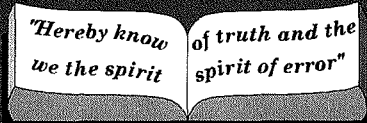


The Discerner



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AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

By William A. BeVier

Our lead article this issue is a continuation of John Hoeldtke's presentation on the Open Theism issue. Originally I thought to present a condensation of his major study, but after more thought, I decided we needed to give the entire article to our readers. I have made only minor editorial changes to make it fit the format for this publication. It is hoped all of you will carefully read his study. In view of the affect this movement is having, you may want to keep this issue for future reference. We need to be able to recognize the concepts of this movement and its fallacies.

Readers of "The Discerner" will recognize the name of David L. Larsen. Since his retirement from Trinity Divinity School Dr. Larsen has continued to write and publish. We are grateful that he continues to provide us with some of the results of his studies. Included in this issue is an update on the cult Swedenborgianism. Small in numbers, but large in impact, and certainly false in its theology.

On February 6th, Steve Lagoon and his wife, Sherry, suffered the loss of their 17-year old son, Kyle, in an automobile accident. Kyle was driving alone when he had a fatal attack due to an asthmatic condition. Steve started as Office Manager of Religion Analysis Service in October. This sudden accident has affected their children as well. Briana, Kellen and Hannah are feeling the loss of their brother, though he was a Christian and they know they will see him again. Briana, age 15, has written a poem as a tribute to her brother which we have printed elsewhere in this issue.

We conclude this issue with reviews of two books that have recently come to our attention.

One other item, please look at your address label or the front cover. If they read XXI-1 or Vol. 21, Nr. 1, your subscription expires with this issue. Remember, it costs only \$4.00 per year in the U.S. to renew. With the increase in postal rates, we anticipate we will soon have to increase our subscription rate. We are grateful to those who renew and at the same time include a gift for the ministry of R.A.S.

CORRECTION

We apologize for the incorrect spellings in John Hoeldtke's article in the last issue of THE DISCERNER.

We do know the difference between Arminius (the man), Arminianism (his theology) and Armenia (the country), Armenian (the ethnic group). Our mistake was a consistent Spelling Check error.

Looking For Truth In The "Open Theism" Controversy

By John Hoeldtke
President, Flame Ministries

PART II

WRONGLY BLAMING THE GREEKS

The response by open theists to the idea of God's transcendence over time is that it is based not on the Bible but on Greek thought, especially that of Plato. Greg Boyd states this plainly though in terms shaped by his perception of classical theology saying it "owes more to Plato than it does the Bible" (*The God of the Possible*, 109). No doubt, he subscribes to the notion Augustine altered Christian thinking by mixing it with Platonic thought and that this has affected classical theology ever since. There isn't time here to explore the pitfalls in this theory, but it needs to be said that notions of God's infinity and timelessness are not *derived* from Plato's writings or other pagan philosophy, but from indications in Scripture. Simply because some correspondence of ideas could be found in the thought of Plato does not mean that is where the notions came from.

As a young person, I myself, from the study of Scriptures had formulated the ideas of God's transcendence of time and His comprehension of past, present, and future at once, before I had even heard of Plato or read any serious theological treatise. And I understood how this was a natural corollary of the concept of infinity.

In this regard, an interesting paper, *The Semitic View of Divine Foreknowledge in the Hebrew Bible*, written by Dr. Oliver R. Blosser makes some critical errors. The author's thesis, expressed at the very beginning, "The foreknowledge debate in the Baptist General Conference is at this point just a Calvinist/Arminian theological dispute over extreme rationalistic viewpoints of divine foreknowledge," shows he adopted a wrong premise. Remember, if your premise is false your conclusion will be false, no matter how many reasons you advance – and Dr. Blosser does make some good biblical points. The central idea he argues is that both Calvinism and Arminianism "are theological statements based on an explanation of the fore-

knowledge of God and which are rooted in the foundation of Greek philosophy (rationalism) rather than the Hebrew faith thought-patterns of the Holy Bible" (*The Semitic View of Divine Foreknowledge in the Hebrew Bible*, 7, unpublished manuscript)). He argues that these systems for understanding God are "based on reason rather than faith, saturated in Greek philosophy rather than Semitic revelation." The author claims what we need is not reason but faith alone – which he claims is the Semitic view of God in the Bible (9).

This notion that the Semitic or Hebrew mind is different from the Greek mind has always fascinated me. I have heard it argued that Greeks thought philosophically and systematically and Hebrews thought concretely. This was an old argument between so-called "systematic theologians" and "biblical theologians." It was claimed this was based on the nature of the Hebrew language compared to the Greek language. Over the years I have come to seriously question the validity of this distinction. My experience with people from a number of different cultures has led me to conclude that in every people group some individuals are capable of reasoning systematically and others have a degree of difficulty doing so.

Furthermore, concepts such as infinity are not simply dependent upon language. In higher educational tests a distinction has been made between verbal ability and conceptual ability. I learned from working with Vietnamese immigrants to the United States that they usually obtained jobs connected with science and mathematics because of the difficulty of changing from their language to English. Conceptually they transferred easily. Concepts of God's infinity and timelessness belong more in the realm of conceptions and are not dependent upon linguistic considerations.

In fact, I understand James Barr (no friend of evangelicals) in his book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, so effectively dismissed the notion of a special Semitic, or Hebraic, mind-set, that in many academic circles arguments based on such a distinction are no longer acceptable.

In response to an unsigned editorial in *Christianity Today* which [sic.] apparently was intended to spread awareness of Open Theism and create an atmosphere more conducive to having allowance for it, Roger Nicole, one of the well-known theologians of the American evangelical movement, wrote the fol-

lowing letter which [sic.] was printed in the April 3, 2000 issue of the magazine.

As a corresponding editor of CT I am constrained to express strong dissent to your editorial "God vs. God" [Feb. 7]. While it contains certain good arguments in favor of the quasi-universal Judeo-Christian endorsement of God's immutability, it appears to attempt to leave a door ajar for the propriety of the "openness of God" position.

Surely the doctrine of God's unchangeableness is not a provincial approach developed by Turretin, the Princeton theologians and Louis Berkhof! Athanasius, Augustine, the council of Chalcedon, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Cranmer, the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Assembly, John and Charles Wesley, to name but a few, would object just as strongly as Turretin and company to a changeable God!

This very notion undermines the validity of God's prophecies, promises, and commandments. It cancels out the effectiveness of prayer, since even if God had been persuaded by my petition, he could shift again before the fulfillment; and it borders on process theology, denying the fixity of the one being who is unmovable in the vast flux of created existence. Nothing good along this line can be expected for evangelicalism. It is unfortunate if the holders of the heretical view of the "openness of God" could now boast about the "openness of CHRISTIANITY TODAY." —Printed by permission of Dr. Roger Nicole.

