

*The*  
Uncontrolling  
Love *of* God

AN OPEN AND RELATIONAL  
ACCOUNT OF PROVIDENCE

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## The Open and Relational Alternative

**I**n recent decades, a compelling way to answer life's biggest questions has emerged. This way includes a variety of ideas under the overarching label "open and relational theology." The label covers a diverse set of views, and its adherents range from conservative to progressive. Open and relational theology also draws from various resources to offer an attractive proposal for how God acts providentially.

Open and relational theology embraces the reality of randomness and regularity, freedom and necessity, good and evil. It asserts that God exists and that God acts objectively and responsively in the world. This theology usually embraces at least these three ideas:

1. God and creatures relate to one another. God makes a real difference to creation, and creation makes a real difference to God. God is relational.
2. The future is not set because it has not yet been determined. Neither God nor creatures know with certainty all that will actually occur. The future is open.
3. Love is God's chief attribute. Love is the primary lens through which we best understand God's relation with creatures and the relations creatures should have with God and others. Love matters most.

Advocates of open and relational theology may describe their views a little differently from the way I have here.<sup>1</sup> Some add other beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup>Among the open and relational theology books of importance and in addition to those cited

But most advocates embrace at least these three statements.

Open and relational theology offers a unique and, I think, helpful approach to understanding God's providence. This general theological movement fits models near the center of the options that we explored in the previous chapter. The model of providence I will propose, essential kenosis, represents one version of open and relational theology.

Believers have trod diverse paths on their journey to embrace open and relational theology. These paths indicate why this way of thinking about God and life's biggest questions is attractive. Each path tells us something interesting about those who walked it. And each points to reasons an open and relational theological perspective helps us understand divine providence.

### Scripture

In 1994, a quintet of scholars—David Basinger, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice and John Sanders—wrote a groundbreaking and provocative book, *The Openness of God*.<sup>2</sup> Although they offered many reasons to embrace the openness view, the book's subtitle points to the chief role of Scripture: *A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.

The authors of *The Openness of God* believe Scripture's overall message fits best with the three basic ideas of open and relational

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elsewhere in this chapter, see Vaughn W. Baker, *Evangelism and the Openness of God: The Implications of Relational Theism for Evangelism and Missions* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); William Hasker, *The Triumph of God over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008); Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville: Kingswood, 2003); Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord and Karen Winslow, *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* (San Diego: Point Loma, 2012); and Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1980).

<sup>2</sup>Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

theology I mentioned. They believe God gives freedom and relates to creatures as the living God of history. Although God knows all that is knowable, God cannot know with certainty now all that will actually happen in the future. Future events do not yet exist and therefore are, in principle, not yet knowable. Love is God's primary attribute, and God calls us to live lives of love.

Clark Pinnock is one of the better-known authors of *The Openness of God*, and many identify his name with this evangelically oriented version of open and relational theology. Pinnock's journey to the open view began in a Baptist context shaped by Calvinist writings.<sup>3</sup> Pinnock originally considered himself, as he put it, "a Calvinist who regarded alternate evangelical interpretations as suspect and at least mildly heretical."<sup>4</sup>

While studying the Bible carefully, however, Pinnock came to believe he needed course corrections in his spiritual journey. He needed to "listen more carefully to what the Scriptures actually say and teach."<sup>5</sup> This led him to believe "reform in the doctrine of God is needed precisely because of the Bible." He came to believe Scripture "authorizes the open view in significant ways."<sup>6</sup>

Old Testament writings witness to a relational deity as God enters into covenant through give-and-receive relations with others. In this covenant, God makes promises whose fulfillment depends on creaturely responses. The Lord says, for instance, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I . . . will forgive their sin and heal their land." But if they "turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments," says the Lord, "I will pluck you up from the land

<sup>3</sup>Barry L. Callen tells the story of Pinnock's journey in *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal, an Intellectual Biography* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1995), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "A Response to Rex A. Koivisto," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981): 153-54.

<sup>6</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), p. 60.

that I have given you” (2 Chron 7:14, 19-20).

In this covenant and others, God waits for Israel’s response. God is not sure which action will be taken until creatures respond. We find covenants such as this among numerous Old Testament passages, and they indicate that God does not always know what will happen in the future.

In the Old Testament, biblical authors also say God has regrets, learns and changes plans. In fact, God sometimes has a change of mind. In the Genesis flood story, for instance, God “saw . . . the wickedness” and “was sorry that he had made humankind” (Gen 6:5-6). If God knows the future exhaustively, God will not have regrets.

In the story of Abraham taking Isaac to be sacrificed, the angel of the Lord says, “do not lay your hand on the boy . . . ; for now I know that you fear God” (Gen 22:12). The Lord learns something from Abraham’s actions, something not known previously. To say God learns is to say God comes to know something not previously knowable.

The Lord says to Hezekiah, “Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.” But Hezekiah prays and weeps. The Lord sees this repentance and says, “I will add fifteen years to your life” (Is 38:1-5). God’s plans change because of Hezekiah’s actions.

The word of the Lord prompts Jonah to proclaim: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jon 3:4). But the king of Nineveh and his people repent. They say, “Who knows? God may relent and change his mind.” God does just that. “When God saw what they did,” says Scripture, “God changed his mind” (Jon 3:9-10). In fact, forty or more Old Testament passages say God has a change of mind, which suggests God does not foreknow the future in its entirety.

Pinnock also listened carefully to the New Testament. While this segment of the Bible says less about God’s knowledge of the future, we find in it a record of Jesus’ life and teachings. Christians believe Jesus offers the fullest revelation of God’s character.

New Testament writers report that God expresses sacrificial love, including love for enemies and strangers. This love tells us something about God’s relational power. “God’s true power is revealed in the

cross of Jesus Christ,” says Pinnock. “In this act of self-sacrificing, God deploys power in the mode of servanthood, overcoming enemies not by annihilating them but by loving them.” This means that “the power of love is the power that wills genuine relationships,” and this view “is certainly not a diminished or inferior view of power.”<sup>7</sup>

In light of Scripture, these passages of Scripture and those describing God’s relationship with the early church, Pinnock found himself “giving up the view according to which God is thought to relate primarily to us as all-determining monarch and law-giver.” This meant “shifting to the paradigm in which God relates to us primarily as parent, lover, and covenant partner.”<sup>8</sup> According to Pinnock, “what we find in Scripture is a range of images designed to disclose something of God’s nature. They seem to tell us that creation is a dynamic project and that God is personal and relational.”<sup>9</sup> This open and relational perspective, he came to believe, is “the dynamic theism of the scriptural witness.”<sup>10</sup>

The open and relational perspective rejects the idea that God controls all things. “In the biblical narrative,” says Pinnock, “one does not find a predestinarian decree operating behind the scenes, to ensure that God’s will is always done.” This means “history is not a printout of pre-programmed events, all videotaped and decided.”<sup>11</sup> History is open, and creatures join God in writing it.

