

REGARDING "OPEN" OR "FREE-WILL" THEISM

In recent years some evangelical thinkers have attempted to approach the age-old question of how to relate the biblical teaching regarding God's power, knowledge and activity to the biblical teaching on (God-given) human freedom.

Their approaches are often called "open theism" or "free-will theism." We believe that many open/free will theists are attempting to be faithful biblical Christians while making needed correction, from a more Wesleyan-Arminian perspective, to views widely-held among Christians. The holding together of key truths exemplified in the following statement reflects an approach quite like our own:

It is important to recognize that God (according to the Bible) is both transcendent (that is, self-sufficient, the Creator of the world, ontologically other than creation, sovereign and eternal) and at the same time immanent (that is, present to the world, active within history, involved, relational and temporal). Combining the two, we say that God is so transcendent that he creates room for others to exist and maintains a relationship with them, that God is so powerful as to be able to stoop down and humble himself, that God is so stable and secure as to be able to risk suffering and change. Theology must strive to do greater justice to the two truths and hold them in proper balance (C. H. Pinnock in *The Openness of God*, p. 105).

However, many of these attempts are philosophical matters rather than issues of biblical interpretation. As a philosophical issue, SCOD neither affirms nor rejects open or free-will theism insofar as it remains faithful to our Articles of Religion. See, for example:

¶101 THE HOLY TRINITY

There is but one living and true God, the maker and preserver of all things. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in eternity, deity, and purpose; everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.

¶111 A FREE MORAL PERSON

God created human beings in His own image, innocent, morally free and responsible to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. By the sin of Adam, humans as the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature so that from birth they are inclined to sin. They are unable by their own strength and work to restore themselves in right relationship with God and to merit eternal salvation. God, the Omnipotent, provides all the resources of the Trinity to make it possible for humans to respond to His grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By God's grace and help, people are enabled to do good works with a free will.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you want a basic introduction to this approach, start with Clark Pinnock's February 2003 lecture:

"Open Theism: "What is this? A new teaching? -- and with authority!"

(Mk 1:27)" <<<http://www.christchair.ucalgary.ca/crsrc/Pinnock.OpenTheism.pdf>>>

In it Pinnock attempts to restate the position in response to some of the extreme criticism which has arisen in recent years (cf. some of the materials below). He also deals extensively with how open theism relates to Wesleyan-Arminian thinking.

Materials Advocating This Approach:

Another good place for people from Wesleyan-Arminian circles to be introduced to free-will or open theism is in a theological biography of Clark Pinnock which was written by a Wesleyan theologian, and published in co-operation with the Wesleyan Theological Society:

Barry L. Callen, Clark H. Pinnock: *Journey Toward Renewal* (Evangel Publishing House, 2000). See especially "Open and Unbounded" (pp. 127-173).

Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (I.V.P., 1994)

Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Baker Academic, 2001)

David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (I.V.P., 1996)

Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Baker, 2000)

John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (I.V.P., 1998) OpenTheism.org offers, among other resources, a "frequently asked questions" page about openness theology.

Materials on the Christianity Today Website (both praise and caution or condemnation):

God vs. God: Two competing theologies vie for the future of evangelicalism (Feb. 7, 2000).
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/002/30.34.html>>

God at Risk: A former process theologian says a 30-percent God is not worth worshiping. (Mar. 16, 2001)
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/004/3.56.html>>

Truth at Risk: Six leading openness theologians say that many assumptions made about their views are simply wrong. (Apr. 23, 2001)
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/006/29.103.html>>

Has God Been Held Hostage by Philosophy? A forum on free-will theism, a new paradigm for understanding God. (Jan. 9, 1995, reposted online May 11, 2001)
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/119/52.0.html>>

Does God Know Your Next Move? Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders debate openness theology, a discussion that has been expanded into a new book (see below).
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/007/1.38.html>>

Materials which Contain Both "For" and "Against" Positions:

Christopher A. Hall & John Sanders, *Does God Have A Future? A Debate on Divine Providence* (Baker Academic, 2003).

David Basinger, Randall Basinger, eds. *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (I.V.P., 1986).

James K. Bielby, Paul R. Eddy, eds. *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (I.V.P. 2001)

Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross, eds. *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock* (Paternoster Press, 2003).

This book contains articles on topics beyond open theism, but many of the essays articulate strengths and/or weaknesses of the approach.

Books that Condemn Open Theism:

John Piper, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Justin Taylor, eds. *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Crossway Books, 2003)

Douglas Wilson, ed. *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism* (Canon Press, 2001)