Isaiah, the prophet, was certainly a Hebrew who could express profound truths. A little thought will show that Isaiah 55:8-9 depicts infinity: *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Psalm 147:5 says: *"His understanding is infinite."* And what more picturesque way is there to describe God's transcendence over time than that in Isaiah 57:13 where God is described as *"the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity."*

For many of us, the basis for believing in God's transcendence over time and His foreknowledge involving comprehension of past, present and future at once arose directly from our

Careful consideration of the teachings of Scripture and an effort to have a reasonable understanding of what was meant.

FASHIONING A FALSE GOD

Not only is the “God” of open theism different from the God of classical Christianity, it is a false God.

Why do I say this? It is an anthropomorphized God: a God who has been made in the image of man.

While open theists claim they take literally passages which historic Christianity has explained anthropomorphically, by doing so they actually make out God to be a man-like being – enlarged and vastly more brilliant, maybe, but nevertheless a man-like being. God “changes His mind” like a man. God is “sorry” like a man. God “doesn’t know what people are going to do” like a man.

One time one of my daughters was talking with an individual who had inclinations toward the ideas of Open Theism. This man said, “I like surprises. Don’t you like surprises? Maybe God is like that and doesn’t want to know everything but likes to be surprised.”

My daughter’s response was: “First, I only like surprises when they are good surprises. And second, you’re reasoning from man to God. You think God must be like we are, and that’s backwards.”

Whether they realize it or not, this is the basic method of open theists. Greg Boyd, for example, employs this kind of reasoning many different ways. To give one example, after referring to his perception of the classical view of foreknowledge, he says this in *God of the Possible*: “...we have to ask: What is admirable about this portrait? Why would this eternally static view of divine knowledge be greater than a view of God enjoying novelty, adventure, spontaneity, creativity, and moment-by-moment personal relationships? If we, who are made in God’s image, enjoy these things in some measure, why think that God is great to the extent that his experience is *devoid* of such things? Conversely, if we would experience an eternity utterly devoid of risk and creativity as mundane and perhaps even torturous (I, for one, would), why should we be inclined to think that this is heaven to God?” (128-129).

Can you see the problem with this kind of thinking?

How can a finite being possibly know what it is like to be an infinite being? We *can* understand *that* a being is infinite, but we *cannot* understand *what it is like* to be infinite! The Trinity may have reasons for joy and excitement we know nothing about. We are dependent creatures relying on experiences and perceptions to give us fulfillment and satisfaction. When we talk about God we are talking about the One who is totally independent in His existence. He doesn't have needs as we have them. When the psalmist says that in God's presence is "fulness of joy" and at His right hand are "pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11), we must not imagine this Fountain of Joy as requiring what we require to experience fulfillment.

When we, because we cannot imagine what it is like for God in His glorious immensity, bring God down and recast Him in human terms, we have committed a fundamental error.

This is one of the worse kinds of idolatry. More terrible because people do not perceive it as idolatry. **It is the presumptuous sin of inverting the motif of human creation: instead of man being made in the image of God, God is made in the image of man!**

When one rejects the idea of anthropomorphic explanations of expressions of God in Scripture and says such things must be understood literally, this is the inevitable result. With anthropomorphism, we can perceive how God is transcendent, far beyond us in His make-up, knowledge, and existence, while at the same time relating to us in the only way we could possibly understand: in terms of human feelings, attitudes and ideas. Such is the loving condescension of the Creator to His special creatures. Open Theism with its insistence on literal understanding of these expressions actually *reduces* God to human terms.

Such thinking calls to mind the arrogant error of which the Lord accused the wicked long ago: "*You thought that I was altogether like you*" (Psalm 50:21).

Any spiritually minded person familiar with Old Testament history knows how infuriating idolatry is to God. He brought His people under terrible judgments because of their false gods. They exchanged the glory of God for a lie. Especially wicked were the times when they identified some man-made god with Him. By that His name and glory were perverted. While men made false gods with their hands, the greater evil is that they made false gods with their minds. To distort the notion of God

revealed in Scripture and reduce Him to something like we are, however enlarged, is wicked. Those who tolerate such thinking and say it is within the bounds of true Christianity are guilty of sanctioning a false god.

A NEW CULT

For a decade at least, Clark Pinnock and his fellow travelers on the so-called Open Theism route have endeavored to be viewed as “evangelicals.” They want to be considered within the camp of orthodox Christians. (This is one of the things that has muddied the American evangelical movement which arose in the second half of the twentieth century and which, as a theological force, has pretty much dissipated and become a thing of the past.)

What we actually have with this group of thinkers is the emergence of a new cult.

I would have more respect for open theists if they would frankly admit they have a different concept of God from that which Christians have historically had and would form their own group. Those who want to adhere to their views could join them.

I would even support their right to do such a thing – for I believe in religious liberty.

One of the emotionalized responses heard by those who want to include open theists in the Baptist General Conference is that those of us who do not believe they should be are to be identified with those who inflicted “stake burnings and river drownings” on the Anabaptists. They accuse us of not allowing people to have freedom of conscience. Such reasoning is a real distortion of the historic concept of religious freedom. If we say that Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are not to be considered within acceptable Baptist doctrine, does that mean we are to be equated with inquisitors? I would defend the right of a Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness to worship as he chooses. I do not believe in persecuting people for their religious beliefs. To twist the historic belief in religious liberty to say that we cannot draw lines by which we identify Christians or Baptists because to do so is intolerant is not so much a reflection of Baptist beliefs as it is of contemporary redefinition of tolerance and diversity.

Probably these people will not form their own group. The inclination of those who have heterodox ideas often seems to be

to want to live parasitically off a Christian group with the support and advantages that go with it.

What this new cult would want to call itself, I am not sure, but I think it could properly be identified as “the cult of the lesser God.”

AN OLD HERESY

On one hand, adherents of Open Theism, and their sympathizers, want their doctrine of God to sound very new. They take pains to make it appear modern, spicing their arguments with references to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in physics, and to “insights” of process philosophy. Some would try to make it look like this concept could only develop in our times with our advanced understanding of science and philosophy.

On the other hand, they try to claim they are “recovering” something historic Christianity has missed.

In actuality, Open Theism is just part of the old Socinian heresy rejected by the church centuries ago. Of course, Socinianism denied the deity of Christ and the need for a substitutionary atonement for justification. Open theists would respond that they do not deny Christ’s deity. Some of them, however, minimize the substitutionary atonement of Christ (e.g., John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998, 105-107). One of the major features of Socinianism was its belief that God does not know what “free agents” will do. This oft-repeated argument by Rice, Pinnock, Boyd, etc., that they do believe in God’s omniscience in that they believe God knows all that is knowable, but that the decisions of humans and other free creatures (along with the consequences of those decisions) are not knowable, directly echoes a Socinian argument (e.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 1:208. He noted: “They openly withdraw from him the knowledge of future contingencies as not being in the class of knowable things....”). They will cite Richard Swinburne (*The Coherence of Theism*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1977, 175) for support, but nowhere in contemporary writings of those with the “open view” of God do we find them referring to the Socinian roots of their doctrine.