Pinnock’s view of God changed partly because he discovered that “the Bible assumes libertarian freedom when it posits personal give-and-take relationships and when it holds people responsible for their actions.”<sup>12</sup> “God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God’s will for their lives,” says Pinnock,

<sup>7</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” *Theology Today* 53 (April 1996): 20.

<sup>8</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, foreword to *Clark Pinnock on Biblical Authority*, by Ray Roennfeldt (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>9</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup>Pinnock, in Clark H. Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 96.

<sup>11</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

“and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us.”<sup>13</sup> All of this implies that God’s relation to time is similar to ours. God “remembers the past, savors the present, and anticipates the future.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the more influential biblical scholars today, Terence Fretheim, also embraces open and relational themes because he sees them in the biblical text.<sup>15</sup> Fretheim argues, for instance, that creation is “not a finished product or static state of affairs but a dynamic process in which the future is open to a number of possibilities and in which God’s engagement with creaturely activity is crucial for creational developments.”<sup>16</sup> “Any talk about divine omniscience in the Old Testament must be limited when it comes to talk about the future,” he says. “It is limited in such a way as to include a genuine divine openness to the future.”<sup>17</sup>

Pinnock and Fretheim are among Christians who, through biblical studies, embrace open and relational theology.<sup>18</sup> According to the overall drift of Scripture, they say, open and relational themes dominate.<sup>19</sup> Christians who regard the Bible as their primary theological resource must take the open and relational perspective seriously.

<sup>13</sup>Clark Pinnock et al., *Openness of God*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup>Terence E. Fretheim has many publications that document the biblical support for open and relational theology. See, for instance, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010); *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005); *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); “Genesis,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); *Exodus* (Philadelphia: John Knox, 1991); “The Bible in a Postmodern Age,” in *The Bible Tells Me So*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord (Nampa, ID: SacraSage, 2011); “Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul’s Kingship,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (October 1985): 595-602; and “The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (June 1988): 47-70.

<sup>16</sup>Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup>Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup>In addition to Pinnock and Fretheim, biblical scholars whose work is especially congenial to open and relational theologies include William A. Beardslee, Michael Brown, William P. Brown, Walter Brueggemann, C. S. Cowles, Ronald Farmer, J. G. Janzen, John Goldingay, Gerald Janzen, George Lyons, David J. Lull, Richard Middleton, Russell Pregeant and Karen Winslow.

<sup>19</sup>For discussions of the suffering and changing God of the Old Testament, see also Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 44-47; Fretheim, *Suffering of God*; and Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp. 138-49.

## Christian Theologies

Some adherents to open and relational theology followed themes already present in the Christian tradition as their path to embracing the open and relational perspective. These traditions include Adventist, Arminian, Lutheran, Mennonite, Pentecostal, Restorationist and Wesleyan.<sup>20</sup> This does not mean everyone who identifies with or works from these traditions embraces open and relational theology. Rather, some members in these traditions follow the logic of particular themes on their way to embracing open and relational thought.<sup>21</sup>

For example, Lutheran theologian Marit Trelstad says, “Lutheran theology provides an emphasis on justification rooted in God’s unswerving love and promise.” God’s covenant “describes the fundamental promise and reality of relationship God offers to creation,” and “covenantal love is essential to God’s nature.” This covenant “provides creative possibilities for new forms of becoming” and “indelibly knits humanity to God.”<sup>22</sup>

Contemporary Anabaptists draw from Menno Simons’s emphasis upon pacifism, freedom and peace. Some Anabaptists find these themes congruent with the emphasis upon noncoercion and divine persuasion typical of open and relational theology. Rod Thomas, for instance, argues that “the theological openness that Jesus embodied and the idea

<sup>20</sup>One could add Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) theology to this list, although scholars debate whether the Latter-Day Saint movement is rightly considered part of the Christian tradition. For Mormon views compatible with open and relational themes, see Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God*, vol. 1 (Draper, UT: Kofford, 2001). See also the discussion between evangelical Clark Pinnock and Mormon David Paulsen, “A Dialogue on Openness Theology,” in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christianity*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), pp. 489-553.

<sup>21</sup>I am grateful to friends and scholars on Facebook discussion groups for helping me think through how members in Christian traditions follow themes when embracing open and relational theologies. In particular, I thank David Cole, Chris Fisher, James Goetz, Simon Hall, Randy Hardman, John D. Holloway, Curtis Holtzen, William Lance Huget, Jacob Matthew Hunt, Dave Huth, Richard Kidd, Richard Livingston, Jay McDaniel, T. C. Moore, Quinn Olinger, Bryan Overbaugh, Matt Perkins, David Saleeba, Neil Short and Rod Thomas.

<sup>22</sup>Marit A. Trelstad, “Putting the Cross in Context: Atonement Through Covenant,” in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist and Mujerista Perspectives*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), p. 109.

that God is relational rely on persuasion as the primary form of engagement.” This involves what Thomas calls “nonviolent politics.”<sup>23</sup>

Some contemporary Baptists extrapolate from their belief that believers must freely choose baptism. This extrapolation leads them to embrace open and relational theology, with its emphasis upon creaturely freedom. Frank Tupper, for instance, believes we should think of God as persuasive and empowering. Worship of Abba, says Tupper, “includes the renunciation of dominating power and overwhelming force as the way to accomplish the will of God.”<sup>24</sup>

Pentecostals believe we must cooperate with God when exercising the gifts of the Spirit, and this Creator-creature-cooperation theme prevails in open and relational theology.<sup>25</sup> Pentecostal theologian Joshua D. Reichard says, “God’s activity in the world is not primarily unilateral but relational.” God shares power with believers through *concursum*, which means God cooperates with creatures to accomplish the divine will.<sup>26</sup> Pentecostal-charismatic affirmations, such as contemporary spiritual gifts and the possibility of miracles, says Reichard, “have inherent compatibility with open and relational theology.”<sup>27</sup>

The Stone-Campbell Restorationist movement emphasizes freedom in the Spirit. This fits the emphasis upon free will found in open and

<sup>23</sup>Rod Thomas, “Rebooting Political Jesus Part 3, Nonviolent Politics,” *Resist Daily*, <http://resistdaily.com/rebooting-political-jesus-part-3-nonviolent-politics>.

