An Evangelical discourse on God's response to suffering: A critical assessment of Gregory Boyd's open theism

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ABSTRACT

This research project makes a contribution to the discourse on the theodicy problem by examining the position adopted by Gregory Boyd known as open theism. Boyd would argue that an open view of God is in a better position to deal with the problem of evil because the traditional understanding of God's attributes fails to vindicate God of guilt or responsibility for evil and should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of the attractive openness model. Boyd claims that God cannot be held responsible for evil and suffering because the future cannot be known to God. He articulates this perspective from the process thought position that the future is not a reality therefore, cannot be known. Thus, God took a risk when he/she created human being with free will because any free will future actions and thoughts cannot be known by God. God is therefore surprised by the actions and sufferings of human being and therefore has to change his/her plans to meet with the free will actions of human beings. Boyd in articulating his open theism theodicy does so by reconstructing the classical understanding of the attributes of God namely: God's omniscience, immutability, and omnipotence to give an answer to the theodicy problem. Evangelicals understand the attributes of God to be part of God nature, therefore any changes in the attributes of God means changes to God him/herself. Because of Boyd's claim to be an evangelical, this project examines the attributes of God as reflected in the works of the early church father to the reformers and influential evangelical scholars in contrast with the work of Boyd. In presenting an evangelical understanding on God and suffering this study concludes that the position adopted by Boyd is a radical departure from evangelicalism and orthodoxy faith and is more consonant of a deistic presentation of God in his/her relation to the world.

KEYWORDS

Evangelical, Open Theism, God, Theodicy, Attributes, Omniscience, Immutability, Omnipotence, Evil, Suffering and Free will.

DECLARATION

I declare that “An Evangelical discourse on God’s response to suffering: A critical assessment of Gregory Boyd’s open theism” is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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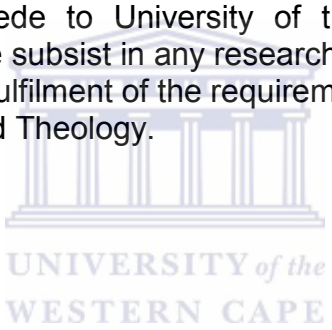

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Godfrey Harold 30 September 2013

LIST OF ABBREBIATIONS

BGC	**Baptist General Convention**
ANF	**Ante-Nicene Fathers**
NPNF	**Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**

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Introduction

> "I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words."
> – C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (1956)

This research project will contribute to the Christian discourse on the classic theodicy problem, namely on the question why God allows so much (human) suffering if God is indeed both omnipotent and a God of love. Erickson (1998:125) states, "the problem of evil is real and serious. To see the destructiveness of nature is disturbing to one who believes in an all-powerful divine being". Therefore, Hamilton (1966:25) observes, for many the contemporary human issue is not merely the absence of the experience of God. It is the experience of the absence of God.

Within the long tradition of Christian reflection on this problem, different approaches have been adopted. This research project will focus on the discourse on the theodicy problem within an "evangelical" setting in North America and South Africa. More specifically, this project will focus on the school of thought within evangelical theology known as "Open Theism" of

which Gregory Boyd is one of the main exponents. Open theism is concerned with how God experiences the world. It asks and attempts to answer questions such as, "What does God know?" and "When does he/she know it?" The questions that open theists raise are not so much about how God knows the future, but if God knows it at all.[1] In open theism God is portrayed as taking risks by allowing human freedom since God cannot predetermine the future actions of free moral agents. This implies that God is not directly responsible for suffering induced by humans themselves.

This study will examine the position adopted by Gregory Boyd on the theodicy problem in publications such as *God at War* (2000), *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (2000) and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (2001). I shall determine Boyd's approach in terms of its ability to do justice to core themes in evangelical Christianity such as the divine foreknowledge, omnipotence and immutability.

1.1 Context and relevance

1.1.1 The reality of human suffering

The reality of suffering is deeply rooted in the history of humanity. Suffering can be divided into two categories: namely, "personal suffering" and

[1] M.J. Erickson (2003) outlined various ways in which the church has understood the foreknowledge of God. "Simple foreknowledge" is the idea that God simply "sees" the future as God stands outside of time looking on. "Middle knowledge" states that God knows not only all that will be, but all the other possibilities in every possible world. Then there are forms of Calvinism, which hold that God knows everything that will happen because God has chosen what is to occur and brings it about.

"solidarity suffering". Pope John Paul II (2001:2) states, "Every individual, through personal suffering, constitutes not only a small part of that 'world', but at the same time that 'world' is present in him as a finite and unrepeatable entity". Together with this, however, is the inter-human and social dimension. The reality of their suffering brings *solidarity* because people who suffer understand one another through the analogy of their situation, the tragedy of their suffering. Thus, although human suffering exists "in dispersion", at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge *to communion and solidarity*, which can be spoken of as the "world" of human suffering. Considering the "world" of suffering in its personal and at the same time collective meaning, one cannot fail to see the fact that suffering is a reality. This is seen in South Africa by the spread of HIV/AIDS and the intermittent xenophobia attacks. At the same time, human suffering becomes as it were *particularly concentrated*. This happens, for example, in cases of natural disasters, catastrophes, upheavals and various social scourges like World Wars I and II. Because of the human need for understanding and care in times of suffering, and perhaps, above all, to answer the persistent question of the meaning of suffering this calls for a response.

1.1.2. Human suffering: The need for a pastoral response

Medical science and technology have helped immensely with the caring of those who undergo "physical suffering" through various methods of therapy. This is only one response to human suffering. Humans suffer in different ways not always considered by medical science with all of its advancements

and specializations. A distinction may be made between “physical suffering” and “spiritual suffering”. This distinction is based upon the double dimension of the human being and indicates the physical and spiritual aspect as the immediate or direct subject of suffering. Physical suffering is present when “the body is hurting” in some way, whereas spiritual suffering is “pain/suffering of the soul”. The “suffering of the soul” occurs when a person asks “Why is God allowing me to suffer physically or where on earth is God during my pain?” Sarah H. Pinnock (2002:39-40) states that the practical problem posed by suffering first hinges on the question “How can faith survive suffering?” Second, “when does religious meaning in suffering raise the issue of the “eclipse of God”: the apparent absence of God in human suffering?” It is with reference to this spiritual suffering that a pastoral/theological response is required. Any theological discourse on the theodicy problem from within the South African context needs to come to terms with the immense (human) suffering, both physical and spiritual, that form part of the everyday experience of many South Africans.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu[2] states:

> The problem of evil and suffering is crucial and is not to be dealt with lightly. Our ability to do evil is intimately connected to our ability to do that, which is good. One is meaningless without the other. Empathy and compassion have no meaning unless they occur in a situation where one could be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. Suffering, it seems, is not optional. It is part and parcel of the human condition, but suffering can either embitter us or ennoble us. I hope that people will come to see that this suffering can become a spirituality of transformation when we find meaning in it.

[2] http://www.beliefnet.com/story/143/story_14326_1.html.
For the sake of presentation and fluidity in the reading process all internet sources will be reflected as a footnote.

In an earlier article, I have suggested that the pastor's task is to try to find out how a person understands God in their suffering (Harold 2005:97). What interaction exists between the person suffering and their expectation of God? The therapeutic aspect of faith is closely connected with the individual's idea of God. According to Louw (1994:77), when people are experiencing suffering or pain, their understanding of God becomes distorted, and this distortion prevents a constructive application of their faith potential. Once a person's emotional filters are blocked, their vision of God becomes distorted. Thus, the quest for meaning becomes primarily a problem of a dysfunctional belief system and it becomes a problem of perception. I agree with Kasambala's statement that when one has a distorted image of God in times of suffering, this will lead to what he terms "pathological faith" (Harold 2005:97).

The task of the pastor is to help the sufferer understand and interpret God in the light of suffering and, conversely, to understand and interpret the individual's experience of suffering in terms of God's relationship with suffering. The person's story must be put with God's story and *vice a versa*. Where the two stories converge, the person may discover God's fulfilled promises and then hope in God can emerge. When a person discovers God's faithfulness and understands Christ's resurrection in light of Christ's suffering on the cross, this discovery results in a dynamic hope. When suffering disturbs this vision, hopelessness ensues. Hope is strengthened when a person's concepts of God once again become constructive and positive.

Boyd (2000:13), in his best-selling work *God of the Possible,* states as one of the goals of his book:

> I also believe this issue is too important and too practically significant to be limited to academic circles ... I believe there is currently a need to present this issue in a manner that can include as many laypeople as possible. This book attempts to do just that.

In this pronouncement, Boyd has outlined the agenda for this theodicy. Because of the negative reaction it received from most evangelical theological institutions, proponents of this theodicy have abandoned the realm of scholarly debate and councils and are now making their case with the church as a whole. Rather than hammering out the position and allowing for a decision in the ring of "academic circles", Boyd has decided to put the brunt of his energy into getting the principles of his theodicy in its simplest and most attractive forms to the general populace. Thus, the purpose of this research project is to enable evangelical pastors in South Africa to become more familiar with the position of Boyd so that in dealing with the problem of evil and the realities of their suffering flock, pastors will not leave their members in a hopeless situation by misrepresenting God in human image. Such reflection on the relationship between God and human suffering has traditionally been addressed within the context of the theodicy problem.

1.2. The Theodicy Problem

The word "theodicy" is derived from the Greek word Θεος (God) and δικη (justice). Theodicy is a word traditionally used for an argument to show that God is righteous or just despite the presence of suffering in the world. The classic problem that is addressed in any form of theodicy is why a God who is both loving and powerful would allow suffering to exist. In other words, if God does not want us to suffer so much and if God can do something about it, why do humans still experience so much suffering? Nash (1988:178), a theologian and philosopher, identifies specific challenges that have to be addressed in relation to the theodicy problem:

- If God is good and loves all human beings, is it reasonable to believe that he/she wants to deliver the creature he/she loves from evil and suffering?
- If God is all-knowing, is it reasonable to believe that he/she knows how to deliver his/her creatures from evil and suffering?
- If God is all-powerful, is it reasonable to believe that he/she is able to deliver his/her creatures from evil and suffering?

In an article entitled "HIV/AIDS and human suffering: Where on earth is God?" Conradie (2005) states:

> The theodicy problem is much easier to formulate than to answer. In fact, any brief overview of theodicy debates over twenty centuries of Christian theology soon reveals the disparateness and inconclusiveness of these debates. Some would conclude that this clearly indicates that the problem cannot be resolved – and that God

> cannot and does not exist if there is so much suffering, or that God is absent, perhaps far away in heaven, or that history is controlled by fate, not God, or that God is either not powerful or not compassionate. Others would maintain that the conceptual problem is indeed irresolvable because human beings would never be able to comprehend God's ways, given the finitude of our own knowledge, wisdom and power. Yet others would question the way in which the problem is formulated. Who are we to offer a justification of God's existence? Should we not focus, instead, on God's justification of us as sinners (God's word of forgiveness)?

One must acknowledge that, from its inception, Christianity has been continually challenged on the philosophical, theological and pastoral levels to provide an answer to the question as to how a good God can allow suffering to prevail in the world. Defences of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the theodicy problem are on record from the beginning of Christianity. The crucial problem that has to be addressed in such reflections on the theodicy problem is how to resolve a number of characteristics that Christians have attributed to God, with specific reference to God's love and God's power. Traditionally, God has been described in terms of characteristics such as absolute goodness, absolute power (omnipotence) and absolute knowledge (omniscience), including foreknowledge. Each of these concepts has been the subject of much debate, especially in the on-going Evangelical discourse on the problem of evil. In turn, the relationships between the characteristics of God have also elicited much debate, which constitutes the basis of the theodicy problem.

1.3. Responses to the Theodicy Problem: A brief survey

Although many have suggested that the theodicy problem is one that, in the final analysis, cannot be resolved theologically since we as human beings cannot put ourselves in God's position, this has not prevented theologians through the ages from providing comprehensive reflections in this regard. During the past few decades this has been the subject of numerous publications.

An early development of a theodicy is found in the Book of Job. The underlying assumption that governed the period in which Job lived was that people lived in a universe that was created and sustained by God. The prevailing orthodoxy held that God had structured the world so that the righteous and wicked were respectively rewarded and punished according to their deeds. We know that the Book of Job struggles with this religious opinion, because it begins by insisting that our notion of the justice of God is not borne out by the reality of human suffering. In this way the book calls into question the prevailing interpretation of the nature and purpose of suffering in a divinely governed universe.

In order to accommodate the discussion of the theodicy problem in the context of open theism in a wider perspective, it is necessary to present a brief overview of the history of Christian reflection on the theodicy problem, drawing on the contributions that follow below.

1.3.1. The Irenaean Theodicy

St. Irenaeus (130-202 CE) taught that the existence of evil actually serves a purpose. From his point of view, evil provides the necessary problems through which we take part in what Hick (1981:40) calls “person-making”. It follows that evil is a means to an end in the sense that, if it did not exist, there would be no means of spiritual development. So the foundational principle of the theodicy of Irenaeus is that we have been placed in a hostile environment in order to learn to become better people. Philosophers such as John Hick and Richard Swinburne have adopted the idea of Irenaeus in recent times. According to this view, the pains and sufferings of the world are used by God to serve as a method to build a truly good person. God could have created us perfect beings, but God is more interested in our choosing to become who God wants us to be (at some point), rather than forcing us to be this way (no matter how long this takes). Leibniz explained the reality of human suffering by saying that God allows it temporarily for the greater good (cited in Stumpf 1989:257). Leibniz, like Plato and St. Irenaeus, maintained that everything in the universe was explicable, and God must indeed create the best while allowing suffering temporarily for the greater good of his creation (cited in Stumpf 1989:64-67). Another modern adherent to this position is Quinn. Quinn (1982:199-215), like Leibniz, argues that we cannot know the effect of removing certain evils in the world since we cannot see the world from an infinite perspective. Hick (1966), in his proposed “soul/person making” theodicy, views suffering not as evil but rather as a necessary stage in the development of a relatively immature creation into a more mature state.

Following St. Irenaeus, Hick does not consider that suffering in the world is because of the fall from a once-perfect state but rather emphasizes suffering as a process that will bring about a gradual improvement in the human race. Hick (1981:25) sees humans as endowed with a real but limited freedom that enables a relationship with God through which they can find fulfilment. This relationship gives meaning to our human existence "as long as the process, through which we are being created by our free responses to life's combination of good and evil, ultimately leads to good". The good that outshines all evil is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom that is yet to come in its full glory and permanence.

1.3.2. The Augustinian Theodicy

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) proposed a solution to the problem by blaming suffering on the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From this perspective, humans are responsible for suffering by being led astray by Satan. To begin understanding St. Augustine's theodicy, one first needs to examine his ideas in light of the two greatest influences in his life. Frend (1953:22-23) rightly observed that the first is *Manichaeism* (established by Mani, 216-76 CE), which St. Augustine was associated with for some time and which emphasised the duality (separation) of darkness and light. This duality was expressed in two eternal principles – matter and God – and both were opposed to each other. Escape from the bonds of the physical world (matter) was said to be the goal (or purpose) of humanity. Augustine eventually became disillusioned with Manichaeism, and as a result

began to reject the notion that evil is an independent and corrupt substance. The other key factor influencing him was the teaching of Plotinus (204-70 CE). Geisler (1999:596-597) states that Plotinus was a Neo-Platonist who taught the goodness of creation and the chaotic nature of evil. For Augustine, God is the author of everything. He also believed the world had been created literally out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), according to the Divine will. This meant that as far as Augustine was concerned, *everything* in the world is created good or perfect. He also believed that, although there is an abundance of variety in the world, this is in fact ordered in varying degrees, according to the fullness of a creature's nature. This means that there is no totally evil thing in the world.