When Clark Pinnock wrote about his theological pilgrimage “From Augustine to Arminius” (“From Augustine to Arminius:

A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989, 16-18), he made no acknowledgment that his doctrine of God had gone “beyond” Arminius to Socinus. He clearly has rejected the Arminian view of God’s eternal foreknowledge as well as the standard explanation of election based on foreknowledge, Wesley’s view of total depravity, and the need for universal prevenient grace. Yet Pinnock continues to present his thinking as “Arminian thinking.”

In observing this, Robert B. Strimple has asked the question: “Why?” Why does Pinnock continue “to speak of his thinking as ‘Arminian thinking,’ never as ‘Socinian thinking’”? He follows up with the remark that one must wonder if the reason is because the “Arminian” label is less objectionable to evangelicals (“What Does God Know? In *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, 141).

Let me suggest another reason. Being the astute man that he is, Pinnock could have deliberately positioned his Open Theism as Arminianism so as to drive a wedge between Calvinists and Arminians. By setting Calvinists and Arminians at each other, he can more readily gain acceptance for his heterodox view.

It would seem that if this were his purpose, his strategy is succeeding. The way the Bethel “Committee on Theological Clarification and Assessment” (CTCA) handled the examination of Greg Boyd’s Open Theism view, played into the hands of this strategy, as has the way some of the leaders of the BGC have handled the controversy. By allowing it to be framed as a Calvinist-Arminian conflict, and continuing to present it that way – in spite of strong appeals that this is not the case – the real heresy of Open Theism has been obscured.

To say the Open Theism issue is simply a part of the Calvinist-Arminian debate is a false premise and – false premises... no matter how much evidence is amassed, or how often arguments are repeated, or how strongly emotionalized appeals are made... lead to false conclusions!

It can be argued that Open Theism is the logical outcome of Arminian ideas of human freedom. I know Calvinists who reason that way. Open theists, of course, do. However a multitude of faithful preachers of the gospel of Arminian persuasion have not gone there – including not only Arminius himself, but also

such men as John Wesley, John Fletcher, Thomas Coke, W. E. Sangster, and Paul S. Rees. They were not willing to sacrifice the biblical idea of a transcendent, infinite God, to solve the problem. Arminians who become Open Theists go over the "great divide."

Open Theism is not genuine Arminianism but an aberration of Arminianism.

Extreme Calvinists still do not reject the infinite God of Hebrew-Christian revelation.

This is why to contrast an open theist with a strong Calvinist and say we should have room for both is a false comparison. It creates an untrue contrast in people's minds.

Perhaps, because of the dogged persistence to keep presenting this in the context of a determination-free will argument, the end result may be division between Calvinists and Arminians. Intelligent open theists realize no Calvinist in his right mind would ever accept Open Theism. (I happen to think that no Arminian in his right mind would ever accept Open Theism either). The danger of this division will grow if Bethel and certain leaders of the Baptist General Conference persist in pursuing the course they initially set out on. Such a division I think would be sad indeed. While some may not agree, I have always viewed the Calvinist vs. Arminian controversy as a dispute between brothers. Open Theism is something entirely different.

What people need to realize is that this allegedly "new" doctrine of God is not new at all. Theologians in the Reformation era were presented with arguments similar to those advanced by Rice, Pinnock and Boyd, in the form of Socinian teaching and clearly rejected them. Lelio Socinus pestered Melanchthon and Calvin with letter after letter in which he argued such views and the Reformers rejected those concepts as incompatible with the biblical witness (Thomas M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, New York: Scribner's, 1938, 470-471).

CARICATURING THE GOD WHO IS

One of the saddest things about Greg Boyd's book, *The God of the Possible*, is that it spread a distorted notion of the classical view of God. People who read it will receive a false impression of what it means to believe in the infinite, all-knowing God revealed in the Bible.

When talking about the classical Christian view of God, what Boyd presents – and this is consistent with presentations other open theists make – is the idea of a static God, who created a “mechanistic” world with “preprogrammed automatons.”

This is a caricature. It says more about Boyd’s mind than about the minds of classical theologians. A few individuals might be found who hold such a view, but overwhelmingly those who believe in an infinite, omniscient God believe that God is really involved in the dynamic of life. They believe the Bible when it tells of God manifesting Himself to Hagar, Abraham’s concubine, and helping her when she thought her son was going to die, while at the same time knowing that Ishmael’s descendants would become a great nation. (See Genesis 16:6-13; 21:14-21). They believe that God actually interacted with Moses in the wilderness, and involved Himself in public displays of supernatural power against Egypt and its gods, and led the people out from Egypt, miraculously dividing the sea so they could pass through and then destroying the Egyptian army in it. (Exodus 3-14). They believe in what the Bible says about a God who works with people, strives with people, punishes people for their sins, calls people, and regenerates people. They believe people are responsible for their choices. They believe God calls upon us to take the initiative in obeying Him and that this is a genuine act on our part. They believe we can obey God or disobey God. They believe our human existence is real and that we are not some sort of pre-programmed robotic creatures acting out a plan forced on us. Not only is Open Theism associated with a distorted reading of Scripture, it fosters a distorted reading of Scripture.

One man I was talking with said to me, “I can’t understand how God can exist beyond time, so that past, present, and future are all known to Him, and still operate in time with us in any real way. That does not make sense to me.”

I said to him, “Your problem is that you think you can fully understand an infinite God with your finite mind. You can’t. Because God is infinite – unlimited – He can exist both in time and beyond time. We don’t have to figure out *how* He can do that to believe it is true. And we don’t have to figure out *how* God foreknows all things to believe it is true.

We must beware of making the mistake theologian Charles Hodge warned about, namely confounding immutability with immobility. When we say God cannot change, we must not see

that as God not acting. No human can understand God perfectly. On the one hand we believe God is unchanging in His being, perfections and purposes. On the other hand we know from Scripture that He is perpetually active. Therefore activity and immutability must be compatible – even if we don't fully understand (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1:391).

Open theists like to say, "If God foreknows what we are going to do, then we are not free because we must do what He foreknew we were going to do."

Open theists are driven by antipathy for anything that smacks of determinism. In fact, the concept of human freedom is the central, organizing principle of their approach to Scripture and theology.

The determinist-free will controversy can be a philosophical quagmire (This is a man-made philosophical problem). It has been argued for centuries. More than this paper would be required to adequately deal with it. The point that needs to be made here is that the open theist solution to it is false – because Open Theism is false. To argue with its adherents on this issue is to give credence to their position when it lacks a genuine biblical base.