<sup>24</sup>E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), p. 133.

<sup>25</sup>In addition to Joshua D. Reichard’s writing (see below), see Kenneth J. Archer, “Open Theism View: ‘Prayer Changes Things,’” *Pneuma Review* 5, no. 2 (2002): 32-53; and idem, *The Gospel Revisited: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Worship and Witness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

<sup>26</sup>See Joshua D. Reichard, “Relational Empowerment: A Process-Relational Theology of the Spirit-filled Life,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 36, no. 2 (2014): 1-20. See also idem, “Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Concursum,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22 (2013): 95-114.

<sup>27</sup>Joshua D. Reichard, “Of Miracles and Metaphysics: A Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational Dialog,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 48 (2013): 274-93. See Reichard’s other essays, including “Beyond Causation: A Contemporary Theology of Concursum,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 34 (2013): 117-34; “An ‘Improbable Bond of the Spirit’: Historical Perspectives on the Christian Life in Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational Theologies,” in *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 179-98; and “From Causality to Relationality: Toward a Wesleyan Theology of Concursum,” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 49, no. 1 (2014): 122-38.

relational theology.<sup>28</sup> William Curtis Holtzen, a theologian in this tradition, says “God’s real power in relational theism is not about compulsion or coercion but rather a love that lures, prompts, and leads humans to become what God desires them to become and transform into the *Imago Dei*.” Holtzen believes God “has to become vulnerable, take risks, and share power with humanity thus allowing us the ability to alter or conform to God’s plans.”<sup>29</sup>

Many attracted to Jacob Arminius’s affirmation of creaturely cooperation with God for salvation and denial of individual predestination find themselves drawn to open and relational theology.<sup>30</sup> Although Arminius believed God foreknows all things, other Arminian themes are identical to themes in open and relational theology. Arminian theologian Roger Olson, for instance, says that “free will is a key idea of Arminian theology, and prevenient grace is the source of free will with regard to a person’s acceptance of the gospel . . . . Free will is *for the sake* of God’s character.” Open and relational theology agrees. Open and relational theology, says Olson, is “closer to the ‘heart’ of Arminianism.”<sup>31</sup>

Christians who believe love is central for faith and practice are likely to embrace open and relational theology. In their own ways, many Christian traditions say God’s primary attribute is love, and God lovingly gives to and receives from creatures. Many say God calls

<sup>28</sup>See C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988). For an early Restorationist tract compatible with open theology, see T. W. Brents’s late nineteenth-century arguments against the predestining and foreknowing God of Calvinism, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 8th ed. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1890), [www.oldpaths.com/Archive/Brents/Thomas/Wesley/1823/gosplan.html](http://www.oldpaths.com/Archive/Brents/Thomas/Wesley/1823/gosplan.html).

<sup>29</sup>William Curtis Holtzen, “Bruce (Not So) Almighty: Divine Limitation and Human Transformation,” in *Essays of Hope*, ed. Joseph Grana (Fullerton, CA: Hope International University Press, 2012), p. 56.

<sup>30</sup>For expositions of Arminian theology, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); W. Stephen Gunter, *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments: An Annotated Translation with Introduction and Theological Commentary* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); and Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup>Roger Olson, “Is Open Theism a Type of Arminianism?,” *My Evangelical Arminian Theological Musings* (blog), Evangelical Channel, *Patheos*, November 10, 2012, emphasis original, [www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2012/11/is-open-theism-a-type-of-arminianism/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2012/11/is-open-theism-a-type-of-arminianism/).

us to cooperate with divine providence by living lives of love.

The central themes of the Wesleyan tradition fit well with open and relational theology. Wesleyans typically follow John Wesley's efforts to understand divine sovereignty in light of God's love.<sup>32</sup> Wesley preached that God "strongly and sweetly influenc[es] all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures."<sup>33</sup> He understood God's power, says Randy Maddox, "fundamentally in terms of *empowerment*, rather than control or *overpowerment*." Wesleyans should believe "God's grace works powerfully, but not irresistibly," says Maddox, at least "in matters of human life and salvation."<sup>34</sup>

Many in the Wesleyan tradition follow Wesley's lead and emphasize love as the center of Christian theology.<sup>35</sup> Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, for instance, wrote her magnum opus, *A Theology of Love*, to envision holiness through the lens of God's relational love.<sup>36</sup> "When each doctrine of the Christian faith is identified and defined by [Wesley]," argued Wynkoop, "the basic meaning invariably comes out 'love.'"<sup>37</sup>

John Wesley's "thought is like a great rotunda with archway entrances all around it," says Wynkoop. "No matter which [archway] is

<sup>32</sup>Among helpful Wesleyan resources, see J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Preventive Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2010); and Rem B. Edwards, *John Wesley's Values—And Ours* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2012). See also sources listed in footnotes below.

<sup>33</sup>John Wesley, "On the Omnipresence of God," sermon 118, in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 4:42, § 2.1.

<sup>34</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), p. 55.

<sup>35</sup>See, for instance, the work of Barry L. Callen, *God as Loving Grace: The Biblically Revealed Nature and Work of God* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1996); John B. Cobb Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); Timothy J. Crutcher, *The Crucible of Life: The Role of Experience in John Wesley's Theological Method* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2010); Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of the Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2010); Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace*; Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*; K. Steve McCormick, "The Heresies of Love: Toward a Spirit-Christ Ecclesiology of Triune Love," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37 (spring 2002): 35-47; Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2005); and Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

<sup>36</sup>Michael Lodahl and I make the same argument in *Relational Holiness*.

