

CLOSING THE DOOR ON OPEN THEISM: OPEN THEISM'S ASSAULT ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD (3)

Rev. Martyn McGeown

God tested Abraham's faithfulness by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Just when Abraham was on the point of plunging the knife into his son, God said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for *now I know* that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12). Concerning this text Sanders writes, "God's statement, 'now I know,' raises serious theological problems regarding divine immutability and foreknowledge,"¹ before adding,

God needed to know if Abraham is the sort of person on whom God can count for collaboration toward the fulfillment of the divine project. Will he be faithful or must God find someone else through whom to achieve his purpose?²

Bruce Ware's explanation of this passage is compelling.³ First, Abraham had a proven record of faith in God and had shown himself to be a God-fearing man (Heb. 11:8-12; Rom. 4:1-3, 18-22). Second, God had promised unconditionally more than once that He would make of Abraham a great nation, so Sanders' suggestion that God might conceivably have to find someone else is impossible. Third, God knew exactly what was in Abraham's heart as he trekked up that mountain, and Abraham even expressed his faith that he *and Isaac* would return (Gen. 22:5). Ware summarizes it this way:

If Abraham was praying, reflecting and contemplating in his own heart and mind, trusting that God would be able even

¹ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), p. 52.

² Sanders, *Risks*, pp. 52-53.

³ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), pp. 67-74.

to raise Isaac from the dead, if Abraham was even planning to return with Isaac, and if Abraham was doing this prior to raising his knife, then does this not demonstrate that Abraham truly has a heart that fears God, and that he has this God-fearing heart before (and as) he lifts the knife? *Yes, and clearly God knows this about Abraham.*⁴

In addition, what has the openness god “learned” from this test? Simply this, that in this one instance, Abraham fears God. Now this god can compile the data and make astute predictions about the probability of future faithfulness on Abraham’s part. Nevertheless, the openness god has *no guarantee* that Abraham will be faithful in the future. After all the Scriptures are not silent concerning Abraham’s sins (Gen. 12:10-20; 16:1-4; 20:1-18). Ware expresses it this way:

But since Abraham possesses libertarian freedom, and since even God can be taken aback by improbable and implausible human actions, what assurances could God have that Abraham would remain faithful in the future? One realizes how transient the “now I know” is for God. As soon as the test is over, another test would seemingly be required.⁵

The howls of protest from open theists notwithstanding, we must interpret Genesis 22:12 as a figure of speech. However, the question remains, what does the text mean? “It simply will not do,” writes Ware, “to say ... that when Genesis 22:12 says, ‘for now I know’ it means, for I have eternally known ... something takes place in relation to God when Abraham lifts his knife.”⁶ The answer Ware finds is in a distinction between God’s eternal and unchangeable counsel, what He has eternally decreed shall occur in time, and the realization of the eternally decreed actions as they actually unfold in history:

God literally sees and experiences in this moment what he has known from eternity. When the angel of the LORD utters the statement, “for now I know that you fear God,” this expresses the idea that “*in the experience of this action, I (God) am*

⁴ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, p. 71; italics Ware’s.

⁵ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, p. 72.

⁶ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, p. 73.

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witnessing Abraham demonstrate dramatically and afresh that he fears me, and I find this both pleasing and acceptable in my sight." Through Abraham's action of faith and fear of God, God sees and enters into the experience of this action of obedience, which action and heart of faith he has previously known fully and perfectly.⁷

In this way, we see how God takes pleasure in something that He knew infallibly would occur without being surprised by it.

Open theists are inconsistent in their denials of anthropomorphisms. They confess that God has exhaustive knowledge *of the present and the past*, yet they do not deal with passages where God seems to be ignorant of more than just future actions of free human beings. Boyd concedes that God's question in Genesis 3:9 ("Where art thou?") is rhetorical,⁸ but neither he, Sanders, nor Pinnock address Genesis 18:21 ("I will go down now and *see whether they have done* altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and *if not, I will know*"). A literal interpretation would lead to the conclusion that God knows neither the past sins of Sodom, nor the present state of that city and is not omnipresent!⁹

Richard Muller sums up the Reformed orthodox response to such texts:

When therefore such passages of Scripture seem to attribute ignorance to God, these refer, not to God's actual knowledge, but to his use of that knowledge and the relation of that knowledge to his will and justice. The literal reading of such texts by the Socinians, as actually attributing ignorance to God, was viewed by the orthodox, not only as an error in exegesis—failing to take a figure of speech as a figure—but as fundamentally abhorrent to Christian theism. As when God vowed to "go down" to Sodom to see what went on there.¹⁰

⁷ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, pp. 73-74; italics Ware's.

