, accepts his or her presuppositions as gifts of Grace from the revealing mouth of God ([Mat 4:4](#)). The Bible-believing Christian reads the most basic presupposition of all in [Genesis 1:1](#), that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This Creator-creature distinction is the presupposition, the foundational axiom of all Christian rationality. Unless this is accepted, the whole nature of “proof” itself is in question.

So why would a Bible-believing Christian want to assume without question the pagan concept of an autonomous human consciousness? It is simply inexplicable—unless of course, you take into account both the Fall and original sin, and especially the effects that Reformed theologians call the “noetic” effects of sin. This surely, is what gives the libertarian free will theory its privileged position as an opinion that nobody dares to question these days. It seems that people will do and believe almost anything at all rather than question the dogma of an autonomist free will.

Well, I'm questioning it. And I'm asking the Molinist why on earth he thinks it would appeal to me as a calvinistic *ex nihilo* creationist, to be told that some Jesuit has at last "reconciled" free will and God's sovereignty? Such a claim is incredible on the face of it. He must first show that his idea of free will is itself a coherent idea. Otherwise there is nothing here to discuss. Then he must show me that it does not contradict particular verses of the Bible that I think are in direct conflict with the assumption of autonomy. Then he must show me that it really *can* be reconciled with the attributes of God, without appealing to convenient "mysteries" and "paradoxes" and "antinomies" in order to cover up the contradictions involved. The next paper will cover that ground, God willing.

Summary of Conclusions?

We must stop here, but let's summarize the main points:

Molinism claims to provide by its conception of God's Middle Knowledge, a *reconciliation* between the theological idea of divine sovereignty and the idea of libertarian free will.

It started out as an attempt to clean up a problem in *Thomism* in order to offset the protestant Reformers' denial of free will as being incompatible with the doctrines of God's sovereignty and salvation by grace that they found in the theology of St. Augustine.

Duns Scotus in the thirteenth, and the Thomists of de Molina's day provided detailed answers to his idea of Middle Knowledge as soon as it appeared.

Whether de Molina's description of Middle Knowledge can really explain how God's sovereignty is compatible with an autonomous free will therefore *remains* a problem.

If libertarian free will is not a Christian conception, *any syncretism* between it and the Bible's idea of God will necessarily fail, and merely generate further problems and inconsistencies for Christian theology to deal with.

Syncretisms between Christian and non-christian systems of thought are *precluded* by the nature of God and the teachings of the Bible. Incompatible presuppositions yield nothing but incoherency, and unresolvable tensions.

Libertarian freewillism is a pagan notion introduced into Christian thinking mainly from *Stoicism* by the early church fathers before Augustine. It is not found in the Bible, and functions today as a sop to Arminianism, and a red herring across the path of the evangelical theologian.

Therefore Christians should give it up as a pagan intrusion, and not allow it to molest the peace of the saints any further.

Sources for Homework

The following is a selection of easily available sources for the historical background to the recent resuscitation of Molinism among evangelical Arminians.

Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion And Ethics* remains a useful source for historical accounts of old theological problems. It has good articles on Arminianism, Pelagianism and Semi-pelagianism, and Molinism too, among other things. Because it was completed by 1926, it represents the growing confidence of the "modernists" of that era, and some articles are not very sound from the Calvinist's point of view. Nevertheless, because it is found in just about every library in the world, it's a good place to start. Many competent conservatives like B. B. Warfield and James Denney contributed articles, as well as people we would think of as liberals today.

The fascinating list of contributors appears at the end of the Index volume, and is an education in historical theology by itself.

The old *Catholic Encyclopedia* is from the same era as Hastings'. It represents a quite conservative pre-Vatican II scholarship, and is very helpful on historical studies of catholic doctrines. Naturally, an article like the one on Predestinarianism or Calvinism will have a heavily catholic bias, but that is to be expected and discounted. This work has the great advantage of being on the WEB, so articles can be easily printed off for your own use. One finds articles on Free Will, Augustine, Molinism, and the later Jesuit scheme of Congruism, among others. It is a very good introductory source for mediaeval theology. Of course, these encyclopedias are recommended with full awareness that their articles constitute only a starting-point for the topics involved, and over seventy years' of modern scholarship has gone under the bridge since 1926. But beginners need to start with something convenient, and nobody should imagine that recent Molinists have much new to offer. The major problems pointed out by the Thomists in the 1500s still remain, even if you believe in libertarian free will.

A good source for the recent arminian use of Molinism is the work of William Lane Craig, who did his doctorate on this topic. His thesis was published by Brill as *The Problem Of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom From Aristotle to Suarez*, in 1980. Craig's article presenting Molinism as a solution to the free will-sovereignty problem was *A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?* in Clark Pinnock's collection of 1989, called *The Grace of God, The Will of Man; A Case for Arminianism*. He has produced other books in the field since these, and has a helpful website containing some of his recent articles.

Several articles have appeared refuting Craig's position, but we should observe first that the encyclopedia articles referred to above, contain the original Thomists' objections to Molina's ideas. Then see J. A. Crabtree's article *Does Middle Knowledge Solve The Problem Of Divine Sovereignty?* In volume two of *The Grace of God, The Bondage Of the Will*, edited by Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Baker Books, 1995, now unhelpfully o.p.). See also Paul Helm's comments on Molinism in his recent Banner Of Truth book, *The Providence Of God*.

Luis de Molina's material is largely locked up in the original Latin, but fortunately there is an English version of part of his main work (the *Concordia*) by Alfred J. Freddoso, called *On Divine Foreknowledge* (1988). It remains a great tragedy that the vast wealth of mediaeval theology and philosophy is still inaccessible to those of us unable to read Latin fluently. People do not even realize that Thomas Aquinas' real love was not apologetics, but expounding the Scriptures verse by verse, and few of his commentaries are in English. Evangelicals can find much of value in his commentary on John's Gospel, which has appeared in English.

Douglas Langston produced *God's Willing Knowledge* (Penn State, 1986) explaining why Molinism did not adequately respond to Duns Scotus on the Middle Knowledge concept.

My own book *No Place For Sovereignty* (Intervarsity Press, 1996) begins a challenge to any form of libertarian freewillism by refuting the arminian idea of a liberty of indifference from the Bible, supported by some historical background and the basic philosophical objections to autonomism. No consideration was given to Molinism or Congruism in this book, because I did not then (and I do not now), consider that any attempt to "reconcile" freewillism with the Bible to be worth the effort, since freewillism is nonsense.

The opinions of the Reformers on freewillism are very important for understanding what they thought the Gospel was, over against the humanistic ideas of the sixteenth century humanists, and of the Catholic Church of the Renaissance era. See Martin Luther's *The Bondage Of The Will*, in many editions, of which the most useful is probably that of Westminster Press,

conveniently containing also Erasmus' *The Freedom Of The Will* in defense of a view that Luther considered nothing but renaissance humanism (of course he didn't use the term "renaissance," which was only invented much later).

John Calvin wrote a large two-volume work against the freewill theory, of which the second part (on divine providence, called *Concerning The Eternal Predestination of God*, (1552) has been in English for over a century as *Calvin's Calvinism*, translated by H. Cole, and often reprinted. The first part (*On Free Will*, 1543), was a detailed refutation of the theories of Albertus Pighius, a Dutch catholic theologian who took a special interest in attacking the doctrines of the Reformers. It finally appeared in English for the first time in 1996, as *The Bondage And Liberation Of The Will*, (Paternoster and Baker, 1996), so I was unaware of it as my own book came out. It is very thorough, quite ferocious, and quite devastating theologically to the opinions it refutes. I could hardly put it down once I started reading it. It's Calvin at his most incisive and entertaining.

Part 2

PHILOSOPHIC PROBLEMS OF THE MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE THEORY

In Part 1, I sought to outline the historical buildup to the modern use of Molinism, or "middle knowledge" theory, mostly by arminian Evangelicals. We noted that after it was refuted at least in principle by Duns Scotus soon after the death of Aquinas, it was again presented in a much fuller form by the Jesuit Luis de Molina in the late 1500s, as a proposed solution to the problem left by Thomas Aquinas of the "mystery" of how to reconcile biblical predestination with human free will.

Aquinas' position was that as the Bible taught absolute predestination of the Elect to salvation, and as the early church fathers in the sub-apostolic age taught that we have a free will in the sense that we could just as easily have chosen one thing as another when alternatives are presented to us, *both doctrines* had to be held as the teachings of the Holy Catholic Church. The fact that predestination could not be reconciled with such an autonomist free will only meant that we had to hold these two truths as "a divine Mystery of the Faith." It was therefore *a heresy* to deny either side of the contradiction (or more politely, the "mystery"). They *both* had to be held in tension as elements of Holy Tradition.

Then along came the Reformation. First Martin Luther, and then John Calvin (and the other Reformers followed them here), pointed out that precisely *because* the notion of free will was in conflict with so many Bible doctrines, of which predestination and God's omniscient foreknowledge were just two obvious points of conflict, the thing to do was to abandon libertarian free will, recognizing that it had no support of any kind in the biblical text. The protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* in any case, indicated that even if the early fathers *did* speak in this kind of language some of the time, by the time of Augustine, it was coming under pretty heavy theological fire, and should not be treated as part of the "apostolic deposit." Its absence from Scripture made this plain enough. What truck have we then, with this child of Athens?

After the Reformers passed on, Arminius and the Socinians and others returned to freewillism. Arminius himself saw that a "freedom of indifference" was indeed incompatible with the reformed doctrine of salvation, and his followers pointed out five problem areas where

the Calvinism of the Dutch state church would have to be modified. These *Remonstrants* produced a challenge to the state church of Holland in 1610, called the *Remonstrance*, which caused the Arminians to be forced out of the Dutch Reformed Church at the Synod of Dordt in 1619, when the Calvinists produced their famous answer to the Arminians in the so-called “Five Points of Calvinism.”

But long before this, the Jesuits, freshly organized as the Soldiers of the Pope, whose whole *raison d’etre* was the destruction of Protestantism through education and political action, had got into the theological act with their “new solution” to the problem of divine sovereignty. It seems that they wanted to make an independent mark on the university world of philosophy, by developing *a new form of Thomism* by which they sought to carve out a new philosophic niche for themselves over against the main teaching order of the day, the Dominicans. The new theory has been loosely called Molinism after its first proponent, and includes the “Middle Knowledge” theory, so-called because of its claims about a type of knowledge they said God had, which they thought could be used to bring about a reconciliation between human free will and God’s universal sovereignty. So: How did this Middle Knowledge work?

An Eirenic Theory of Reconciliation?

Luis de Molina as a concerned Jesuit theologian, and well settled in the standard Thomist tradition of the Middle Ages, decided that the protestant rejection of autonomist free will was not only heretical, but it was also *unnecessary*. Thomas Aquinas was simply wrong about our needing to accept *both* predestination and autonomous free will as a divine “mystery,” for *they could be reconciled after all*. Among the different facets of God’s knowledge, there was a type of knowledge which Aquinas had apparently not seen the implications of. We must first look at what Thomas had thought in this area, before we can see the point of Molina’s shift to “middle” knowledge.

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas had observed that God must necessarily have exhaustive knowledge of all future events. This was simply the Bible’s doctrine of divine Omniscience, and was not a problem to any orthodox Christian. But this further meant that God’s eternal decree to have this universe rather than some other possible or conceivable universe, was a matter of certain foreknowledge of the world *as it would actually exist*, because God saw the future possible world, including our future freewill decisions, in his own decree to create. His knowledge of future events was essentially his knowledge of his own decree to produce *this* universe rather than some other universe. This foreknowledge of God was called his knowledge of vision, or *scientia visionis*, meaning that God saw things that have been, are now, and will be, by looking at them in the stream of time which of course is ever-present to him. But how did this stream of time get to be *present* to the mind of God? Only because God’s knowledge of the real world is identical to his knowledge of his own plan or decree for that world.

But God also had another kind of knowledge, his knowledge of simple intelligence, his *scientia intelligentiae simplicis*, by which he knows the purely possible. This knowledge comes from within God’s own being. It is innate to God, and it would include all possible events, as distinct from actual events. So God’s foreknowledge of future real events is the first kind of knowledge (of our future freewill acts as they will actually occur), and this is all determined,

including our future freewill acts, by God's sovereign decree. This statement, aside from his insistence on free will also, shows that Thomas Aquinas was just as predestinarian as Luther and Calvin. Sovereign Predestination was clearly taught in Scripture, and was never in dispute between the Reformers and the real Thomist catholic theologians of their day.

De Molina decided that this was not realistic. He thought that it really undermined the freedom of our actions, for it made them the results of the divine decree itself. This was not a "divine mystery" at all, but a philosophic error in Aquinas' reasoning, which he, de Molina, proposed to correct. Aquinas, he said, had not properly analysed the nature of God's foreknowledge. There had to be *another kind of foreknowledge*, which he called "middle" knowledge, because he conceived of it as being midway between the other two. God not only knew both all the *possibilities* as well as how things would *actually* turn out, but he also knew *how the free will would actually act under all possible circumstances*. God knows these future conditional events by his *scientia media*, or "middle" knowledge. In this way, God could know future free events without determining them, for his decree to create involved his then choosing from this prior knowledge, which universe he wanted out of all the possible worlds. This middle knowledge presupposed that the acts were in fact free, and the creatorial decision of God's Will followed this knowledge *on this assumption*. In this way Molina thought to preserve human autonomy while admitting that God's foreknowledge was perfectly accurate. At the same time, he was refuting Calvin and Luther, who had simply insisted that Free Will is found nowhere in Scripture, while divine sovereignty is writ large throughout the Bible. Because they are incompatible, the Reformers naturally rejected the notion of an autonomist Free Will.