<sup>37</sup>Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1972), p. 10.

entered, it always leads to the central Hall of Love.”<sup>38</sup> This love “creates freedom,” she says, and it links “every doctrine together into one dynamic architectonic and [shows] the theological stature and integrity of John Wesley.”<sup>39</sup>

Theologians in all these traditions wrestle with how to understand God’s foreknowledge in light of divine love and creaturely freedom. Most deny that God foreordains or predestines all things. But many believe God foreknows all future occurrences. For them, God knows with absolute certainty what we will do tomorrow and in the entire future, and yet we are free to do otherwise. These theologians embrace traditional positions on God’s omniscience typically labeled “simple foreknowledge” or “middle knowledge,” which I will explain later.<sup>40</sup>

Others in these traditions, however, believe emphasis upon God’s love and creaturely freedom does not fit traditional views of God’s foreknowledge. God does not foreknow the future exhaustively. They believe God experiences time in a way similar to the way creatures experience it. The future is full of possibilities, and, being omniscient, God knows them all. But God cannot foreknow with absolute certainty which possibilities will become actual.

Although Pinnock’s book *The Openness of God* and other works brought this view of God’s knowledge to the center of contemporary conversation, theologians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also affirmed it.<sup>41</sup> For instance, Methodist theologian Lorenzo

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

<sup>40</sup>For more on middle knowledge, see Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). For more on simple foreknowledge, see David Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 65-103; and for a criticism of simple foreknowledge see Dean Zimmerman, “The Providential Usefulness of ‘Simple Foreknowledge,’” in *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 174-202.

<sup>41</sup>For a list of leading voices preceding and including contemporary open theologians, see John Sanders, “Who Has Affirmed Dynamic Omniscience and the Open Future in History?,” *Open Theism Information Site*, updated January 27, 2014, [http://opentheism.info/information/affirmed-dynamic-omniscience-open-future-history/#\\_edn11](http://opentheism.info/information/affirmed-dynamic-omniscience-open-future-history/#_edn11). Tom Lukashow has done signifi-

D. McCabe (1817–1897) extensively defended the view that God’s omniscience does not entail exhaustive foreknowledge.<sup>42</sup> “As to pure contingencies prior to their creation,” argued McCabe, “[God] may have theories, ideals, fancies, possibilities or probabilities, but cannot have certain knowledge.”<sup>43</sup> “In the divine omniscience,” he says, “there must be an element of growth,” which means new knowledge will become available to God in the future.<sup>44</sup>

Lutheran theologian Isaak Dorner (1809–1884) said a consistent view of God working with us in history requires that God knows future, free acts of creatures as possibilities, not actualities. “We cannot be satisfied with the assertion that for God there can be nothing past and nothing future as such,” argued Dorner. God’s knowledge “presupposes a movement, a change even in the knowing activity of God himself.”<sup>45</sup>

Stone-Campbell Restorationist thinker T. W. Brents (1823–1905) believed God voluntarily chooses not to know some things. Brents argued that “if God knew before He gave Adam the law in the garden that [Adam] would violate it, then [Adam] was not free; for he could not have falsified God’s foreknowledge.” For this reason, God “saw fit to avoid knowledge of everything incompatible with the freedom of the human will.”<sup>46</sup>

The Roman Catholic theologian Jules Lequyer (1814–1862) followed what he believed the logic of free will implied by God’s foreknowledge.<sup>47</sup> “I believe that God has only a conjectural knowledge of the

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cant historical work on advocates of the open view of the future, and his work can be found on the web: “Open Theism Time Line by Tom Lukashow,” published by Terri Churchill, March 28, 2013, [www.scribd.com/doc/132763616/Open-Theism-Timeline-by-Tom-Lukashow](http://www.scribd.com/doc/132763616/Open-Theism-Timeline-by-Tom-Lukashow).

<sup>42</sup>See Lorenzo Dow McCabe, *Divine Nescience of Future Contingencies a Necessity* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1882); and idem, *The Foreknowledge of God* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1887).

<sup>43</sup>McCabe, *Divine Nescience*, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>45</sup>Isaak August Dorner, “On the Proper Version of the Dogmatic Concept of the Immutability of God,” in *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology*, ed. and trans. Claude Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 135-36.

<sup>46</sup>T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 1st ed. (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1874), p. 96, [www.oldpaths.com/Archive/Brents/Thomas/Wesley/1823/gosplan.html](http://www.oldpaths.com/Archive/Brents/Thomas/Wesley/1823/gosplan.html).

<sup>47</sup>See Donald Wayne Viney, “Jules Lequyer and the Openness of God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14

acts determined by human activity,” said Lequyer.<sup>48</sup> God’s knowledge depends, in part, upon creaturely decisions.

Adventist scholar Uriah Smith (1832–1903) wrote commentaries on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and yet denied exhaustive foreknowledge. “God made [humans], as he must make all intelligences who are to serve him, as free moral agents,” argued Smith, “that such service may not be mechanical and constrained, but voluntary and free.” “God knew of course that [humans] *might* sin,” he says, “but this would be a very different thing from saying he knew that [humans] *would* sin.”<sup>49</sup>

Several Methodist theologians in the early twentieth century rejected exhaustive foreknowledge.<sup>50</sup> One of the best known, Edgar S. Brightman (1884–1953), put his rejection of exhaustive definite foreknowledge this way: “God cannot be said to have complete foreknowledge. Although a divine mind would know all that was knowable and worth knowing, including the consequences of all possible choices, it would not know what choices a free mind would make.”<sup>51</sup> God cannot know because God’s “consciousness is an eternal time movement, the soul of the ongoing of all reality.”<sup>52</sup>

In the latter part of the twentieth century, some followed the newly emerging process-theology tradition as their path to open and relational theology.<sup>53</sup> Process theology is notoriously difficult to define,

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(April 1997): 212-35.

<sup>48</sup>Jules Lequyer quoted in Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 230.

<sup>49</sup>Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus or Christ as Type or Antitype* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1898), p. 49, ¶2.

<sup>50</sup>See Randy L. Maddox’s work on Methodists who rejected exhaustive foreknowledge in “Seeking a Response-Able God: The Wesleyan Tradition and Process Theology,” in *Thy Nature and Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord (Nashville: Kingswood, 2001), pp. 111-42.

<sup>51</sup>Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Finding of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1931), p. 136. See also idem, *The Problem of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1930).

<sup>52</sup>Brightman, *Finding of God*, p. 132.