For St. Augustine matter is something essentially good, but it is also something that is able to deviate from what it should be. Thus for St. Augustine the notion of "evil" must now be understood as the *privatio boni* ("privation of good"), or that which occurs when a person renounces their proper role in the order and structure of creation. In other words, something becomes "evil" when it ceases to be what it is meant to be. St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 6.12 in *NPNF* Vol. II:101*)* further clarifies the relationship of privation to the good, by stating:

> Those things are good which yet are corrupted, which, neither were they supremely good, nor unless they were good, could be corrupted; because if supremely good, they were incorruptible, and if not good at all, there was nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption harms, but, less it could diminish goodness, it could not harm. Either, then, corruption harms not, which cannot be; or, what is most certain, all which is corrupted is deprived of good. But if they be deprived of all good, they will cease to be. For if they be, and cannot be at all corrupted, they will become better, because they shall remain

> incorruptibly. And what more monstrous than to assert that those things which have lost all their goodness are made better? Therefore, if they shall be deprived of all good, they shall no longer be. So long, therefore, as they are, they are good; therefore whatsoever is, is good. That evil, then, which I sought whence it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance, and so a chief good, or a corruptible substance, which unless it were good it could not be corrupted. I perceived, therefore, and it was made clear to me, that Thou made all things good, nor is there any substance at all that was not made by You; and because all that You have made are not equal, therefore all things are; because individually they are good, and altogether very good, because our God made all things very good

Thus, if St. Augustine understood creation to be good, then this begs the question: Where then did evil originate? For St. Augustine, evil entered the world because of the wrong choices of free beings (free in the sense that there was no external force necessitating them to do wrong). In other words, corruption occurred because of the use of our free will. According to St. Augustine, (in *The City of God* 12.6 in *NPNF* Vol. II:229) when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil – not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked. This not only absolves God of creating evil but also allows Him to show the world His love by bringing Christ into the world. A modern advocate of St. Augustine's view can be found in Alvin Plantinga (*God, Freedom and Evil*, 1974), who claimed that for God to create a person who could only have performed good actions would have been logically impossible.

St. Augustine's theodicy is often associated with the supposed free will defence – which suggests that suffering is essentially a function of human

freedom and therefore, God cannot be blamed for such suffering. The logic of the free will argument may be described in the following way:

- ☐ Evil is the result of human error.
- ☐ Human error results from human free will (the ability to do wrong).
- ☐ If we did not have free will we would be robots.
- ☐ God prefers a world of free agents to a world of robots.
- ☐ Evil is therefore an unfortunate although not an unavoidable outcome of free will.
- ☐ For God to intervene would be to take away our free will.
- ☐ Therefore, God is neither responsible for evil nor guilty of neglect for not intervening.

Anthony Haig (2006), in summarising the free will view, states that the basis of free will theodicy is the claim that God created creatures who are genuinely free in some highly desirable sense, but who are also capable of choosing to be/do evil. It is then argued that the good that comes from creating such genuinely free creatures, outweighs the cost of the various evils that will result.

1.3.3. Process Theodicy

Process philosophy concerns itself with what exists in the world and with the terms of reference in which this reality is to be understood and explained (metaphysics). The task of metaphysics is, after all, to provide a cogent and

plausible account of the nature of reality at the broadest, most synoptic and comprehensive level. Moreover, it is to this mission of enabling us to characterize, describe, clarify and explain the most general features of the real that process philosophy addresses itself in its own distinctive way. The guiding idea of its approach is that natural existence consists of and is best understood in terms of *processes* rather than *things* or modes of change rather than fixed stabilities. Process philosophers see change of every sort – physical, organic, psychological – as the pervasive and predominant feature of the real.[3] Process theologians, who derive their philosophical influences from process philosophy, attempt to understand God and the problem of evil from the premise that reality is changing and so God also changes or is developing, so God cannot be held responsible for sin or the problem of evil.

1.3.4. Protest Theodicy

The attempt to reconcile God's existence with the presence of evil and suffering in the world, typically finds a person protesting to God, because God who is almighty and is fully able to intervene against evil, does not make that choice. The protest theodicy of Roth (1980:10) begins in agreement with Hegel: history is "the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of people, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed". Protest theodicy of Roth challenges the "cost- effectiveness" of God's decision because of the pain that is seen in human history. Roth (1980:10) stated that his theodicy sees God-as-economist, and the question posed above deals

[3] See http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-philosophy/

with his/her waste. The point here is that as far as protest theodicy philosophers and theologians are concerned, God could and should do something to restrain evil and suffering from occurring in the world.

1.3.5. Victim-Orientated Theodicy

Surin (1986:142-153) opts for a kind of theodicy with “practical” (victim-orientated) emphasis, such as those developed by Dorothee Sölle , Jürgen Moltmann and Peter T. Forsyth. Moltmann, in his seminal book *The Crucified God* (1993), has pursued this theme: the crucial issue of theodicy lies in God’s salvific activity to overcome evil. Moltmann characterizes God as a fellow-sufferer but, unlike Sölle (1975), insists that the deity takes our suffering into the very Godhead. God feels the misery that we produce and the unhappiness that we experience as well. Our history of suffering is taken up into his history of suffering. Like Moltmann, Surin (1986:142-153) calls for developing an adequate “grammar” of salvation, namely a way of communicating that God himself justifies through his suffering on the cross. Surin’s “practical” theodicy is an attempt to root his theodicy in the concrete realities of human suffering by developing solidarity with the victim of suffering through the cross. Gutiérrez (1988:103) argues: “Only if we take seriously the suffering of the innocent and live the mystery of the cross amid that suffering, but in the light of Easter, can we prevent our theology from being ‘windy arguments’ (Job 16:3).” Billing (2000) observes that the question of theodicy, and the life of the Christian, is lived between the suffering of the

cross and the increasingly penetrating light of Easter. As such, the question of theodicy remains open and anomalous rather than answered and (hence) forgotten. However, McCabe (1985:464-467) argues that it is not in the nature of God to be an "object" in history, a being alongside other beings, and so God cannot depend on his creatures in any way. It follows from this that God cannot suffer, though he does have the most intimate possible involvement in the sufferings of his creatures.

1.3.6. Informed Consent Theodicy

Anthony Haig[4] a philosopher from Australia, developed what he calls an "Informed Consent" theodicy – which suggests that before God can make any free agent to become truly good, God must obtain their informed consent. Furthermore, given the momentous and irreversible nature of the transformation involved, such consent must involve thorough knowledge by acquaintance with the nature and consequences of the alternatives. Thus, informed consent theodicy can be used to argue that the pain, suffering, and death that we endure in this life constitute a necessary process of education in order for us to adequately understand the alternatives from which we must choose for eternity. In this regard, it has some similarities to the Irenaean approach to theodicy. Both theories emphasize that evil and suffering are justified by virtue of the fact that they have an educative effect upon those who experience them.

[4] See http://www.ArsDisputandi.org.

1.3.7. Open Theism Theodicy

In recent years another proposal regarding the problem of evil has gained a degree of recognition and acceptance among some evangelical theologians and philosophers. Theologians in the school of open theism have argued that the classical definitions of both divine omnipotence and omniscience are seriously problematic for addressing the problem of evil and suffering. Hasker (1994:152) provides the following explanation:

> God knows that evils will occur, but God has not for the most part specifically decreed or incorporated into his plan the individual instances of evil. Rather, God governs the world according to general strategies which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of the creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them. As a result, we are able to abandon the difficult doctrine of "meticulous providence" and to admit the presence in the world of particular evils God's permission of which is not the means of bringing about any greater good or preventing any greater evil.

Open theism derives its name from its view of the relationship between God and the future. On that view, God lacks exhaustive knowledge of the future; the future is thus "open" to him. Therefore, while God may have a good idea of what might happen, he does not know when it will happen. According to Boyd (2000:11), the future is "partly determined and foreknown by God, but also partially open and known by God as such. Divine uncertainty of the future results from God's decision to grant freedom to some of his creatures. On this Pinnock (1994:7) elaborates:

> God, in grace grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for their lives, and he enters into a dynamic, give and take relationship with us. The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings. We respond to God's gracious initiatives and God responses to our responses.

The above statement is an accepted explanation for God granting humans significant freedom within the evangelical tradition, but Pinnock goes on to say that the freedom humans have in relation to God's foreknowledge runs counter to the evangelical view of God's foreknowledge. He (1994:7) states:

> God takes risks in this give-and-take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working towards his ultimate goals. Sometimes God alone decides how to accomplish these goals. On other occasions, God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialogue God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being.

Hasker (1994:139) therefore confidently argues that the openness model is "in a better position than Calvinism or Molinism" in dealing with the issues brought about by the problem of evil. In particular, it is asserted that traditional Christian theism fails to vindicate God of guilt or responsibility for evil and should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of the attractive openness model of divine providence.

Blount (2005:178) views the open theist knowledge of God as a God who takes risks and adapts his/her plans to changing situations. God's doing so, results from the fact that he/she has created us as free creatures together with the assumption that he/she cannot know in advance what we will freely do. Such an understanding of the divine nature stands in marked contrast to traditional theism, according to which God not only exhaustively knows the

future, but also is timeless, immutable and passible rather than impassible, which leads to an entirely different understanding of the divine attributes.

1.4. Demarcation and statement of the research problem

This research project will focus on contributions to the theodicy problem emerging from within the school of thought known as “open theism” within the wider discussion of evangelical theology. The intention of this research is not to evaluate how mainstream academia deals with the problem of evil, but to examine the responses from evangelical scholars to the problem of evil and to open theism. More specifically, the position adopted by Gregory Boyd in this regard will be investigated and assessed. One aspect of his position will be investigated in particular, namely the implied understanding of the divine attributes embedded in his position. Three such attributes will be investigated, namely: divine foreknowledge, immutability and omnipotence. These three perfections of God are selected because the controversy regarding open theism centres on these three divine attributes. Boyd’s understanding of these three divine attributes will be investigated on the basis of whether this may be regarded as a fruitful extrapolation of an understanding of these divine attributes within the evangelical tradition in the USA and South Africa.

1.4.1. Historical Development of Open theism within Evangelicalism

In this section, I shall first discuss the historical antecedents of open theism briefly and then focus on the formative period of open theism, roughly from 1980 until 2004. Geisler (1999:526) defines open theists as those who hold to the "openness of God" view or "free will theism", by which God is regarded as open to change while humans are deemed to have free will or incompatibilist (libertarian) freedom – freedom that is opposed to any divine determinism or control. Exponents of open theism view God as one who does not possess exhaustive knowledge as to how humans will use this freedom.

a) Historical antecedents

Jowers (2005:1-9) states that any theological tendency that minimizes God's absolute immutability or sovereignty constitutes, in some sense, an antecedent of open theism. Open theist theologians and philosophers do, on the whole, seem principally concerned to ratify two doctrines: (a) That the future of human beings in time and eternity depends principally, if not entirely, on their own, autonomous decisions; and (b) That God freely renders himself exposed to his creation so that human beings can affect him for better or worse and collaborate with him in determining creation's future. The first doctrine, Jowers (2005:1-9) claims, has the support of numerous theologians. The second doctrine has faced opposition from some of Christianity's most influential thinkers like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Jowers (2005:1-9) argues that Hegel (1770-

1831CE) is perhaps history's most prominent advocate of divine mutability. Jowers (2005:1-9) lists three schools of thought that emerged within Christendom before the Hegelian revolution that explicitly denied the doctrine of divine immutability, namely: the Audians, the Socinians, and the Arminians. These antecedents of open theism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

b) The Formative Period

The willingness of open theists to conceive of God in less majestic terms than traditional theists, therefore, is by no means without precedent even in the pre-Hegelian era. In the post-Hegelian era, denials of divine immutability and impassibility became popular. Relatively few theologians and philosophers of religion in the period 1831-1980, however, publicly advocated open theism's most distinctive and controversial claim: that God lacks comprehensive knowledge of the future. Support for fully fledged open theism, however, became relatively common after the publication by Richard Rice, the architect of modern evangelical open theism, of *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will* (1980). In the time between the first appearance of Rice's book and the beginning of significant controversy over open theism in 1994, six figures emerged as prominent advocates of open theism within evangelical theological circles, namely Richard Rice, Clark Pinnock, William Hasker, David Basinger, Gregory Boyd, and John Sanders. During this period, the six wrote several essays and three books in support of open theism. One of the

books, moreover, gained significant critical acclaim, namely Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge* (1989). During this period, nonetheless, the evangelical public, with the exception of some vigilant philosophers and theologians, was largely unaware of open theism.

c) Themes addressed in Open Theism

In the widely publicised manifesto of open theists, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (1994), Pinnock (*et.al.*), Basinger in chapter five concludes the book by identifying five claims about God as integral to open theism:

- ☐ God not only created this world *ex nihilo*, but God can also (and at times does) intervene unilaterally in the affairs of the earth.
- ☐ God chose to create us with incompatibilistic (libertarian) freedom, freedom over which God cannot exercise his/her total control.
- ☐ God so values freedom, the moral integrity of free creatures and a world in which such integrity is possible, that God does not normally override such freedom, even if God sees that it is producing undesirable results.
- ☐ God always desires our highest good, both individually and corporately, and thus is affected by what happens in our lives.
- ☐ God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of exactly how we will utilise our freedom although he/she may at times be able to predict with absolute accuracy the choices we will freely make.

d) The leading exponents of Open Theism.

Since the publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, a volume of essays by Rice, Sanders, Pinnock, Hasker, and Basinger in 1994, open theism rose from obscurity into the Evangelical arena, thus accomplishing the purpose of that publication, which was to promote open theism to the broader public, one beyond the confines of professional philosophers. In 1996, Basinger published *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment.* Boyd in 1997 published another book on behalf of open theism, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*, in which he made open theism the centrepiece of an attractive theodicy. In 1998 Sanders published his work, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, followed in 2000 by another publication by Pinnock in support of open theism entitled, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness,* and Boyd's 2000 publication *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. In 2001 Boyd published a sequel to his *God at War* (1997) namely, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*. In 2003 Boyd published *Is God to Blame? Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil*, a popularization of his earlier publication, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (2001). For the purpose of this dissertation, I shall focus on the publications of Boyd.

1.5. Gregory Boyd

1.5.1. The life and work of Gregory Boyd

Boyd is an evangelical pastor, Christian theologian, and author. He is Senior Pastor of the Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul Minnesota, United States. Boyd graduated with a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Minnesota, earned his master's degree (cum laude) from Yale University Divinity School and a doctorate (magna cum laude) from Princeton Theological Seminary (Strobel 1998:110). He was Professor of Theology at Bethel University for sixteen years. There he became acquainted with the process theology of Charles Hartshorne, whom Boyd considered "essentially correct" in the philosophical and theological understanding of the nature of God and the future. His book *Letters From a Skeptic* (1994) contains much Hartshornian thought that was later expanded in the book *God of the Possible* (2000) in which he described his view of God, or open theism: the view that the future is open and therefore known to God partly as a realm of possibilities. Boyd's (1995) publication, *Cynic Sage or Son of God? Rediscovering the Real Jesus in an Age of Revisionist Replies,* was a critique of the liberal perspective of Jesus within the Jesus Seminar (Strobel 1998:110).

While there are over fifteen books published by Boyd since 1992, and his works range from philosophy to politics, his most prolific writings are blended with philosophy and theology as seen in the books that directly deal with the

problem of evil. For the purpose of this research project I shall engage these individual works (dealing with the problem of evil) specifically:

- ☐ *Letters From a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity* (1994).
- ☐ *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (1997).
- ☐ *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (2000).
- ☐ *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (2001).
- ☐ *Is God to Blame? Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil* (2003).

1.5.2. The significance of Boyd's work

The belief that God does not know the future decisions of his creatures is the theological revolution, while *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* by *Boyd* (2000) is the revolutionary book that rallies evangelicals to join open theism's assault upon "the majority view in the church". Boyd initially advocated open theism in *Letters from a Skeptic* (1994) that eventually incited conflict within the Baptist General Conference (BGC), the denomination that founded Bethel College where he was Professor of Theology. As his book gained wider popularity, it also won notoriety. Concerned pastors in the BGC began to analyse his open theist views as unorthodox according to Scripture, their "Affirmation of Faith", and

beliefs accepted among evangelicals throughout church history. Responding to criticism, especially from John Piper and many others, Boyd composed various replies from which he wrote a manuscript that he distributed within the BGC and later published as G*od of the Possible*. His efforts in the BGC secured both his roles as professor at Bethel College and as pastor of a BGC church. With the publication of this book, Boyd brings his theological revolution to a wider audience within evangelicalism.