It is this theory that modern Arminians (like William Craig) are latching on to today, in order to safeguard their arminian assertion of an autonomous human will in the face of all that the Bible says about God's creatorial sovereignty. They agree with him that God does not know future free acts in the absolute decree of his Will, but only as *futura conditionata*, or "futable" acts, as possible future events. But this realm of God's foreknowledge is certain knowledge, the freewill choices remain undetermined, and so the conflict with absolute predestination is thereby resolved. Or so Luis thought.

The following proofs however, demonstrate that Molina's solution fails at all the important places. We shall recount the arguments against this aspect of Molinism by Duns Scotus, by the Thomists themselves, and by more modern philosophers, including Pohle, Crabtree, and Helm. We shall then look briefly at the Bible itself to demonstrate that the Scriptures exclude belief in any kind of autonomy, making the project simply irrelevant for the believer who wishes to "live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (as the Lord Jesus insisted in [Mat 4:4](#)).

John Duns Scotus

In the course of criticizing Aquinas' view of the relation between God's Will and his Intellect, Duns decided that it was God's Will that was primary, and that therefore all the functions of the divine Intellect had to follow what the Will decided, rather than (as Aquinas had it), the Will choosing from the options that the Intellect first presented to it. This means that all of God's knowledge, including his exhaustive knowledge of future contingencies as they would exist under all possible conditions, is ultimately based in God's eternal Will or decree to create. God's knowledge is never bare awareness of possibilities only, but always a "willing knowledge." Even future conditionals are only intelligible in terms of God's decree. God cannot "know" something independently of "willing" it. God's knowledge of all future contingencies is

not only a bare knowing, but a knowledge of his will for the future. Thus de Molina's idea of a middle knowledge of autonomous choices undetermined by God's decree is impossible.

Further, Douglas Langston points out that de Molina did not properly understand in the first place, Scotus' view of Free Will, which was what came later to be called the "freedom of spontaneity," not a "freedom of indifference." That is, Scotus did not hold to de Molina's view of the Will at all, but agreed with what the Reformers came to accept. So de Molina's objections to Scotus' view of why God's Sovereignty is compatible with human responsibility is simply irrelevant to the issue of compatibility.

Of course, it would be possible to answer that Scotus held other views, but my point here is that some modern commentators believe that de Molina failed to see how damaging Scotus' arguments against Aquinas were by extension, to his own view of a conditional middle knowledge. In effect, Duns Scotus had refuted Molina before he was born.

It is not much good claiming to believe in something *called* "Free Will," if one's definition of freedom is different. The new definition must itself be justified. It cannot be just arbitrary.

The Thomists

By the time de Molina tackled this problem, he no longer had the option that Scotus had, of changing the definition of free will, because the libertarian theory of free will had by then (in 1545–63) been made official catholic dogma by the council of Trent. Luther and Calvin could do this too, but de Molina could not; he was stuck with libertarian free will, just as he found it in Aquinas.

The followers of Aquinas (mainly in the rival Dominican order) argued three ways against Molinism:

First, de Molina's claim to reconcile an autonomously free will with absolute predestination by a fully sovereign God was no solution at all. All de Molina had succeeded in doing was to remove the "mystery of the Faith" from its natural place in evaluating the obvious contradiction between the two, to a weird theory of how God could know exactly how a particular will would in fact act granted a particular set of hypothetical circumstances. This was just as mysterious as the first mystery; for once it be granted that God does know accurately exactly how a choice would in fact be made, it is already being said that that choice is being determined by the circumstances. This contradicts the original claim that the will "could" have chosen some other way. De Molina countered with the claim that God knew how the will would in fact act, because he had some kind of "supercomprehensive," or "deep" knowledge of the will itself. But this is either an empty claim amounting to yet a further Mystery of Faith, or it is a claim that God knows that the properties of a particular will are such that it cannot but act a particular way in a particular set of circumstances. But this means that the will is infallibly determined to a particular course of action *by its very nature*, which denies its freedom of indifference. So (secondly) Molina was really denying free will, not reconciling it with Divine Sovereignty. There has to be a "medium" in which divine knowledge operates. Either God knows a certain thing in itself, or he knows it as a merely possible future reality. But possibilities can only become realities because the Will or decree of God sovereignly causes them to pass from the possible to the actual. Since only God's causal premotion can cause the Will to go one way rather than the other, even free acts are only such because of God as the first cause of everything.

The third objection of the Thomists was that the Molinists were really only secret Semipelagians. It was of the essence of Semipelagianism, that the beginning of our motions

towards God, the very initial beginning of faith is the work of our free wills. Only then does God assist us with effectual grace. Before we form that initial desire to believe and trust God, we are the objects of only a general or “sufficient grace” which only becomes “efficient grace” when the free will makes it so. Likewise the Arminians also taught that only when we chose autonomously to believe, does God’s universal or “prevenient grace” become “efficient grace” or actually saving grace. The Thomists noted that the Molinists likewise had the difference between sufficient and efficient grace produced not by God, but by the human free will. The Semipelagians and Arminians alike had God’s choice to make grace effective (his Election of some and not others) depend on his foreknowledge of how the free will would act. Likewise the Molinists, making God’s decree to create follow upon his foreknowledge of how the free will in fact will act under certain circumstances, makes Election follow foreknowledge.

So the Thomists pointed out that Molinism really gave no account at all of *exactly how* God could have certain foreknowledge of future freewill decisions. Therefore, no real “reconciliation” had occurred, and the Mystery of Faith was just moved down the process a notch or two. The real “mystery” was where God got this “middle knowledge.”

Catholic Encyclopedia Articles

As Pohle says in his Catholic Encyclopedia article on the “Controversies on Grace,” it is apparent that above all, molinism is determined to throw a wall of security around the free will. The Thomists maintain that this is done at the expense of grace. Instead of making free will dependent on the power of grace, it is the will which freely determines the success or failure of grace. Thus in the last analysis it is human will which decides whether a particular grace will prove efficacious or not, although revelation teaches that it is God, who with his grace, gives both the willing and the doing of a good act.”

He then observes that even Cardinal Bellarmine saw this difficulty and refused to follow the other Molinists in that direction. I think Bellarmine and the Thomists were right in this criticism of de Molina.

At this point, I would like to observe that in his C. E. article on Free Will, Michael Maher offers to supply “proof” of free will, but only tells us of the three traditional arguments, that freewill must be right because it is obviously true (the consent of the people), that it is necessary as the foundation of human responsibility, and that it is essential to our conception of what human nature is (otherwise we would be robots). I have refuted these superficial claims in my own book, *No Place For Sovereignty*, and have concluded that as there are no coherent arguments proving the freewill theory, it must be regarded as an unproven dogma.

The official catholic position is quite straightforward. They recognize with the Lutherans and the Calvinists that the Bible teaches absolute predestination as correlatives of the doctrine of God’s creatorial sovereignty. This was not disputed at the time of the Reformation, although Augustinianism declined in importance in Roman Catholicism after the destruction of the Jansenists in the 1700s. But in addition to God’s sovereignty, Catholics must also believe in libertarian free will, not because it is found in the Bible, but because it seems to be taught in the church fathers of the second, third, and fourth centuries, if anything with increasing clarity. In the final analysis, free will is defended on traditional grounds only. Therefore, assumed to be part of the Apostolic Tradition, it determines the catholic Faith as much as Scripture does. The catholic view of this matter is the same now as it was in the 1500s; an autonomist free will and an absolute divine sovereignty *must both be held as a divine mystery of faith, even though they*

cannot be reconciled by theologians. Since most Evangelicals have little idea what the Reformers thought of this subject, they tend to agree with this state of affairs. This makes life pretty easy for a modern Molinist. He can assume that a modern Evangelical will think that the freewill theory is correct (indeed, it's "obviously true,") without asking for proof. It's a privileged assumption, a dogmatic presupposition, which only a crazy person would question. Naturally, a thoughtful person might reasonably think that some kind of reconciliation is perfectly reasonable.

J. A. Crabtree's Response

In Schreiner and Ware's collection of essays, the second volume contains a most insightful article analyzing de Molina's method of argument in the *Concordia*. Crabtree begins by focusing on de Molina's explanation of how God gets his foreknowledge of future freewill contingents. In his official or overt account, de Molina claims that God knows exactly how a particular person will in fact freely choose, under all possible circumstances. God then chooses to actualize that set of circumstances which best fits his own decree to create and redeem the world.

Crabtree then points out that Molina seems to have two "significantly different accounts" of how middle knowledge works. On the one hand, his "official" account is that God knows these futable contingencies by a direct, non-inferential, immediate or intuitive knowledge. On the other hand, he also has a covert account which requires that God knows them because he has an ability to infer infallibly that person P will do X at time T, on the basis of his infinitely thorough knowledge of how the will of P works under certain conditions. So: Is God's middle knowledge inferential or intuitive?

In the official account, God's knowledge is deep, immense, infinitely thorough, but he does not infer this knowledge from other things that he knows about P. No real explanation is given of how this is possible; it is rather a declaration of a "mystery," that no explanation can or will be given. The final result is that *middle knowledge is really just as mysterious and incomprehensible as the original Mystery of Faith propounded by Aquinas.*

In the unofficial or "covert" account, de Molina appeals also to "the preeminent comprehension" by which [God] knows that faculty (of the will). ... He knows which part (direction) it will in its freedom turn itself towards." But this is more like empirical knowledge, drawn from an awareness of the properties of the individual will as such. He describes it as "the most profound and inscrutable comprehension" of the "faculty of free choice." And this is an entirely different medium of knowing than innate awareness. No doubt it does explain how God can know which way the will will in fact turn, but a further problem arises immediately.

The obvious question, after we ask "Which of these explanations is it?" becomes, "What happens to an autonomous free will under these circumstances?" The unofficial account has God knowing the will by knowing its properties or character, *i.e.*, by knowing the internal determinations of the will itself. Calling it "free" in the sense of autonomous and equally able to go either way is no longer an option under such conditions. The moment the will is irrevocably associated with a particular set of conditions under which it will definitely go one way rather than the other, its freedom (considered as autonomy, as a freedom which allows it also to go the other way under the same conditions), is eliminated by definition.

Crabtree observes that while the first explanation is only to fall back on mystery, the second explanation destroys free will completely. In other words, de Molina gives no explanation of how middle knowledge could work at all.

Paul Helm's Observations

On the other side of the Atlantic, Paul Helm is the recently-retired head of the philosophy of religion department of King's College at London University. This philosopher questions whether it is really possible for God to know which of any two alternative choices is the real one without a context which distinguishes the choices. How can any set of "circumstances" exist even potentially, in which a particular choice will *certainly* be made, unless God decrees these circumstances? God would have to distinguish between even potential sets of circumstances in order for the different choices to be distinguishable. Clearly, each choice is associated in some irrevocable way with a particular set of circumstances. But this is tantamount in practice to saying that the circumstances determine the choice. Otherwise any set of circumstances could enable any choice whatever. The whole point of middle knowledge is that God foreknows all possible freewill choices, in all the possible sets of circumstances each one could be made in. But this implies that the circumstances are necessary for the choice to go one way rather than the other, and that is all causation amounts to. As long as the choice is associated with a particular set of conditions, de Molina can no longer say he is preserving an autonomous free will.

But this is again another version of an objection raised in de Molina's own days by the Thomists, and never really faced. No matter how they explain free will, the Molinists cannot cope with the fact that even when de Molina is claiming that God's will has not yet decreed the particular circumstances in which a particular choice will be made, he is claiming a knowledge which even God could not have. *If the circumstances can be known, they also determine which choice will be made.* Since God knows which way the human Will certainly will in fact go in each case, even before it is actualized in his plan, he inevitably associates it with a particular set of conditions, and this is equivalent to predetermination of the Will. That is, autonomy is denied.

No matter how he works it, once he admits that God knows freewill decisions before they occur, de Molina cannot escape the predetermination of individual choices by God. It is my opinion that the only way to do this is to limit God's knowledge of the future, the way Clark Pinnock does. And this sets the Bible aside as an authority, for God could not then know centuries in advance that Joseph and Mary would actually decide to go to Bethlehem rather than stay in Nazareth for the birth of Jesus.

The Essence of Autonomism

Once we allow creation out of nothing by an omnipotent deity, it follows necessarily that *either* God is the first mover of all events in the universe, including human decisions, *or*, we must introduce another dualistic factor over which God has no significant control. This might be Chaos and Old Night, the god Tiamat, eternal Matter, pure chance, or Being-in-general. It makes no difference what you call it, it must be the womb of all that God rejects, or does not know. But to do this is to limit God by that factor at least some of the time, and that makes God *finite*. Therewith, the mono-theism of Isaiah, Jesus, John and Paul has been abandoned.

This is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden when they decided to make themselves the reference-point for evaluating whether God ("Thou shalt surely die") or Satan ("Thou shalt not surely die"), was correct about the future of the sinner. Had God been the reference-point, Satan's position would have been ruled out of court by definition. But if God is the Creator, he is necessarily the only Ultimate to exist, and he must necessarily be the reference-point for all interpretation of human experience. There can be only one Ultimate, by the very nature of Ultimacy. To deny the ultimacy of God is to make oneself the Ultimate. And this is the essence

of the Fall, the essence of sin, the essence of the assumption of the metaphysical autonomy of the will.