<sup>53</sup>Process theology comes in a variety of forms. In addition to those by Cobb, Griffin and Hartshorne, whose works are mentioned above, these books represent some of the variety: Bradley Shavit Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Relationship of Process Theology* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2013); Joseph A. Bracken, *Does God Roll Dice: Divine Providence for a World in the Making* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012); Philip Clayton, *Adventures*

and scholars debate how best to describe its essence.<sup>54</sup> But Christian process theologians typically affirm the centrality of love for theology, genuine creaturely freedom, randomness and necessities in the world, and that God's current knowledge does not include future occurrences.<sup>55</sup> They are open and relational theologians.

Most process thinkers agree with Charles Hartshorne, who argues for "growth in God's knowledge." "The creative process produces new realities to know."<sup>56</sup> This means "God does not already or eternally know what we do tomorrow," says Hartshorne, "for, until we decide, there are no such entities as our tomorrow's decisions."<sup>57</sup>

Process theologian John B. Cobb Jr. agrees. "If one reads the Bible in any straightforward way," he argues, "there is no question but that creaturely events have an impact on God that is not already predetermined. The Bible often speaks of God's interacting with human beings, of this interaction as even changing God's mind." The Bible does not make much sense, says Cobb, if God eternally knows all events as already completed.<sup>58</sup>

Other theological traditions and theologians propose beliefs congenial with or identical to open and relational theology. My aim for

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*in the Spirit: God, World, and Divine Action* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008); Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Bruce Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2011); Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster, 2004); Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003); idem, *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, eds. *Handbook of Process Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006); Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 1967); Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); and Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>54</sup>John B. Cobb Jr., a leading representative for process theology, does not identify an essence to process theology. His colleague and also a leading spokesman for process thought, David Ray Griffin, lists ten core doctrines. David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup>For introductions to process theology, see John B. Cobb Jr., *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions About Process Theology*, ed. Jeanyne B. Slettom (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003); and Epperly, *Process Theology*. See also McDaniel and Bowman, *Handbook of Process Theology*.

<sup>56</sup>Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 27.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>58</sup>Cobb, *Process Perspective*, p. 31.

this section, however, has been to make two main points. First, ideas at the heart of some Christian traditions prompt some members to follow the logic of those ideas as their path to open and relational theology. Second, although open and relational theology as a comprehensive way of thinking is a recent phenomenon, some theologians from the distant past championed its ideas. Significant theologians of yesteryear even championed the idea that God's omniscience does not include knowing now with certainty all that will occur sometime in the future.

### **Philosophy**

A third path some have taken to open and relational theology is philosophical. Philosophers divide their discipline into various traditions, divisions and emphases. In the current scene, analytic and continental philosophical approaches dominate. Among those two, analytic philosophers have engaged themes of open and relational theology most directly, especially the issue of divine foreknowledge.

A number of important philosophers accept an open and relational view of God's knowledge. William Hasker is one of the best known. Hasker was convinced early in life that humans have free will, in the sense of libertarian freedom. And this conviction played a key role in his journey to open and relational thought.

As a Wheaton College student, Hasker began to discover problems with affirming libertarian free will and believing some traditional theological ideas. "I was torn between my love and admiration for Augustine (which still persist today)," he says, "and the deeply troubling aspects of his doctrines of election and reprobation. Eventually I concluded that the God of holiness, love, and justice in whom both Augustine and I believed simply could not be the author of an eternal, unconditional decree of reprobation."<sup>59</sup>

During these early years, Hasker held the simple foreknowledge view of God's omniscience. This view says humans are genuinely free,

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<sup>59</sup>William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 98.

and yet God foreknows all free choices in the future and the results of those choices. Most who accept simple foreknowledge think God timelessly foreknows future free actions.

Later in life, Hasker was introduced to the middle-knowledge view of God's omniscience, also known as Molinism. This view says God knows all the actual decisions free creatures will make before creatures make them. God also knows what free creatures would have done in any possible situation, even if the choices were never actually made. Philosophers call the alleged actions creatures might have done "counterfactuals of freedom."

Hasker's reaction to Molinism was and remains negative. "Right from the beginning, this theory struck me as being entirely implausible," he says. As Hasker sees it, "there is nothing whatever either in the circumstances involved or in the nature and character of the chooser that determines in advance the decision that will be made."<sup>60</sup> Until a free agent makes an actual choice, God cannot foreknow that choice except the possibilities involved.

In 1973, Hasker began to move away from the simple-foreknowledge perspective. In that year, he read Nelson Pike's argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.<sup>61</sup> "The argument at once struck me as extremely compelling, and I have never wavered from that first impression," he reports. "None of the ingenious ways of evading the argument has seemed to me at all satisfactory."<sup>62</sup> We now call the alternative Hasker began to consider "the open view" of God's knowledge.

Hasker also began to question the traditional view of God's relation to time, especially timeless eternity. During this period, he "began to write a paper exploring the difficulties of this doctrine."<sup>63</sup> The paper eventually led to a book, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, and

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>61</sup>See Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken, 1970).

<sup>62</sup>William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, p. 100.

<sup>63</sup>William Hasker's paper was eventually published as "Concerning the Intelligibility of 'God Is Timeless,'" *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983): 170-95.

to Hasker rejecting divine timelessness.<sup>64</sup>

The idea that God is essentially timeless makes little philosophical sense to Hasker, and “it clearly is not the biblical way of thinking about God.” “For me personally, the decisive consideration was that a timeless God would be able to know us human beings only as timeless representations,” he explains. “This detracts seriously from the personalism and intimacy which are so important to our relationship with God.”<sup>65</sup>

In his journey to an open and relational perspective, Hasker also came to believe that neoplatonic-inspired metaphysics, not the Bible, motivated the traditional Christian view of God’s relation to time. In contrast to neoplatonism, a more adequate view says God experiences the passage of time in a manner similar to the way creatures experience it: moment by moment.

“God’s knowledge of the future, incomparably greater though it is than any knowledge we could possess, is not the complete, certain, and infinitely detailed knowledge posited by most of the theological tradition,” says Hasker. “Though this conclusion is not one that I am now reluctant about, it was arrived at with considerable reluctance and after extended reflection.”<sup>66</sup>

Hasker and other open and relational thinkers believe God is omniscient. They believe God knows everything that can be known. God knows now what might occur in the future, but God cannot know now all events that will actually occur. To put it philosophically, God knows all possibilities and all actualities, but God cannot know which possibilities will become actual until they are actualized.