⁸ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), p. 59.

⁹ See Ware, *Lesser Glory*, pp. 76ff.; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), p. 194.

¹⁰ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development*

Then Muller quotes Pictet:

God thus expresses himself, 1) in order to display his justice that he might not appear hurried on to vengeance by a blind fury; 2) to set forth his longsuffering, whereby he is not in haste to punish, though provoked by the obstinate wickedness of man; and 3) to set an example to magistrates in the administration of justice.¹¹

The second group of passages to which the open theists appeal is the divine repentance passages. The Bible does indeed state that God repents, that is, changes His mind. The open theists insist that God *literally* does so. Traditional theism views these statements of divine repentance as something that God *only appears to do*. Calvin is representative:

Concerning repentance we ought so to hold that it is no more chargeable against God than is ignorance, or error, or powerlessness. For if no one wittingly or willingly puts himself under the necessity of repentance, we shall not attribute repentance to God without saying either that he is ignorant of what is going to happen, or cannot escape it, or hastily and rashly rushes into a decision of which he immediately has to repent ... the mode of accommodation [of speech] is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us.¹²

The open theists complain that Calvin was influenced by Augustine, who “filtered the biblical message” according to his (i.e., Augustine’s) understanding of what was fitting for God.¹³ Boyd complains, “If God in fact never changes his mind, saying he does so doesn’t communicate anything truthful: it is

of Reformed Orthodoxy ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 401.

¹¹ Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 401.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (USA & GB: The Westminster Press and S. C. M. Press, 1960), 1.17.12, 13, vol. 1, pp. 226, 227.

¹³ Richard Rice in Richard Rice, John Sanders et al (eds.), *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), p. 82.

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simply inaccurate.”¹⁴

Let us examine two classic passages where God *appears* to change His mind, Jonah 3:9-10 (God’s repentance occasioned by Nineveh’s repentance) and Isaiah 38:1-8 (God’s adding fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life).

The Reformed interpretation of Jonah 3 is that God brought the Ninevites to repentance *in the way of threatening judgment upon them*. Ware writes,

God’s secret intention was to show mercy to Nineveh (which Jonah suspected) and God accomplished this intention exactly as he had purposed, but he accomplished it through Jonah’s warning of the Ninevites and the repentance that the warning elicited.¹⁵

Shedd demonstrates that God’s apparent repentance is actually a testimony to His immutability:

If God had treated the Ninevites after their repentance as he had threatened to treat them before their repentance, this would have proved him to be mutable. It would have shown him to be at one time displeased with impenitence, and at another with penitence.¹⁶

James Oliver Buswell argues that the Ninevites understood that God’s threat of punishment was not an irrevocable decree of damnation. Therefore they did not respond with despair:

Both children and grown people recognize the distinction between a warning and a pronouncement of a sentence when a final decision has been reached. This is true even though the conditions attached to the warning are not expressed but only understood.¹⁷

¹⁴ Boyd in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 39.

¹⁵ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, p. 94.

¹⁶ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Classic reprint edition, 1888), p. 352.

¹⁷ James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, repr. 1975), p. 49.

God uses the language of repentance, because *from our perspective* God appears to have changed His mind, or to have repented. In reality, He has not. In the way of threatening judgment upon Nineveh, God brought His elect in Nineveh to their knees. His fierce anger against their sins was real. He was not pretending to be angry. God does not play games. God's anger against the sins of the elect Ninevites was so real that He poured that wrath upon Jesus Christ centuries later. Only on the basis of the cross that was central to God's immutable counsel could God turn His fierce anger away from His elect people in Nineveh. God had never intended to destroy Nineveh at that time. In his eternal counsel, He had decreed the salvation of the Ninevites by means of the preaching of Jonah. God threatens His elect with judgment, not because He intends to destroy them, but as a means to drive them to the cross. From our perspective, God changed His mind. The idea of repentance is simply a figure of speech, an anthropomorphism, by which God comes to us and condescends to speak in our language. In the same way, we read of God's hands, His nostrils and even His feathers. God does not have these physical characteristics. Neither does He repent.