1.6. Statement of the research problem

In terms of the discussion thus far, the problem, which will be investigated in this research project may now be formulated in the following way:

> How should Boyd's position (within the school of thought known as "open theism") on the classic theodicy problem be assessed within the wider context of evangelical discourse?
>
> More specifically, may Boyd's understanding of three divine attributes, namely divine foreknowledge, immutability and omnipotence, as these relate to his position on the theodicy problem, be regarded as a fruitful extrapolation of the consensus position in the evangelical tradition in the United States of America and in South Africa on these three divine attributes?

This formulation of the research problem requires further clarity on the following:

1.6.1. Why these three attributes?

Since evangelicals hold to a high view of God's providence (which affirms God's exhaustive knowledge, omnipotence and immutability), any other understanding of these terms would not be considered evangelical.

- ☐ Divine omnipotence

Omnipotence may be defined as the perfect ability of God to do all things that are consistent with the divine character; thus God's power is not always coercive, but may honour the freedom of creatures. When Boyd (2001:51-84) ascribes "incompatibilistic" freedom to human beings he means to say that human actions are free in the sense that it is always within the power of human beings not to perform any action that they actually perform. Such freedom is "incompatibilistic", because it is incompatible with divine causation of everything that occurs. Boyd has an incompatabilist understanding of human freedom. This contrasts with the compatabilist understanding of human freedom that is typical of evangelical theology. It is appropriate to note that those who oppose Boyd's claim do not, as a rule, consider human freedom illusory. Rather, they ascribe "compatibilistic" freedom to human beings, i.e., the freedom to do whatever one wants. Freedom of this sort can coexist with divine omnicausality, because it entails neither that human behaviour can deviate from God's eternal plan nor that the future is in any sense indeterminate. According to the compatibilist perspective, human beings can do what they want, but God knows what they will do in advance. Freedom of this sort is not empty, because a being that enjoys compatibilistic freedom never suffers divine obligation to act in a manner contrary to his

desires. While Boyd sees God as a person who is omnipotent but at the same time vulnerable to the free will decisions of humans. Thus, Boyd sees God's omnipotence as limited. This is in contradiction to the Evangelical Tradition, because Evangelicals believe God's influence upon the world is unlike any other mode – unlimited in capacity. Thus human freedom is grounded in, permitted by and derived from the power of God. Human freedom can assert itself against God's power, but only in limited and fragmentary ways that can never alter or dispute the power of God.

- Divine Immutability

According to the Evangelical tradition, God is unchangeable in his/her being, perfection, purposes, promises; yet God does act and feels emotion, and acts and feels differently in response to different situations. Boyd (2001: 51-84) asserts that God's wishes may be frustrated by the decisions of human beings and that human beings, consequently, can effect changes in God. Boyd seems to confuse God's immutability with God's mobility. By mobility, I mean that God is active and enters into relationships with changing humanity. Human beings, according to open theism, possess the power to inflict suffering on God or to give him/her pleasure. While such an approach may seem to allow for a fuller presence of the intrinsically valuable aspects of emotion in God, it is necessary to note that, at least according to the perspective of classical theism, the view that God is passible does not diminish his/her immutability. Open theists seem to incorporate the

impassibility[5] of God as an attribute that is in conflict with God's immutability. Since open theism sees God as dependent on the world in certain respects, the question emerges whether Boyd's approach can do justice to the affirmation of God's immutability as maintained in much of evangelical theology.

- Divine foreknowledge

According to the evangelical tradition, God is infinite in knowledge. God knows him/herself and all other beings perfectly from all eternity – whether they are actual or merely possible, whether they are past, present or future – in one simple eternal act. Thiessen (1996:81) asserts that God knows things immediately, exhaustively, and truly. The fact that God knows all things possible can be deduced from God's full understanding of him/herself, which includes all things that are possible. Swinburne (2008:6) explains omniscience as God having all true beliefs about everything, and in God they constitute not just beliefs but infallible knowledge. Boyd (2001:85-115) on the other hand asserts that God lacks exhaustive foreknowledge of human actions and can at best accurately predict a great number of them. This claim has a number of disturbing implications for evangelicals who see prophetic utterances in Scripture as being true, and trustworthy and authoritative to life and faith. Thus, Boyd's affirmation of divine ignorance implies that God's expectations may at times be mistaken. Boyd understands God as having limited knowledge about the future actions of men – which contradicts Psalm 139:1-2 that speaks of God having intimate knowledge of our lives, both

[5] God is not subject to passion and emotions.

actions and thoughts. The question is therefore whether Boyd can do justice to this divine attribute as affirmed in the Evangelical tradition.

1.7. What is meant by evangelical theology or evangelicalism?

It is generally accepted that evangelicalism as a modern movement started in the eighteenth century with the spiritual awakening that is usually associated with John and Charles Wesley. Although evangelicalism is customarily seen as contemporary phenomena, the evangelical spirit manifested itself throughout church history. The commitment, discipline and missionary zeal that distinguish evangelicalism were features of the apostolic church, the fathers, early monasticism and the reformers. The term "evangelical" is derived from the Greek word *euangelion* (good news) and is used by historians in continental Europe as a synonym for "Protestant". Evangelical scholars claim that the movement was firmly based upon the principles of the Reformation. In this sense, it is believed that evangelicals are true heirs of the reformation. At the Reformation the name "evangelical" was given to the Lutherans, who sought to redirect Christianity to the gospel and renew the church on the basis of God's authoritative word. However, this spiritual vigour was lost due to the church being ruled by civil leaders. Therefore, the Reformation root is essential in understanding the development of evangelicalism.

The recovery of spiritual vigour sprung up again in the eighteenth century through German Pietism, Methodism and the great awakening. These movements were rooted in Puritanism that had a strong emphasis on biblical authority, divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The nineteenth century was clearly the evangelical age; figures like the Lord Shaftesbury and W. E. Gladstone occupied central positions in public life. Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon and the Christian Plymouth Brethren reached many with the gospel. The YMCA, founded by George Williams, and the Salvation Army, founded by William and Catherine Booth, was born out of the evangelical presence in Britain in the nineteenth century.

In America, the eighteenth century Great Awakening, as an indigenous movement spread extensively under the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield, not only resulted in evangelical ascendancy in churches but also dominated American culture, politics, science and education. McLoughlin (1968:1) claims that the story of American Evangelicalism is a story of America itself. By the 1870s the American movement was declining, but evangelical zeal and missionary vision fuelled the outreach that spread to most parts of the world. Evangelicals were at the forefront of the nineteenth century missionary advances into Africa and Asia.

Worldwide evangelicals now total well over 500 million, making up the bulk of Protestantism, almost 25% of Christendom, and 8% of the total world population. Growth has averaged over 5% annually, with the highest growth

in the emerging economies of the world. A recent survey[6] reports that while the number of people who are actively committed to the Church of England is in decline, the proportion of churchgoers who are serious about their faith – and its implications for private and public life – is growing. The report also reflects on Peter Brierley, a collector of statistics on faith in Britain, assessment that 40% of Anglicans attend evangelical parishes these days, up from 26% in 1989.

The word "evangelicalism" usually refers to a broad array of religious orthodox[7] beliefs, practices, and traditions found among Protestant evangelical Christians and some evangelical Catholics where conformity to the basic tenets of the faith and a missionary outreach of compassion and urgency is emphasized. A person who identifies with it is an "Evangelical" – one who believes and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelicalism has both a theological and historical meaning.

Theologically, it begins with the sovereignty of God, the transcendent, personal, infinite being. God is a Holy Being in whom there is no sin, yet he/she is one with love and compassion for sinners. God actively identifies with the suffering of his/her people, is accessible to them by prayer, and by his/her sovereign free will has devised a plan whereby humanity may be

[6] http://www.economist.com/node/21549943

[7] Packer (1984) "The English equivalent of the Greek *othodoxai* (from *othos*, "right" and *doxa*, "opinion"), meaning right belief, as opposed to heresy or heterodoxy. The word expresses the idea that certain statements accurately embody the revealed truth content of Christianity and are therefore in their own nature nominative for the universal church. This idea is rooted in the New Testament insistences that the gospel has a specific factual and theological content (1 Cor. 15:1-11; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 6:3; II Tim. 4:3-4; ect.), and that no fellowship exist between those who accept the apostolic standard of Christological teaching and those who deny it (I John 4:1-3;II John 7-11)." See "Orthodoxy" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* .

redeemed. Although this plan was foreknown, God allows humanity to cooperate in the attainment of his/her objectives and bring their wills into conformity with his/her will through evangelism. Thus, evangelicalism is typified by an emphasis on evangelism, a personal experience of conversion, biblically oriented faith, and a belief in the relevance of Christian faith to some cultural issues. It stresses a more intimate relationship with God at the individual level, as well as activism based upon one's biblically based beliefs. Evangelicals believe the Bible as true, trustworthy and reliable, and the final authority on matters of faith and practice. The doctrines of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* are central. Evangelicals are reluctant to give up certain crucial claims, including the belief that all truth is from God, that God is perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent and that the Devil is a devastating (personal) reality.

While evangelicals are always associated with fundamentalism in America and in South Africa, this is not true in most Evangelical churches. While some evangelicals are fundamentalist and many fundamentalists are evangelicals, a large number of evangelicals, while claiming to hold to fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, would reject the title "fundamentalist", limiting its use to a relative small party within evangelicalism. Tidball (1994:17-18) citing John Stott lists eight significant differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals:

- ☐ Fundamentalists are suspicious of scholarship, while evangelicals are open to it.
- ☐ Fundamentalists deny, while evangelicals recognize the human

and cultural dimensions of the Bible.

- ☐ Fundamentalists revere the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, while evangelicals believe that there are more accurate translations.
- ☐ Fundamentalists are strongly separatist, while evangelicals are more open to other Christians.
- ☐ Fundamentalists interpret the Bible considerably more literally than do evangelicals.
- ☐ Evangelicals are more critically aware that their beliefs are influenced by their culture than are fundamentalists.
- ☐ Fundamentalists are less concerned about the social implications of the gospel than evangelicals.
- ☐ Fundamentalists insist on premillennial views of the second coming of Jesus Christ, while evangelicals hold a variety of eschatological views.

Although evangelicalism is a movement without a confession, it has theological interests and a theological ethos. One expects evangelical theologians to hold to sound teaching and contend for the faith once delivered, though in a trans- denominational way. Differences can be expected, given the ecumenical character of the movement and experiments in theological reform in which new ground is broken. The movement is not stagnant theologically-new light still emanates from God's holy Word (even in conservative circles), and at least a little room exists for theological creativity.

Thus evangelical theology can be conservative and contemporary but never unorthodox in its affirmation of how God is as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. So while evangelicals have no confessional statement, it has held to the traditional view of God's attributes as passed down through the ages.

1.8. Research Hypothesis

I propose that, desirous of maintaining libertarian, or contra-causal, freedom on the part of the creature, as well as absolving God of all responsibility for evil, open theists have radically reconstructed the doctrine of God by stating that:

- ☐ God often changes his/her mind and experiences regret regarding some of his/her decisions.
- ☐ God does not know the future actions of free moral agents and therefore is surprised at the abuses of creaturely freedom.
- ☐ God is, to one degree or another, temporal, or bound by the constraints of time, as God interrelates with his/her creatures.

Thus, the research problem may be elucidated by the following hypotheses: That Boyd's understanding of divine power, divine mutability and divine foreknowledge is essentially different from how Evangelicals understand these terms. Evangelicals hold to the classical/ traditional views on God's attributes and therefore position themselves within the orthodox historical understanding (often referred to as classical or traditional theism) of the

attributes under investigation. The position of Boyd should be considered therefore, as a deviation from the evangelical tradition and not as a fruitful extension of this tradition.

1.9. Research Procedure

What then are the sources of this theological reflection? Before engaging in this theological quest to understand the relationship between open theism and evangelicalism, a word about the theological method employed in this study might serve to be helpful. Every theological investigation employs a certain methodology in its exploration. Methodology includes the operations, processes and procedures by which one comes to ascertain the essence of a matter. In the case of this study, the method employed is one which draws from the Early Church Fathers to the Reformers, the work of evangelical scholars and Boyd in order to investigate whether Boyd's position is a move away from evangelicalism.

According to Cooper (1988:104-126) "a literature review uses as its database reports of primary or original scholarship, and does not report new primary scholarship itself. The primary reports used in the literature may be verbal, but in the vast majority of cases reports are written documents. The types of scholarship may be empirical, theoretical, critical/analytic, or methodological in nature. Second a literature review seeks to describe, summarise, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the content of primary reports." This research project

will adopt the latter by critically and comprehensively engaging and analysing the works of Boyd, namely: *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (2000); *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God;* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (2001)* comparing the views of God's attributes through the scholarly works of Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, Bruce Ware and Norman L. Geisler. These scholars are chosen because of their influence within evangelicalism. Grudem, who is a New Testament scholar turned Systematic theologian, author is Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary, Arizona. He earned a BA from Harvard University, an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary, and a PhD from the University of Cambridge. In 2001 Grudem moved to Phoenix Seminary after having taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for more than twenty years where he was also the chairman of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology. Grudem served on the committee overseeing the English Standard Version translation, and in 1999 he was the president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. He is the author of *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994). Erickson is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Western Seminary, Portland, and the author of the widely acclaimed systematics work *Christian Theology* (1998) along with more than twenty other books. He was professor of theology and academic dean at Bethel Seminary for many years. He earned a B.A. from the University of Minnesota, a B.D. from Northern Baptist Seminary, an M.A. from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. from Northwestern University.

Erickson, an ordained Baptist minister, is a fairly conservative Evangelical. Bruce Ware is an evangelical theologian and author. He is currently Professor of Christian Theology and Senior Associate Dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Formerly, he taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he served as Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology. Prior to this, he taught at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary and at Bethel Theological Seminary. Ware has written numerous journal articles, book chapters, and books and Norman L. Geisler is an evangelical scholar Christian apologist and the author/co-author of over fifty Christian books defending the Christian faith by means of logic, evidence, and philosophy. He has also authored many scholarly articles on a wide range of theological and philosophical topics. Geisler has taught at the university and graduate level for over forty years. Geisler's work *Baker Encyclopaedia of Christian Apologetics* (1999) has been well received and is considered a systematic and comprehensive work of Christian apologetics to ascertain whether Boyd's understanding of the attributes of God align with that of Evangelicalism. An overview of the views of the Early Church fathers through the Reformers on the three attributes will also be undertaken to show that the Evangelical understanding of these attributes namely: God's omniscience, immutability and omnipotence is in keeping with the classical view about God.

1.10. Chapter Outline

Chapter One has provided an introduction to the scope of this thesis. It clarifies the scope by providing the background to this study and the planned methodology it applies to this study.

Chapter Two will focus on a historical investigation of the problem of evil. I shall use the works of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1978) and Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1979) to trace the development of the theodicy problem within the early church from the perspective of the early church fathers namely: St. Augustine and St. Ireneaus In this chapter, I shall outline a summary of the historical development of different versions of theodicies and investigate how they address the question of the reality of suffering and evil. This will also set the foundation for the investigation of how contemporary theologians have integrated these classical views to develop their own contemporary theodicies.

Chapter Three provides a general overview of the movement open theism in the context of the larger evangelical history. This chapter will glance through the works of Whitehead and other process theologians to examine the impact that process theology has on the development of open theism and finally on evangelicalism.

Chapter Four, Five and Six will comprise the focus of this research project by investigating the question as to whether Boyd offers a legitimate

improvisation on such traditional discourse or whether he departs from the critical and fundamental convictions within the evangelical tradition. Using the works of Boyd mentioned under the heading Research Procedure, this section will engage Boyd's work comprehensively and critically to determine Boyd's position on the three attributes of God under consideration. Boyd's position will then be compared with other Evangelical views on the three attributes of God. A historical literary analysis on the aforementioned attributes will be undertaken by using the works of Roberts and Donaldson *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1978) and Schaff *Post-Nicene Fathers* (1979). Standard textbooks by Evangelical systematic theologians such as Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* (1999) and Wayne Grudem's Systematic *Theology* (1994). These texts are chosen because they are widely used in evangelical theological seminaries as primary texts for the study of Systematic Theology. Other works of prominent Evangelical scholars such as Norman Geisler's, *Battle For God* (2001) and Bruce Ware's, *God's Lesser Glory* (2001) that critically engage open theism will also be used. The results will allow for the consideration as to whether Boyd's position may be considered a deviation from or a constructive innovation within the evangelical tradition.