Open and relational thinkers believe God’s alleged foreknowledge of actual events is incompatible with creaturely free will. But they do not say God’s foreknowledge exerts causal force to determine what will happen. Open and relational thinkers believe, however, that the exhaustive-foreknowledge view implies the future is complete, settled

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<sup>64</sup>William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>65</sup>Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, p. 100.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.

and fixed. Free will only makes sense if the future is not complete, not settled and not fixed because free will requires multiple options and the ability to do otherwise than what one might have done. For free will to be genuine, the future must be open, not settled.

In addition to denying that God knows the actual future, most for whom philosophy was their path to open and relational theology reject additional views of God common in Christian history. Most reject traditional ways of thinking about God's timelessness, simplicity, impassibility and immutability. These attributes interrelate, at least loosely, and rejecting one often means rejecting the others.

For instance, the open and relational view of foreknowledge is tied, as Hasker realized, to God's relation to time. Process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead is perhaps best known for postulating that God exists everlastingly in the process of time. Whitehead's early twentieth-century contributions continue to influence scholars today.

Some outside the process tradition now also make this argument, however. Nicholas Wolterstorff, for instance, says that "at least some of [God's] aspects stand in temporal order-relations to each other. Thus God, too, has a time-strand. His life and existence is itself temporal." Furthermore, says Wolterstorff, "the events to be found on God's time-strand belong within the same temporal array as that which contains our time-strands."<sup>67</sup> God exists everlastingly in time.

For a significant period, process philosophers and theologians were the most prominent among those reevaluating the classic doctrine of divine impassibility.<sup>68</sup> The impassibility doctrine says creatures do not essentially affect God. According to the traditional view, God has only logical relations with creation, not real and mutually

<sup>67</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 181-203; reprinted in *Philosophy and Faith: A Philosophy of Religion Reader*, ed. David Shatz (New York: McGraw, 2002), pp. 62-69. See also selections from Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, eds., *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Amos Yong, "Divine Knowledge and Relation to Time," in *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2003), pp. 136-52.

<sup>68</sup>See especially Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941).

influencing relations. Rather than relational, the impassible God is not susceptible to creaturely causation.<sup>69</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century, it seemed the majority of Christian scholars rejected the classical view of impassibility. Most believed God to be relational because God affects others and others affect God. Ronald Goetz even argues that the doctrine of the suffering God—the view that God is relational and passible rather than unaffected and impassible—has become the new orthodoxy among Christians.<sup>70</sup>

Richard E. Creel is among contemporary philosophers who now believe God is relational rather than impassible. If God loves, Creel says, God must sympathize with those whom God loves. “Any being which is insensitive or indifferent to the joys and sufferings of others,” he argues, “is unloving and therefore unworthy of the title ‘God.’” A personal God enters into dialogue with others, which means God must “take such input into account in decisions about and response to [creatures].”<sup>71</sup> If God truly takes “such input into account,” creatures affect deity.

Closely related to passibility is God’s mutability. To be mutable is to change, and the classic doctrine of divine immutability says God never changes in any respect. Charles Hartshorne’s views on this subject may be the most influential, historically speaking, among open and relational thinkers.<sup>72</sup> Hartshorne rejected the idea found

<sup>69</sup>Richard E. Creel, “Immutability and Impassibility,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 314.

<sup>70</sup>Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *Christian Century* 103 (1986): 385–89. Jürgen Moltmann has become well known for his emphasis upon God experiencing suffering, which is the same as saying God is passible or relational. See especially Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974). More recently, Wesley Hill has argued that impassibility has returned to general favor. Hill’s characterization of a suffering-God motif is not robust enough, however, to account for the view held by most relational theologians that God has both passible and impassible aspects. Wesley Hill, “The New ‘New Orthodoxy’: Only the Impassible God Can Help,” *First Things*, January 15, 2015, [www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/01/the-new-new-orthodoxy](http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/01/the-new-new-orthodoxy).

<sup>71</sup>Creel, “Immutability and Impassibility,” p. 315. For a slightly different and earlier argument from Richard Creel, see his book *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (1986; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

<sup>72</sup>For a summary of Hartshorne’s philosophical views on God, see Donald Wayne Viney, *Charles Hartshorne and the Existence of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

in Thomas Aquinas, for instance, which says God is pure act without any potential for change. For Aquinas, God is immutable in all respects. For Hartshorne, God is immutable in some respects and mutable in others.

Hartshorne says God's eternal nature never changes. It is immutable. But God's living experience changes in moment-by-moment relations with others. It is mutable. As the greatest conceivable being, God's essence is perfectly unchanging. But in experience, God as the greatest conceivable being perfectly changes when taking in new information and experiences.<sup>73</sup>

If God is a living person with moment-by-moment experiences, God's experience in one moment could be surpassed by God's experience in the next. In this sense, God changes, but this change is perfect. "The numerically distinct God-tomorrow will also be perfect," says Hartshorne, "though He will exhibit perfection in an enriched state of actuality."<sup>74</sup>

In sum, Christian open and relational philosophers are rethinking traditional views of God.<sup>75</sup> They remain committed, however, to

<sup>73</sup>See Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948).

<sup>74</sup>Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1962), p. 66. See also my essay "Attaining Perfection: Love for God and Neighbor," in *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, ed. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2011), pp. 65-73.

<sup>75</sup>For other philosophically oriented works on open and relational thought, see Basinger, *Case for Freewill Theism*; Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941); William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*; idem, *God, Time, and Knowledge*; J. R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (London: Blackwell, 1989); Derek Malone-France, *Deep Empiricism: Kant, Whitehead, and the Necessity of Philosophical Theism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006); Timothy O'Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Alan Rhoda, "Beyond the Chessmaster Analogy: Game Theory and Divine Providence," in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009); idem, "The Philosophical Case for Open Theism," *Philosophia* 35 (2007): 301-11; Alan Rhoda, Gregory A. Boyd and Thomas G. Belt, "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006): 432-59; George W. Shields and Donald W. Viney, "The Logic of Future Contingents," in *Process and Analysis: Whitehead, Hartshorne, and the Analytic Tradition*, ed. George W. Shields (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 209-46; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Dale

overarching Christian beliefs that say God loves, creates, sustains, knows all, is powerful, is holy, etc. In these commitments, they remain traditional. But the ways open and relational philosophers understand God's attributes differ from the understanding of many philosophers and theologians of yesteryear.