The same solution presents itself with respect to Hezekiah. God sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would die, whereupon Hezekiah betakes himself to prayer and earnestly beseeches God to spare his life. Open theists conclude from this that Hezekiah prevailed upon God to change His mind and that the length of Hezekiah's life was open and not fixed in God's plan (contrary to Acts 17:26). Boyd testifies that a consideration of this narrative in particular led him to reconsider God's attributes of immutability and omniscience.¹⁸ Herman Hanko points us to the historical context of this account. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, stood in the Davidic line from which line Christ according to the flesh must come. But Hezekiah had *no heir*. If, therefore, he had died at this time, the covenant promises of God would have failed and the Davidic line would have been extinguished. Therefore, from the perspective of God's covenant, it was impossible that Hezekiah could die at this point. Was God playing with Hezekiah? Absolutely not! God was teaching Hezekiah his utter dependence upon Him: "Evidently it was God's purpose to bring Hezekiah to

¹⁸ Boyd, *Possible*, p. 7.

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the awareness of his need for a child.”¹⁹ To this can be added the penetrating insights of Bruce Ware:

Is it not entirely conceivable that God’s purpose behind these words was in fact to elicit from him such earnest, heartfelt dependence on God in prayer? ... God granted to Hezekiah *fifteen years* of extended life—not two, not twenty, and certainly not, “we’ll both see how long you live,” but *fifteen years exactly*. Does it not seem a bit odd that this favorite text of open theists, which purportedly demonstrates that God does not know the future and so changes his mind when Hezekiah prays, also shows that God knows *precisely and exactly how much longer Hezekiah will live*? On openness grounds, how could God know this? Over a fifteen-year time span, the contingencies are staggering! The number of future freewill choices, made by Hezekiah and innumerable others, that relate directly to Hezekiah’s life and well being, none of which God knows (in the openness view) is *enormous*.²⁰

God presents Himself as repenting, therefore, not because He is ignorant but as a teaching aid to finite, mortal creatures.

In this connection, we insist that intercessory prayer *never* changes God’s mind. God knows exactly what we will ask for and in His eternal counsel He has determined the prayers of His people as one important means to accomplish His immutable purpose. Buswell explains,

God has anticipated our prayers before the foundation of the world. He has built the answer to our prayers into the very structure of the universe. He knows that we will pray and that we will pray in a spontaneous manner as a child cries to his father.²¹

Therefore it is the height of folly, not to mention arrogance, to think that God enters into dialogue with us before He decides what to do in the world.

¹⁹ Herman Hanko, *When You Pray* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2006), p. 52.

²⁰ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, pp. 95-96; italics Ware’s.

²¹ Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 49.

Ware writes,

Because God's knowledge and wisdom are vastly superior to ours, we would be utter and absolute fools to want God to wait to "hear from us" before he decides what is best to do ... The presupposition of all healthy, humble, God-honoring, petitionary prayer is not, "Your will be formed," but "Your will be done"²²

This is in full harmony with Romans 11:34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" It would appear that open theists want to be God's counsellors!

The third type of texts concerns God's "regret" over past decisions. Genesis 6:6 reads, "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Such passages do not teach that God is shocked by what has occurred, as if He did not anticipate the wickedness of man. The language underlines God's abhorrence at sin in a very striking way.

With reference to Jeremiah 7:31, etc., where God says through the prophet that it never entered His mind that His people could be so wicked as to sacrifice their own children to a pagan deity, Caneday writes,

Hyper-scrupulous minds may not use the expression "it never entered my mind" lest they lie, but this only betrays ignorance of the idiom's meaning. It is an intensive idiom to express what is unthinkable.

He adds in a footnote,

Open theists fail to recognize the idiomatic nature of this expression. If they insist that we must take the expression literally, then they have a problem, because they also claim that God knows all possibilities, yet here is something that did not enter God's mind. If that is the case, then he did not know this even as a possibility. Caird cleverly observes, "No doubt in every community there will be someone who takes

²² Ware, *Lesser Glory*, pp. 168-170.