This is what the Greeks, the Catholics, the Arminians, and everyone else who presupposes free will is doing. A dogma pure and simple is being elevated to the status of a divine revelation. There are no arguments for free will found in the Bible, it is never appealed to there as a category of explanation, it is incompatible with divine sovereignty, and it was correctly abandoned by the Reformers. They of all people knew that it was incompatible with the free grace of a sovereign God, and said so repeatedly in many different contexts. Martin Luther told Erasmus that the denial of the free will theory was at the heart of the Gospel. And Erasmus was really happy with this confession, for it saved him for the rest of his life, from the accusation of being a secret Lutheran. No longer could anyone say that Luther hatched the egg that Erasmus had laid!

All pagan systems struggle with the One and Many problem, often in the form of the battle between polytheistic and pantheistic elements of a nonchristian religion. Absolutely nobody escapes this dilemma, because nobody can formulate even so much as the relation between a question and its answer without facing the question of what principle of unification and which principle of diversification to depend on. Heathen systems from Socrates to Kant have either opted for logic in order to unify things, or Chance to provide diversity. Those who do not wish to choose, formulate some syncretistic combination of both Chance and Logic. And this leads to ultimate instability.

In all nonchristian systems, Reason struggles against a background of Chance. And all because in the Fall, our first parents decided to make their own consciousness ultimate instead of God in his Word.

The Fundamental Blunder

The great blunder underlying Molinism is not that it supports Arminianism (it doesn't) or that it undermines the theology of the Reformation (which it certainly does) or that it is inconsistent with itself and cannot explain how free will and God's sovereignty can be made compatible. The real issue is that it *assumes the Free Will Theory without proof*, and then proceeds to "reconcile" the Bible with something that does not exist. The autonomy of the will is a dogma which corresponds to nothing in the real world.

Syncretism Vs. Apologetics

Presuppositions control conclusions much like the International Rules determine what counts as a possible move across the whole board. And nobody escapes this control of their presuppositions, for presuppositionless argument is impossible. You have to start somewhere, and your starting-point functions as a set of presuppositions. And no system can derive its own axioms.

So from a christian standpoint, "objectivity" as such is not possible. Objectivity is itself an idol of the fallen mind, for all thought, all interpretation of any experience of the world whatever, is an interpretation which either presupposes the God of the Bible as the Ultimate reference-point, or it presupposes the idol of the finite human awareness in His place.

All syncretisms, all artificial efforts to combine God's revelation with nonchristian presuppositions, must lead to basic inconsistencies, and produce basic instabilities and tensions. We are then confronted in philosophy as we so often are in ethics, with "a double-minded man,

unstable in all his ways,” as James has it. The usual way to paper over these inconsistencies is to refer to them as Mysteries (like Thomas Aquinas did) or Paradoxes (with Soren Kierkegaard and the existentialist theologians who depend on his notion of faith) or perhaps Antinomies (as J. I. Packer did in a well-known booklet of his). But contradictions are just contradictions after all, and contradiction embraced leads rapidly to craziness. One half of any logical contradiction is always wrong.

When Paul challenged the Greeks at Athens he made no attempt to move from their assumptions to his own, but instead challenged everything of importance in their world-view. He began with creation out of nothing, and ended with the historical resurrection of the body. The first they regarded as metaphysically impossible (which it is if you are a pantheist or a polytheist, and they were both), while the second they just laughed at. It was just too stupid for consideration by civilized people. But in the crowd, and even on the Areopagus Council itself there were those who realized that they had just heard the most penetrating and destructive attack on the Hellenistic world view they had ever encountered, and they were riveted to this man. Some of them, a small handful, believed that at last they had heard Truth in its final form, and they just could not get themselves free from it. These believers were experiencing God’s efficacious grace in the encounter with the Gospel of a God with true creatorial sovereignty!

When Jesus in [Matt 4:4](#) repeated a verse from Deuteronomy to Satan in the desert, asserting that over against the notion that a real human being should determine his own destiny with himself as the reference-point, man must live not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, he was reversing the process begun by Eve in the garden of Eden, and reasserting his heavenly Father as the ultimate reference-point for all interpretation. The entire drama of redemption turned in that instant on that epistemological hinge!

Solomon was right after all (in [Prov 1:7](#), [9:10](#), and [15:33](#)), and the apostle Paul after him (in [2 Tim 3:16–17](#)), that the recognition of who God is, is the beginning of Wisdom, of Knowledge, and of day-by day Instruction in righteousness. Borrowing from the heathen will not cut it. Borrowing intellectual capital from pagan sources is a very bad way to start a Christian Apologetics bank account!

Conclusions?

Molinism has been so often refuted, and has so many different problems and inconsistencies in it, that I truly stand amazed in the presence of an Evangelical who thinks he can polish it up and use it in God’s service. Besides, we need to face the point that was never an issue among the Dominicans or the Jesuits, that de Molina was a hardworking Jesuit who spent his whole professional life trying to undermine the theology of the Reformers. Why would an Evangelical want to help them do this? *Why?*

Middle Knowledge is just a Jesuit scam. Its purpose is to reconcile a pagan assumption borrowed from the Greek philosophers and unknown to the pages of the Bible, with the sovereignty of God, and it just doesn’t work. Even the Thomists could see that.

There is little doubt that Molinism was an encouragement to Arminius himself, and yet we notice that he nowhere embraced it wholly. The simple truth is that Molinism, as a form of Thomism, is incompatible with Arminianism, while *both* of them leave the theologian open to the accusation of Semipelagianism. Neither can adequately safeguard the independence of efficacious grace.

Arminians are not facing the real state of affairs in the Bible when they cheerfully side with Eve in locating Ultimacy in the human will instead of in God, and assume the Free Will theory *without proof*, giving it the status of a *privileged presupposition*. It simply *must* be questioned.

It is a waste of the Evangelical's time, because free will in the libertarian sense of a "liberty of indifference" simply does not exist. It is just a pagan religious delusion.

And the most tragic thing of all, is that the spread of molinist ideas among Evangelicals today provides sad evidence that modern Evangelicalism is even more ignorant of the theology of the Reformation than it was a generation ago. The Reformers are less and less understood in our churches than ever before. One thing is abundantly clear: we need much more historical teaching in our Sunday Schools, if people are going to wake up to what is being done to undermine the Reformation.

Biblical Anthropology 101

By Dr. Robert Morey

Introduction

Since man was created to bear the image of God, then we must understand the nature of God *before* we can understand the nature of man. This is so clear from [Gen. 1:26–27](#), that it is truly amazing that humanists, processians, neoprocessians, Molinists and Arminians seem totally unaware of this biblical truth. In fact, they reverse the biblical order and start with man as defined by pagan Greek philosophy. Then they define God according to the pagan definition of man!

An Old Problem

This problem is documented in the Bible as far back as [Num. 23:19](#), where the heathen assumed that since man can lie and fail to keep his promises, then God can likewise lie and fail to keep his word. A literal translation of [Num. 23:19](#) reads:

God is not a human being;
Why then do you assume that he can lie?
Nor is he a boy;
Why then do you assume that he can arbitrarily change his mind?
Does he speak,
And then fail to act accordingly?
Does he promise, then fail to keep his word?

Even Balaam had enough sense to know that God is incapable of lying or failing to keep his word. Yet, modern processians do not understand this at all.

Why?

Pagan philosophers have traditionally defined “freedom” as “the power of contrary choice,” i.e. to be “truly” free, you must have the ability to do the *opposite* of what you chose to do. You must be able to choose the contrary. Thus your choices are never necessary or certain because they cannot be predetermined beforehand by anything or anyone – including God. Your choices are therefore never fixed or predestined.

The following illustration will help us to understand this pagan dogma.

I chose to lie today. I could have chosen to do the contrary by telling the truth. But I chose to lie. She asked me if her dress made her look fat. I did not want to get into trouble, so I told her, “No. You look great!” The truth was, the dress did make her look fat. Since I chose to lie, I chose to sin. But I could have chosen the contrary, i.e., not to sin.

Once we begin with the pagan definition of freedom as our *a priori* presupposition, then we end up defining in what sense God is free. Since pagan philosophers assume “man is the measure of all things including God”, then in order for God to be “truly” free, he must have the power of contrary choice. His choices and actions cannot be predetermined or predestined by anything, not even by his own nature. He must be able to do the opposite of what he chooses to do or he is not really free.

What About God?

Does God ever choose to tell the truth? Yes. Then, according to humanism, God could have equally chosen to do the contrary, i.e. he could have chosen to lie. If he can choose not to sin, then he can choose to sin. Thus God must be free to become the devil and to do evil or he is not “truly” free.

It is by this convoluted line of reasoning that processians like Stephen Davis come to the heretical conclusion that God can lie and God can sin. It does not matter to them what the Bible says on this issue. Their vaunted “reason” tells them that freedom is “the power of contrary choice.” They naively assume this to be true and thus never bother to prove its validity.

What Does the Bible Say?

The God of the Bible is incapable of sinning in any sense whatsoever. This is what makes him different from the gods of the heathen. It is thus no surprise to read:

“God cannot lie.” (Tit. 1:2)

“It is impossible for God to lie.” (Heb. 6:18)

“He cannot deny himself.” (2 Tim. 2:18)

“God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone to do evil”

(James 1:13)

The grammar and the syntax of the Greek text in the above passages demonstrate that God does not have the power of contrary choice. He is limited by his own divine nature and is thus incapable of doing anything that is contrary to that nature. God cannot lie. He cannot fail to keep his promises. He is completely trustworthy because his actions are completely predicable. They are both necessary and certain.

The Law and the Prophets

When Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” ([Gen. 18:25](#)), his rhetorical question meant that God does not have the power to do the contrary of justice. Since he is just by nature, then he can only what is just and right.

The same rhetorical question is put forth by Paul in [Rom. 3:5](#) and [9:14](#). Paul rebukes as blasphemy the very idea that that God could do anything contrary to his righteous and holy nature. God is free to be and to do only that which is in conformity with his nature.

Is Man Created in God’s Image?

Since man was created in the image of God, and God does *not* have the power of contrary choice, then man does not that power either. Man is free to be and to do *only that which is in conformity with his nature*.

Take sin as an example. Are we sinners because we sin or do we sin because we are sinners? We are born in sin and go astray from the womb ([Psa. 51:5](#); [58:3](#)). We are the children of wrath “by nature” ([Eph. 2:3](#))

In [Matt. 7:17–18](#), Jesus made it clear that man does not have the power of contrary choice but he acts according to the nature of his character.

Even so, every good tree bears good fruit;
But the evil tree bears evil fruit.
A good tree cannot produce evil fruit,
Nor can an evil tree produce good fruit

A tree (i.e. man) does not have the power to produce fruit that is contrary to its nature. The same concept is found in [Gen. 6:5](#); [Jer. 13:23](#); etc. The Son of God taught us that evil deeds come from an evil heart.

Are you still lacking in understanding also?
Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated?
But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.
For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

([Matt. 15:16–19](#))

It seems that processions lack this basic understanding of Scripture. They would do well to heed the words of Incarnate Deity.

The Glory of Heaven

In [Heb. 12:23](#), we are told that when we ascend to heaven at death, we are perfected and hence rendered incapable of sinning. Thank God we will not have the power of contrary choice in heaven! Thus we will not have the power to sin or do evil in heaven. This is true freedom.

The Eternal State

In [I John 3:2–3](#), when the Lord returns and the eternal state begins, we will be made impeccable like him. No one on the new earth will have the power to sin.

Conclusion

Since God by nature does not have the power of contrary choice, the saints in heaven do not have it either, and since it is absent from the eternal state, on what grounds can anyone claim that fallen man has this power today? I see no biblical basis for the vaunted claims of humanism and all the deviate theologies it has spawned.

Is God free? Yes. Is the Church triumphant free? Yes. Will we be free in the eternal state? Yes. We will be free to be all that God wants us to be. Free to do what is right and just and pure. Free from sin and all its temptations. For if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Sermon Notes —The Attributes of God

by Dr. Robert A. Morey

Introduction

Why did Jesus come to earth and die for our sins? What was His goal or mission? In [John 17:2–3](#) Jesus stated that the goal of salvation is to *know* God. Indeed, the entire process of redemption can be summed up in the words: *to know God* ([Gal. 4:8–9](#)). Christians are people who have come to know God ([I John 5:20–21](#)).

Do You Know God?

“Knowing God” involves three things:

1. Knowledge about God
2. Intellectual assent to this knowledge
3. Personal trust in God

True saving faith begins with an intellectual faith in the head and ends with a personal faith in the heart. The only way to reach the heart is through the mind.

It is not surprising in the least to find that modern unbelief centers its main attack on knowing God. They deny that God can be “known” intellectually. They claim that no one can know anything about God. This is the very soul of unbelief and is a device of Satan to keep people from saving faith. While they agree that people can experience God, this experience is non-rational. No one can talk about God in an objective or rational way.

The modern attitude of up-playing experience and downplaying theology has found its way into the church. People do not sense the value and importance of an intellectual knowledge of God. All they want is a “happy” time in church, i.e., experience! They do not want to think

deeply about the existence, nature and being of God. They want their “heart” filled but their “mind” empty. They want “fun” but not “facts.”