In fact, in Open Theism we see humanism, as applied to theology, in full bloom. It is the fruit of the passion for human autonomy. Humanism says man is the measure of all things. So man has come to measure God by his own understanding. To use the issue of human free-will as the deciding factor for what God can know is but another indication how open theists reason from man to God.

The capacity of the human mind to understand God and His relation to His creatures varies. Some minds can stretch to cover more than others. Perhaps the mind of Jonathan Edwards, with its brilliance, stretched much further than most others – but it still came far short of covering all. And perhaps other minds stretch to cover aspects Jonathan Edwards could not. Who knows? No human mind can come anywhere near covering it all. God's foreknowledge is another of those things "broader than the measure of man's mind."

It is not wrong to reason and think after God in these things. Those who say, "Oh, we should abandon any reasoned approach and just accept it all by faith," leads us ultimately

into absurdity. What are we to accept by faith? No answer can be given except by reason.

I remember, as a student at Bethel Seminary – in another era – hearing Dr. Carl Lundquist speak on how we should love God with all our minds (Matthew 22:37). What can that mean if we don't use our minds to think after the ways of the Lord and seek to understand life in terms of that? But as the debate about God's sovereignty and human freedom continues – and it will – we must always remember that some aspects will remain beyond our measure. But to opt for the open theist solution is erroneous.

One other thought needs to be added. In classic Christianity the problem concerning human "free will" was a theological (*ethical*) one, and not a philosophical (*metaphysical*) one. The focus was not on the idea that God somehow limits humans by His sovereignty and foreknowledge, but that sin limits them. [John 8:34: "*Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'*" Romans 8:7: "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*" 1 Corinthians 2:14: "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*"] You will find precious little about this aspect of human limitation in the writings of open theists, perhaps because, as some of them have evidenced, they have a less than biblical idea of sin also (See Pinnock's view in "From Augustine to Arminius," 21-22; see also Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 238-251).

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Open theists like to exaggerate how much the classical view of God owes to Greek philosophy, but they seem reticent about admitting that their view, as it has been expressed in the last couple of decades, has far stronger ties to modern philosophy. The philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), as furthered and modified in certain respects by Charles Hartshorne, has been formative. Whitehead was a philosopher and anything but a biblical theologian. For example, he did not believe in creation out of nothingness but rather in the eternity of matter. However, out of the Whitehead-Hartshorne stream of ideas developed what has been called "Process Philosophy" and "Process Theology." Whitehead suggested God is in the process of becoming, much as humans are. Some pastors and leaders

have kept people from knowing about this controversy thinking it is of no consequence and reasoning "what people don't know won't hurt them." Such an approach leaves God's people ill-equipped for facing what is the major theological error invading the Church at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Open theists are indebted to the arguments of this philosophy. Thus the old heresy of Socinianism is dressed up in modern intellectual garb. However, they usually say they do not believe in Process Theology, probably because they don't want to be associated with the thought of certain radical process theologians.

But it can logically be argued that Open Theism is an attempt to use Process Philosophy to do evangelical theology. If God does not know what people and angelic beings are going to do, when they do act God then learns something new. According to this view, every day and every year God is learning new things. That means His knowledge is much greater today than it was a year ago, and a year ago His knowledge was greater than it was 500 years ago, and His knowledge 500 years ago was greater than it was 2000 years ago. If that is so, He does not think about things the same way He did long ago. Is not this a developing God, a God who is in the process of becoming?

This cannot be the God who is described in Psalm 102:25-27:

*Of old You laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
They will perish, but You will endure;
Yes, they will all grow old like a garment;
Like a cloak You will change them,
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will have no end.*

With such an approach we can no longer count on our Savior being "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

NO SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

To engage in disputing various aspects of open theistic thinking, would probably serve to obscure the truth that the whole notion is without sound biblical basis. The concept of "a partially open future," for example, is philosophical speculation based on false presuppositions. It is an attempt to try to fit in

Bible texts that definitely say God knows things about the future with the idea God does not know other things about the future. When Boyd says those who reject this notion do so because of all “one way or the other” thinking (*God of the Possible*, 144), he oversimplifies. While those of us who reject it do so primarily because it is unbiblical, we also do so philosophically because to our minds the future is made up of so many interwoven contingent factors, most of them based on human decisions and acts, that to speak of God knowing some things that are going to happen but not other things is simplistic and illogical. But it must be emphasized that the greater reason we reject it is because it is without any basis in Scripture analyzed with proper exegesis.

One aspect of this false God approach, however, needs to be addressed. Basic to this whole controversy is the fundamental question that has haunted Christianity through the centuries: how can a good God allow evil to happen? Classical theologians, who call this problem *theodicy*, have recognized that in the final analysis certain aspects elude the human mind.

Open theists think they have the solution. The problem, according to them, is really our view of God. We have credited Him with too much. If we reduce our concept of Him so that He is contained in time, as we humans are, and He can only see the future as it exists now, the problem is solved. God can't know ahead of time what people are going to do. So God allows evil to happen because God did not know it was going to happen! So with one stroke of the sword these open theists have cut the Gordian knot that has plagued great theologians, thinkers and novelists over the centuries.

Those familiar with Greg Boyd's writings know this is a key concept in his thinking. His answer to his agnostic father in *Letters from a Skeptic* shows this clearly. His father had asked why God would allow an Adolf Hitler to be born if he foreknew that this individual would massacre millions of Jews. Boyd's answer is that this was not foreknown as a certainty at the time God created Hitler (See Gregory A. Boyd & Edward K. Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, Victor Books, 1994, 25-31; and *God of the Possible*, 98).

People may applaud Boyd's motives in that he was seeking to help his father become a believer (In this respect a comment by John A. Frame in *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994, 28, is noteworthy: “It is remarkable how many heresies are traceable to apologetic

motives.”), and some may say that his approach provides a “creative” answer to the problem of the Holocaust. The truth, however, is that the solution proposed is false, it does not solve the problem of evil, and it is not true to the biblical revelation.

Even if we say God did not know when Adolf Hitler was born that he would massacre millions of Jews, the fact remains when Hitler’s atrocities began God had sufficient time to realize what was going to happen and He still did not stop Hitler. The problem of God allowing evil has not been solved by this approach.

Classical Christian theologians through the centuries have refused this solution because their study of the Scriptures would not let them reduce God in this way. They would say such a view of God represents less than the God of revelation.

A couple of Bible examples could be cited. In 2 Kings 8:10-13, Elisha the prophet wept and told Hazael the reason why: *“Because I know the evil you will do to the children of Israel: Their strong holds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child.”* He informed Hazael that God has revealed that he would become king over Syria. Here is a Bible example of God foreknowing the evil this man would do. Daniel 11:33 contains a prophecy of how under the dominance of a “vile person” who would rise in the future people *“shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.”* Here is another case of God foreknowing – and telling – about an individual who would do great evil.