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everything literally, someone whose leg you dare not pull for fear that it will come away in your hands.”²³

Besides, it *did* enter God’s mind for, as Ware demonstrates, God warned against the practice of child sacrifice centuries before it happened.²⁴ It is interesting to note the fruit of Russell Fuller’s research that the traditional Rabbinical interpretation of these kinds of texts was also to treat them as anthropomorphisms. Open theism, then, “requires us to believe that Christians and Jews have misunderstood history, theology and exegesis for thousands of years.”²⁵

Impassibility Vs. Vulnerability

The god of open theism is vulnerable. He takes risks in creating and in giving his creatures free will. Having given His creatures the gift of free will, He does not know how they will use it and therefore risks disappointment. This is Sanders’ thesis in *The God Who Risks*. This vulnerability is something to which God “sovereignly” decided to subject Himself: “If in some cases God does not get what he wants it is ultimately because of the decision God made to create the sort of world in which God does not get everything he wants.”²⁶

The results of this risky project into which God entered have been less than satisfactory. “Creation has miscarried.”²⁷ “God is extremely disappointed at how things are turning out.”²⁸ We are able “to hurt God by refusing his offer and by working at cross purposes to him.”²⁹ “God did not want [wars] to happen Rapes and murders are tragedies that make God weep.”³⁰ “God does not get everything he wants in every given situation: that is the plight of a

²³ A. B. Caneday in John Piper, Justin Taylor and Paul Kjos Helseth (eds.), *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), p. 194.

²⁴ Ware, *Lesser Glory*, p. 79.

²⁵ Russell Fuller in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 41.

²⁶ Sanders, *Risks*, p. 229.

²⁷ Sanders, *Risks*, p. 230.

²⁸ Sanders, *Risks*, p. 49.

²⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), p. 46.

³⁰ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 47.

lover.”³¹ “Love is precarious and makes even God vulnerable because it may not be reciprocated.”³² “God feels the pain of rejection.”³³ “The world affects God emotionally and he is moved by the sufferings of his creation.”³⁴

This vulnerable god is not the God of traditional, and especially Reformed, Christianity. Orthodoxy has confessed that God is impassible, that is, *unable to suffer*. Open theism abominates this view of God as pagan Stoicism. Impassibility is not the teaching that God has no emotions, but means that God cannot feel pain or suffer as we human beings do. Richard Muller demonstrates that impassibility and relationality are not incompatible. Impassibility, he writes,

in no way implies an absence of relatedness, love, longsuffering, compassion, mercy and so forth. Impassibility, when attributed to God in the Christian tradition and, specifically in medieval and Protestant scholastic thought, indicates, not a Stoic notion of *apatheia*, but an absence of mutation, distress, or any other sort of negative *passiones*.³⁵

Thus Muller’s humorous conclusion:

The modern writers who argue against the doctrine of divine impassibility as if it were little more than the uncritical importation of a Stoic concept are beating, not a dead, but a nonexistent horse.³⁶

Open theists portray God as suffering because of their heresy of a universal love of God. Since God supposedly earnestly desires the salvation of all men head for head, He suffers terribly at the prospect of seeing many of the objects of His love damned for all eternity. “Scripture,” avers Boyd, “elsewhere tells us that if it were up to God alone, he would save everyone.”³⁷ “[God] genuinely strives to win everyone.”³⁸ Scripture *denies* that God desires to save everyone

³¹ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 54.

³² Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 81.

³³ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 88.

³⁴ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 88.

³⁵ Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 310.

³⁶ Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 310.

³⁷ Boyd, *Possible*, p. 46

³⁸ Boyd, *Possible*, p. 74.

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(Matt. 11:25-27; Rom. 9:22-24). He loves and desires to save His elect only, and He actually saves them. This is the good news of the gospel. The gospel of open theism is good news, neither for sinners, nor for open theism's eternally sad god.

Open Theism's Foundation: Libertarian Free Will

As indicated earlier, open theism is built upon the shaky foundation of God's "repentance," which we have already discussed, and man's alleged libertarian free will, to which we now turn. The contention of the open theists is that genuine relationships and true love are only possible if man is free to choose or to reject God's love. Sanders expresses this in very strong terms:

Irresistible grace may be thought of positively as divine liberation from an invincible prison. But it may also be seen negatively as *divine rape* because it involves nonconsensual control; the will of one is forced on the will of the other. Of course, the desire God *forces* on the elect is a beneficent one—for their own good—but *it is rape nonetheless*. Love cannot be forced because it involves the consent of persons.³⁹

Such a statement is outrageous. Mark Talbot answers Sanders' wicked slur:

Sometimes nonconsensual, unilateral action is necessary if there is to be any possibility of interpersonal love and personal freedom. Suppose I find my wife unconscious and in cardiac arrest. In that condition, she will never love or exercise any kind of personal freedom if I do not work to revive her without her consent. Indeed, my love for her drives me to act without obtaining her consent. Whether love must act without the beloved's consent depends on the condition that the beloved is in. Compatibilists believe that Scripture asserts—and deeper Christian experience corroborates—that, until God regenerates us, all human beings are not merely spiritually sick but actually spiritually dead in our sin (Eph. 2:1).⁴⁰

³⁹ Sanders, *Risks*, pp. 239-240; italics mine.