But the Bible does not go along with the existential spirit of the age. It calls us to a three-fold knowledge of God:

The Mind (understand)

The Heart (assent)

The Will (trust/choose)

In this light, when we say, “God has attributes and we can talk about them,” we are saying something truly profound.

While modern theologians and philosophers admit they know nothing about God, the humblest saint knows through Scripture all there is to know about God! The key is divine revelation. If God has revealed Himself to man in words that we can understand, then we can know God. But if there is no revelation from God, there can be no real knowledge of God.

I. “GOD HAS ATTRIBUTES”

A. What do we mean when we say attributes?

1. A characteristic or quality of God’s existence, being or nature.

2. Not something we attribute to God but something He has revealed about Himself:

* Revealed (not “reason”)

* Objective (not “subjective”)

* Immutable (not “cultural”)

* True (not “mythological”)

3. God is not just the sum of His attributes anymore than we are the sum of our attributes.

4. God’s attributes/qualities are “invisible” ([Rom. 1:20](#)). Since God is invisible, having no body, His attributes cannot be perceived by the senses.

II. “AND WE CAN TALK ABOUT THEM.”

A. Jesus ([John 4:24](#)) and the Apostles ([Rom. 1:20](#)) had no difficulty in talking about God’s attributes. All the names and titles of God are actually ways of talking about God’s attributes: [I Tim. 1:17](#); [6:13–16](#).

B. As long as we limit our understanding about God to the Bible, our knowledge of God will be:

1. Objective

2. Immutable

3. True

C. If we go beyond Scripture and mold our understanding of God by what we “think,” “feel” or “experience,” then we are engaged in idolatry and our knowledge of God becomes:

1. Subjective

2. Mutable

3. False

Summary

The God who is truly there has not been silent. He has revealed Himself and facts about Himself in Scripture (the Written Word) and in Christ (the Living Word). We can know true facts about God as well as personally knowing God. This knowledge is only possible because salvation was planned by the Father in eternity, accomplished by the Son in history, and applied

by the Spirit in the present. To the Triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit be all the glory forever and ever, Amen!

I. WE CAN TALK ABOUT GOD IN A MEANINGFUL WAY.

Christian Theology

Modern Unbelief

God > Man

Man > God

Revealed by God

Projection of Man

Objective

Subjective

Immutable

Mutable

Transcendent

Cultural

Absolute

Relative

Universal

Particular

Knowledge

No Knowledge

Truth

Myth / Speculation

While the Christian God gives us a sufficient basis for truth, morals, justice and beauty, modern unbelief has ended in total skepticism (no truth possible) and relativism (no morals possible): God, morals, science, history, etc.

Of course, both relativism and skepticism are self-refuting.

“There is no absolute truth.” Is that absolutely true?

“No one knows anything about God.” How do you know that about God?

“There are no absolutes.” Is that an absolute?

“Everything is relative.” Except what you just said?

“Truth/morals are subjective.” How objective is that statement?

ATTRIBUTE #1 — MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

When we open the Bible, we are at once confronted with the first attribute of God that He wants us to understand about Him.

MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

“*In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth*” (Gen. 1:1).

A. The early church saw this in a really profound way and placed it in the forefront of all their creeds.

The Apostles’ Creed:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty,

Maker of Heaven and earth.”

B. The implications of God as creator are stupendous! They formed the basis of western culture and made science possible.

1. God exists prior to, apart from and independent of the space / time world that He created out of nothing for His own glory. This “demystified” the world.
2. The world is not eternal.
3. It had a beginning and will have an end.
4. It is not a part of God but a separate creation of God.
5. The reality and goodness of matter is established and spiritualism is refuted.
6. The reality and goodness of spirit is established and materialism refuted.
7. The world reflects God’s law and power and not chaos and confusion.
8. It began with the personal and rational God and not with non-personal and irrational chance.
9. Man has dignity, worth, significance and meaning. He is not a “fluke” of evolution.
10. All people are “human” because we all came from Adam and Eve. Racism is not true.
11. History follows a divine plan and has meaning and significance.
12. We can make moral judgments.
13. We can know the truth.
14. We can make the distinction between:

Creator/Creation
Truth/Error
God/Man
Right/wrong
Eternal/Temporal
Male/Female
Infinite/Finite
Justice/Injustice
Man/Animal or thing
Order/Chaos

C. If one accepts God as Maker of Heaven and earth, then he will not have any difficulty in accepting the rest of the Bible. All the other attributes of God modify the Creator. They are understandable only in the context of Creation *ex nihilo*.

D. This is why unbelief attacks the creator-hood of God with so much rage.

- * “The world is eternal.”
- * “It does not have a beginning or an end.”
- * “Chaos, chance and luck rule this world.”
- * “Man is only ooze that oozed out of ooze and is returning to ooze.”

KING SOLOMON:

“Remember now Thy Creator.” (Ecc. 12:1)

THE PROPHET AMOS:

“Prepare to meet your God.” (Amos 4:12)

ATTRIBUTE #2 — THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

Introduction

The early church began the attributes of God with “Maker of Heaven and earth.” The doctrine of creation is the foundation of everything else in the rest of the Bible. Nothing else in the Bible is true if [Genesis 1:1](#) is not true. But if [Gen. 1:1](#) is true, then everything else in the Bible is true.

The early Christians wisely chose incomprehensibility as the second attribute of God.

Definition of “Incomprehensibility:”

The finite mind of man cannot exhaustively or completely grasp, understand, explain or define the infinite nature of God.

I. “INCOMPREHENSIBILITY” TELLS US THAT GOD IS BEYOND OUR CAPACITY TO GRASP FOR FOUR REASONS.

- A. God is infinite. Thus only God understands God infinitely ([I Cor. 2:11](#)).
- B. Since man is finite, his mind cannot fully comprehend the Almighty. This is not evil but good for God made man finite ([Eph. 3:19](#)).
- C. Since man is sinful, he has a moral aversion to God ([John 1:10](#) cf [3:19–20](#)).
- D. The confines of revelation limit man’s understanding of God to what is found in Scripture ([I Cor. 4:6](#)).

II. “INCOMPREHENSIBILITY” DOES NOT MEAN:

- A. God is unknowable ([John 17:3](#)).
- B. God is illogical or irrational. He is a-rational, i.e., beyond reason/logic.
- C. Beware of the hidden assumption of modern philosophy: Either man knows all there is about God or nothing at all.

III. BECAUSE GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIM IS FINITE, TRUE AND CERTAIN (I JOHN 5:20).

IV. BIBLICAL BASIS OF INCOMPREHENSIBILITY

- A. O.T. passage of full mention: The Book of Job
 - 1. The incomprehensibility of God is revealed as God’s “answer” to the problem of evil as found in the evils inflicted on poor Job.
 - 2. The context: The evils that came upon Job
 - 3. The source: Did the evils come from God? or Satan? or evil people? or all of them at the same time? Is God the author of evil?

4. Job's position
 - a) God was in control of all things.
 - b) No evil could come upon Job unless God approved.
 - c) God was not the agent or cause of the evil. The devil and evil people were to blame—not God.

Note: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY ARE BOTH TRUE!

Man's failure to reconcile these two truths does not negate their truthfulness. Faith swims when reason can no longer feel the bottom!

- d. Job trusted in God that He had sent these evils for God's glory and Job's good.
- e. While Job could not understand why God allowed these evil things to happen, he could still worship God!

5. The basic texts
 - a) A contest in Heaven led to a conflict on earth: 1:6–12
 - b) Job's godly attitude: 1:20–22
 - c) Another evil comes upon Job: 1–9
 - d) Job's godly attitude: 2:10
 - e) God's incomprehensibility: 5:9, 9:10–12; 11:77–10, 38:1–5 42:1–6

ATTRIBUTE #3 — GOD IS INFINITE

Introduction

Ever since Francis Schaeffer pointed out that we could have truth, justice, morals and beauty because God is the infinite reference point that gives meaning and significance to all things, the infinite nature of God has come under a mounting attack. If God can be reduced to a finite being, then there is no infinite or universal standard that can form a sufficient basis for truth or morals. Relativism can win if God is not infinite.

Once God is reduced to finiteness, then He is just another particular in search of a universal to explain Him!

The denial of God's infinite nature is a masterstroke of Satan because by attacking this one attribute, he has attacked all the other attributes of God. If God is not infinite, then no "omni" attributes (ex. omnipotent) are true and the distinction between God and His creation is erased.

The Christian God is different from angels and man by virtue of being infinite. While God, men and angels possess Person, Power, Presence and Perception they are not the same.

I. Def: *The Word "Infinite" Does Not Describe an Independent Attribute of God. It is an Adjective Which When Applied to All the Other Attributes of God Make God "God."*

INFINITE Person
 INFINITE Power
 INFINITE Presence
 INFINITE Perception

A. The Heb. word itself means "unlimited," "boundless," "without a cutting off place."

B. God is present everywhere in the totality of His person, i.e., we cannot find a “cutting off place” for God. He has no “limitations” or “boundary” after which we can say, “God stops here.” There is “no end” to God’s presence.

C. God’s love, mercy and grace must be infinite or all is lost. Prayer depends on God’s infinity! (Psa. 139).

D. Biblical Support

O.T. Passage of full mention: [Psa. 147](#)

1. God’s omniscience (v. 4). The stars may be “without number” to man, but God knows their “number” and “name.”

2. Verse 5 is a poetic contrast to v.4

THE STARS
GOD’S KNOWLEDGE
“have a limit”
“is infinite” (N.A.S.V.)
“can be numbered”
“without limit”
stars..no more stars
God...(no limit)

3. God’s infinite nature is what makes Him superior to the stars. He is “great” and “mighty” because He is infinite.

ATTRIBUTE #4 — THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Introduction

We have already seen that God is infinite in His existence, being, nature and attributes. The word infinite simply means that for God there are:

No limitations
No boundaries
No “cutting off point”
No beginning or end.

I. GOD’S EXISTENCE IS “INFINITE,” I.E.:

- A. It is self-existent ([John 5:26](#); [Exo. 3:14](#)).
- B. It is independent ([Acts 17:24–25](#)).
- C. It is eternal ([Deut. 33:27](#); [Isa. 57:15](#)).
- D. It is immortal ([I Tim. 1:17](#)).
- E. It is perfect ([Job 37:16](#); [Psa. 19:7](#); [Rom. 12:2](#)).
- F. It is immutable ([Psa. 102:24–27](#); [Psa. 42:2](#)).

II. MAN’S EXISTENCE IS FINITE, I.E.:

- A. It is dependent ([Job 12:10](#); [Dan. 5:25](#); [Acts 17:25](#)).
- B. It is temporal ([Acts 17:26](#)).
- C. It is mortal ([Psa. 90:9–12](#)).

- D. It is imperfect ([Phil. 3:12](#) cf [Heb. 12:23](#)).
- E. It is mutable ([Job 14:1–6](#)).

III. APPLICATIONS

- A. What a glorious God!
- B. What an amazing Gospel!
- C. What a terrifying prospect if we reject such a God and His Gospel!

ATTRIBUTE #5 — THE ETERNITY OF GOD

When we say, “God is infinite,” we mean that He is infinite in respect to something. Infinitude is not an independent attribute but it is that element which when applied to all the attributes of God make God “GOD.”

God is infinite in respect to:

- *. Time, i.e., ETERNAL
- *. Space, i.e., OMNIPRESENT
- *. Knowledge, i.e., OMNISCIENT
- *. Power, i.e., OMNIPOTENT
- *. Will, i.e., SOVEREIGN
- *. Goodness, i.e., HOLY

I. What Do We Mean When We Say That God is “Eternal.”

- A. This tells us that God is:
 1. Self-existent
 2. Beginningless
 3. Endless
 4. Uncreated
 5. Uncaused
- B. This tells us that the world:
 1. Is Dependent
 2. Has a Beginning
 3. Will Have an End
 4. Was Created
 5. Is Caused
 6. Is Limited by Time, i.e., “in” Time
- C. This tells us that “time:”
 1. Is Dependent
 2. Has a Beginning
 3. Will Have an End
 4. Was Created
 5. Is Caused
 6. Is Limited by God

II. MODERN THEOLOGIANS REJECT THE ETERNITY OF GOD IN THREE WAYS:

- A. God is merged into the world and takes on all the attributes of the world.

- B. Time is moved up to take God's place and attributes.
- C. Time becomes the God in whom and by whom God exists! This is the Greek god "Kronos!"

III. WHAT IS SHOCKING IS THAT SOME MODERN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIANS ARE NOW TEACHING THIS HERESY! (DAVIS, PINNOCK, RICE, BOYD, ANDREW, SANDERS, ETC.)

IV. WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH?

- A. [Gen. 1:1](#) does not say, "In the beginning TIME." It says, "In the beginning GOD."
- B. [Gen. 1:1](#) says that God created the space/time world. It does not say, "God and time created the world" or "Time created God and the world."
- C. God alone is said to be "eternal" in the Bible ([Gen. 21:33](#); [Rom. 1:20](#)). Not once is "time" said to be "eternal."
- D. God is the creator of all things, time included. They are "in" Him ([Col. 1:16–17](#); [Acts 17:28](#); [Rom. 11:36](#)).
- E. God is said to be "eternal," i.e., timeless ([Psa. 41:13](#); [90:1–4](#); [106:48](#); [Isa. 57:15](#); [Isa. 43:13](#)).
- F. Time is a process ([Gen. 4:3](#); [38:12](#)) that God "sets" ([Acts 1:7](#)), "appoints" ([Gen. 18:14](#); [Dan. 8:19](#); [11:27, 29, 35](#)) and "determines" ([Acts 17:26](#)). Nowhere in the Bible does time control or limit God!