God has His own purposes and reasons, beyond our understanding, for tragedy, suffering and other evils that occur. To ascribe limits to God’s knowledge to solve the problem is not the way to go; to admit limits to our own understanding is.

LESSONS FROM THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

Centuries ago a controversy raged in Christendom concerning another central doctrine: whether Jesus was truly God. A knowledge of what happened can be instructive for us today.

When a dispute arose between Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and his presbyter, Arius, over Arius’ idea that the Son of God was Himself created and therefore not truly divine like the Father, the emperor first tried to solve the problem by describing the dispute as “very trifling and indeed unworthy to be the cause of such a conflict.” When he discovered the dispute was not going to be settled so easily, Constantine called a coun-

cil of the whole church, the first "ecumenical" (general) council at Nicea in AD 325. The council decided for the position that the Son is uncreated and *of the same essence* as the Father, which was advocated by the party under the leadership of Athanasius (about AD 296-373). The statement of doctrine produced at Nicea, with certain later modifications, became one of the great creeds of Western Christianity.

Arius was an interesting individual. We are told he was "a man of pure and ascetical life." He and his teaching had a profound impact on many individuals. At the same time, whether or not it was true of him, evidence suggests an element of deceitfulness in some of his followers.

One of the things about the Arians was their great use of Scripture texts to prove that Christ had a beginning and was to be considered different from the Father. They believed they were biblical.

Martin R. DeHaan has told of a farmer friend who helped him set traps to catch rats, which had invaded a chicken coop. The farmer said: "No rat will touch an exposed trap. You must disguise it with food. Fill a pan with meal and place the trap in it. Cover it well with meal so it is completely hidden."

It worked. The next morning they had caught a big fat rat. DeHaan reflected that Satan carefully disguises his trap with truth. The numerous false cults and religions in the world all set their traps of error in a pan of meal. Many quote the Bible. This is why we must "*Test all things...*" (I Thess. 5:21).

This was by no means the end of the controversy. Not only did Arius and his followers persist in their ideas, but a third faction, the Semi-Arian or Eusebian party, attempted to be a mediation between Arianism and Athanasianism, and actually amplified the conflict. The controversy raged on widespread, at times violent, and prolonged, lasting in all almost a century. Whole sections of Christendom were rent asunder. Political favor shifted from side to side, depending on who the emperor was. The champion for the orthodox view of the Trinity, Athanasius, was exiled five times. His unswerving persistence ultimately, under God, won the day, and now he is regarded as one of the spiritual giants in the history of Christianity.

Arianism, however, lived on. Its religious descendants are found in the Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses.

It might be wise to realize that major controversies such as that concerning Arianism and Open Theism are not easily

solved. Simple denominational politics will not do it. Those who want a mediating, compromising position may for a while exert influence and try to hold things together, but ultimately some clear resolution must come – for the two different positions are fundamentally incompatible. And even some ecclesiastical decision will not immediately end the conflict.

INFLUENCE OF POSTMODERNITY

It is wrong to judge the acceptability of a doctrine according to the personal popularity of its proponents rather than according to what Scripture truly teaches.

The whole controversy in our era is being complicated by the influence of what has been called “postmodern thought.”

At one time in the western world, people generally believed truth existed in an objective sense (out there) and most believed in logic, moral principles, and revelation from God. This could be termed *premodern*. In the 18th century, with the influence of the Enlightenment and its ideas of progress, came the shrinking of objective truth to what could be ascertained by the scientific method – this type of thinking has been termed *modern*. *Postmodernity* has abandoned belief in objective truth (out there) and accepts only a subjective understanding. “Truth” is what an individual or culture make it out to be. The common saying in educational circles is: **“Truth exists only in the construct.”**

Many people unknowingly evaluate and operate in patterns associated with this way of thinking.

This postmodern thinking has invaded evangelical circles in a number of instances. Several “evangelical” theologians have forsaken any claim to objective truth. To cite but one example, J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh of Toronto’s Institute for Christian Study, in their book *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, reject any such notion outright: “Since all world-views in a postmodern reading are merely human inventions, decisively conditioned by the social context in which they occur, and certainly not given to us by either nature or revelation, any ‘truth’ we claim for our cherished positions must be kept strictly in quotation marks” (*Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1995, 4-5). Some go so far as to say that any evangelical concern for truth is wrongheaded and irrelevant (An example of this is Philip D. Kenneson in a chapter whose

title is telling, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing Too," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Philipps and Dennis L. Okholm, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995, 155-70).

Some have said, "Why lump Dr. Greg Boyd in with Pinnock, Sanders, etc.? He does not believe everything they believe."

The issue is not simply about Boyd but about Open Theism. The arguments Boyd uses are not particularly original: they can be found in the writings of other open theists and process theologians. Furthermore, Boyd's report, posted on the Open Theism website on the internet, regarding the action taken at the BGC Annual Meeting in 1999, was revealing in that it made it quite clear he views himself as a champion for Open Theism.

Attempts to distinguish Dr. Boyd from the rest of the open theists are misleading. He may argue he does not necessarily believe everything others in the movement do, but he is in agreement with them on the essentials regarding their view of God. And he wants open theists to be accepted into the evangelical camp.

Since truth, according to postmodernity, exists only in the construct and each individual has his own construction, it is apparent different people's construct will be logically incompatible. That is seen as O.K. Logic is not considered a valid device for determining truth. In such thinking, because everyone's beliefs are seen as having equal validity, attempts to persuade are seen as acts of aggression to be disparaged. In society the idea is, "You don't have any right to impose your beliefs on anyone else."

Concomitant with these ideas growing in society, a sort of "evangelical political correctness" philosophy has developed many places in evangelical denominations, and especially in the Baptist General Conference. For example, it is considered unacceptable to refer to an idea as "heresy" or to a person as a "heretic." The term is said to have bad connotations and to arouse emotional reactions so we are not to use it. In fact, to call a person a heretic is viewed as worse than a person actually being a heretic! By the same token, a person who says an individual is deceptive and misuses words, even when it is manifestly true, is viewed as worse than the person who is deceptive. To point out the errors, inconsistencies, and falsehoods in a theological argument is construed as "mean spirited." The words "civil," "civility"

and “Pietism” are set-up like roadblocks to prevent any form of judgment or conclusions.

Such “evangelical political correctness” creates ideal conditions for the growth of doctrinal error.

One of the notions of Postmodernity is the idea words are fluid and can be redefined any way we want to suit our purposes. Since the meaning of words is not fixed but a function of “interpretation” an individual can construct his own meaning. (An example of this was displayed when it was claimed by Bethel Administration that Greg Boyd believes in God’s “exhaustive foreknowledge without qualification.”).

What postmodern theorists will do is inundate the evangelical reader or listener with convoluted and distorted reasoning, which can make it very difficult to sort out what is truth – supposing there are still a few of us who believe in truth (out there).