### *Science*

Science is the fourth major path that some have taken to open and relational theology. Many who engage the science-and-religion dialogue are attracted to open and relational themes, in large part because aspects of science harmonize with aspects of open and relational theology. For these science and religion scholars, it makes sense to say an open and relational God creates an open and relational universe.<sup>76</sup>

John Polkinghorne came to open and relational theology primarily through his studies in science. After earning a PhD in physics at Cambridge University, Polkinghorne began a career in the sciences, writing his first book on particle physics. He worked with some of the foremost scientists of his day and contributed to scientific research, specifically theoretical elementary particle physics. He also served as university lecturer in prominent universities in the United Kingdom.

Around the age of fifty, Polkinghorne decided to leave the laboratory and pursue ordination in the Church of England. "I simply felt that I had done my little bit for particle theory," he said, "and the time had come to do something else."<sup>77</sup> In the decades that followed, he served as the dean and chaplain at Trinity Hall, Queens College, Cambridge, in addition to becoming a prolific author. As a leading

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Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 28-51; Donald Wayne Viney, "God Only Knows? Hartshorne and the Mechanics of Omniscience," in *Hartshorne, Process Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Robert Kane and Stephen Phillips (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 71-90; Keith Ward, *Divine Action* (San Francisco: Torch, 1991); idem, *God, Chance, and Necessity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996); and a compilation of Ward's work, *By Faith and Reason: The Essential Keith Ward*, ed. William Curtis Holtzen and Roberto Sirvent (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2012).

<sup>76</sup>For philosophical essays on science from open-view philosophers, see Thomas Jay Oord, William Hasker and Dean Zimmerman, eds., *God in an Open Universe* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011). For theological essays from open and relational thinkers, see Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009).

<sup>77</sup>John C. Polkinghorne, *From Physicist to Priest, an Autobiography* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 71.

voice among those who work to reconcile science and theology, he tried to “be two-eyed, looking with both the eye of science and with the eye of religion, and such binocular vision enables [him] to see more than would be possible with either eye on its own.”<sup>78</sup>

Training in physics led Polkinghorne to approach the world in a particular way. As I noted earlier, physics suggests that events in our world are at least partly random and unpredictable. Twentieth-century science saw the death of mechanism as scientists discovered in nature widespread and intrinsic unpredictability. The subatomic level first revealed this, but intrinsic unpredictability also became evident at the everyday level of chaos theory.

Polkinghorne came to believe the randomness in the world tells us something true about the openness of reality itself. This belief stems from his commitment to philosophical realism, which says our observations tell us something true about the world.<sup>79</sup> “Affirming that what we know or cannot know should be treated as a reliable guide to what is the case,” he explains. Or to put it more philosophically, “intelligibility is the reliable guide to ontology.”<sup>80</sup>

The realist position is persuasive because it considers reality when trying to make sense of life. As a critical realist, Polkinghorne believes reality is at least somewhat like it appears to be.<sup>81</sup> When the realist sees intrinsic unpredictabilities, he takes them “as being signs of a genuine ontological openness,” says Polkinghorne.<sup>82</sup>

Extrapolating from the scientific idea that observation tells us something true and from the theological idea that God works creatively in the world, Polkinghorne came to believe God faces an open

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>79</sup>For analysis of Polkinghorne's understanding of realism in relation to other understandings, see Niels Henrik Gregersen, “Critical Realism and Other Realisms,” in *Fifty Years in Science and Religion: Ian G. Barbour and His Legacy*, ed. Robert John Russell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), chap. 4.

<sup>80</sup>John C. Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>81</sup>Polkinghorne explains what he means by critical realism in *The Polkinghorne Reader: Science, Faith, and the Search for Meaning*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2010), pp. 21-24.

<sup>82</sup>Polkinghorne, *From Physicist to Priest*, pp. 139-40.

future. “If I can act in this way in a world of becoming that is open to its future,” he says, “I see no reason to suppose that God, that world’s creator, cannot also act providentially in some analogous way within the course of its history.”<sup>83</sup>

Consistent with open and relational theology, Polkinghorne says God is not a Cosmic Tyrant who does everything and allows no independent power to creatures. But neither is God a Deistic Spectator who just stands aside and lets it all happen. Instead, “the Christian God is the God of love who neither abandons creatures nor prevents them from being themselves and making themselves.”<sup>84</sup>

The idea that creatures play a role in “making themselves” is partly Polkinghorne’s way of interpreting evolution theologically. “God interacts with creatures,” he says, but God “does not overrule the gift of due independence which they have been given.”<sup>85</sup> Evolution requires contributions from both creatures and the Creator. The created order comes from God’s creating and creatures co-creating.

Polkinghorne is one of many contemporary thinkers who find kenotic theology satisfying, and kenotic theology influences how he thinks about God’s foreknowledge. He believes “the creation of a world of real becoming” must have involved “not only a kenosis of divine power but also a kenosis of divine knowledge.” This means “even God does not yet know the unformed future, for it is not yet there to be known.”<sup>86</sup>

God’s lack of foreknowledge signifies no imperfection in God’s nature. It only means God’s relation to time is similar to creation’s relation. “The eternal God, in bringing a temporal world into being,” says Polkinghorne, “has condescended also to engage with the reality of time.” Postulating both eternity and temporality in God’s nature, although in different respects, “has been an important ingredient in much contemporary theology.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-41.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, p. 73.

<sup>87</sup>Polkinghorne, *From Physicist to Priest*, p. 141.

Open and relational theologies are well situated to accept the randomness many report in the world, in general, and in evolution, in particular. They assume that God is not all-controlling and that creation exhibits genuine causality. They also affirm with most of science that all causation is forward oriented. In open and relational theologies, the forward flow of time is a necessary feature of those things that actually exist. In other words, effects cannot precede their causes.

Polkinghorne has his own version of open and relational thought, but other scholars leading the science-and-theology conversation offer their versions of open and relational thinking. Among prominent voices are Ian Barbour,<sup>88</sup> Philip Clayton,<sup>89</sup> John Haught<sup>90</sup> and Arthur Peacocke.<sup>91</sup> In each, we see not only theological arguments about God's knowledge, presence, power and love. Each also accepts dominant perspectives in the sciences, especially physics and biology.

Open and relational scholars do not agree on all the specifics, of course. The details of their visions of providence, for instance, differ depending on their interests, expertise, inclinations and primary concerns. The open and relational umbrella is broad enough to include a diversity of ideas.