V. THE PHILOSOPHIC ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD'S *ETERNITY* ARE *FOOLISH*. (See Morey, *Battle of the Gods*)

Application

What a strong foundation for our hope and security in God. Because He is eternal, He has, is and will take care of us! ([Deut. 33:26–29](#))

ATTRIBUTE #6 — THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

When God's infinitude is applied to time, we say that God is eternal. When it is applied to space, we say that God is omnipresent.

I. Def.: *God is present everywhere at the same time. God is present in the totality of His personhood "in," "throughout," "beyond," "above," "beneath," "before," "after" and "beside" all things. There is no place where God is not.*

A. What a comfort to the saints! No matter where you are at any time, God is there. At morning, noon or night, He is there. In times of plenty or want, He is there. In times of joy or sorrow, sickness or health, in riches or poverty, God is there.

B. What an encouragement to awakened sinners. God is there and He is ready, willing and able to receive sinners who come to Him through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

C. What a terror to rebel sinners! You have no place to hide! Where can you go to escape God? His arm of justice is long, His wrath may seem to tarry but it is only delayed in mercy. Fear God and live!

II. BIBLICAL SUPPORT

- A. [Gen. 1:1](#) tells us that God is greater than the space/time world.
- B. God cannot be contained or confined by space ([I Kings 8:27](#); [Acts 17:24–25](#)).
- C. He “fills” Heaven and earth ([Jer. 23:23–24](#)).
- D. Earth is His “footstool” ([Isa. 66:1–2](#)).
- E. [Psa. 139:7–13](#) is the O.T. passage of full mention v. 7a - “Where can I go from Your Spirit (within)” b - “Where can I flee from Your Presence?” (without) (lit. “FACE”)

WE CANNOT ESCAPE FROM GOD MENTALLY OR PHYSICALLY, INTERNALLY OR EXTERNALLY!

V.8–12 - Possible places to hide from God

1. “Up” (the Heavens) (height)
2. “Down” (Sheol) (depth)
3. “Sideways” (the wings of dawn) (speed) (East or West) (the far side of the sea) (distance)
4. “Darkness” (the darkness will hide me) (cover)

III. PRAYER PRESUPPOSES GOD IS EVERYWHERE ([PSA. 65:2](#)).

IV. SALVATION PRESUPPOSES GOD IS EVERYWHERE ([ACTS. 17:27–28](#)).

ATTRIBUTE #7—THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

Just as we applied God’s infinitude to God’s relationship to space and time and found Him omnipresent and eternal, we will now apply it to His knowledge. Once we do this, we must say that God is omniscient.

I. I. Def.: *God knows everything about everything only as God can know it. His knowledge is infinite and has no “cutting off point” or limitations ([Psa. 147:5](#)).*

It is not only infinite but:

- A. Eternal ([Acts 15:18](#))
- B. Self-Existent ([Rom. 11:33–35](#))
- B. Perfect ([Job 37:16](#); [11:11](#))

II. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

A. The Plain Statement of Scripture

1. “The Lord is a God of Knowledge” (I Sam. 2:3)
2. “He Knows Everything” (I John 3:20)
3. “His Understanding is Infinite” (Psa. 147:5)
4. He is “perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16)
5. “All Things are Open and Laid Bare” to Him (Heb. 4:13)
6. “God Knoweth!” (II Cor. 12:2–3)

B. The Vocabulary Used to Describe God’s Knowledge

1. “Foreknows” (Acts 2:23)
2. “Foresees” (Gal. 3:8)
3. “Nothing Hid” from God (Heb. 4:13)

C. The Chief Attribute of God is His Prescience, i.e., Foreknowledge of the Future (Isa. 41:21–26; 44:6, 7, 26, 28; 45:11–13, 21; 46:9–11)

Special Note: Isa. 46:10 “*Declaring the End from the Beginning.*”
Human Knowledge must progress from the Beginning to the End.
Divine Knowledge already knows the End from the Beginning.

Application

- A. What a Comfort to the Believer!
(Psa. 138:1–6)
- B. What a Terror to the Unbeliever!
(Rom. 4:4–16)

ATTRIBUTE #8—THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

When we apply God’s infinitude to His power, we say that God is omnipotent or “all-powerful.” This is one of the most misunderstood attributes of God and we need to define what it means carefully.

I. WHAT “OMNIPOTENCE” DOES NOT MEAN:

- A. That God can do anything and everything!

Can God Sin? No!

Can God Lie? No!

Can God become non-God? No!

Can God make a rock so big He cannot move it? No!

The key to remember is that God cannot do or be anything which contradicts His Divine Nature: see: II Tim. 2:13; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18

- B. That God is now doing all He can or could do.

II. WHAT “OMNIPOTENCE” MEANS:

- A. God’s Power is:

Infinite

Eternal

- Self-Existent
- Inexhaustible
- B. God's Power is exercised only in conformity to:
 - His Immutable Nature
 - His Sovereign Will
- C. Nothing and no one can hinder God in the execution of His will, i.e., nothing outside of God can frustrate Him.

III. BIBLICAL BASIS

- A. Gen. 18:14
- B. Job 42:2
- C. Psa. 115:3
- D. Jer. 32:17,27
- E. Dan. 4:35
- F. Zech. 8:6
- G. Matt. 19:26
- H. Lk. 1:37

Application

God's Omnipotence Means That:

Our salvation is eternally secure ([Heb. 9:12](#)) and The Judgment of the wicked is inescapable ([Acts 17:31](#))

Attribute #9—The Sovereignty of God

INTRODUCTION

When we apply God's infinitude to His control of the universe He has made, it means that God's control is infinite, i.e., nothing and no one can limit God's control.

God's Omnipotence = Infinite Potential Power

God's Sovereignty = Infinite Actual Control

God's omnipotence supplies the will of God with all the power it needs to control all that exists so that everything in Heaven and earth will bring glory to God.

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

A. It is not just an attribute but the chief attribute of God. A. W. Pink, following the Puritans, called God's sovereignty "The Godhood of God" because it is God's sovereignty that makes all the attributes of God work together to accomplish God's will.

B. This means that we cannot strip God of His sovereignty without destroying His deity.

C. God's sovereignty amplifies and magnifies all the other attributes of God.

ex. God's love becomes God's sovereign love. ([Jer. 31:3 K.J.V.](#))

God's grace becomes God's sovereign grace. (Eph. 2:8–9)

Note: What hope of salvation would we have if God were not sovereign?

Note: What assurance would we have that the good will ultimately triumph over the evil? that history is His-story? that it will reach its climax as predicted in Scripture? if God be not sovereign?

II. THE BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

A. Biblical Basis

1. General Statements of Scripture

O.T.

N.T.

a. Gen. 1:1

f. Rom. 8:28

b. Job 42:2

g. Rom. 11:33–36

c. Psa. 103:19

h. Eph. 1:11

d. Psa. 115:2–8

i. Acts 17:24–28

e. Dan. 4:34–35

j. Rev. 4:11

2. Specific Scriptures

a. I Chron. 29:10–13

b. I Sam. 1:6, 10; 2:1–10

c. Pro. 16:33

d. Col. 1:16, 17

e. James 4:13–15

3. The Names of God reveal that He is sovereign:

Lord (Adonai): Sovereign Upholder of the universe

Most High: Ruler over all things

Ruler Over All: Blessed Controller

King of Kings: Nations in His control

Lord of Lords: Rulers in His control

B. Historical Basis

The sovereignty of God is what the Christian faith has believed for nearly 2,000 years. Modern denials of God's sovereignty reduce God to a finite god who sits with man in the back seat of a driverless car rushing to possible oblivion in a chance-based universe where nothing is secure! And they expect us to worship such a divine wimp? No way!

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Biblical Illustrations

1. Animals:

birds: I Kings 17:2–4

cattle I Sam. 6:7–12

colt: Mk. 11:1–10

fish: Matt. 17:24–27

2. Man:

Joseph: Gen. 27:17–31; 39:6–20; 45:4–9; 50:19–20

Christ: Rev. 13:8; Lk. 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:24–30

Conclusion

No discussion of the attributes of God can be complete without reference to the “Godhood of God” which is His divine sovereignty over all things. It is only by His sovereignty over all things that we know that our God is GOD!

This then is the God we love and serve. He is a mighty GOD! A God who is worthy of our worship. A God before whom we should bow in wonder, awe and praise. To Him belongs all the glory both in this world and in the next. Amen!

The Believer’s Security

by Dan Corner

Reviewed by Dr. Robert A. Morey

Whenever I read a religious book, I have several standard questions about the book. I will apply these questions to Corner’s book.

1. What doctrine is Corner advancing? On p. 5, we read that he is going to argue for “*the view that a Christian can...end up in Hell.*” This view is what has historically been called the Roman Catholic or Arminian view.
2. Does the author define or state his doctrine precisely in the book? No, he does not do so.
3. Does he define his terms clearly? While he does not generally define his terms, on p. 8, he states that when he says “Christians can go to hell” he does not merely mean *professing* Christians can go to hell but “*real* Christians” or “*a true* Christian” (p. 21).

This is of course the fatal flaw that renders his arguments invalid. He assumes that the New Testament was written only to “real” Christians, (i.e. those truly born again), and not just to the *professing* visible Church composed of any and all who *claim* to be born again. For example, he states that Paul wrote Galatians “*to real Christians*” and not just to professing Christians. (p. 8)

3. Are the arguments he advances in his book:
 - a. Hermeneutically sound? Corner’s interpretation of Scripture is hermeneutically flawed on many occasions. For example, Corner uses the parable of the Prodigal Son as his main proof text (see pgs. 10, 18, 30–32, 65, 68–69, 77–78, etc.). Yet, his interpretation of this parable and other parables reveals that he does not know how to interpret parables.

- b. Exegetically correct? Since he does not understand hermeneutics, Corner consistently misinterprets the Bible. As a matter of fact, he is so mistaken on so many passages that we must

conclude that he started with Arminianism as his beginning assumption and then ran through the Bible trying to find “proof texts”—most of which he took out of context.

c. Logically valid? His logical errors are many and render most of his arguments irrational. For example, he uses the “straw man” argument against Calvinism.

4. Does he deal with other views in a fair and scholarly manner? No. He often presents an extreme view of other positions. The Calvinistic view is a mere caricature.

5. Does he refute other views by clear and precise arguments? No, he uses emotive arguments and inflammatory language that produced more heat than light.

6. What is his main proof text? The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15) is the backbone of his book. His understanding of this parable is extremely flawed.

a. Hermeneutically, parables should not be used for doctrine because they are only given as illustrations of truth and not as the basis of truth. A story cannot logically or hermeneutically be used to prove any doctrine.

b. In parables, there is only one main idea that is being illustrated in the story. The details of the story do not have any special meaning but are there as literary “filler.” Thus it is erroneous to give special meanings to the details.

c. In Luke 15:2, the Pharisees complained, “this Man (i.e. Jesus) receiveth sinners.” Jesus then illustrated this glorious truth by giving three rabbinic stories (parables). In the context, each parable illustrates the *conversion* of lost sinners. Indeed, in 5:10 we are told that heaven rejoices when a lost sinner repents and turns to Jesus for salvation.

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep (vs. 4–7), Jesus is the shepherd and the lost sheep is the sinner who is saved. In the Parable of the Lost Coin (vs. 8–10), Jesus is the woman and the lost coin is the sinner who is saved. In the Parable of the Lost Son (vs. 11–32), Jesus is the father and the lost son is the sinner who is saved.

Corner misinterprets the Parable of the Lost Son as if:

(1.)The father is God the Father;

(2.)The lost son is a Christian who backslides and then repents;

(3.)The son was thus a real Christian who lost his salvation, “died” spiritually and got saved all over again.

This is his main argument throughout the book.

Corner’s understanding of the parable is erroneous from beginning to end. There is nothing in the three parables that refers to *Christians* returning to Christ after backsliding. All three parables illustrate the truth that Jesus receives lost sinners. It should be noted that the “sinners” in the immediate context are whores and thieves who would hardly qualify as Christians.

7. An even greater problem besets Corner. He claims that real born again Christians can be unborn again if they sin. But what sin is he talking about? Any and all sins? Then no one including Corner is now saved. We are all “constantly falling short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). In many things we all offend (James 3:2). He who says he is without sin is a liar (I John 1:8–10).

He attempts to escape this problem by making the same basic distinctions between sins that Catholics do. While “big” sins will damn you (mortal sins), “little” sins (venial sins) will not damn you.

He only looks at the external acts of sin and not the inner lust and evil thoughts. The attempt to say that adultery will damn you but adulterous thoughts will not damn you is to follow the Pharisees in their interpretation of the Law. Jesus refuted that nonsense in Matt. 5.

8. The most damaging problem is that Corner falls into a works salvation motif on pg. 97. He emphasizes that the only ones who will be saved are those who are “worthy.” He hopes that when he faces Jesus one day, he will be “worthy” of salvation by virtue of all his good works and his avoidance of “big” sins.

I do not feel “worthy” of salvation. My only “worthiness” is the inputted righteousness of Christ in justification (I Cor. 1:30). I am only a sinner saved by grace. As Walter Martin put it, we receive “*eternal life*” when we believe in Jesus. If we lost that life after two days or two years, it would only be two days or two years of life-which hardly qualifies as “*eternal life*.”