An example of such convoluted reasoning is when Boyd in *God of the Possible* twists ideas around to make it look like his lesser God, who he claims “grants an appropriate degree of freedom to humans (and angels) to determine their own futures,” is more glorious and sovereign than the God of classical theology, who he wrongly assumes does not grant any degree of freedom to humans (and angels). By such means he would portray a God who doesn’t completely know the future as greater than a God who does. It takes a really astute reader to sort through such subtle and deceptive reasoning (This can be found on p. 68 in *God of the Possible*).

Another aspect of postmodern technique is constant shifting to justify one’s self or one’s position. This ability to change one’s story is seen as a function of the ability to “reinvent oneself.” When a certain idea is disproved, the individual simply acts like he never had that idea and instead advances a different idea to support his claim.

Postmodernity believes “image” is everything. What matters is not substance, but projecting a positive image. This reinforces the fallacy that simply because an individual is popular and attractive his ideas must be acceptable.

All these factors are playing into this present-day controversy regarding God’s omniscience.

One more aspect of Postmodernity must be mentioned. Since people hold different constructs of truth, and these are logically incompatible, what do we do? The postmodern answer is that we must keep the conversation going. We must not

reach any judgments, nor say anyone is right or wrong; we must simply keep the topic open for consideration as acceptable. When Bethel Administration has said, "We want open discussion and debate on Open Theism," one gets the definite impression this is what they mean. They would say the continuing debate is all right as long as no conclusions are reached, no judgments declared, and no action taken contrary to Greg Boyd.

Meanwhile class after class of Bethel College students have been conditioned to have a "soft" attitude toward Open Theism.

Exercising the degree of doctrinal exclusiveness called for in Scriptural Christianity is not always comfortable. Many of us want to be "nice" guys who would avoid a fight if we could. It is much easier to go along with an inclusive attitude that would allow almost any belief as long as an individual exhibits other admirable traits, abilities, and ideas. We could use the humanistic idea of "academic freedom" to justify our latitude and compliment ourselves on how intellectually sophisticated, humble, broadminded, and loving we are.

In obeying the Scriptures that call us to take a stand and teach clearly about sin and falsehood, we run the risk of being called "narrow," "fundamentalist," "unloving," and even "divisive" – though the true cause of divisiveness should be traced to those who introduce and promote alien and unscriptural doctrine. Many will fail to understand our love for God, for people, and for truth. Nor will they understand our concern that false theology ultimately hurts people. **A major issue before us is whether we will have the courage to practice a healthy biblical intolerance of false doctrine or whether we will succumb to contemporary worldly, spiritually unhealthy notions of tolerance.** (See Jude 3; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Rom. 16:17; Eph. 4:14-15).

The influence and implications of postmodernity will trouble true Bible-believing Christians for years to come – if the Lord tarries – and there is a good chance new "divisions" and alignments may result as a consequence. The storm clouds of this controversy are just being seen on the horizon. Many pastors and people in evangelical churches have been sleeping and are still sleeping in regard to what has been developing in the decade of the 1990s. American evangelicalism, which emerged in the last half of the twentieth century, has been seriously undermined and is rapidly waning as a genuine theological and

spiritual force and we are entering another era, perhaps comparable in some ways to the former fundamentalist-modernist contest.

Scripture warns us of those who are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7).

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

Among the things I think I have learned is the truth that God is more concerned about *sin* than about *suffering*. A related idea is that He is more concerned about *major error* than about *controversy*. I know many would not agree with that, but think about it.

I believe it would be sinful to raise a controversy over some things. I also believe it would be sinful not to raise a controversy over an issue of the magnitude of Open Theism.

Institutionalism has become one of the main problems in dealing with serious doctrinal error. Leaders in denominations and schools seek to subvert controversy. Their view of Christianity is *primarily* institutional. Their emphasis is on raising money and advancing plans and any conflict is seen as counter-productive. **Thus they are more interested in *preventing controversy* than in *countering error*.**

This is one reason for the drift into liberalism so apparent in several main-line denominations.

Gamaliel is the patron saint for postmodernists and religious pragmatists. In the 5th chapter of Acts, we have an account of how Peter and the other apostles were brought before the Jewish council. The fury of the council was subdued by the advice of Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who told them: “*...let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of man, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it.*”

Some, in times of controversy, say they are taking a position similar to that of Gamaliel.

Well, I think two things about Gamaliel should be pointed out.

One, he was not a Christian believer! He was a man who spoke the wisdom of the world, not the wisdom of God.

Two, he was wrong! Things can succeed without being from God. Unless you are prepared to acknowledge that

Scientology, the Mormon Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are all of God – because they have experienced great success at different times – you better not buy into Gamaliel's false criterion.

That quaint and effective preacher, Vance Havner, had a sermon entitled, *Gamaliel, the Appeaser*. In it he told how he had once been much impressed with this individual as a sane and sound, levelheaded, reasonable man. But he had come to have a radical change of mind about Gamaliel. He was an appeaser who compromised. Because he was unwilling to straightforwardly deal with the truth, he missed the truth.

The attitude of appeasement has infected the professing church said Havner. "It straddles the fence with Gamaliel." One of the successors to this Jewish teacher was Erasmus, "attempting always to shade down his Yes till it is almost a No, and to burnish up his No until it might almost pass for a Yes."

If it had been up to Erasmus we would never have had a Reformation. The true heart of Christianity beat with Luther, the man of truth, convictions, and passion – not Erasmus.

Someone has observed that the real weakness of Evangelicalism in America has been that it has had far too many Erasmuses and not enough Luthers!

The approach is usually to set up social machinery to subdue and silence disputes.

Think how different this is from what occurred in New Testament times. In the early church a powerful storm of ideas and passions arose over the question whether Gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised and brought under regulations of the Mosaic Law. To deal with the problem a great council of church leaders was held. They came to a clear decision. The position of the Judaizers was rejected (Acts 15:5-21).

The idea of setting up a committee to handle the problem seems not yet to have been conceived. Frankly, such an approach comes more from the corporate halls of the American business world than from Scripture.

Seriously difficult days are ahead for those who believe in truth and who are committed to clear Scriptural positions.

But so be it!

As the Apostle Paul so succinctly put it: "*Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar*" (Romans 3:4).

Swedenborgianism Revisited

By Dr. David L. Larsen
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Almost thirty-five years ago I wrote an article for *The Discerner* on "Swedenborgianism and the National Council of Churches" (V, 11, July-September, 1967). This is a small but lethal cult and notwithstanding its serious deviation from historic orthodoxy obtained admission into the National Council of Churches. In a climate of "ecumenical madness" I cited this as clear evidence of the total apostasy of the NCC.