Chapter Seven, having considered the most important doctrinal areas central to and definitive of the open theism and evangelicalism as to God and his/her relation to the world in Chapter 4-6. This chapter will focus on how evangelicals understand and respond to the problem of evil. The purpose is

to asses open theist's proposal as it relates to the evangelical understanding of evil and suffering.

Chapter 8

This chapter serves as a conclusion for the entire project.

Chapter Two

An Historical Investigation of the Problem of Evil

Introduction

The church has always been challenged by the problem of evil. In this chapter, I shall undertake a study examining how the early church fathers dealt with the theodicy problem, specifically St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus. In this section I have deliberately limited the focus to a more detailed evaluation of the theodicies' of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus. This is because of their dominance within Christianity and also the claims made by open theists that their understanding of God puts them in a better position to deal with the problem of evil than that of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus. It is because of this claim of a "better position" that a review of open theism needs to be undertaken. This chapter will also briefly focus on the Protest Theodicy of Roth, because of Roth's affirmation of the omnipotence of God – which open theists deny. To give a better historical and theological understanding of open theism, an investigation of process theology needs also to be undertaken because open theism is considered to be a "child" of process thought.

2.1. The Augustinian Theodicy

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) proposed a solution to the theodicy problem by blaming suffering on the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From this perspective, humans are responsible for suffering by being led astray by Satan. To understand Augustine's theodicy, one first needs to examine his ideas in light of two significant influences in his life. Frend (1953:22-23) rightly observed that the first is Manichaeism (established by Mani 216-76 CE), which St. Augustine was associated with for some time and which emphasises the duality (separation) of darkness and light. This duality was expressed in two eternal principles – matter and God – that were opposed to each other. Escape from the bonds of the physical world (matter), was said to be the goal (or purpose) of humanity. Eventually St. Augustine became disillusioned with Manichaeism, and as a result began to reject the notion that evil is an independent and corrupt substance. The other key factor influencing him was the teaching of Plotinus (204-70 CE). Geisler (1999:596-597) states that Plotinus was a Neo-Platonist who taught the goodness of creation and the chaotic nature of evil.

2.1.1. Platonic and Neoplatonic influences on St. Augustine's understanding of God

Because of a Neoplatonic conception of reality, St. Augustine arrived at a new understanding of God. As discussed in Chapter One, St. Augustine's initial conception of God was rooted in his nine-year association with the Manichees that posited the existence of two gods, one good and the other

evil. These gods, according to Manicheanism, are corporal in nature and seemingly mutable, as good and evil are engaged in a constant struggle or battle for domination. When the evil god wins, evil occurs; when the good god wins, good occurs. With the influences of the Platonic and metaphysical perception of reality, St. Augustine however was able to return to a new understanding of God and being. St. Augustine (in *The City of God* in *NPNF* 50.10 Vol. II:462) accepted the Platonic view of the simple Good: that "there is a Good, which alone is simple, therefore, immutable". This simple Good for Augustine is God. From God, all other good was created. God is the author of everything. He also believed the world was created literally out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), according to the Divine will. This meant that as far as St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 12.7 in *NPNF* Vol. I:177) was concerned, everything in the world was created good or perfect but it was mutable. He also believed that, although there is an abundant variety in the world, this is in fact ordered in varying degrees, according to the fullness of a creature's nature. St. Augustine (in City *The City of God* in *NPNF* 10.1.16 Vol. II:190-191) states that metaphysical hierarchy divides all existing creatures into three layers of reality. At the top of the hierarchy is God; in the middle are created spirits, such as angels and human souls; at the bottom are living and non-living objects such as bodies, plants and rocks. Thus, St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 7.5.6 in *NPNF* Vol.1:103) came to the realization that that which is incorruptible is better than that which is corruptible, and therefore God being incorruptible is perfect and the most Good, God. St. Augustine's (in

Confessions 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 in *NPNF* Vol.1:103-104) discussion on the topic can be outlined in the following way:

- God is Goodness itself, utterly and entirely better than the things that he/she has created.
- To be corrupted is not good.
- Therefore, the substance that is corruptible cannot be God.

Thus, the goodness of God implies incorruptibility. From Platonius, St. Augustine was able to develop his understanding of God, by establishing a metaphysical perception of reality based on his understanding of creation that formulates a basis for a solution to the problem of evil that God cannot create evil.

However, many tackle the problem of evil by addressing the origin of evil through promoting the following syllogism, (i.e. a process of logic in which two general statements lead to a particular conclusion):

- God created all things.
- Evil is a thing.
- Therefore, God created evil.

If the first two statements are true then the formulation, if sustained, is devastating for Christianity. God therefore cannot be good if he/she knowingly created evil.

St. Augustine realized that the solution to this problem was not to ask where evil originated but rather what is evil? The correct procedure, as he explains,

is first to discover the nature of evil and then to investigate its origin. In proceeding to question the nature or the "what" of evil, St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 7.5.7 in *NPNF* Vol. I:19) asks more specifically: What is the metaphysical nature of evil? Does evil exist as a separate entity and does it have being? If so, what is the nature of the being which evil might possess? Is evil a substance, perhaps an immaterial substance? Or is it something entirely without substance, perhaps the opposite of substance, and hence, the negation of Being itself, as Plotinus thought? Thus St. Augustine's preference for inquiring into the "what" before the "whence," can seemingly be traced to the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Plotinus (In *Ennead* 8.1)[8] writes:

> Those enquiring whence Evil enters into beings, or rather into a certain order of beings, would be making the best beginning if they established, first of all, what precisely Evil is, what constitutes its Nature. At once we should know whence it comes, where it has its native seat and where it is present merely as an accident; and there would be no further question as to whether it has Authentic–Existence.

Using this as a starting point, Plotinus (in *Ennead* 8.4)[9] characterizes the "what" of evil, as the privation of good and a pure lack of it. Adding to the challenge of responding to the question of the origin of evil is the obligation for St. Augustine, as a Christian, to preserve the traditional attributes of God, especially God's omnipotence and immutability, as well as the goodness of creation.

The syllogism above stated that evil is a thing. However, for St. Augustine evil is not a "thing" because "things" require creating. For St. Augustine, then,

[8] http://www.davemckay.co.uk/philosophy/plotinus/plotinus.php?name=enneads.08

[9] http://www.davemckay.co.uk/philosophy/plotinus/plotinus.php?name=enneads.08

evil did not require creating. Therefore, St. Augustine's understanding of the source of evil will take another direction. For St. Augustine God is good and because God is good he/she is incapable of creating evil. In order to show how St. Augustine comes to the understanding that God did not create evil, one must begin with the premise that God created all things good meaning perfect and evil is not good. It therefore can be stated in the following ways:

- ☐ All things that God created are good.
- ☐ Evil is not good.
- ☐ Therefore, God did not create evil.

Second:

- ☐ God created everything.
- ☐ God did not create evil.
- ☐ Therefore, evil is not a thing.

St. Augustine thus sees evil as not a created thing but rather a deviation from that which is good – which he refers to as the privation of good, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.1.2. Privation of Good

For St. Augustine matter is something essentially good, but it is also something that is able to deviate from what it should be. Thus for St. Augustine the notion of "evil" must now be understood as the *privatio boni* ("privation of good"), or that which occurs when a person renounces their

proper role in the order and structure of creation. St. Augustine thus frames his discussion about evil within the context of the nature of God and creation. As indicated earlier, for St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 7 2.3, 5.7 in *NPNF* Vol. I:103-109) God is Goodness itself, and the highest or most pure being, who is immutable and not susceptible to corruption or degradation. All other things that existed according to St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 12.7.7 in *NPNF* Vol. I:177) were created by God *ex nihilo.* According to St. Augustine, (in *Confessions* XII. XII.15 in *NPNF* Vol. I:179) this by no means infers that creation is derived out of God's own substance. This then would mean that creation would be equivalent to God. Nor does Augustine imply that there is a substance called "nothing" from which God created. Unlike humanity, God does not require any material out of which to create; God is omnipotent and as such He is able to create out of nothing from that which had no existence at all. St. Augustine (in *Concerning The Nature Of Good, Against The Manicheans* in *NPN*F Vol. IV:351) articulates the immutability of God very clearly by stating:

> The highest good beyond, that which there is no higher is God and consequently *he/she* is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal, truly immortal. All other good things derive their origin from *him/her* but are not part of *him/her*. For what is of him/her is *him/herself*. And consequently if *he/she* alone is unchangeable, all things that *he/she* has made is changeable because *he/she* made them of nothing. For he/she is so omnipotent that even out of nothing, that our of what is absolutely non-existent, he/she is able to make good things, great and small, celestial and terrestrial, spiritual and corporeal. Because *he/she* is also just, *he/she* has not those things that *he/she* made out of nothing on an equality with that which he/she begat out of *him/herself*. Because, therefore, no good things whether great or small through whatever gradation of thing can exist except from God (*italics added*).

For St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 12.7.7 in *NPNF* in Vol. I:177) God created everything out of formless matter, and this formless matter was created out of nothing. Therefore (in *Confessions* 12.7.7 in *NPNF* in Vol. I:177), because one good God brought everything into existence, everything created by God is also good. However, according to St. Augustine, things are not created out of God, but by God out of nothing. Therefore creation cannot be equal to God or to his supreme goodness but they approximate to the supreme good. This then begs the question: If all things are created good, how can one speak of evil?

The answer for St. Augustine (in *Enchridon* 11 and 12)[10] resides in the nature of the created being, the absence of good. Based on his Neoplatonic understanding of the nature of God, God is the only being that is perfectly good, eternal and unchangeable. Because created beings are but an approximate of the Good, they are capable of decreasing and increasing because their created nature is susceptible to change. It is this change from a state of goodness which a created being was intended to possess – a degree of goodness with which it was created – to a lesser state of goodness that St. Augustine defines as evil or the privation of good.

St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 7.10.18 in *NPNF* Vol. I:110*)* further clarifies the relationship of privation to the good, by stating:

> And it was made clear unto me that those things which yet are corrupted, which, neither were they supremely good, nor unless they were good, could be corrupted; because if supremely good, they were corruptible, and if not good at all, there was nothing in them to be corrupted . For corruption harms, but unless it could diminish goodness,

[10] http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm

> it could not harm. Either, then, corruption harms not, which cannot be; or, what is most certain, all which is corrupted is deprived of good, they will cease to be.

So far, then, St. Augustine's interpretation of the "what" of evil can be outlined as such:

- ☐ God is supremely and unchangeably good.
- ☐ God created all things.
- ☐ Because the things created by God are created *by* him/her (out of nothing), as opposed to being created *from* him/her (from his nature) they are good, but they are not supremely nor unchangeably good.
- ☐ Since created things are not immutably good, the good in created things can be diminished and increased.
- ☐ Evil is the diminution (deprivation, corruption, etc.), of good in a created thing.

So one can conclude that if things are deprived of all good, they cease altogether to be; and this means that as long as they are, they are good. Reiterating this point that evil is not a thing, St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 3.7.12 in *NPNF* Vol. I:63) explains that evil is nothing but the removal [privation] of good until finally no good remains. Thus, for St. Augustine evil is not a thing or a substance because God created everything and it was good. It can also be stated then that God made everything good and that there is no evil thing. The evil that exists does not exist in and of itself but rather as a corruption or privation of good things, which was made by God. Therefore,

St. Augustine (in *On the Nature of Good* 6)[11] concludes: “But if corruption takes away all measure, all form, all order from corruptible things, no nature will remain. And consequently every nature which cannot be corrupted is the highest good, as is God. But every nature that can be corrupted is also itself some good; for corruption cannot injure it, except by taking away from or diminishing that which is good.”

Thus stating that evil is a privation is not the same as saying that it is a mere absence or negation of good; or that metaphysical evil is not a mere negation or unreality as assumed by Griffin (2004). From these passages, one can conclude that:

- ☐ Every actual entity is good; a greater good if it cannot be corrupted (God), and a lesser good if it can be (all created being).
- ☐ Only those things that are good (but not supremely good) can become corrupt or evil.
- ☐ Where there is evil, there is a corresponding corruption of the good.
- ☐ Where there is no privation of the good, there is no evil.
- ☐ As long as a thing is being corrupted, there is good in it of which it is being deprived.
- ☐ If, however, the corruption comes to be total, there is no good left, because it is no longer an entity at all.

[11] http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm

- ☐ Corruption, then, cannot consume the good without also consuming itself.

If God is the creator of all things good, then where did the privation in human nature come from? What or who caused the corruption of these natures? St. Augustine's answer to this question is twofold.

First, God is supreme, incorruptible and good. St. Augustine (in *On The Moral Of The Manichees.* 9.24 in *NPNF* Vol. IV:73) states that God cannot create anything evil because God is the source and standard of all perfection, and God cannot be less than fully perfect. God is simple perfection, and an absolutely simple being cannot be destroyed. Since God is infinite and without composition, he/she cannot be torn apart or decompose – but this is not so with creation. Therefore, every created thing is composed and thus by nature decomposable. For St. Augustine (in *On the Nature of Good* 1)[12] anything of God is good, and there is only one that is good, God. All other things are from God but not *of* God. "The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal and truly immortal. All other good things are only from Him, not of Him." So creation is not out of God (*ex Deo*) but rather out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Thus, creation makes evil possible (but not a necessity) since anything that is created can be destroyed or deprived. But the precise nature of God is such that he/she cannot be the author or cause of evil.

Second, St. Augustine argues that evil entered the world because of the wrong choices of free beings (free in the sense that there was no external

[12] http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm

force necessitating them to do wrong). In other words, corruption occurred because of the use of our free will. According to St. Augustine (in *The City of God* 12.6 in *NPNF* Vol. I:104), when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil – not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked. This not only absolves God of creating evil but also allows him to show the world his love by bringing Christ into the world. This articulation of St. Augustine's approach emphasises the use of free will claims that for God to create a person who could only have performed good actions would have been logically impossible. He goes on to say that God created free creatures, but he/she cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if God does so, humans are not free after all as reflected (in *Confessions* 7.5 in *NPNF* Vol. I:105):

> Some people see with perfect truth that a creature is better if, while possessing free will, it remains always fixed upon God and never sins; then reflecting on men's sins, they are grieved, not because they continue to sin but because they were created. They say: He should have made us such that we never willed to sin, but always to enjoy the unchangeable truth. They should not lament or be angry. God has not compelled men to sin just because He created them and gave them the power to choose. Such is the generosity of God's goodness that he/she has not refrained from creating even that creature which, he foreknew would not only sin, but remain in the will to sin (*italic added*).

Therefore, God is neither responsible for evil nor guilty of negligence for not intervening. St. Augustine acknowledges the reality of his own will in the *Confessions*. Here, in attempting to determine the cause of evil, St. Augustine (in *Confessions* 7.5 in *NPNF* Vol. I:104) states: "I directed my attention to discern what I now heard, that free will was the cause of our

doing evil." Not only is St. Augustine certain that he has a will, but when he chooses to do something that can be characterized as either bad or good, he knows that it is his will that is the cause of his bad or good action.

This acknowledgement that will is freely able to choose between sin and right action, happiness or unhappiness, is the starting point for St. Augustine's explanation of the origination of evil. Geisler (2003:157) states that one of the clearest definitions St. Augustine provides for what he means by the word "will" is in *On Two Souls, Against the Manicheans*. Here, in attempting to defend the freedom of the will against the Manichaean view that human beings sin necessarily because of the evil element trapped within their bodies, St. Augustine (in *On Two Souls, Against the Manichean* in *NPNF* Vol. IV: 103) defines the will as a movement of mind, no one compelling, either for not losing or for obtaining something. St. Augustine clarifies his definition by stating that when we will something, our mind is moved toward it and we obtain it or we do not obtain it. If we do obtain it then we will to retain it and if we do not obtain it then we move to acquire it.