Conclusion

The “Tim & Al Show” (KJSLAM St. Louis) asked Corner and me to debate on their program. At the last moment, Corner backed out of the debate when I refused to comply with his demand that I would refrain from pointing out all the exegetical and logical fallacies found in his book. He later told people that I was the one who backed out of the debate! Tim and Al had to set the record straight that Corner was the one who ran away.

Why do I bring this up? Well, someone recently approached me that Corner wanted to debate. I responded, “Since Corner claims that a Christian loses his salvation when he sins, then Corner is no longer a Christian because he lied. Until he repents of his lie and asks my forgiveness for that lie, he is not “worthy” of debate!”

Now, I am sure that he thinks that he is still saved and that his lies are only “little” sins. Can hypocrisy be plainer?

Trinity and Process (Peter Lang, N.Y., 1992)

by Dr. Gregory Boyd

Reviewed by Dr. Robert A. Morey

Introduction

In 1992, a friend of mine handed me a copy of Boyd’s doctoral thesis from Princeton and asked me to read it. I had never heard of him and thus had no preconceived prejudices against him whatsoever. As I read his thesis, it was clear that he had bought into most of Process Theology, a revival of Platonic religion popularized by the infamous Alfred North Whitehead, who claimed that Jesus was not intelligent and that the biblical God was his notion of the devil.

Boyd’s personal mentor was an antichrist by the name of Charles Hartshorne, whose works I had studied when writing *Battle of the Gods*. Hartshorne is a well-known enemy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The following review first appeared in 1992. I sent Boyd a preview copy in the hope of converting him to Christ, but to no avail. He threatened to sue me if I printed it! (Letter on file.) I would have enjoyed going to trial, as it would make public what Boyd taught in secret. But his threats were as empty as his arguments.

Since that time, John Piper and many others have taken a refutation of Boyd’s heresies. Even his own denomination has finally condemned his theology. We were the first to sound the

warning about Boyd and we are glad that so many people now see how dangerous his doctrines are.

Our Foundational Principles

We have been writing book reviews for Christian magazines and theological journals for many years. Our reviews are based upon the following principles:

1. God has revealed in Scripture propositional truths concerning His nature and attributes.
2. Our views of God and Christ must arise from a careful exegesis of Scripture and not from a *priori* philosophic speculations.
3. Historical, classical, traditional, confessional, orthodox theology as expressed in the great creeds of the Church for nearly two thousand years is the Biblical position set forth in confessional form.
4. Any theology that denies the historical, classical, traditional, confessional, orthodox understanding of the nature and attributes of God and the two natures of Christ is heretical.
5. We are not deceived by heretics when they use orthodox terms such as God, omniscience, Trinity, etc., but give them an unorthodox meaning. For example, the Socinians pretended that they believed in the “omniscience” of God while denying that God knew the future!

The liberal theology created by Karl Barth is called “neo-orthodoxy” even though it is *not* orthodox Christianity. Just because someone uses the same religious terms we use does not mean that he is orthodox in his definition of those terms.

As Francis Schaeffer pointed out, our beliefs about God and the world must conform to the “orthodoxy of history” as well as to the “orthodoxy of Scripture.” The moment someone denies the historical, classical, traditional, confessional, orthodox definition of God and Christ, they have opened the door to the relativism of modern liberal theology and the cults.

This is what cultists such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have always done as well as Liberal theologians. They all dismiss historical, classical, traditional, confessional, orthodox theology as being Platonic, or Aristotelian, etc. In its place, they substitute their own views of God as being more “biblical” than the orthodox creeds!

This book review focuses on Boyd’s books *Trinity And Process* and its implications for orthodox Christian doctrine. The first rough draft was sent to Dr. Boyd for his comments in the hopes that he would clarify some of his remarks. Since he has not seen fit to send us a detailed response to the doctrinal issues we raised, we are forced to proceed without his input.

At the time the book was published, Boyd was a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He later taught theology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Campbellite movement of the 19th Century spawned many cults such as the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. That Boyd was a product of one of these cultic offsprings of Campbell is no surprise.

In order to avoid the charge that we have taken Boyd “out of context” and thus “misrepresented” his position, we reproduced the entire page from which the citations are taken and sent them to such well-known scholars as Gleason Archer and Ronald Nash. Thus each statement was read in its full context. At the end of this review, we reproduce one of many positive letters we received from those who checked the review for accuracy.

Boyd's Goal

It is clear from his book that Dr. Boyd attempted to construct a concept of a "three-fold" deity that process thinkers such as Hartshorne might accept. But this attempt ended in abject failure, as Hartshorne did not accept Boyd's views.

Why He Failed

Boyd's attempt was doomed from the beginning for a very good reason. He started out by announcing that he accepted the fundamental principles of Hartshorne's process philosophy as correct!

It is our conviction that the fundamental vision of the process worldview, especially as espoused by Charles Hartshorne, is correct.

(Preface, i)

And even when he disagreed with Hartshorne, he praised Hartshorne as his greatest mentor.

My warmest appreciation must also be expressed to Charles Hartshorne. Though I disagree with him on a great many points, he has influenced my own thinking more than any other single philosopher, living and dead.

(Preface, ii)

Since Boyd states that although he disagreed with some of his teachings, the "fundamental vision of the process worldview, as espoused by Charles Hartshorne is correct," and that Hartshorne influenced his thinking "more than any other philosopher, living or dead." On this basis, we can describe Boyd's theology as "neo-Hartshornian" Process thought.

Once Boyd admits that Hartshorne's process worldview is fundamentally correct, why should Hartshorne change any of it? No wonder Boyd's attempt failed.

The Implications

Boyd points out that Hartshorne's process philosophy has great implications for Christian theology. First, he states,

The paradigmatic shift taking place in our contemporary culture, the "death of substantialist philosophy," requires contemporary theology to rethink its classical dogmatic structure. (p.7)

Now, this does not just mean that Christians should try to be "relevant." Boyd states that "the classical structure of our confessions must be reworked" (p.7). Evidently Boyd believes that The Apostle's Creed, The Nicene Creed and indeed all the great creeds "must be reworked" to conform to Hartshorne's process thought! But Boyd is not yet finished.

There is another reason why Hartshorne's thought is centrally significant to Christian theology. Norris Clark has argued, quite rightly, that Process thought is not only one of the most compelling contemporary metaphysical systems of our time, it also represents one of the "principal challenges to traditional theism" at the present time. In the course of arriving at a view of God and the world which is consistent with the modern proclivity to

think in dynamic and relational categories, Process philosophy and theology has sacrificed a great deal of what has traditionally been thought to be central to the Christian proclamation. Much of this, we shall argue, is actually advantageous to the Christian Church, for a good deal of its traditional view of God, being significantly influenced in an adverse way by Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, has little resemblance to the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. It needed to be attacked and rejected. In my estimation, therefore, Process thought has done the Church a great service. (pgs. 9–10)

Boyd states that the “traditional view of God” found in the confessions of the Church “needed to be attacked and rejected.” Do you understand what he is saying? The Church’s traditional view of the nature and attributes of God as found in the creeds needs to be “attacked and rejected,” according to Boyd, because the Christian Church has been wrong all these years. Thus the historic orthodox view of God is actually pagan in origin and came from Plato and Aristotle!

Can you imagine that! All the creeds, all the Fathers and all the hymns were really pagan in their view of God! For two thousand years the Church has been worshiping a pagan god!

The traditional view of an “Almighty God” is reduced to a “god” that must die to set men free. Notice that Boyd not only quotes with approval Migliori who spoke of the “omnipotent god” but he himself uses the small “g” for the God of the creeds in the following two passages.

As a number of recent theologians have argued that the classical ideal of God’s power, imported into the Church from extra-biblical sources, has had significant personal and political repercussions. This too constitutes part of the difficulty of the classical view of omnipotence we are presently concerned with. Migliori, for example, speaks of the repercussion of the view of God as “sheer almightiness” when he writes,

The image of the domineering God breeds fear, resentment, and rebellion. If God’s rule over us takes the form of unlimited control over impotent subjects, then the master-slave relationship in human society finds justification in religious belief. The only way to be free from coercive power exercised by the omnipotent god and earthly tyrants is to repudiate their authority and actually or symbolically to destroy them.

The only possible response to such despotic authority is revolt- against the “earthly tyrants,” and then against the “omnipotent god” which grounds such views. Revolting atheism, in other words, is the inevitable response, and indeed, to the extent that atheism has declared this god of “sheer almightiness” dead, it has done Christian theology a great service.

(p. 264–265)

Boyd is not finished yet. At the bottom of the page he gives us the following footnote. Note that these words are Boyd’s words.

This is what has been called “the truth of atheism.” The god which made human life unlivable must be proclaimed dead that free humanity may live.

Boyd states that not only have the atheists done the Church a “great service” by declaring that “Almighty God” is “dead” but the radical feminists have also helped the Church by attacking and rejecting God as “the Father.” (n. 76, p.265)

How to Rework the Creeds

Now we see how the creeds can be “reworked.” Instead of saying,
I believe in God the Father Almighty.
we should say,
I believe in God the Parent who is not almighty.

The Traditional God

Boyd gives a definition of the “traditional” or “classic” view of God which needed to be “attacked and rejected.”

The dominant motif of this classical tradition, as we are here defining it, is that God is conceived of as an *actus purus*, as embodying no potentiality for change. Hence, to state the matter most generally, God is here conceived of to be nontemporal, immutable, impassible, simple, all-knowing (even of future events, and all determinative. (p.179, n.3)

Boyd singles out Church Fathers such as Augustine, medieval theologians such as Aquinas and modern theologians such as Gruenler, Craig, and Geisler as representing the view of God that he must “attack and reject.”

Boyd must have had a special dislike of Dr. Norman Geisler because he singled him out for attack on pages 197, 254, 314, 328, and 360.

The Christian God

We define the historic orthodox view of the nature and attributes of God as found in the creeds of the Christian Church is as follows:

There exists only one triune Being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who by permanent nature is an eternal, timeless, immutable, perfect Spirit who is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient of all things including the future, all wise, all good, all holy, righteous, true and sovereign.

The bulk of Boyd’s book is an attack and a rejection of the traditional view of God given above. The game plan of his book is quite simple. Boyd first sets forth Hartshorne’s arguments against the historic Christian view of God and then agrees with him that the Church has been wrong all these years.

Boyd’s “God”

What kind of god does Boyd want us to adopt after he has successfully “attacked and rejected” the God of Christian orthodoxy? I can only guess that Boyd’s creed might be as follows:

There exists in a non-substantialist sense a contingent event who not having any fixed or permanent nature is eternal along with Time (with God being eternally in” Time and not Time “in” God). This contingent event is temporal, mutable, imperfect, limited in power and limited in knowledge, because it is incapable of knowing the future. It is neither good or sovereign in the traditional sense. This contingent event is eternally triune in a social

or relational sense. But we should not use such terms as “persons,” “Father,” or “Son” lest the gays and the feminists get upset.

Now, while I was obviously poking fun at Boyd’s pathetic deity, I believe it does substantially reflect what he said in his book.

What of Christ?

Does Boyd support the orthodox view of Christ as having two natures in one person? No. Boyd rejects the “one person - two natures” doctrine.

As has been frequently pointed out in recent times, the most fundamental difficulty which the traditional understanding of Christ poses for the modern mind concerns its substantialist categories: Christ is said to be “two natures” in “one person.”

If the concept of an “enduring substance” as the ground of an entity’s actual attributes has become problematic to the categories of modernity, how much more problematic is the concept of two such realities crammed” into one person... “without division,” and “without confusion?” (pgs. 399400)

Instead of Christ having two natures, Boyd believes that,

Christ may be said to be distinct from all other humans in that in this one person the disposition which defines God as God, and the disposition which defines humanity as human, converged. Thus, we might say that the dynamic essence of Jesus was wholly taken up into the dynamic essence of God so that God now “aims” at Godself—as God eternally does—but now God does so through this one man. In this one man, God achieves Godself anew. (p.400)

It is crystal clear that Boyd is as heretical in his views of Christ as he is of the nature and attributes of God. The man Jesus was not “taken up” into God. Christ had a divine nature and a human nature without division or confusion as the orthodox creeds state.

Conclusion

Boyd’s attempt to “attack and reject” the orthodox view of the nature and attributes of God, the Trinity and the two natures of Christ failed to convince us. His views are offensive as well as heretical. He has been weighed and found wanting.

We agree with Carl F. Henry, Francis Schaeffer, Walter Martin, Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, D. James Kennedy, John Ankerberg, Norman Geisler, Ronald Nash, R. C. Sproul, J. I. Packer, Gleason Archer, and many other orthodox apologists, that this one true God who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture has repeatedly warned us that He is a jealous God who will not stand for idolatry.

To believe in and worship any other God than the One revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture is idolatry. This means that the “event-god” of Process Theology is idolatry!

Post Script

Prof. Ehrenstein worked under Donald Gray Barnhouse, along side of Walter R. Martin. After Barnhouse died, he joined forces with Walter Martin when CRI was in New Jersey. He is best known for being the editor of Eternity magazine and handling Dr. James Boice's correspondence. His theological knowledge of such things as Process theology is profound and his support for the review above was received with honor.