⁴⁰ Mark R. Talbot in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 108.

Frame notes that the concept of libertarian free will is assumed by open theists without being carefully scrutinized in the light of Scripture and that it is “a kind of grid, through which all other theological assertions must pass.”⁴¹ Libertarian free-willism is the teaching that man’s will is completely free, so that he can choose or not choose on every occasion, that nothing or no one can cause man to choose one thing over another thing and that not even his own nature can determine his free choices. Compatibilism, on the other hand, teaches that man is free to choose *in agreement with his own nature*. Because man is totally depraved, he freely, but in agreement with his own wicked heart, always chooses sin and never good. Frame explains,

If our decisions are caused by anything or anyone (including our own desires), they are not properly our decisions, and we cannot be held responsible for them. To be responsible, we must be able to do otherwise.⁴²

Libertarian free will is an unbiblical concept. Reformed thinkers demonstrate that an uncaused human will does not even exist. Louis Berkhof writes,

The will of man is not something altogether indeterminate, something hanging in the air that can be swung arbitrarily in either direction. It is rather something rooted in our very nature, connected with our deepest instincts and emotions, and determined by our intellectual considerations and by our very character.⁴³

Reymond concurs,

There simply is no such thing as a will which is detached from and totally independent of the person making the choice—suspended, so to speak, in mid-air, and enjoying some “extra personal vantage point from which to determine itself.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), p. 119.

⁴² Frame, *No Other God*, p. 121.

⁴³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner, repr. 2003), p. 68.

⁴⁴ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 353.

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Frame asserts that “Scripture never suggests that God honors causeless choice in any way or even recognises its existence.”⁴⁵ In fact, argues Frame, “libertarian freedom is never assumed to be a condition of moral responsibility” and if a man can be shown to have committed an entirely motiveless crime, he would be judged as insane!⁴⁶ Man is free to choose whatever he desires but, since he is *by nature* fallen, his desires are always evil (John 8:44; Eph. 2:3), so he is not forced against his will to be wicked (James 1:13-15). He acts in accordance with his own nature, and he enjoys sinning, like a pig enjoys mud (Job 15:16). For this reason, no sinner, without irresistible grace (John 6:44), can choose to come to Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:19-21) and is judged for his own wickedness in refusing to believe in Him.

Open Theism’s Questionable Genealogy

Open theism does not have a venerable pedigree. We allow the open theists themselves to trace their theological genealogy. Pinnock writes, “The open view of God grows out of the ideological, if not the ecclesiastical, soul of Wesleyan Arminianism,”⁴⁷ and, “our Calvinist critics call it ‘consistent’ Arminianism, a judgment I am not inclined to reject.”⁴⁸ Sanders shows where his views do and do not find favour:

Whereas the early fathers, Eastern Orthodoxy, Arminius, Wesley, Pentecostalism and a good number of contemporary theologians and philosophers provide a place for divine conditionality, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin either reject any conditionality in God or are inconsistent on the subject.⁴⁹

In a chapter entitled, “Socinianism: the Missing Link in Open Theism’s Genealogy,” Frame exposes the Socinian skeleton in the open theism closet. Frame finds it curious that this link is rarely, if ever mentioned by open theists. “My point,” he writes,

⁴⁵ Frame, *No Other God*, p. 125.

⁴⁶ Frame, *No Other God*, p. 126.

⁴⁷ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 106.

⁴⁸ Pinnock, *Mover*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *Risks*, pp. 164-165.

is not to charge the open theists with all the heresies of Socinianism, or even to imply that they have been concealing something about their heritage. Perhaps they have been unaware of the Socinian connection, although such ignorance would not reflect well on the quality of their scholarship.⁵⁰

Many dogmatic works and systematic theologies make reference to Socinianism's denial of God's foreknowledge. McGregor gives the following prognosis of open theism based on its kinship to Socinianism:

The broad attempt to modify what Reformed theology calls the incommunicable attributes of God represents a radical departure from orthodox theology closely parallel to Socinianism. As far as I know, the free will theists have not begun to deconstruct the Trinity or the Incarnation yet, but they are already trying to empty hell (see Clark Pinnock's *A Wilderness in God's Mercy* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992]). The Incarnation and such concomitant doctrines as Christ's impeccability cannot logically survive the autonomist view of humanness, as the Socinians demonstrated in the 1600s.⁵¹

Conclusion

In Psalm 50, the mighty God (v. 1) speaks to the wicked: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (v. 21). This, to my mind, is the root problem of the open theists. They think that God is *like they are*. This seems to be their presupposition when they ask foolish questions like these: "We experience novelty and surprise. Why wouldn't God experience novelty and surprise? Wouldn't God be bored if He was in control of all things? Isn't it a virtue in us to change? Why would we imagine God to be unchangeable?" This goes hand in hand with their insistence on taking (some) anthropomorphisms literally.