Having looked at the various paths scholars have taken to open and relational theology, I turn now to a specific view of providence offered

<sup>88</sup>Among Ian Barbour's many books, see especially *Nature, Human Nature, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000); *Religion in an Age of Science* (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 1990); and *Issues in Science and Religion* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966).

<sup>89</sup>Among Philip Clayton's many books, see especially *Adventures in the Spirit; Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); *God and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and Philip Clayton and Jeffrey Schloss, eds., *Evolution and Ethics: Human Morality in Biological and Religious Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>90</sup>Among John Haught's many books, see especially *Christianity and Science* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007); *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospects for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2003); and *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2007).

<sup>91</sup>Among Arthur Peacocke's many books, see especially *Paths from Science Toward God: The End of All Our Exploring* (London: Oneworld, 2001); *God and Science: A Quest for Christian Credibility* (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 1996); and *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming: Natural, Human and Divine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

by John Sanders, an open and relational theologian. I want to explore Sanders's model not only to note its helpfulness and not only because it has been highly influential. I also explore Sanders's model of providence to show how it is both similar to and different from the essential kenosis model I will propose as an alternative.

## Postscript

*W*e all want to make sense of life. But tragedies and evils—whether caused by free will, agency or random events—make it difficult to do so. The Boston Marathon bombing, a rock that accidentally killed a woman, a baby's acute debilitations, Zamuda's rape and her family's murder all need satisfying explanations. The answers most people give to God's role in these evils are unsatisfying. Believers in God want helpful answers to the biggest questions of life. In this book, I have offered answers that I find helpful.

In my work to provide satisfying answers, I have affirmed the reality of randomness and chance at various levels of existence. Scientists and philosophers rightly describe at least some events in the universe as random, in the sense of their not being entirely determined by anyone or anything. These events are not done on purpose, and no one intends them. No creaturely agent, factor or law controls these events, and neither does God. Randomness is real.

Lawlike regularities are also present in the cosmos. These lawlike regularities are the natural expressions or entailments of the all-embracing, all-sustaining and uncontrolling love of God. In fact, God's self-giving, others-empowering activity makes possible both regularity and randomness. God provides free will, agency, self-organization and spontaneity because God's love makes life possible. God's gifts and the ongoing flow of time mean that neither the creatures nor the Creator can foreknow with absolute certainty which possible

events will someday become actual.

Most attempts to describe God's providence in the universe are not compelling. Some models present God as controlling; they at least say God could or occasionally does control. Some models deny genuine randomness. Some offer little explanatory consistency, which does not help us make sense of life. Some models of providence portray God as unaffected, impersonal and uninvolved, making it difficult to imagine how God lovingly relates to creatures. Some models deny that we can comprehend God in any way, which results in absolute mystery.

Open and relational theology is well suited to account for the randomness and regularities of our world. This approach to reality helps us make sense of our intuitions about free will, agency, self-organization, spontaneity and other causation. Open and relational theology supports the view that both genuinely good and genuinely evil events occur. And it argues that love resides at the center of the most satisfying answers to life's vexing questions.

Although many people intuitively believe love is uncontrolling, most theologians—even some open and relational theologians—have not considered kenotic love the logically preeminent attribute of God's nature. Instead, some think divine power precedes divine love. But placing sovereign choice before self-giving, others-empowering love prompts us to wonder why God doesn't occasionally control creatures to prevent genuine evils. When power logically precedes love, God could control others or situations if God wanted. We rightly wonder why the God capable of control does not, in the name of love, do so more often to prevent genuine evil.

I propose a model of providence I call essential kenosis. When describing this model, I draw from the broad themes of Christian Scripture, especially those pertaining to divine love, creaturely agency and the God-creation relationship. God's almighty love graces all creation all the time. Uncontrolling love is the mode by which divine providence operates because love logically comes first in God.

The distinguishing feature of essential kenosis is its claim that God

cannot deny God's own nature of self-giving love. God necessarily gives freedom, agency, self-organization or spontaneity to creatures. Because the divine nature is self-giving, others-empowering love and God "cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13), God cannot withhold, override or fail to provide these gifts to creation. The Creator necessarily gives, and these gifts are irrevocable.

Essential kenosis solves both questions raised at the outset of this book. To the question of why a loving and almighty God does not prevent genuine evil, essential kenosis says God necessarily loves and consequently cannot prevent such evil. For God to prevent such evils unilaterally, God would have to deny himself, which cannot be done.

To the question of how God can be providential despite randomness, chance and luck in the world—especially those events with negative consequences—essential kenosis says God gives existence, including spontaneity, to all things. Random events are possible because of God's existence-giving love. God cannot foreknow with certainty or prevent random events from generating negative consequences.

God's gifts provide being to creatures in each moment, and God is ever active in giving and receiving relationship with each creature. Kenotic love empowers creatures to be and to act, and this love enables complex creatures to act freely. When creatures and creation respond well to God's uncontrolling love, well-being is established. The kingdom of God is present. Love reigns in heaven and on earth. All that is good derives from God's essential kenosis, which comes before and makes possible creaturely response.

The God that essential kenosis describes has plans and purposes. God invites, commands and empowers creatures to respond well to them, but God never controls creatures or situations. God does not operate from a foreordained or foreknown blueprint. Instead, God enables others. Creatures who cooperate work toward God's good purposes.

The uncontrolling God of essential kenosis is faithful both to provide the regularities of existence and to enact miracles. Miracles are good and unusual events that involve God's special action to

provide beneficial forms of existence to the world. God does not supernaturally intervene in, control or violate creation. But through God's persuasive love, both lawlike regularities and the special action in miracles express divine providence.

Essential kenosis offers an adventure model of reality. This model may strike some as a precarious paradigm of providence. Adventures aren't safe, after all, because they have general goals, not predetermined designs. Adventures involve calculated risks, free decisions and sometimes random occurrences. Love is an adventure without guaranteed results.

The adventure model of providence that essential kenosis offers, however, fits the world in which we live. Our world has genuine good and evil, randomness and regularity, freedom, agency, disappointments, and even miracles. It also fits a vision of a God who does not and cannot control others. If we read the Bible through the lens of God's self-giving, others-empowering, kenotic love, we will find that the essential kenosis model makes better sense of the broad biblical witness than do other alternatives. Essential kenosis helps us make sense of both the Bible and the world in which we live.

God's uncontrolling providence is an adventure of open and relational living. And in the logic of love, that makes sense.