Little of course has changed but some evangelicals seem impervious to the continuing grave dangers in contemporary ecumenism. Just recently some conservatives have been "cozying" up to Robert Edgar, the newly elected leader of the NCC and thought to make common cause with a strong statement on the importance of strong families and the need to fight the trend of divorce and serial polygamy increasingly common among us. The statement was really a good statement on traditional and Biblical family values but the gay and lesbian interests were so outraged that the NCC chief had signed on to it that they rose in wrathful protest and the poor man ultimately withdrew his support of the statement under immense pressure. Why does any Bible-believing Christian waste time and energy trying to "buddy up" with this band of apostates called the NCC? Happily, both the NCC and the WCC (World Council of Churches) are broke and in process of general disintegration ("NCC chief backtracks," in *Christian Century*, December 6, 2000, 1264ff).

After thirty-five years the Swedenborgians continue as members of the NCC and show us how a minor cult can exert a harmful influence far beyond what its numbers might suggest. Never numerically large, this cult was named after its founder, the Swedish man of science and mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). The son of the Lutheran Bishop of Skara in southern Sweden, Swedenborg served on the Swedish Board of Mines and is considered to be "the father of crystallography." At age 59 he turned to spiritual interests, claiming the God told him to seek out and publish "the spiritual sense of Scripture." His

massive collected works extend to forty times the number of words found in the Old and New Testaments. Swedenborg saw three levels of reality: the natural, the spiritual and the celestial. He saw his own writings as the Second Coming of Christ. He had strange and bizarre visions, which were Revelation to his followers. He claimed to be in constant contact with angels and spirits. He believed that the New Jerusalem is human society and the churches his followers have established are called Churches of the New Jerusalem.

Strongly anti-Trinitarian, Swedenborg was a Unitarian, but a Unitarian of the Second Person (so much like the “oneness Pentecostals” and as Bishop Jakes and the United Pentecostal Church of our own day). His “sole deification of the Son” (with its consequent denial of the Father and the Holy Spirit) is very much like that of the influential German theologian Albrecht Ritschl. He has mixed “occult and alchemical doctrines” in a curious hodge-podge. Strains of ancient Free Masonry and Jewish Cabbalism blend into the fabric. He strongly denied the atonement of Christ for sin. Asserting that we now live in the Garden of Eden, some followers of Swedenborg like the poet William Blake and his wife pranced about in their yard without clothes (Peter Ackroyd, *Blake: A Biography*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996, 154). Swedenborg’s visions in *Heaven and Hell* are not recognizable as in any way Biblical or Christian.

How could any such amalgum of nonsense and heresy ever take root and then persist across the centuries? Appealing primarily to self-styled intellectuals it represents another example of human beings synthesizing a religion which pleases and pampers them. As indicated, the widely acclaimed English engraver and poet William Blake and his wife were followers of Swedenborg in London. After dabbling in many odd movements, there is evidence that the Blakes turned from Swedenborgianism and became Muggletonians as his mother had been (David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Creative A Christian Reader’s Guide to Great Literature and its Themes*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999, 217). Both the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and the poet Goethe were influenced by Swedenborg. George MacDonald the heterodox Scottish novelist (1824-1905) deeply imbibed a Swedenborgian broth (David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from The Old Testament to the Modern Era*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998, 623). The currently popular Oswald

Chambers who wrote the classic devotional *His Utmost for My Highest* was into Swedenborgianism before his conversion and it seems to me there is an occasional opaque echo from Swedenborg in Chambers (very much as Arthur Pink's earlier forays into Theosophy leave some traces in his life and ministry).

The American folk-hero, Johnny Appleseed was actually John Chapman (1774-1847). He is known for his travels on the frontier, particularly in Ohio, in which he distributed apple seeds and sprouts, serving also as a horticulturist and herb doctor. His exploits were legendary but what is not so well known is that he was a convinced Swedenborgian and he plants the nefarious seeds of doubt in the Bible and about Christ and the Gospel wherever he went. What a variety of instruments Satan uses to deceive.

Thomas Edison the American inventive genius was also into Swedenborgianism. Raised in a devoutly Christian home and repeating the Bible on his phonograph, he turned from the faith, "intoxicated by the expansive rhetoric of social Darwinianism (Neil Baldwin, *Edison: Inventing the Century*. New York: Hyperion, 1995, 230). In facing death he realized he had nothing. The great American poet Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) was Emersonian and Swedenborgian in his sympathies as was Helen Keller the remarkable deaf, dumb and blind woman who captivated the American imagination. Another American poet, Vachel Lindsay (1829-1912) who wrote "General Booth Enters into Heaven" was raised in the Campbellite connection but was drawn to and wrote about Johnny Appleseed (David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Creative*, op. cit., 299).

The Canadian novelist, Robertson Davies (1913-1995) though raised soundly did not like the idea that "Christianity was free for everyone" and wandered theologically. In his *What's Bred in the Bone?* His character Frances Cornish has an outlandish vision of Emmanuel Swedenborg, no less (Ibid., 427). The French novelist Gustave Flaubert also fed deeply on Swedenborg as did the able Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Indeed he also lectured on Swedenborg (Ibid., 483). Henry James, Sr., father of the eminent novelist Henry James and William James, the Stanford-Harvard pragmatist, was an avowed Swedenborgian. The senior James was a graduate of Union College in Schenectady, New York, and

started at Old Princeton Seminary but dropped out. He first became a Sandemanian (a Scottish heresy which taught that intellectual assent in the faith was sufficient) and then in a trough of deep depression he found solace in the “vastations” of Swedenborg. His influence on his large and significant family (and others) was of course decisive (R. W. B. Lewis, *The James*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1991).

In terms of numbers, then, this tragic cult deception has never been large. Yet because of its appeal to and flattery of the human intellect, it has rallied men and women around the world who have been “idea” people and great harm has been done. How alert we need to be and how vigilant. It is not only the “everlasting gospel” of Jesus Christ which is being propagated diligently. Let us beware. I John 4:1-3.


Poem

By Briana Lagoon




Goodbye

There's an empty chair at the table.
There's an empty room across the hall.
There's an empty feeling in me, and that is worst of all.
There's an empty seat at church.
There's an empty place in the driveway.
There's an empty feeling in my life, and I wish it would
go away.




I will never again see you laughing.
I will never again see your face.
I will never again see you here in this place.
I will never again see you drive your truck.
I will never see you growing old.
I will never again see you courageous, happy, scared, or
bold.



You will never meet another girl.
You will never get married.
You will never hold the baby your wife would have carried.
You will never again drive.
You will never again share your pain.
You will never tell me "I love you" again.
We will never again talk to each other.
We will never again fight.
We will never again tell each other it's going to be all right.
We will never again eat another meal together.
We will never again mark your height on the wall.
We will never again play sports like football, baseball,
and basketball.

I so badly want to wake up from this nightmare and
find you waiting there.



You can't be gone.
You can't be dead; so many things were left unsaid.

So many things I want to take back.
So many things I want to say.
So many things I want today.
Why did you have to die?
Why did you have to go?
So many things I want to know.