Thomas Aquinas (in *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.79.3)[13] also speaks of this recurrent theme of human action:

> But sin can be called a being and an action only in the sense that something is missing. And that missing element comes from a created cause, i.e. the free will in its departure from the First Agent who is God. Accordingly, this defect is not ascribed to God as its cause, but to free will, just as a limp in a cripple comes from his deformity and not from the power to move even though this power enables him to move.

[13] http://newadvent/summa/2079.htm

What then is the metaphysical origin of evil? For St. Augustine there is none. Metaphysical evil is nothing and therefore requires no cause. However, Griffin (1992:210-211) seems to imply that St. Augustine's privation of evil results in making evil an illusion. He goes on to say that St. Augustine denied the existence of genuine evil. For St. Augustine the metaphysical problem is moral. Free choice is the source of the corruption of the good that God made. Since human beings are finite and have the freedom to choose, they are capable of choosing evil. This wrong use of freedom brings about evil.

Plantinga (1974) justifies God's permitting of evil by reiterating the views of St. Augustine. Neither the sins nor the misery are necessary for the perfection to the universe, but souls as such are necessary, which have the power to sin if they so will, and become miserable if they sin. If misery persisted after their sin had been abolished, or if there were misery before there were sin, then it might be right to say that the order and government of the universe were at fault. Again, if there were sin but no consequent misery, that order is equally dishonored by lack of equality

He states that a good universe requires the existence of free thinking and moral agents; and some of the free creatures that God created made wrong choices. Thus, a universe containing free creatures and the evil they commit is better than a universe that contains neither free creatures nor this evil. Thus, attempting to explain "God's way to man", Plantinga (1974) states that St. Augustine claims that God could create a better, perfect universe by not permitting evil to occur and that he/she could by refusing to do so. This

shows that God is just in permitting evil. In keeping with the Augustinian tradition, Anthony Haig (2006) states that the essence of free will theodicy is the claim that God created creatures who are genuinely free in some highly desirable sense, but who are also capable of choosing evil. It is then argued that the good that comes from creating such genuinely free creatures outweighs the cost of the various evils that will result.

Geisler (1978: 49) states that it is worthwhile to ask how evil arose. For St. Augustine, evil is the corruption that arises when that which is good but potentially corruptible turns away from the infinite good of the Creator to that which is lesser. Thus evil is not metaphysically caused, but metaphysical evil arises when a creature considers his/her own finite good more important than the Creator's. It then can be concluded that free choice is good, but the misdirection of free choice is evil. Evil therefore is not the striving after the evil nature but the abandonment of the better nature. While evil is not metaphysically caused, I conclude that metaphysical evil comes about when moral pride occurs, because human beings considered their own finite good more important than the Creator's.

2.2. The Irenaean Theodicy

Despite the dominance of the Augustinian theodicy within the Catholic and Protestant (which includes Evangelicals) Christian traditions, there has been a minority that holds to an Irenaean theodicy. St. Irenaeus (130-202 AD)

taught that the existence of evil actually serves a purpose. The Irenaean tradition is older in its development than that of the Augustinian theodicy, while at the same time newer because of the reformulations of this theodicy by philosophers like John Hick over the last century. John Hick (1981: 217-218) states that in the past myth and theology have been closely intertwined, making it difficult for theologians to separate myth from history and science. The Augustinian theodicy that continued substantially unchanged within the Roman Catholic Church was also adopted by the Reformers and went unchallenged within Protestant doctrine until one hundred years ago. This distinguishing of myth from history had a profound impact on St. Augustine's theodicy. Hick (1981: 219) believes that the creation narrative including the fall of man is a myth; a myth as understood by Hick "only functions to illumine by means of unforgettable imagery the religious significance of some present or remembered experience". Thus, when this pictorial presentation is taken as fact to solve the problem of evil, the solution, Hick (1981:219) believes, "suffer(s) from profound incoherencies and contradictions". Hick (1981: 220) states that the incoherence of St. Augustine's theodicy begins with evil having its origins in the fall of humanity, which is inconsistent with the eruption of sin in the supposedly perfect angels. Hick (1981:220) goes on to argue that God had in effect predetermined Adam and Eve's rebellion by withholding from them the assurance of eternal bliss which he/she had given the angels, who did not sin. Thus he states that the myth mistakenly understood as serving as a theodicy brings in another concept: that of absolute divine predestination. For Hicks this only leads the Augustine

theodicy to contradict itself. Hick elaborates that the original intent of Augustine's theodicy was to blame evil upon the misuse of free will. But this abuse of free will is said to fall under God's divine predestined decrees, which collapses the theodicy into radical incoherence. Thus there is a necessity according to Hick for another and better way. Irenaean theodicy does not regard humans as having been created by God in a finished state, as finitely perfect beings fulfilling the divine purpose for their human existence and then falling disastrously away from this. Instead, it understands human beings as still being in the process of creation. Using Genesis 1:26, St. Irenaeus (in *Against Heresies* 5.6.1 in *ANF* Vol. I: 531) comments that when God said "Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness", this suggests a distinction between image and likeness. He views humans as personal and moral beings who already exist in the image of God, but have not yet come into the likeness of God. According to Hick (1981:223), St. Irenaeus means by likeness "something more than a personal existence as such; he means a certain valuable quality of personal life which reflects finitely the divine life". This theodicy is both developmental and teleological. This represents the perfecting of humans, the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom (Hick 1981:225). This journey within the life of each individual comes into perfection through the doing of evil as well as good. From his point of view, evil provides the necessary platform through which we take part in what Hick (1981:40) calls "person-making". It follows that evil is a means to an end in the sense that, if it did not exist, there would be no means of spiritual

development. So, the foundational principle of the theodicy of St. Irenaeus is that we have been placed in a hostile environment in order to learn to become better people. According to this view, God uses the pains and sufferings of the world as a method of producing a truly good person. God could have created us perfect beings, but God is more interested in our choosing to become who God wants us to be (at some point), instead of forcing us to be this way (no matter how long this takes). Leibniz explained the existence of human suffering by saying that God allows it temporarily for the greater good (cited in Stumpf 1989:257). Leibniz,[14] like Plato and St. Irenaeus, maintained that everything in the universe was explicable, and that God must indeed create the best while allowing suffering temporarily for the greater good of his creation (cited in Stumpf 1989:64-67). Another modern adherent to this position is Philip Quinn. Quinn (1982:199-215), like Leibniz, argues that we cannot know the effect of removing certain evils in the world since we cannot see the world from an infinite perspective. Hick (1966), in his proposed "soul/person making" theodicy, views suffering not as evil but rather as a necessary stage in the development of a relatively immature creation into a more mature state. Following St. Irenaeus, Hick does not consider that suffering in the world is the result of a fall from a once-perfect state but rather sees suffering as a process that will bring about a gradual improvement in the human race. Hick (1981:25) sees humans as endowed

[14] Leibniz has been considered the foremost spokesman of optimism and rationalism. His view of evil as an instrument to work for cosmic good is known as the "best-of–all-possible-world" solution. God is the best of all possible beings. The best of all possible being cannot do less that His best. God's nature at best demands that he makes the best possible world (if He wills to make one). This world is the world that God made. Therefore, it is the best of all possible worlds (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz-evil/).

with a real but limited freedom that enables a relationship with God through which they can find fulfilment. This relationship gives meaning to our human existence "as long as the process, through which we are being created by our free responses to life's mixture of good and evil, ultimately leads to good". This then is the point for St. Irenaeus/Hicks' theodicy, in trying to apply the realities of sin and suffering to the perfect goodness and love of the all-powerful Creator. This theodicy is eschatological in its outlook. Instead of looking to the past for answers to the origin of evil, it looks to the future as its position to provide a solution to the problem of evil. Understanding the divine purpose working through the affairs of humanity, towards the fulfilment that lies in the future, this theodicy finds the meaning of evil in the outworking of that purpose that leads to a better person. The good that outshines all evil is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom that is yet to come in its full glory and permanence, and that has been revealed in and through Christ Jesus (Hick 1981:229).

2.3. Protest Theodicy

The Protest theodicy of John K. Roth[15] has been largely shaped by the Jewish response to the Holocaust. Roth is influenced by the works of Elie

[15] "John K. Roth is the Edward J. Sexton Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and the Founding Director of the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights (now the Center for Human Rights Leadership) at Claremont McKenna College, where he taught from 1966 through 2006. In 2007-2008, he served as the Robert and Carolyn Frederick Distinguished Visiting Professor of Ethics at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. In addition to service on the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and on the editorial board for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, he has published hundreds of articles and reviews and authored, co-authored, or edited more than forty books, including Genocide and Human Rights: A Philosophical Guide; Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the

Wiesel, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, who, like Moses, acknowledges God's sovereignty but argues with him and for the sake of his people puts God on trial. Thus, this theodicy attempts to reconcile God's existence with the presence of evil and suffering in the world, by asking: Why doesn't God *do* something? The starting point of this theodicy engages that God could and should do something to prevent evil and suffering from occurring in the world. For John Roth, the problem of evil and suffering begins here. As far as Roth is concerned, God's (traditionally) supposed sovereignty (control over everything) and omnipotence (power to do anything) means God could and should be able to do something about evil and suffering, but must clearly not want to. In fact, Roth goes so far as to say that God's persistent inactivity means that God is *directly responsible* for evil and suffering occurring, and that the only reasonable response from us should be to *protest* to God that enough is enough. Roth (1981:10-11) also believes the wrong image of God, which suggests that God is benevolent (all-good) and always available to do the best for us, must be reconsidered in light of the "horrendous historical consequences". Roth states (1981:11): "… the slaughter-benches (make) God's luxury wasteful. No matter what horn of the dilemma is seized, any way in which God could rationally justify *his/her* economy purely as cost-effective in pursuing goodness that *humans* can appreciate … well, those are

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Holocaust and Its Aftermath; and Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau. With Peter Hayes, Roth is currently editing the Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies for the Oxford University Press. Roth has been Visiting Professor of Holocaust studies at the University of Haifa, Israel, and his Holocaust-related research appointments have included a 2001 Koerner Visiting Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in England as well as a 2004-05 appointment as the Ina Levine Invitational Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. In 1988, Roth was named U.S. National Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching".

http://www.paragonhouse.com/manufacturers.php?manufacturerid=174.

beyond imagining. This result testifies that such a wasteful God cannot be totally benevolent" (*italics added*). As far as Roth is concerned, God has done too little for too long, especially when one considers the numerous and extensive atrocities committed by humanity to humanity over the course of history. This will bring into focus how Roth views evil.

2.3.1. Evil as waste

While most Christians see evil as that which works against the intended purposes of God, Roth defines evil as waste. In relation to the understanding of the problem of evil and suffering, Roth (1981:8) understands evil as "*activity* and sometimes, *inactivity* and therefore it is the manifestation of power. Evil power displays are those that waste. That is evil happens whenever power ruins or squanders, or it fails to frustrate those results". Roth considers the amount of "waste" in the world to be the standard by which one can assess the level of good and bad in individuals, societies or even God. The greater the amount of evil and suffering, the greater the amount of "waste". Roth does not see evil or suffering as bringing out the greater good as projected by St. Irenaeus and Hick. For Roth the senseless deaths and suffering during the Holocaust were just the senseless waste of human life. This is how Roth defines the notion of evil. For Roth there has been too much waste over the years, and as the perpetrator of such waste, God must be held liable.

2.3.2. Omnipotence of God

Roth (1981:16) believes in an omnipotent God: "… that is God is bound by his/*her* will. Nothing except it determines what he/she shall do or become." All possibilities to change the course of history and the ability to stop this "waste" is within the reach of God, but it seems that God is not interested in doing anything other than allowing misery to inflict this world. Although God has the ability to intervene at any point in present history, he/she chooses to allow freedom to work its own course as it lives in individuals and communities. Thus, Roth (1981:16) sees "God's plan as virtually no plan at all". He (1981:16) goes on to state that while God could determine the future he/she declines to do so, thus making human freedom reality. God also commits him/herself to that which took place in the past, being bound by his/her own lack of intervention to that which has taken place. And so everything hinges on the fact that God, who is all-powerful, fails to use his/her power well enough to intervene in history to make the course less wasteful. Thus, in spite of God's sovereignty, Roth (1981:16) concludes that "God is everlastingly guilty". Protest theodicy therefore presents us with the choice of either a God who is deprived of some power, or one who is less than good; a God who is innocent but ineffectual, or one who is all-powerful but less benevolent. Roth favours the latter version of God, for the simple reason that, like Job, the one suffering can be said to have an opportunity to state his/her case before God in the hope that God will change things

around. Thus for Roth a finite God has nothing to offer in making things better.

2.3.3. An evaluation of Roth's theodicy

Roth states that most theodicies have a fatal flaw, i.e. "legitimate evil", because they suggest that either suffering is deserved, or that all things are working towards some greater good. Roth rejects both these approaches, and in doing so regards his theodicy of protest as more of an *anti-theodicy*. For him, nothing can justify all the evil and suffering going on in the world, and the responsibility for it all lies squarely with God. Therefore, as Roth sees it, for too long now there has been an emphasis on the love of God at the expense of a real response to the problem of evil and suffering.

Roth's protest theodicy affirms the traditional understanding of God's omnipotence and omniscience, he digresses from the classical understanding of a perfect God when he revises or limits the attribute of God's goodness, thus calling into question the perfection of God. Davis (1981:22) states that Roth's theodicy involves giving up something that is central to Scripture and Christian tradition, namely the belief that God is perfect, morally good, just and holy. To limit God's moral goodness portrays God as having a dark side that allows or causes evil. Since Roth, believes in a God who is all-powerful with all possibilities within his reach, he has yet to give an answer as to why redeeming evil is not a possibility that will be achieved by God or whether one day God will indeed redeem all evil. The

hope of the Christian faith lies in the affirmation that in the future God will intervene and restore and redeem humanity from all evil.

2.4. Process Theodicy

The idea that God changes in diverse ways as a result of his/her relationship to the world is the main distinctive of process thought. The founder of this movement, philosopher Alfred North Whitehead distinguished the two aspects of divine nature. He understood the nature of God as being "dipolar"[16]

Process philosophy concerns itself with what exists in the world and with the terms of reference in which this reality is to be understood and explained (metaphysics). The task of metaphysics is, after all, to provide a cogent and plausible account of the nature of reality at the broadest, most synoptic and comprehensive level. In addition, it is to this task of enabling us to characterize, describe, clarify and explain the most general features of the "real" that process philosophy addresses itself in its own characteristic way. The guiding idea of its approach is that natural existence consists of and is best understood in terms of *processes* rather than *things* – of modes of change rather than fixed stabilities. Process philosophers see change of every sort – physical, organic, psychological – as the pervasive and

[16] This will be further discussed in Chapter 3 under Alfred North Whitehead.

predominant feature of the real[17] that Charles Hartshorne refers to as "neo-classical metaphysics". This is metaphysics not of "being" or "substances" but in which events are leading to ultimate reality that is in a state of dynamic process. The basic unity of reality is an individual unit of becoming, or a process of feeling or an actual entity. It is this interplay between actual entities that forms the "process" as expounded by Whitehead, the system behind the intuition that the cosmos is "alive". Things change in the world and everything is on the move. God, the envisioner of possibilities, brings this process into being. The nineteenth century absolute idealist philosopher Hegel (1967:789-808) suggests that God developed consciousness through dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis to synthesis. This result is a breakdown of the divine transcendence into the phenomenological realities of the historical process. For absolute idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century, God cannot be conscious of something that does not exist. For consciousness to be possible there must first be an object of consciousness. Thus the question is asked, how can God know the future if the future does not exist as an object of consciousness? Thus, according to the Hegelian tradition God is in some respects conditioned by the elements of temporality we call the "future" (Bush, 2008:780). God is therefore understood as a cosmic individual whose consciousness dawns and progresses as God experience the present reality. Theologians who derive their philosophical influences from process philosophy attempt to understand God and the problem of evil from the view that reality is changing and that God also

[17] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-philosophy/

changes or is developing. According to Diehl (l996), another common argument from process theology includes, the notion of God's "dipolarity" (God has two natures) and the notion that God is integrally involved in the endless process of the world. God has a "primordial" or transcendent nature, God's timeless perfection of character; and God also has a "consequent" or immanent nature by which God is part of the cosmic process itself. This process is "epochal", i.e., not according to the motion of atoms or changeless substances but by events or units of creative experience, which influence one another in temporal sequence. Process theologians argue that the reality of God is not fixed and that God is still developing.