Caneday suggests that open theists have reinvented God for the modern American culture: "[Open theists] readily characterize God with categories

⁵⁰ Frame, *No Other God*, p. 34.

⁵¹ R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong With Freewill Theism?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), pp. 227-228.

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drawn from our modern therapeutic culture that prizes ‘self esteem’ and regards vulnerability as virtuous.”⁵² William C. Davis argues that “the God of open theism is conveniently consistent with the deity that American evangelicals will find comfortable.”⁵³ He continues,

Open theism appeals to the American distaste for mystery on a range of issues. How can we be truly free and God majestically sovereign? No problem: God’s sovereignty is limited by our freedom. Why is there so much evil in the world? God wasn’t able to prevent it without violating human autonomy. Why would God have us pray if he already knows what we’ll ask? He only knows generally what we’re likely to ask. The future is undetermined until we make our choices. Until we pray, there is nothing for God to know about our specific requests; so God can’t decide until then how to respond. He can know what we’ll ask before we ask it only in a general way. Open theism claims to resolve one classic mystery after another.⁵⁴

He adds, “This is a long way from the God of Ephesians 1, who accomplishes everything according to the counsel of his own will.”⁵⁵ This is certainly true. The god of open theism is nothing but an idol. Since he has not done whatsoever he hath pleased, he is not our God who is in the heavens (Ps. 115:3). The open theist must beware, because the same God who rebukes those who think He is altogether such as they are, warns the wicked that He will reprove them and set their sins before their eyes (Ps. 50:21), adding this chilling warning, “Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver” (Ps. 50:22).

Is open theism a temptation for Reformed churches? Probably not. Let us beware, however, for the slippery slope of apostasy that leads to open theism begins with a denial of the sovereignty of God and an embracing of Arminianism. This is the case with Clark Pinnock, whose spiritual pilgrimage is the wicked departure from the truth of Calvinism, via the false gospel of Arminianism,

⁵² Caneday in *Beyond the Bounds*, pp. 151-152.

⁵³ Davis in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 137.

⁵⁴ Davis in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 138.

⁵⁵ Davis in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 138.

to the blatant idolatry of open theism. It is true that not all Arminians have become open theists. Nevertheless, open theism is consistent Arminianism. By continuing to combat Arminianism in all its forms, the Reformed churches will be protected from open theism.

The Reformed confessions, as a faithful summary of the teaching of Scripture, will, if faithfully believed, taught and defended, guard Reformed churches from Arminianism and open theism. Let us continue to confess that “all creatures are in His [i.e., our heavenly Father’s] hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 28) and that “nothing happens in this world without His appointment” (*Belgic Confession* 13). Let us believe in the God who is “immutable, infinite, almighty, [and] perfectly wise” (*Belgic Confession* 1) and who does all things according to “His eternal and unchangeable counsel” (*Belgic Confession* 16). Let us especially be faithful to the *Canons of Dordt*, by which our Reformed forefathers opposed the heresy of Arminianism.

One who believes that God elects some according to His “unchangeable purpose” (*Canons* I:7) and grounds this in the fact that God Himself is “most wise, unchangeable, omniscient and omnipotent” (*Canons* I:11) can never be an open theist. One who is faithful to the *Canons* will repudiate any gross error that makes God changeable (*Canons* I:R:6) and will see that a god who sends Christ to the cross without a decree to save certain people is a god who lacks wisdom (*Canons* II:R:1). One who finds comfort in the glorious truth of the perseverance and preservation of the saints, which truth is grounded in the “unchangeable purpose of election” (*Canons* V:6), can never embrace open theism.

Let us, then, as Reformed Christians cling to the sovereign, unchangeable, omniscient God of Scripture as set forth in the Reformed creeds and we will keep our churches free from Arminianism. Then, by God’s grace, open theism will never become a temptation for us.