SOME THOUGHTS ON DR. ROBERT MOREY'S ANALYSIS OF DR. GREGORY BOYD'S BOOK *TRINITY AND PROCESS*

With his usual delightful biting humor, Dr. Robert Morey has sharply focused on the "far-out-ness" of Dr. Gregory Boyd's sad ideas of the God we Evangelicals love and worship, and has showed Boyd's views for what they so clearly are - rank unbelief.

It never ceases to amaze me how a faculty member of a "Christian" educational institution can profess Christianity and yet heartily approve of the heretical ideas that are tossed about in theologically liberal circles.

Dr. Boyd teaches at Bethel College in Minnesota and yet in his book that evaluates the modern day popular Process Theology, he appears to sell out the Christian faith by insisting that we revise and rewrite the great creeds of the Church.

I personally find it extremely difficult to understand why so many so-called Christian doctrines that unbelievers or leaders bend over backward to alter, avoid or evade Biblical liberals, can accept them without embarrassment.

Dr. Morey, in his review of Dr. Boyd's book on Process Theology cites passage after passage taken directly from Boyd's book, in which the author robs God of virtually all that makes Him God. In fact, when Morey gets through with his review of Dr. Boyd's book, one can only wonder how a confessing Christian could possibly look at Process Theology and approve of it.

Morey has a way of going for the "jugular"—that is, zeroing in on those areas where an author misses the mark of Biblical Christianity. Being ruthless may not seem to be a Christian virtue but when seeking to expose theological error, Robert Morey cuts and cuts deeply—yet always fairly and with adequate evidence taken from the thinking and writing of the author he is exposing.

I have personally read the quotes Bob Morey takes from Boyd's book and there is no taking out of context. He tells it like it is in Boyd's own words, in which Boyd shows his strong leanings in a less than Biblical manner. I heartily concur with the criticisms Robert Morey levels at Gregory Boyd and his book in this review.

Dr. Herbert Henry Ebreinstein

Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality

By Phillip G. Davis

Reviewed by Debra Sperry

Like oil is to a smoothly run machine, so is the new Goddess religion to gender feminist politics. A credible conclusion demonstrated by the meticulous research into the roots and rise

of the modern-day Goddess religion by Dr. Phillip Davis, professor of religious studies at the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada. As an ambitious undertaking, Davis brilliantly exposes the true goals of gender politics as a dangerous and deceptive trend that affects our everyday lives and shapes our political futures.

Using their own writings, Professor Davis deftly points to the major flaws in gender feminist academic methods as ample enough reason to reject their claims of being able to remake human life with Goddess worship. Carefully tracing the purported roots of the Goddess, Davis takes the reader back in time to the true findings of archeology and through a survey of religious history. Sifting the sands of time, he also finds the modern roots of Wicca stemming from the various male esoteric traditions that gained influence in reaction to the Enlightenment, the Romanticist's idealization of women and the legacy of Theosophy.

But even beyond the sloppy research of gender feminists, Davis urges us to observe the motivation behind the formulation of a Goddess religion as the basis for a separate truth for women. Quoting their own material, he shows us that they freely and purposely use their imaginations as the foundation for reality—a “whatever works” mentality promoting Self as the center of the universe. For our understanding, Goddess Thealogy represents the imminent New Age when Goddess civilization will be re-asserted, saving us from violence and ecological disaster.

We learn, that by claiming a natural moral superiority in women, a nurturing, life-giving, loving attitude, gender feminists hark to the primordial past as an example and impetus for urging civilization to recognize the collision course its on. Their solution being to right ourselves once again by putting women at the helm, with the voluntary and adoring consensus of men repentant of their hateful and violent ways. But their method for accomplishing this objective is purposely set in contrast to the open methods of Christianity.

The most appealing element of this religion is the hidden pursuit of magical powers—an ability to manipulate reality—seeking to match and even become God and thus emasculate and dethrone Him, reversing the curse. “They see their task as the expression of a profound and coherent understanding of the nature of reality.” (Davis)

Philosophically, the Goddess movement is based in Neoplatonism, which emphasizes the contrast between the temporary (in appearance only), changeable world which we perceive with our senses and the ideal, eternal realm of changeless ideas and forms which can only be known through the educated and disciplined efforts of the mind and spirit.

Davis links the emergence of the occult ideas of ancient Egypt and Sumer with the rediscovery of Hermeticism and Gnosticism by Western Scholars in the late 1400's. These mystical traditions, along with Kabbalism and alchemy helped to shape the Renaissance rebirth of humanism through the revival of classical arts. The Renaissance represented the supreme confidence in the ability of human beings to penetrate and master the mysteries of the universe. Coupled with this re-assertion of the human over the Divine was the rising idea that divinity was inherent in humans. The Goddess spirituality takes this a step further and insists that the divine is exclusively feminine.

Among the many threads of history that scholars may follow, Davis takes us on a tour of the sites to point out the coherence of relationships that Goddess spirituality claims kinship with: the wandering philosophers of the middle-ages hawking their wares of life-giving elixirs, Catholic and Protestant witch hunts, the pantheism of Bruno, the astrology of Dee, the magical orders of the Rose-crucians, Freemasonry, Knights Templar, the utopian philosophers St.-Simon, and

Comte, the science of Swedenborg and Mesmer, and the Romantic authors, Goethe, Fourier, Constant and Michelet.

These provide the background for the eventual emergence of Romantic Neopaganism, a kickback theory of mind set against the Enlightenment and the real seedbed for female messianism. Davis provides a tremendous amount of detail here connecting us to the final shaping and refinement of the Goddess movement.

Davis pinpoints the Romantic Movement's philosophical basis as the ability of human perception to shape reality. This includes the notion that human thought can be a law unto itself, that observation and rational theory were incapable of uncovering the metaphysical order of reality and that we can't possess the absolute knowledge of morality, applying morality to the realm of feeling, intuition and imagination. The Romantics were certain that meaning and ethical direction lay in the subjective realm of the emotions.

The Romantics saw women as "the ultimate exponents of love and that only their full liberation would complete the triumph of love in the world at large," and that women are the "incarnation of love and feeling and man is ennobled and purified for worshipping such a being." Mixed in with all the sentimental rhetoric of these men was an underlying revolutionary nationalism meant to return nations back to their pre-Christian pagan traditions when they thought women exerted a more central, organic and loving influence. This worldview allowed them to take a more libertine attitude toward sexual mores laying the groundwork for the Theosophy.

Davis clues us in on the history of Theosophy from its inception in the 19th century all the way through to the modern manifestation in Wicca. Tracing the history of its founder and offshoots, he demonstrates the syncretic nature of its foundations as a composite of Eastern mysticism and Western esoteric tradition as it bounced back and forth between Europe and America. Even though women were involved, men maintained leadership as the major proponents seeking to recruit female members to join them in their endeavors. Davis proves by his study that "all the feminine phantoms had their origins in the minds and imaginations of men."

Combined with the social trend of women exerting more influence through the voting box and the pursuit of careers outside the home, Davis asserts that the "occult orders offered women paths to spiritual progress and leadership" in which so few avenues were available to them at that time.

One scholar that was caught between Romantic scholarship and scientific archeology in the search for truth was J.J. Bachofen, who concluded after studying the antiquities that civilizations were driven mostly by the influence of matriarchy and female love. In spite of incredible poetic license, his ideas became accepted by the circle of creative artists, psychologists and literary men, though soundly rejected by academics. Bachofen formed the basis of much of today's version of Goddess Thealogy.

From Bachofen's ideas, Davis delineates the various branches of the occult revival and its evolution into the modern day Wiccan Movement. He notes such contributors as Aleister Crowley, Carl Jung and finally Gerald Gardner who was the first to publicly profess witchcraft after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act of 1736 in June, 1951, in England. Many other authors are cited as well for their contributions to the general compilation of spurious historical, philosophical and psychological fuel that continues to eloquently feed the Goddess mythology.

In spite of their claims, Davis notes that “modern witchcraft is an elite expression and not the grassroots, mother-to-daughter tradition of peasant folklore said to typify the beginnings of Wicca.”

Concluding his research, Davis warns his readers that the repercussions of the Goddess religion is not in a corner, out of touch with the general movements of culture. But rather he shows us that they are seriously trying to effect societal change to their way of thinking and succeeding in every area where women may be found. Their main platform occurs in the sphere of higher education where they exert their influence in the name of compassionate equality for all, especially for the handicapped, racial minorities or females. Goddess literature is not written to satisfy the curious but “to recruit and encourage gender feminism.”

The content of their gender-based outrage is the Western intellectual heritage, which is dismissed as the “hegemony of dead white males,” in particular, “framed by a patriarchal power structure that is also white, able-bodied, heterosexual and middle-class.” Their goal is to compel ALL students to take at least one course in Women’s Studies. Though they believe that all instruction is indoctrination, they see no hypocrisy in their own agenda.

Davis points out the most dramatic effects of biological distinctions and the idealization of women is the impact on dysfunctional households and broken homes through women’s shelters. The data produced from these shelters are used to assert that biological females are innocent victims and are intrinsically good. Much is done to sidestep the evidence that women are as capable as men to employ violence, serving to manipulate public debate and policy.

Though Davis inserts here and there the contrast with the truth of the Bible, the reader can easily conclude with him that the “Goddess is the deification of a lie: the Romantic, neo-pagan idealization of the female over against the male. Her rise to prominence and significant influence in contemporary society serves as a prime example of how seductive and potent such falsehoods can be.”

Goddess Unmasked proves essential reading for anyone wanting to reach today’s woman for Christ and understand the social forces that influence and shape her.

The Sovereignty of God and Prayer

by Dr. Robert A. Morey

One of the most difficult Biblical topics that I have ever wrestled with is the subject of prayer. Why? Prayer is so difficult to deal with because, in the final analysis, only the Holy Spirit Himself can teach us what it is really to pray. We may read all the books written on prayer and hear great sermons on prayer and yet these things will never teach any believer the secrets of true prevailing prayer. The Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit alone can teach us what it is to pray truly.

Men of prayer in ages past all point to the absolute necessity of the Spirit’s assistance and guidance in prayer. Listen to some of their testimonies:

C.H. Spurgeon

“Prayer is an art that only the Holy Spirit can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer.”

John Bunyan

“There is no man, nor church in the world, that can come to God in prayer but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit.”

Octavius Winslow

“It must be acknowledged by the spiritual mind that all true prayer is of the leading of the Spirit; that He is the author of all real approach of the soul to God. The Spirit puts all true prayer into words. He is the Author of prayer in the soul.”

Edwin Palmer

“Without the Spirit, prayer is impossible. To pray acceptably to God, to pray with power, one must pray in the Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, there can be no true prayer.”

John Calvin

“God gives us the Spirit as our teacher in prayer, to tell us what is right and to temper our emotions. We should seek such aid of the Spirit.”

C.H. Spurgeon

“Pray for prayer- pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray and give not up praying because you cannot pray, for it is when you think you cannot pray that you are most praying.”

When we study the person and work of the Sovereign Spirit of God, we soon discover that He is called “the Spirit of grace and supplication” (Zech. 12:10). The apostle Paul tells us in [Eph. 2:18](#) that it is only by the Spirit’s assistance that we can have access through Christ to the Father. And again, in [Eph. 6:18](#), he commands us to be continually “Praying in the Spirit” as part of the armor of God which protects us from the schemes of the Devil. Jude also tells us in his little Epistle that one of the keys to keeping ourselves in a living awareness of God’s love is to pray “in the Spirit” (v. 20). Thus, in [Rom. 8:26–27](#), we are told that it is the distinct ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us overcome our infirmities in our prayer life. It is His ministry to teach us what to pray for and to stir us up to groan our infirmities to God.

The Several Aspects of Prayer to Be Considered

Now the subject of prayer involves many different things and, therefore, we cannot hope to plumb the depths or scale the heights of this aspect of the unsearchable knowledge and wisdom of God. But I do wish to emphasize those aspects of Biblical praying which should be most searching to our consciences and most helpful in our daily lives.

I. The First Question We Need to Answer is: “What is Prayer?”

Prayer is the soul’s automatic response to the Spirit’s work of regeneration; or to put it in other words, all true Christians are characterized by a life of prayer.

According to the Word of God in [Gal. 4:6](#), once a man, woman or child has been born again, regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, they become children of God. The Spirit then functions as the Spirit of adoption and causes the believer to cry “Abba, Father” from the very depths of his heart. As the indwelling Spirit of adoption, He bears witness to our spirit that we are the children of God and leads us to seek the things of the Spirit ([Rom. 8:5, 13–16](#)). Thus John Bunyan comments:

“If the grace of God were in him, it will be as natural for him to groan out his condition as it is for a sucking child to cry for the breast. Prayer is one of the first things that discovers a man to be a Christian.”

And, along this same line, Richard Hooker adds:

“Prayer is the first thing wherewith a righteous life begins and the last wherewith it ends.”

This leads us to several questions. Are you living a life of prayer? Do you find yourself constantly at prayer throughout the day? Is prayer something natural for you or is it something forced? Let no one fool himself, even if you have all the theological knowledge in the world, if you are a prayer-less man, woman or child, you are not a Christian. I did not ask you if you were a church-going person. I asked, “Are you a praying man?” How did Ananias know that the violent persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, had now become a Christian? “Behold, he prays” ([Acts 9:11](#)). Listen to some men of old on this important point:

Timothy Dwight

“He who does not habitually pray to God, cannot be a Christian.”

Charles Hodge

“A prayerless man is, of necessity and thoroughly, irreligious. There can be no life without activity. As the body is dead when it ceases to act, so the soul that goes not forth in its actions towards God, that lives as though there were no God, is spiritually dead.”