Whitehead in *Process and Reality* (1978:31) views God as "bipolar" – a term that is used to describe God as having two "poles": one mental and one physical, or one eternal (potential) and one temporal (actual). The potential pole (mind of God) is the order of all that can be, and the actual pole (his body) is the order of all that is. The potential pole is both absolute and eternal, but the actual pole is relative and temporal. God is then actually finite but potentially infinite. Thus, process theologians see humanity as "created co-creators" with God. The creation itself is seen as a co-operation between God and all other beings. Thus they can be considered panentheists[18]. For them God is in the world attaining perfection successively and endlessly because of his/her interaction with humanity. As a result, God is limited by conditions from the outside. While process theists affirm divine love, they

[18] Panentheism must not be confused with pantheism. Pantheism means *all is God,* but panentheism means "*all in God*". For a summarized explanation on panentheism see *Bakers Encyclopaedia of Christian Apologetic* 576-579.

reconstruct divine power because the concept of the omnipotence of God leads to considerable difficulties. Griffin (2004:298) states that process theodicy is based upon a perception that there are metaphysical principles that are beyond even divine decision. According to Whitehead (1978:32-33), this metaphysical principle is itself the "principle of limitation" as God relates to the actual (metaphysical). The conclusion here is that God's perfect power is best conceived in relation to human beings. Thus God is limited, at least to some degree, by others who possess power of their own. Because of the limitation of God's divine power, process theists do not believe that God is accountable for failing to prevent evil or suffering but rather see any suffering in creation as also undergone by God.

2.4.1. An Evaluation of Process Theodicy

The process theism of Whitehead and Hartshorne does indeed deal with the problem of evil, but to the extent of limiting God's power and knowledge. The process theist critic of classical theism possesses its own challenges. If God lacks the power to actualize his/her own end in the world, how can process theists be certain that the good will eventually be achieved? If God's power is curtailed in order to absolve him/her of responsibility for evil, then the guarantee of the ultimate triumph of good is also jeopardised. Madden and Hare (1968:117) elaborate on this more clearly:

> According to the process theist natural events do not thwart (God) but are occasions for God to exercise *his/he*r creative power, but they still must admit that on this view the matter of God is still limited in the sense that God neither creates nor wholly controls actual occasions.

> Moreover, if God does not wholly control actual occasions, it is difficult to see how there is any real assurance of the ultimate triumph of good. The two elements of traditional theism reinforce each other. The unlimited power of God insures the triumph of good, and the latter requires the notion of God's unlimited power. The mutual reinforcement however is wholly lacking in Whitehead's system. The absence points up a fundamental difficulty with this quasi theism.

Thus, Madden and Hare implies that divine power is coercive. This coercive power directly influences the outcome, since the process must conform to its control. According to the process theist, persuasive power operates more indirectly, for it is effective in determining the outcomes only to the extent that the process appropriates and reaffirms for itself the aims envisioned in the persuasion. Thus, God's control is limited by the existence of evil in the world. Process theists conclude that God possesses no coercive power; only God's persuasive power will be actualized because of his limited knowledge of the actual decision that will be taken by the creature. Thus unlimited power and knowledge is incompatible with divine perfection. Whitehead (1978: 342) argues that traditional theism has fashioned God into the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers. He goes on to complain that the church gave in to the attributes of God that belonged exclusively to Caesar, which he sees as a deeper idolatry. However Sontag (1982:123) argues against Whitehead, holding that Greek thought influenced classical theism and that it is process thought or theodicy that takes us back to an ancient notion of a limited God. This is necessary because one of the major discussions of process theodicy has been the supposed borrowing of Greek notions by early Christian theologians to develop the divine perfection of

God. The early church fathers held to the omnipotence of God and rejected Plato's limited deity.

According to Ford (1992:249), God's persuasive power, maximizes human freedom, respecting the integrity of each creature in the very act of guiding that creature's development towards greater freedom. According to process theologians, the image of God as a craftsman, the "cosmic watchmaker" must be abandoned. They see God as a gardener in the vineyard of the world, fostering and nurturing its continuing evolutionary growth throughout ages. God is seen as a companion and friend, who inspire us to achieve the very best within us. Thus, God creates by persuading the world to create itself. And so the process theists reason for a broader understanding of persuasive power, because a lack of this understanding will lead either to divine determination or pure chance.

The respective role of God as far as his/her knowledge is concerned can be now summarized as follows: God is omniscient, by knowing as actual everything that is actual and knowing as possible everything that is possible. However, process theologians state that God cannot know as actual what is not actualized or possible. This perception has ramifications in theology where God's foreknowledge and immutability is limited in favour of creaturely freedom (Shaw, 2000:440).

Evil is therefore recalcitrant, and no final victory over it is possible. Whitehead (1978:341) concludes:

> In our cosmological construction we are, therefore left with the final opposites joy and sorrow, good and evil, disjunction and conjunction-

> that is to say, the many in one- flux and permanence, greatness and triviality, freedom and necessity, God and the World.

Since God is neither omniscient nor omnipotent, even God does not know how the world process will eventuate.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have set the stage to show the development of open theism by discussing the approaches taken in trying to articulate a theological response to the problem of evil and ending with process thought or process theodicy. Process theodicy is not a solution to the traditional problem of evil, but rather a denial that there is such a problem, because one cannot reconcile the fact of the problem of evil with faith in a God who is limited in power. Process theologian understand the omniscience and power of God differently from evangelicals. Process theologians view God as being who is conditioned by events and is essentially temporal. God in this view then does not have the power to deal with the problem of evil because as God influences the world, the world also influences God. The next chapter deals with philosophical influences that gave rise to open theism (which is the child of process thought) within evangelicalism.

Chapter Three

Overview of Open Theism

Introduction

The question of the influence of open theism on the evangelical theological dialogue is a crucial one. It is acknowledged that open theism is a debate about divine foreknowledge initiated by the belief that God does not know the future fully. This limiting of God's knowledge is a reworking of historic and orthodox theology. However, because open theists oppose the exhaustive knowledge of God, it is imperative to focus on the precursors who held to the view that God's knowledge is limited. Therefore, this section will focus on the various schools of thought in philosophy and theology over the centuries (more specifically process theology and process philosophy) that influenced the open theists' understanding of God's knowledge against the long tradition of a positive affirmation of God's exhaustive foreknowledge. This chapter will endeavour to prove that the limiting of God's knowledge does not have its origins in orthodox Christianity but is influenced primarily by philosophers outside of Christianity. Evangelicals traditionally hold to the view that God is infinite in knowledge.

3.1 Precursors to Open Theism

3.1.1. Aristotle

The parallel between the teachings of Aristotle and open theism for this investigation is a critical position to start at. In *On Interpretations*[19] Aristotle considers the truth status of various kinds of propositions. A proposition must be either true or false, according to what has been labeled the law of the excluded middle. When it comes to an analysis of propositions about the future, however, there is a problem. For if it is the case that a certain result will occur or not occur, Aristotle (in *On Interpretation* 9)[20] states:

> There would be no need to deliberate or to take the trouble, on the supposition that if we adopt a certain course, a certain result would follow, while if we did not, the result would not follow. For a man may predict an event ten thousand years before hand, and another may predict the reverse; that which was truly predicted at the moment in the past will of necessity take place in the fullness of time.

For Aristotle if these predictions are correct, then the occurrence is a matter of necessity. This for Aristotle[21] leads to an impossible conclusion:

> For both predictions and actions are causative with regards to the future, and that, to speak more generally, in those things which are not continuously actual there is a potential in either direction. So such things may either be or not be; events may either take place or may not take place…. For in the case of that which exists potentiality in either direction, but not actually, the rule which applies to that which exists actually does not hold good.

[19] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/interpretation.1.1.html

[20] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/interpretation.1.1.html

[21] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/interpretation.1.1.html

While there have been a variety of interpretations of Aristotle's argument about the future, most philosophers take this as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Kenny (1979:2) explains this as follows:

> If the future-tensed propositions about singulars were already true, then fatalism would occur. But fatalism is absurd; therefore, since many future events are not yet determined, statements about such events are not yet determined; statements about such events are not yet true or false, although they will later be.

Aristotle (in *Metaphysical* 12.8)[22] anticipated in his own doctrine of God as "thought thinking itself." Aristotle (in *Metaphysical* 12.9)[23] could not conceive how God could know the world, since the world is an ever changing reality. Aristotle viewed God as a closed circle in which no distinction could be made between "thought" and "thinking." Thus Aristotle could not conceive of a God who could think thoughts simultaneously. If this is the case, then one can conclude that Greek tradition has influenced the way open theists consider the future.

3.1.2. Celsus

Celsus was a second century Platonist philosopher who attacked Christianity and Christian belief. He wrote a book in about 178CE entitled *True Discourse.* Origen uses the work *True Discourse* to analyse Celsus' understanding of God and the Christian faith in the eight books of *Against Celcus.* Concerning the issue of foreknowledge, Celsus contends that this

[22] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html.
[23] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html.

must result in the loss of human freedom, “for being God He predicted these things, and the prediction must by all means come to pass”. While Celsus seemed to have held the view that the disciples invented accounts about Jesus, at other times he appears to have held that they were deceived. Origen (in *Against Celsus 2*.20 in *ANF* Vol. IV: 439-441) argued, using the betrayal of Jesus as an example, that the fact that God foreknew and predicted this betrayal of Jesus does not mean that he caused it. Celsus imagines that an event predicted through foreknowledge comes to pass because it was predicted; but we do not grant this, maintaining that he who foretold it was not the cause of its happening, because he foretold it would happen – but the future event itself, which would have taken place though not predicted, afforded the occasion to him who was endowed with foreknowledge of foretelling its occurrences. Origen’s understanding about God’s foreknowledge was that, while God knows that an event might occur, this does not make him/her the cause of the event, but rather because it is going to happen God knows of it before it happens. Erickson (2003:113) notes that Celsus’ rejection of divine foreknowledge was part of a much larger criticism of Christian theology. Celsus also rejected the idea of the divinity of Jesus Christ as inconsistent with his poverty and suffering. His rejection of the traditional view of foreknowledge came from outside the Christian faith.

3.1.3. Marcion

Marcion, who considered himself a Christian, lived in the second century and was excommunicated from the church because he distinguished between the Creator, the Old Testament God whom he saw as the author of natural evil, and the New Testament God of love. He therefore rejected the Old Testament and developed his own canon. The influence of Gnosticism on Marcion impacted his understanding of God and is seen in how Marcion viewed God's omniscience in relation to the problem of evil. If God is good, he/she would seek to prevent evil, and if he/she is all-powerful, then he/she should be able to prevent evil. He goes on to state that, if God is omniscient, God should have known that when he/she created human beings they would fall into evil. Since however there is evil in the world, God must be lacking in one of these qualities, and Marcion therefore rejected the teaching of God's foreknowledge. To this Tertullian (in *Against Marcion* in *ANF* Vol. III:301) replied:

> But what shall I say of *his/her* prescience, which has for its witness as many prophets as it inspired? After all, what title to prescience do we look for in the Author of the Universe, since it was by this very attribute that he/she foreknew all things when *he/she* appointed their places, and appointed then their places when *he/she* foreknew (*italics added*).

Tertullian further refutes Marcion's case, arguing that nothing evil could come out of God and it was human choice to sin. Thus, for God to use his foreknowledge to stop Adam from sinning would have been an assault on his/her own character. Tertullian (in *Against Marcion* 2.7,4.41 in *ANF* Vol.

III:303) argues that this foreknowledge of God in no way interferes with God's gift of human freedom of choice, even if humans perish through their choice to sin. Like Marcionism, open theists cannot see the compatibility of human freedom with God's foreknowledge, and thus elevate human freedom at the expense of limiting God's foreknowledge.

3.1.4. The Socinians

Probably the best-known group to oppose the orthodox view of God's exhaustive knowledge was the seventeenth century Socinians, a late Reformation group that was more radical in its theology than were other Reformers. Faustus Paulo Sozzini (Socinus) was disturbed by the doctrine of predestination, which was an essential part of the theology of both Luther and Calvin. He felt that if predestination were true, then the very foundations of religion could be denied or rejected. Hodge (1995:400-401) testifies also to the universal Christian affirmation of the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God with the primary exception of the Socinians:

> The Church … in obedience to the Scriptures, has, almost with one voice, professed faith in God's foreknowledge of the free acts of his creatures. The Socinians, however, and some Remonstrants, unable to reconcile this foreknowledge with human liberty, deny that free acts can be foreknown. As the omnipotence of God is his ability to do whatever is possible, so his omniscience is his knowledge of everything knowable. But as free acts are in their nature uncertain, as they may or may not be, they cannot be known before they occur. Such is the argument of Socinus.

One of the important factors in this difficulty is the role of divine foreknowledge. In order to understand Socinus' approach to God's foreknowledge, it is necessary to evaluate his understanding of the relationship of God with time. He rejected the atemporalist approach according to which God holds all time in one simultaneous moment. Instead, Socinus saw God as knowing all events past, present and future according to their respective natures. Fock (cited in Erickson 2003:114) elaborates that the future for Socinus consists of either what must necessarily occur, or what only will possibly occur, or under certain conditions and contingently may occur. On the latter hangs all acts of human freedom. Since God know all things as they are, accordingly he/she knows the necessary future as such and the contingent future also as such. If it were otherwise, God would not know things as they are, for the truth is the congruence of knowledge with its object. Socinus insists, however, that if God knows the future as determined from all eternity, then there can be no human freedom. There is also no divine freedom, since from all eternity God could only act as he/she actually does act. One serious problem with Socinian' view was, of course, prophecy. The basis of his understanding of prophecy was that everything has been decreed by God. Common evidence of foreknowledge was the appeal to prophecy. Socinus did not think this evidence to be of value, as noted by Toulmin (1777:230):

> There are many other sacred testimonies, which seem to establish the notion of divine foreknowledge, to all which he will be able to easily return an answer who will weigh and consider what we have observed. From which these for rules may be inferred and laid down: Firstly if any passage speak of good works foreseen, God himself hath undoubtedly decreed them. Secondly, whether it speaks of good or evil actions, the

> predictions may be founded only on probabilities and on this are enquiring. Thirdly, that it may be rather an admonition to do good, or to avoid that what is evil. Fourthly, that if it be certain predictions of an evil work, this work was indeed decreed by God, but not the malignity of heart.

Most who today abandon the traditional view of foreknowledge are reluctant to claim the precedent of Socinianism. In his *Trinity and Process*, Boyd (1992:296-97) frankly acknowledges: "… until the time of the Socinians, the belief that God's omniscience included all future events was not generally questioned". Yet in his later publications, God *of the Possible* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, he makes no mention of Socinus at all, but mentions several other people who do not hold the traditional view. The reason for his reluctance to associate with Socinianism as a predecessor to open theism may arise from the Socinians' unorthodox view on a number of other essential doctrines: *viz*, their denial of the deity of Christ. The relationship between open theism and Socinianism is that they share the same convictions and arrive at the same conclusions concerning the relationship between human freedom and divine foreknowledge. Socinus denied that God either determines or eternally knows our free acts. Rather, humans determine the acts, and God knows them only after the fact or as they occur.

This approach implies real novelty in the divine consciousness; it means that human beings can cause changes in God[24]. In this bold break with the

[24] This will be covered in the next chapter dealing with God's immutability.

traditional understanding of God's knowledge, Socinus germinated the thought that led to the development of the present process theology[25].

While many open theists react strongly against any association with Socinianism, the impact it has on the movement is noted.