Why are you gone?
Why didn't you stay?
Why did your life have to end this way?
"Why" keeps haunting my mind
But I know God has a reason for every season.
Even though this is all hard to understand
It is a relief to know that God will help me some how.
In the Bible, God's own word, it says there is a time to
 be born and a time to die,
But still I can't help but ask why.
I feel like Job, but I know God is there for me.
Maybe by this others too will see.
I don't have the answers.
I only have questions with many emotions.
My feelings are mixed.
I am very sad, but I am also very glad.
You get to see your Creator.
You get to walk on streets of gold and see other wonders
 never before told.
You get to live free of pain.
You get to live happily, but still I wish you could think
 of me.

You lived a great life.
You made some mistakes
You are only human but now you are free from hate.
I guess this is goodbye.
I miss you.
I love you.
I always have, I always will.
In a million years you can count on my love still.
I will think of you often, every single day.
I will remember all the things you use to say.
Whenever I am feeling blue
I'll take a stroll down memory lane
And you will be with me once again.
So goodbye, I miss you.
I love you.
Goodbye till we see each other again with our Lord up
 in Heaven.
Goodbye.



BOOK REVIEW

Please Tell Me...

By Tom C. McKenney

Huntinton House Publishers, 1994

Reviewed by Rev. Ervin Ingebretson

This book is a revelation of the philosophies and practices of Freemasonry that, for the most part, are not known even by active Masons. The author employs an interesting format: Questions he has garnered in over twenty years of public speaking and Masons and the answers are the result of his intensive research on the subject. Much of his library is made up of material that he as a non-Mason should not possess. As one reads McKenney's book there is a revelation of much unflattering truth about Freemasonry that he decided should be made public.

The author explains the origin of Masonic lodges, their requirements for membership and the cultural and religious factors that impinge on the practice of Freemasonry. Lodges were open only to healthy, white, Protestant males. A small lodge for blacks was later formed. Women may not become members. However, they and teen boys and girls each have social organizations to which they can belong. The counterpart for the Roman Catholics is the Knights of Columbus.

One prominent feature of Freemasonry is its commitment to secrecy. This landmark is practiced in rituals, handshakes, passwords, recognition signs, penalty signs and death oaths. Their meetings are held behind guarded doors with windows painted or heavily curtained. The primary reason secrecy is demanded is that it is a revival of the ancient pagan mystery religion of the East, especially those of Egypt where their secret ceremonies were practiced in honor of certain gods. The author points out a fallacy in this feature. Most Masons believing that their secrets are not known outside the organization are very much deceived. McKenney claims that the Masons have no secrets.

Is Masonry Christian? The Royal Arch and York Rite are the only lodges that claim to be Christian. Their practices belie their claim. For instance, the Royal Arch lodge professes their god is a combination of Jehovah and Baal or Bel, the pagan god ancient Israel was warned not to touch. This lodge is known to remove the name of Jesus from any Scripture reference they

would choose to use in their ritual. Jesus is reduced to the category of great men of the past.

Is Freemasonry based upon the Bible? No, says the author. This is one of the most common misconceptions among Masons. Some lodges have the King James Bible (insignia on cover) on the so-called altar. Others have the Koran or the Hindu Vedas or some other "holy book" replacing the Bible. Placed on the inside cover of the Bible is a copy of the Masonic Creed and a section of "The Great Light in Masonry," both of which contradict the truths of the Bible.

The Shrine, the advanced degree of Masonry, is the Islamic expression of Freemasonry. The candidate for initiation into the Shrine is greeted by "the existence of Allah and the creed of Mohammed...."

The truth about the Shrine. It is the most conspicuous part of Masonry. They love publicity in their participation in parades and support of children's hospitals. According to the author, only two percent of their gross annual receipts go to the support of children's hospitals. Their greatest interest is in parties and reveling.

The red hat of the Shrine has an interesting history. It is called a "fez" and is bright red in color. It got its name and color from a city in northern Morocco. The city and surrounding area were Christian until the Muslims overran it in the 8th century. The Muslims slaughtered thirty-five thousand Christians, men, women and children. They dipped their hats in the blood of these slaughtered Christians. Hence the blood red color of their hats.

One of the most serious features in Masonry is its practice of divided loyalties. Their oath required as a Mason would allow them to lie in court if a brother Mason were being tried. It could also create a schism in husband/wife relationships.

The Occult and New Age philosophies run through the entire Masonic system. Masons seek power and they look to the Occult for that power. Both Masons and New Agers deny the uniqueness of Jesus.

The primary concern of the author is to present the truth about Freemasonry. He is appalled at the lack of knowledge by non-Masons and Masons alike. He points out that Freemasonry does not have the answers to life, death and eternity, despite their claim. The Bible does.

BOOK REVIEW

Dinosaurs and Creation: Questions and Answers

By Dr. Donald DeYoung

Baker Books, 2000, 141 pages

Reviewed by Steve Lagoon

The whole creation-evolution debate is in high gear. Creationists are winning the days on many fronts, and evolutionists are on the defensive. Dr. Donald DeYoung has been a leader in the creationist movement, having written several books in the field. As chair of the Natural Science Division at Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, faculty member of the Institute for Creation Research, and president of the Creation Research Society, Dr. DeYoung is well qualified to write on this subject.

DeYoung lays the book out in five sections as follows: Dinosaurs and History, Dinosaurs and Modern Times, The Dinosaur Family, The Biology of Dinosaurs, and the Physics of Dinosaurs. Each of the sections is broken down into a question and answer format. There are a total of 50 questions Dr. DeYoung answers in the book, spread throughout the five sections. The book contains very useful glossary a Scripture index, a subject index, and a helpful listing of creationist organizations. The book is intended for "homeschool and Sunday school teachers, Christian teachers and educators, parents, and anyone interested in dinosaurs." Throughout the book DeYoung provides an alternative creationist framework for understanding dinosaurs from that offered by secular evolutionary science.

On page 21, DeYoung shows why radioactive dating does not work for fossils including dinosaurs because fossils "do not contain the needed radioactive isotopes." He then shows that the sedimentary rock layers that contain fossils are also not reliably dated radiometrically because "sedimentary material consists of preexisting rock fragments." Therefore, the millions of years of ages assigned to the dinosaurs are not arrived at by radiometric dating, but by assumptions of the uniformitarian and evolutionary models.

On pages 26-30, DeYoung shows the weaknesses of the popular theory that dinosaurs became extinct as a result of a collision of a large Mars-size object with the earth 65 million years ago.

On pages 51-52, DeYoung gives a delightful account of the

1938 discovery of coelacanths (a type of fish) that evolutionists had been teaching was extinct for 80 million years.

I enjoyed reading this book and have learned much about dinosaurs and how they fit in with the biblical story. It also provides sound answers to the false evolutionary claims about dinosaurs. I recommend this very readable book for anyone interest in creationism and dinosaurs.

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