John Bunyan

“You then are not a Christian if you are not a praying person. The promise is “that everyone that is righteous will pray.” You then are a wicked wretch if you do not pray.”

In the light of these things we would be fools to assume that prayerless people have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. If the subject of prayer is of little interest to you and your mind would rather dwell on the attempts to cut the Gordian knots of the Calvinist-Arminian debate, then you have grounds to question your salvation. The true Christian is vitally interested in prayer. Is your life characterized by prayer?

II. Evangelical and Experiential Motives Comprise the Only Proper Basis for Prayer.

Having established that all true Christians pray by virtue of the indwelling of the Spirit of supplication, we need to examine the inner motives which prompt us to pray. What are these evangelical motives?

First of all, there must be an awareness of our absolute dependence upon the grace and mercy of God as given to us through the redemptive work of Christ. We must pray as those who trust in Christ’s righteousness alone. This is the essence of what it means to pray “in the name of Christ.”

Secondly, we should pray because we want to, because we love to and because it is as natural as our breathing. Our love to God, Christ and neighbor, which arises from our hearts in response to God’s prior love to us ([I John 4:10](#)), should constrain us to prayer.

Therefore, we must beware of legal motives for prayer because they indicate an unregenerate heart. The children of God cry “Abba, Father” through freedom in Christ, not as those in bondage to the elements of the world ([Rom. 8:14–16](#)).

Questions for your conscience: Why do you pray? Do you pray because you are supposed to? Is it merely a habit with you? Do you pray because you cannot do otherwise? Do you love to pray? Does the love of Christ constrain you to pray?

III. We Should Conform and Construct Our Prayers According to God's Revealed Will in Holy Scripture.

We should never attempt to conform our prayers to the ultimate purposes of God, which are unknown to us (*Deut. 29:29*).

John Bunyan and John Cotton commented on this point as follows:

John Bunyan

“Prayer is a pouring out of the heart to God, through Christ, in the strength of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised. Prayer must be within the compass of God's Word; it is blasphemy or at best babbling, when the petition is beside the Book. David therefore in his prayers kept his eye on the Word of God: ‘My soul cleaves to the dust; quicken me according to your Word’; ‘Remember Your Word to Your servant, on which you have caused me to hope’ Indeed the Holy Spirit does not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without, but by, in and through the Word. The Spirit by the Word directs the manner as well as the matter of praying.”

John Cotton

“What is it to pray according to God's will? When we pray for things which are agreeable to God's will, i.e. His revealed will; we should ask for nothing but what He commands us ...for those things we have warrant to pray.”

Realizing that we should have Biblical warrant for our petitions should cause us to be more careful and serious in making our requests to God. It should cause us to prepare for prayer. But, on the other hand, if we foolishly try to conform our prayers according to God's secret will, then we will soon cease to pray for anyone or anything. Thus some have abandoned believing prayer as being unprofitable. They sneer at days of prayer and know little of agonizing in prayer because they think that the doctrine of God's sovereignty is opposed to effectual, believing prayer. In their minds they view prayer as the enemy of divine sovereignty.

Is it any wonder that some people complain that if God is sovereign and if everything is pre-ordained, then prayer is useless at its best and blasphemous at its worst, for if we pray for something which ultimately is not God's decreed will, we appear to be fighting against God. WE seem to be sinning against God by rebelling against His sovereign will.

Timothy Dwight dealt with the exact problem in a sermon on [Job 21:15](#), “What profit should we have if we pray to Him?” In this sermon, he quotes those who hold to the false theory that the doctrines of grace are opposed to believing prayer and then he goes on to tear this theory to pieces. I would like to quote part of a statement in which he quotes the objections raised against prayer.

“Prayer is fruitless or in the language of the text, unprofitable, because all things are determined from everlasting by an immutable God and will, therefore, take place according to His determination. Hence our prayers, making no alteration in anything, must be an idle, perhaps an impious, service; idle, because they can effect nothing; impious, because they are expressions of our desires for blessings, which God has not chosen to give. If God has determined to give us these blessings, we shall receive them without prayer. If He has determined not to give them, we shall not receive them, however fervently we may pray. So far, then, as we pray for things that God has determined to give, our prayers are useless. So far as we pray for those which He has determined not to give, our prayers are directly opposed to His pleasure.”

I think that all of us have either thought of these objections in our minds or have had Arminians hurl them at us as objections against the doctrines of grace. But there are several solid Biblical arguments that refute this position.

1. Since the Christian is to do whatever the Bible commands him, he must pray because he is commanded to pray (I Thess. 5:17). And since God commands us to pray, it is obvious that it is not useless or stupid, but of great profit and efficacious in procuring the blessings of God. For example, God revealed His purpose to send rain, yet Elijah prayed and his prayer stopped and started the rain (I Kings 18:1, 42). Thus, James 5:16 says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Prayer cannot be unprofitable for it avails much.

2. All prayer is to be exercised in an attitude of submissiveness to God, in which you really desire God’s will as to what is best and good: “Your will be done.” (Matt 6:10) Thus, there is no impiety in prayer because we are not demanding that God do what we ask. We want His will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

3. This objection, if true, would apply equally to all activities of life. It would mean not only no more praying but, also, no more preaching, witnessing, working, eating, no more anything. All activity would be paralyzed because all is determined.

4. This objection is based on ignorance of the fact that God ordains the means as well as the end. Prayer plays a part of the outworking of God’s decree. God has decreed that we have not if we ask not. He has predetermined to hear our prayers and answer them. He has decreed that His eternal plan of salvation be worked out through the effectual, fervent prayers of righteous men, women and children.

5. The doctrines of grace should strengthen and provoke believing prayer because they point us to the absolutely sovereign God who can do what we ask. The God addressed in prayer is mighty to save, mighty to deliver and mighty to sanctify. Pray for God to save sinners and to revive saints. On the other hand, it is actually the Arminian who should give up prayer, for his god is too small, too weak and too flabby to answer prayer. If God is not sovereign and man has a “free will” which even God cannot tamper with, why pray (a) for the lost or (b) for protection from enemies, either human or demonic? What comfort can be derived from a Deity who is biting his fingernails over whether or not men will “let” him do something?

6. Historically, the doctrines of grace, rightly understood and applied to the Christian life have always produced men of prayer, as any honest survey of church history would reveal. Most men of prayer in days gone by were thoroughgoing Calvinists.

7. Therefore, if your theology has led you to abandon prayer and to sneer at the concept that prayer is vital and necessary, then your theology is not Biblical.

IV. A close examination of the prayers recorded in Scripture reveals that the saints of old filled their mouths with arguments when presenting their petitions to God.

They buttressed their requests with Biblical arguments. They pleaded with God in terms of His Word, His glorious names, His covenants of promise, and His plan of redemption. In short, they presented their prayer requests like a lawyer who skillfully presents his arguments to judge and jury.

Pleading with God in prayer and presenting reasons to God why He should grant our requests is a lost art today. It was even a lost art in George Mueller’s day, as his biographer points out.

“At this time of need...this man who had determined to risk everything upon God’s word of promise, turned from doubtful devices and questionable methods of relief to pleading with God. And it may be well to mark his manner of pleading. He used argument in prayer and at this time he piles up eleven reasons why God should and would send help...He was one of the elect few to whom it had been given to revive and restore this lost art of pleading with God.”

In his sermon on [Job 23:3–4](#), C.H. Spurgeon commented:

“The ancient saints were given, with Job, to ordering their cause before God. Not filling the mouth with words nor good phrases, not pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments ... When we come to the gate of mercy, forcible arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened ... When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking.”

Now, to be sure, we are not to suppose that the arguments we present in prayer are given to convince or to inform God as to what course He should take in His administration of the universe. Rather, the arguments focus on the strengthening of our faith. Mueller’s biographer goes on to point out:

“Of course God does not need to be convinced; no argument can make any plainer to Him the claims of trusting souls to His intervention, claims based upon His own Word, confirmed by His oath. And yet He will be inquired of and argued with. That is His way of blessing... We are to argue our case with God, not indeed to convince Him, but to convince ourselves.”

To this Ezekiel Hopkins adds:

“Now, although it be true that all the arguments that we can urge and all the reasons we can allege, cannot alter the purposes and determinations of God, as to any event that He has ordained, yet there is this twofold use and necessity of pleading them. First, because by considering the reasons we have to pray for such mercies, our desires will be the more earnest and fervent in the obtaining of them... Secondly, because reasons in prayer do mightily conduce to the strengthening of our faith and give us great encouragement to believe that we shall certainly obtain what we have so much reason to ask...”

Or again, as C.H. Spurgeon put it:

“Why are arguments to be used at all? The reply is, certainly not because God is slow to give, not because we can change the divine purpose, not because God needs to be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves... The arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for His. Our use of arguments teaches us the ground upon which we obtain the blessing... Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency...”

Now, it is important to ask, from what shall we construct our arguments? Where can we find weighty reasons to lay before God? Where can we derive arguments from which we can present weighty reasons along with our petitions?

1. God’s attributes. Spurgeon put it like this:

“You and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the long-suffering, the tenderness of God and we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battery- ram with which we may open the gates of Heaven.”

For example, we can argue from [I John 1:9](#) that God’s faithfulness and justice are grounds for forgiveness (cf [Psa. 51:1–3](#)).

2. The promises of God. Spurgeon observes,

“If you have a divine promise, you need not plead that with an “if” in it; you may plead with a certainty.” (cf I Kings 8:56; I Thess. 5:23–24)”

3. The names of God. When in need of strength, should we not cry out to Elohim, the God of power and strength? When seeking a blessing from the New Covenant, should we not argue from the name Yahweh, which is God’s covenantal name? When appealing to God’s sovereignty, Adonai should be upon our lips. When confronting satanic forces, the Lord of Hosts should be our shield and high tower.

4. The sorrows of God’s people. The present condition of the church is a weighty argument for our need of revival (cf [Psa. 80:4–7](#); [Psa. 12:1](#)). We should also plead our own unworthiness, weakness and poverty of spirit (cf. [Psa. 25:16](#); [Luke 15:18–19](#)).

5. The history of redemption. God’s mighty acts in past history provide a foundation for our trust in God (cf. [Psa. 30:11](#); [143:1–6](#)).

6. The atoning life, death and intercession of Christ. Spurgeon observes:

“When you plead the name of Christ, you plead that which shakes the gates of Hell and which the hosts of Heaven obey and God Himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea. You would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ’s griefs and groans...Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs and cries and groans to plead, you cannot take a denial.

The end result of using argument in prayer shall be a strengthened and energized prayer life. Faith will be emboldened to go to God’s throne and secure the petitions inquired of God. Thus we will rejoice in seeing our prayers avail much.

If the Holy Spirit shall teach us how to order our cause and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that we shall have our mouth filled with praises. The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer.”

At this point we must apply the principle of argumentation in prayer to our own lives. Do we have much of a prayer life? Do we agonize before God, groaning out our requests? Has our understanding of the doctrines of grace revolutionized our prayer life for the better or for the worse?

V. A study of the prayers in the Bible reveals that the saints of old—and even our Master—set apart whole days or nights dedicated to prayer.

When something great was requested from God or whenever the situation was desperate and important decisions were soon to be made, the saints of old would give themselves to fasting and prayer.

When we examine the lives of men of prayer in every generation, we find that they too would set apart whole days for prayer and fasting. Is it any wonder that they often witnessed the power of God in their own day? Is it any surprise that they attained to great measures of holiness in their lives? Perhaps one reason why we are not seeing a mighty revival of the doctrines of grace moving in this country is because we do not desire it enough. We really do not believe that God can do it in our own day. We study much and pray little to our shame and confusion.

As an aid to organizing a day of prayer and fasting, I would like to share the following suggestions (not rules). Of course, I would point out that fasting is not a virtue in and of itself, but it simply means that we engage ourselves in prayer instead of eating and drinking.

1. In setting up a day of prayer, be very selective about whom you ask to join you. An Achan in the midst can destroy the spirit of the day. Choose a few men or women who you know can abandon themselves in true fervent prayer and who are more concerned with God and His glory than with their impression on others.

2. Do not talk about prayer or boast around others that you are having a day of prayer. Be secretive about this as Christ commands in [Matt. 6:5–18](#).

3. When you gather together for a day of prayer, do not waste time talking with one another, for you are there to talk to God. A day of prayer is not a Bible study or testimony meeting. Foolish jesting and too much talk can ruin the day because this grieves the Author of prayer, the Holy Spirit.

4. Structure your day carefully to make sure that you do not wander aimlessly in your prayers or repeat yourself. There are enough issues in life to pray about. I suggest the following divisions, not as the only way or even the best way, to structure a day of prayer. You may arrange your day in any way you please, but it should be orderly. However, the following basic procedure has been a source of great blessing:

1. Invocation - Call upon God to hear you.
2. Confession - Confess your sins to God.
3. Worship - Praise and worship God.
4. Petition for your own needs.
5. Intercession and supplication for others.
6. Thanksgiving.

If you allow thirty minutes for each section, three hours will be required for your day of prayer. But you may spend an hour or more in each section if you are so led. The essential thing is to pray effectual, believing prayer, patterned after the prayers recorded in God's Word.

Conclusion

Obviously, volumes have been written on the subject of prayer. I heartily recommend John Bunyan's book, *Prayer*, as an excellent treatise on this topic. I trust that the aspects covered in this study will stimulate you to "pray without ceasing."