3.1.5. Jules Lequyer

One whose ideas on free will anticipated much of the current debate was the nineteenth century Frenchman Jules Lequyer (1814-1862). Lequyer had a major influence on Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne and Reese (2000:227) state that "about one hundred years ago the reasoning of Socinus concerning God's omniscience and time reappeared in the French philosopher Leguier"[26] . In the foreword of *Translation of the Works of Jules Lequyer* (1998) edited and translated by Donald W. Viney, Robert Kane (1998:xiii) argues in the Foreword that Lequyer not only anticipated the theological debate over the openness of God, but made a significant contribution to that debate through his *Dialogue of the Predestinate and the Reprobate.* Lequyer was not a philosopher or theologian. He taught French composition and mathematics. His death in 1862 by drowning at the age of 48 may have been suicide. Kane (1998: xi) observes that had it not been for his friend, the celebrated French philosopher Charles Renouvier, the work of Lequyer may have never been

[25] http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/Hartshorne/6newworld.html

[26] The name can be spelt in various ways. See Viney DW, "Jules Lequyer : Bold Traveler in the Worlds of Thought," in *Translation of the Works of Jules Lequyer* for a discussion on the variant spellings.

known at all. Kane (1998: xi) contends: “It is now generally acknowledged that Lequyer anticipated many of the themes of the twentieth century process philosophy and process theology, associated with the later works of Alfred North Whitehead and especially the work of Charles Hartshorne.”

Central to Lequyer’s thought is the concept of will. Rejecting the compatibilist understanding of freedom as the absence of constraint, he defined freedom as a creative act that brings “a new mode of being” (1998:46). Using an incident from his childhood in which he decided to pluck a leaf from a hornbeam tree, Lequyer (1998:45-47) illustrates this concept of “a new mode of being”. When he reached for the leaf, he startled a bird hidden in the tree, which flew away and was killed by a sparrow hawk. The boy Lequyer had created an event that would have otherwise not occurred. Thus, Lequyer (1998:127) distinguishes between epistemic possibility and ontological possibility or indeterminacy. Freedom requires indeterminacy: “If it is a question of a free action, we know that it is certainly possible not to do it.” Erickson argues (2003:117) that Lequyer’s problem with foreknowledge arises from his conception of human freedom because Lequyer argues in *The Dialogue of the Predestinate and the Rebrobate* (1998:127) that “it is clear that freedom taken with this simplicity, and reality, excludes all prevision of the act that it determines”. This is not actually a limitation on God’s omnipotence, however, for such a supposed foreknowledge would be like omnipotence requiring God’s ability to make a triangle in which the sum of the three angles was not equal to the sum of two right angles. Therefore, Lequyer (1998:128) argues that the principle of the excluded middle does not

apply to a future tense proposition: "… between the contingent past things and contingent things to come there is the difference of two contradictory affirmations concerning contingent things to come, neither one nor the other is true, both are false." This position creates a problem for Lequyer concerning prophecy. Some to be sure are conditional prophecies, such as the destruction of Nineveh. Of the absolute prophecies, however, some pertain to events that are the outworking of casual factors. There are events that God unilaterally and directly causes but in the instances like Peter's denial, God knew that the denial was an inevitable result of Peter's self-determined character, and then God withheld divine help at the very crucial moment. Thus, for Lequyer Peter's actions created a "new mode of being". Like Renouvier, William James, and the existentialists who followed him, Lequyer was critical of determinism and defended a concept of freedom as a creative act. Lequyer also explored the ramifications of his ideas on freedom for philosophical theology. He (cited by Donald Wayne Viney in "Philosophy after Hartshorne") spoke of his belief in "God, who created me the creator of myself". His views have affinities with process theologies and with open theism.

3.1.6. Otto Pfleiderer

Born at Stetten in the region of Württemberg in Swabia on 1 September 1839, Otto Pfleiderer was a New Testament specialist, who was influenced by the German idealists who preceded him, but more so by Hegel. Pfleiderer

understands the working out of God's purpose through the revelation of God in nature and history, which leads him to reject miracles and the supernatural intervention of God in the world. This interaction with the world changes God's ability to know everything exhaustively. Pfleiderer (1888:296) rejected the classical view of God's omniscience as immediate, eternal and immutable and adopts a panenthestic view of God. Pfleiderer (1888:296) argued that the classical view or what he termed "religious consciousness" destroyed the analogy between the divine consciousness and the human, which necessarily involves a succession of states or growth in content. Furthermore, Pfleiderer (1888:296), contended that it renders questionable as to whether a real relationship of God to the temporal process or else the reality of this process. According to Pfleiderer (1888:296-297), it is therefore necessary to understand God having successive states within his consciousness. But this has a definite impact on our understanding of God's omniscience: "… it follows that foresight of the future must be distinguished from knowledge of the present and must be thought to refer not to accidents of the particular but rather the essential features of the universe, so that it coincides with the purposive idea of the world-ordering wisdom." It is interesting to note that Hartshorne sees parallels between each of the thinkers I have just discussed and his own process philosophy. Hartshorne (1971:22-23) states that "it has been encouraging to discover in recent years, to see that Pfleiderer and Lequier have had the same ideas of God more or less to that which I defend".

3.1.7. Alfred North Whitehead

Alfred North Whitehead the son of an Anglican minister was born in England in 1861. Whitehead's understanding of religion is a land mark in modern thought. His understanding of theology or propositional religious statements has challenged the orthodox understanding of God. Whitehead's complex thought can be briefly described as all things are in process of becoming, including God. Thus for Whitehead rational religion is an attempt to find a permanent, intelligible interpretation of experience. Therefore, Whitehead's metaphysical understanding is grounded in the primacy of how God experiences the world. The experience to which Whitehead looks is not merely the sensory experience of self-conscious organisms. Instead, such experience is seen as a rather complex and high-order manifestation of an even more fundamental form of experience. Thus, God is seen to be in the process of becoming through the way he/she experiences the world. It is an experience of both profound relationships, of contingency, of the dependence of God upon humanity through our cosmic experience. Therefore, in light of this relationship, Whitehead in *Process and Reality* (1978:46) views God to be "bipolar" – a term that is used to describe God as having two "poles": one mental and one physical; or one eternal (potential) and one temporal (actual). The potential pole (mind of God) is the order of all that can be, and the actual pole (his/her body) is the order of all that is. The potential pole is both absolute and eternal; but the actual pole is relative and temporal. So then God is actually finite but potentially infinite. Thus, Whitehead describes God

as having two natures: primordial and consequent when he states (1978:45) that, analogously to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar i.e., God has both a mental and a physical pole. God has both a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The primordial nature is an infinite envisioning of all potentialities not the actual reality or action. Thus, God knows the multiplicity of possibilities of any future action that may be taken by him/her or humanity. Therefore, there is no completion to God. God is eternal and therefore unfinished, open-ended, relating and responding to the unfolding world. Whitehead (1978:45) argues that:

> This side of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious. The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then acquires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, 'everlasting,' fully actual, and conscious. His necessary goodness expresses the determination of his consequent nature

This nature of God is that aspect of the divine that engages the temporal world. It draws up the experience of the world into the divine life, and incorporates it into its own eternal process of concrescence. In so doing, God orders the plurality of experiences into the divine unity, bringing about the greatest possible harmony of events. Whitehead (1978:45-46) goes on to argue:

> Thus, the actuality of God must also be understood as a multiplicity of actual components in the process of creation. This is God in his/her function of the kingdom of heaven … Each actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God's nature. The corresponding element in God's nature is not temporal actuality, but the transmutation of that

> temporal actuality into an ever-present fact. An enduring personality in the temporal world is a route of occasions in which the successors with some peculiar completeness sum up their predecessors. The correlate fact in God's nature is an even more complete unity of life in a chain of elements for which succession does not mean a loss of immediate unison.

Thus humans are seen to be “created co-creators” with God to bring this harmony of actual events into reality. The creation itself is seen as a co-operation between God and all other beings. Thus, process theologians are panentheists, God attains perfection successively and endlessly because of his/her interaction with humanity in the time. As a result, God is limited by conditions from the outside. While process theists affirm divine love, they reconstruct divine power. Griffin (2004:298) states that process theodicy is based upon a notion that there are metaphysical principles in operation that are beyond the control of divine determination. According to Whitehead (1978:52), this metaphysical principle is itself the “principle of limitation” as God relates to the actual (metaphysical). The assumption here is that God’s perfect power is best conceived in his/her relation to human beings; thus God is limited, at least to some degree, by others who possess a power of their own.

Because of the limitation of God’s divine power, process theists do not hold God culpable for failing to prevent evil or suffering but rather see any suffering in the creation as also undergone by God. God is the instantiation of the created process, not the Creator. While the world depends upon God for its order and meaning, God depends upon the world for divine enjoyment and satisfaction. God's nature is therefore in a sense contingent upon the reality

of the world (and vice versa). Thus, God is also clearly not omnipotent. In process theology God merely guides the unfolding process of creation. Herzog (1988:84-85) describes process thought even more clearly by stating: “Omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience indicate the constant turning of the Creator to the creature. Divine power shared with creatures to allow the creator God to be influenced by his creatures. When God cooperates with his creatures, this leads to self-limitation”. Therefore, according to Whitehead, God is not an all-powerful, all-knowing, arbitrary ruler of the earth. In fact, Whitehead (1978:41) believes that God is powerless before the freedom of each individual moment. For in this sense God is no different from every other actual entity. He knows more because he envisages more. He suffers more because he knows more. In conclusion, according to Whiteheadian thought, God is that actual entity that is either the structure or context in which reality emerges (primordial nature) and the totality of that reality (consequent nature). This is because God apprehends both the totality of possibility (primordial nature) and the totality of actuality (consequent nature) fully. God is therefore a being who is abstract and concrete, eternal and temporal, transcendent and immanent. Thus Whitehead views God and the world as not actually different. God is the order (and value) in the actual world. The world is God’s consequent nature. It is the sum total of all actual entities (events) as ordered by God. But the world is in process, it is constantly changing, therefore God in his/her consequent nature is constantly in flux.

Whitehead view of creation is also different from orthodox Christianity. He views the universe as eternal. God is dependent on creation as creation is dependent on God. Thus God is not "before all creation, but with all creation" (1978:343). God does not bring the universe into existence, he directs its progress. Thus God is more a comic persuader than a God who is in control. Whitehead (1978: 31-32) even views God as a creation itself one who is self-caused being who is constantly becoming. The process of creation is therefore an eternal process of God's self-realization. Thus God knowledge is grows moment by moment within the community of actual events. Thus God is becoming in continuity. For Whitehead there is no changeless enduring "I". Human begin are self-caused becoming. Whitehead in *Modes of Thought, 228*[27] states:

> I find myself as essentially a unity of emotions, enjoyment, hopes, fears, regrets valuations of alternatives, decisions- all of them subjective reactions to the environment as active in my nature. My unity- which is Descartes' "I am"- is my process of shaping this welter of material into consistent pattern of feelings. I shape the activities of the environment into a new creation, which is myself at this moment; and yet, as being myself it is a continuation of the antecedent world.

Whitehead thus see himself as co-creator one who share with God this character of self-causation. There is therefore, an on-going evolutionary process. God is achieving more and more value and because of this movement neither God nor the world can reach static completion.

[27] http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Whitehead/Whitehead_1938/1938_08.html

3.1.8. Charles Hartshorne

Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) was born in Kittaning, Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). After attending Haverford College he served in World War I in France as a medic, taking a box of philosophy books with him to the Front. After the war Hartshorne received his doctorate in philosophy at Harvard, and there he met Whitehead[28]. Hartshorne (1963:604) argues that divine foreknowledge does not follow from omniscience unless it can be shown that divine foreknowledge is possible. However, divine foreknowledge is not possible unless future events exist, as fully determinate. Hartshorne denies that future events exist in this sense. More precisely Hartshorne (1984: 30) insists:

> The future is irreducibly potential rather than actual, and this means in some degree, however slight, indeterminate rather than determinate. Becoming is the passage from incomplete definiteness to definiteness. It is creation.

If perfect knowledge is knowledge of the world, as it actually exists, then according to Hartshorne (1945:248) "omniscience is only possible when understood as temporal – as knowing new facts when there are new facts to know, but always knowing all the facts there are at the time". This is Hartshorne's central argument concerning divine knowledge and is found throughout his writings. Thus, perfect knowledge knows things as they are. The past is determinate and the future is partly indeterminate. Therefore,

[28] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hartshorne/

perfect knowledge knows the past as determinate and the future as partly indeterminate.

It is the process philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century that had the greatest influence and impact on open theism. According to Mellert:

> The incorporation into God of both the static perfections and the process perfections is the great achievement of Charles Hartshorne. In his writings he distinguished between absolute perfection and relative perfection. The former is applied to a being that is "unsurpassable in conception or possibility even by itself"; the latter obtains when the being is "unsurpassable except by itself." It is the latter concept that is important for process theologians. It means that, in addition to imperceptible perfections, which are static, there are also perfectible perfections, which are dynamic. Given the temporal frame of reference, relative perfections do not and need not imply imperfection, which is the absence of a perfection that should be present at that time. It simply means that something which reaches perfection relative to the rest of reality in one moment of time can be further perfected at a future moment of time.[29]

Of these the clearest and most complete statement is that of Charles Hartshorne. His view of divine foreknowledge and of indeterminate future as seen from his general metaphysical view has had the most significant impact on open theism. Hartshorne, like all other process philosophers, believes that the basic unit of reality is not substance but event. Every event has two sides: an eternal or abstract side; and a temporal or concrete side. Thus, there is both permanence and change in everything that occurs. This general understanding applies to everything including God, who participates in the same bipolar character of reality as elaborated by Hartshorne (1941:19-20):

> There is both an absolute and a relative pole in God's nature, God's A-

[29] http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=3040&C=2599.

> perfection (or absolute perfection) and his R-perfection (or relatedness perfection). The former means that which in no respect could be conceivably any greater and hence incapable of increase while the latter means that individual beings … than which no other individual being could conceivably be greater, but which itself, in another 'state', could become greater (perhaps by the creation within itself of new constituents).

Hartshorne (1941:20) states that perfection is "excellence such as rivalry or superiority on the part of other individuals is impossible but self-superiority is not impossible". It is that latter conception of perfection that Hartshorne is working with when he discusses such attributes as omnipotence and omniscience. Hartshorne concludes (1941:98) that it is perfectly possible to have an omniscient being who changes. Working from the model of R-perfection, it would make perfectly good sense as stated by Hartshorne (1941:98) that a being who changes will know far more at one moment than the preceding moment; but this implies he/she was previously 'ignorant' only if it is assumed that events are there to be known prior to their happening. Thus for Hartshorne, if knowledge is to be true it must correspond to reality, and the things that have not yet happened are not real. Thus to know them would be to know them falsely, for there is nothing of the sort to know. Hartshorne (1941:98) further elaborates that if the future is indeterminate, if there is real freedom between alternatives, if any which way can happen, then the true way to know the future is to see it as undetermined or unsettled. This is how Hartshorne views the future. Hartshorne (1941:100) notes that human beings have the ability to predict the future, because we have learnt the laws that govern these occurrences. This is not how classic Evangelical

theologians claim that God knows the future and, if it were, that would assume a type and extent of determinism that theologians have not subscribed to. If, however, the future is unsettled or indeterminate, knowing it as such rather than as determined would not be ignorance, but true knowledge. Hartshorne is also aware that some invoke the law of excluded middle to attempt to prove that future events are determinate. Using an example to prove his position he says (1941:100): “Either I will write a letter tomorrow or I will not write it tomorrow – only one can be true.” Hartshorne however replies (1941:100-101) that while only one of these statements might be true, it may be that both of them are false. Between the two statements is the statement, “I may do it”: meaning that “the present situation of myself and indeed of the world in its totality is indeterminate with respect to my doing it. Thus, for Hartshorne the difference between the contradictory statements of “it will occur” is not “it will not occur” but “it may occur”.

Thus, Hartshorne is clear about his intellectual heritage of understanding of divine knowledge. He (1984:27) insists that God is all-knowing only in the Socinian sense. Concerning fulfilled prophecies, Hartshorne (1941:103-104) states that it does not indicate that the future that was predicted was determined, but rather that when the future became present it was definite. For Hartshorne, it means that nothing more than coincidence was involved, or that the person making that prediction knew enough about the pertinent laws, such as the character of persons involved, to be able to prophecy accurately what would happen. Thus, predictions are made based on inference from known present conditions.

3.2. Basic Tenets of Open Theism

None of the precursors mentioned in the preceding section examined could be categorized as evangelicals in their orientation. Open theists regard themselves as evangelicals who call into question the classical attributes of God, namely: God's foreknowledge, God's immutability and God's power.

Open theism derives its name from its view of the relationship between God and the future, thus emphasizing the relational nature of God. Accordingly they reject St. Augustine's interpretation of God's exhaustive knowledge because they deem it incompatible with a belief that God maintains tangible personal relationships with human beings. Sanders (1998:12) prefers to call this view "relational theism", meaning by this "any model of the divine-human relationship that includes a genuine give-and-take relationship between God and humans such that there is receptivity and a degree of contingency within God". In this give-and-take relationship, God receives and does not merely take.

Basinger (1995:142) also maintains the same idea of a "God who interacts with his/her creation in the sense that he/she responds to what humans experience in an attempt to bring out a desired goal. Like process theologians, open theists defend the bipolarity of God having both an "actual" and a "potential" nature. Thus God is absolute, necessary, eternal and changeless but also relative, contingent, temporal and changing in so far as he relates and responds to creations. Such a view requires a comprehensive redefining of the doctrine of God. In openness theology God cannot be

omniscient and omnipotent as traditionally understood. On that view, God lacks exhaustive knowledge of the future; the future is thus “open” to him.

Therefore, while God may have a clear idea of what might happen, he does not know when it will happen. According to Boyd (2000:11), the future is “partly determined and foreknown by God, but also partially open and known by God as such”. Divine uncertainty of the future results from God’s decision to grant freedom to some of his creatures. In open theism, the future is either knowable or not knowable. The open theists**,** who hold that the future is knowable by God, argue that he/she voluntarily limits his/her knowledge of free will choices so that they can remain truly free. Sanders (1998:198) takes this statement even further, by arguing that the future, being non-existent, is not knowable, even by God.

> All of the future that is undetermined by God (which includes all future free choices and actions), since it has not happened and is therefore not real, cannot be an object of knowledge. This future, they say, is logically unknowable, and as such not even God can rightly be said to know what cannot in principle be known.

Boyd (2001:113) thus compares God to a master chess player, who considers all the possible moves an opponent might make together with all the possible future responses the opponent may make to each of these possibilities. Therefore, God does not know exactly what move to make until humans make the first move. Thus placing God “at risk” on this, Pinnock (1994:7) elaborates:

> God, in grace grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God’s will for their lives, and he enters into a dynamic, give and take relationship with us. The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings. We respond to God’s

gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses.

The above statement is an accepted explanation for God granting humans significant freedom within the Evangelical tradition, but Pinnock's understanding of the freedom humans have in relation to God's foreknowledge runs counter to the Evangelical view of God's foreknowledge. Pinnock (1994:7) states:

> God takes risks in this give-and-take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working towards his ultimate goals. Sometimes God alone decides how to accomplish these goals. On other occasions, God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialogue God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being.

To summarize, open theists maintain that God is bound by time and does not entirely know the future; and that God's power is limited by human action, thus rejecting the notion of God's exhaustive knowledge of all events past, present and future. Instead they affirm that God only knows things about the future that it is logically possibly for him/her to know. Therefore, the future actions of human beings are not knowable in advance by any being, so they cannot be included among the things that God knows. They would thus affirm divine "present knowledge". Basinger (1995:134) explains that "Gods infallible knowledge extends over everything that is (or has been) actual and that which follows deterministically from it, excluding any future states of affairs that involve free human choices". Thus God makes room for indeterminacy or risk.

3.2.1. The Impact of Process Thought on the Development of Open Theism

While open theists maintain their differences from process theists, similarities do remain. The two differences are that process theologians believe that God is dependent on the world, while open theists believe that God is not dependent on the world. The other difference according to process thought is that God never acts unilaterally, whereas open theists believe that God can and does sometimes intervene in the world, even overriding the free wills of human beings (Rice 2000:185-88).

While Boyd (2000:106) contends that there is no connection between open theism and process theology or thought, many open theists claim that process philosophers have influenced their thinking. In fact Boyd (1992:i) acknowledges that his position has been more influenced by Charles Hartshorne than any other single philosopher. Rice (2000:165-166), an open theist, clearly states that he was attracted by the philosophical theology of Hartshorne while doing his graduate studies at the University of Chicago. He (2000:166) goes on to state that if we accept Hartshorne's version of dipolar theism this will help formulate a doctrine of God that is superior to the God of classical theism. Hasker (2000:216-17), the most prominent philosopher within open theism, says: "On a personal note, let me state that I first became clearly convinced of this thought through the reading of Hartshorne's *Divine Reality*." However, to what extent does process theology actually reveal itself in the thoughts of evangelical open theists? Hasker (2000:217) states that

process thought allowed him to see that God is affected by the state of his creatures, and sufferers when things go badly for them.

Rice (2000:166) shows this influence exceptionally clearly by stating that:

> The notion that a perfect being can change is not only conceptually coherent (a point that Hartshorne argues at great length) but gives us an idea that is more faithful to the biblical portrait than classical theism and more helpful to us on the level of personal religion as well. The idea that God's relation to the world is interactive, or dynamic, makes it possible for us to develop coherent concepts of divine love and creaturely freedom. In doing so, it helps us to overcome some of the problems that have perplexed Christian thinkers for centuries, such as the relation of human freedom and divine foreknowledge.

While I have noted Boyd's objection to this influence of process thought, Boyd states (2000:31) that "some evangelicals have wrongly accused open theists of being too close to process thought, but the two views have little in common". He further argues (2000:170) that they are different because process theology holds that God needs the world. He could not exist without it. It also denies God's omnipotence. Yet in *Trinity and Process* (1992), he seemed to be attempting to work out a conventional Trinitarian view with process categories. Boyd (1992: Preface) states:

> This work is, in essence, an attempt to work out a Trinitarian-process metaphysics, which overcomes this impasse. It is our conviction that the fundamental vision of the process worldview, especially espoused by Hartshorne, is correct. But it is our conviction as well that the spiritual and traditional understanding of God as triune and antecedently actual within Godself is true, as is, in fact, a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. But we contend, these two views, when properly understood within a proper framework, do not conflict. Indeed, it shall be our connection that Hartshorne's a priori metaphysics, when corrected of certain misconstrued elements actually requires something like a Trinitarian understanding of God to make it consistent and complete! My warmest appreciation must also be expressed to Charles Hartshorne. Though I disagree with him on a great many points, he has influenced my thinking more than any other single philosopher, living or dead.

While Boyd alludes to the differences that exist between process thought and open theism, he does acknowledge the considerable influence that process thought philosophers had on his own perspective. Open theists have also been influenced not only by Hartshorne but also by Whitehead's view of reality. Boyd (2000:17) insists that the future is not something that is knowable; it has no reality, so the inability to know is the inability to know something. Therefore, for Boyd God not knowing the future is not a lack of knowledge because there is no future to be known. Thus open theists, by contrast, hold that the future consists of partly settled realities and unsettled realities or potentials. Thus, the futures for the open theist are sets of possibilities that God knows about, but not the possibility that actually becomes reality.

In this chapter I have shown the influences that have impacted upon the development of an open view of God sometimes referred to as Neotheism (cf. Geisler and House, 2001), which deals with human free will and its relationship with God, including the nature of the future. It is the teaching that God has granted to humanity free will and that for the free will to be truly free, the future free will choices of individuals are unknown ahead of time by God. They hold that if God knows what a person is going to choose, then how one can be truly free when it is time to make those choices, since one cannot make a counter choice because it is already "known" what the choice is going to be. In other words, one could not actually make a contrary choice to what God "knows" a person will choose, thus implying that the choice in question

would not actually be free. This view has been relatively rare in church history, but is gaining popularity today in certain sectors of evangelicalism. Theologians in the school of open theism have argued that the classical definitions of both divine omnipotence and omniscience are seriously problematic for addressing the problem of evil and suffering. Hasker (1994:152) provides the following explanation:

> God knows that evils will occur, but God has not for the most part specifically decreed or incorporated into his plan the individual instances of evil. Rather, God governs the world according to general strategies which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them. As a result, we are able to abandon the difficult doctrine of 'meticulous providence' and to admit the presence in the world of particular evils God's permission of which is not the means of bringing about any greater good or preventing any greater evil.

3.2.2. The Impact of Open Theism on Evangelical Theology

Having looked at the perspective development of open theism, this section will engage the impact the open view of God has on Evangelicalism and its distinctive which is a cause for concern. Differences about God between Evangelicalism/ classical theism and open theism can be summarised as follows which affects one's view of God and Scripture. Stallard (2000:5) makes an interesting observation about the concerns read out at the November 2000 national meeting of Evangelical Theological Society held in Nashville concerning the non-traditional ways of looking at God and how he/she interacts with the created order, especially with human beings. At

stake for evangelicals in the discussion is the reconstruction of God and how he/she relates to the world concerning evil, suffering, prayer, and the guidance of God in everyday life?

Classical Evangelicalism	**Open Theism**
God is Creator	God is director
God is sovereign over the world	God is working with the world
God is independent of the world	God is dependent on the world
God is unchanging	God is changing
God is absolutely perfect	God is growing more perfect
God is monopolar	God is bipolar
God is actually infinite	God is actually finite
God is omnipotent	God power is limited

3.2.2.1. Effects on Systematic Theology

When one doctrine in systematic theology is reinterpreted, it impacts all other doctrines. No one area of systematic theology can be developed in isolation. Boyd's (2000:8) claim that "next to the central doctrines of the Christian faith, the issue of whether the future is exhaustively settled or partially open is relatively unimportant" is just not true because it necessities a reinterpretation of those central doctrines. Examples taken from hamartiology and soteriology

reflect how a reinterpretation of the exhaustive knowledge of God impacts on the traditional evangelical view of sin and salvation. Sanders (1998: 45-49) teach that God did not expect or know that Adam and Eve were going to sin in the Garden of Eden. In soteriological eschatology, Sanders (1998:133) maintains, “there is nothing specifically said in the Old Testament that would have led one to predict a dying and raised Messiah”. Rice (1981:43) states that at the incarnation God took the risk that not knowing whether Jesus would fail in the struggle with temptation. That means that Christ could have sinned which impacts the doctrine of the impeccability of Christ. And this very real possibility ran the “risk of permanently disastrous consequences to the Godhead itself”.

3.2.2.2. Trustworthiness of God

The open theist constructs a God who can only react to the actions of mere mortals. While God knows what *could* happen, He/She does not know when it will happen, until it happens. So God does not know any real action that will occur. That is not a God who engenders trust, hope, and security. There is no comfort in the open theistic view of God who is waiting to respond. Jeremiah 10:12 says: “But God made the earth by *his/her* power; *he/she* founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding” (NIV *italic added*). God’s power (omnipotence) is directly linked to his/her wisdom and understanding (omniscience).

3.2.2.3. Trustworthiness of God's Word

Although many open theists claim to believe the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, this is inconsistent with their basic teaching. If God cannot know the future infallibly, then the predictions in the Bible that involve free acts cannot be infallible. Some of them may be wrong and we have no way of knowing which ones. Sanders (1998:125) states: "God is yet working to fulfil his promises and bring his project to fruition. The *eschaton* will surprise us because it is not set in concrete; it is not unfolding according to a prescribed script." The "prescribed script" that Sanders refers to is what Evangelicals understand to be predictive prophecy as declared in the Bible. Pinnock (2001:50) further elaborates that much of prophecy is conditional involving free choices that cannot be known, yet Evangelicals see the very nature and wonder of prophecy as its specificity. And if all prophecy involving libertarian freedom is conditional, then there could not be any test for a false prophecy as the Old Testament prescribes in Deuteronomy 18:22. All of this would seem to say that there is no sure prophetic word and that the Scriptures cannot say with authority what the future holds. Erickson (1998: 267) states that the "Bible is an expression of God's will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves". Evangelicals therefore, understand the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and what is recorded in it is actually what God wants us to hear. If God does not know the future or God changes his/her mind, then the Bible cannot be trusted.

3.2.2.4. Authority of God

Erickson (1998:268) defines authority as the right to command belief and/or action. God has ultimate authority because of who he/she is. God is the highest being, the one who always has been, who existed before we or any other being into existence. God is the only being having the power of his/her own existence within him/herself, not dependent on anyone or anything else for his/her existence. A nineteenth century Scottish churchman, Andrew Bonar quoted by Bonar (1960:529), wrote: "There is a natural aversion to *authority*, even the *authority of God,* in the heart of man." Everything about open theism elevates and defends the autonomy of human beings over the authority and sovereignty of God. Bloesch[30] (1995:256) says of God as presented in the open theist's worldview: "This is a far cry from the God of Calvin and Luther who is ever active in all things and events, steering everything toward a foreordained goal and purpose." And I would suggest that open theism defies human and humanizes God, as will be reflected in Chapters 4 to 6. In doing so robs God of his authority to care for and provide for our needs. The authority of God is also averted because his/her word or

[30] "Donald G. Bloesch (1928-2010) born in Bremen, Indiana was a noted American evangelical theologian. For more than 40 years, he published scholarly that generally defended traditional Protestant beliefs and practices while seeking to remain in the mainstream of modern Protestant theological thought. The ongoing publication of his *Christian Foundation Series* has brought him recognition as an important evangelical American theologian. From 1957 until his retirement in 1992, he was a professor of theology at the University of Dubuque, Iowa he continued as a professor-emeritus. The Theological Seminary's library serves as the repository of his papers. He received his undergraduate degree from Elmhurst College. He earned his Bachelor of Divinity (BD) at Chicago Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago He did postdoctoral work in Europe at University of Oxford and Tubingen. He served as president of the Midwest Division of the American Theological Society". www.wikipedai.org/wiki/Donald G. Bloesch.

promises cannot be relied upon because God changes his/her mind. The following three chapters will investigate the doctrines of God's foreknowledge (Chapter 4), God's Immutability (Chapter 5) and God's Omnipotence (Chapter 6) to show that the evangelical understanding of these attributes is in keeping with the traditional or orthodox understanding of the aforementioned doctrines. While open theists claim that they are part of the Evangelical church, the following chapters will show that their understanding of these attributes is a deviation from an evangelical understanding concerning the doctrines under investigation.

Chapter 4

God's Omniscience: A Literary Investigation

Introduction

Stanley Gundry in his 1978 presidential address before the Evangelical Theological Society expressed concern about the direction of evangelicalism. This concern has become a reality, especially in the form of open theism. In this chapter and the two following chapters I shall investigate three attributes of God to show that an Evangelical understanding of the attributes under preview is rooted in orthodox theology and the interpretation by open theists is a radical departure from a tradition they claim to hold to. Another challenge posed by open theists is both theological and practical because "a right conception of God is essential not only to systematic theology but also to practical living" (Tozer[31], 1961:10). The concept of God is foundational to Evangelicalism, thus open theists challenge Evangelical belief at its very

[31] "Aiden Wilson Tozer was an American evangelical pastor, speaker, writer, and editor. After his conversion to Christ at the age of seventeen, Tozer found his way into the Christian & Missionary Alliance denomination where he served for over forty years. In 1950, he was appointed by the denomination's General Council to be the editor of *The Alliance Witness* (now *Alliance Life*). Born into poverty in western Pennsylvania in 1897, Tozer died in May 1963 a self-educated man who had taught himself what he missed in high school and college due to his home situation. Though he wrote many books, two of them, *The Pursuit of God* (1941) and *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961) are widely considered to be classics within the Evangelical tradition."
http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1082290.A_W_Tozer.

roots. In this chapter I shall use the works of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson *Ante -Nicene Fathers* (1979) and Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1979) to trace the development of the doctrine of God's omniscience from the perspective of the early church fathers. This approach is used to show that an Evangelicals understanding of the three attributes are constant with traditional understanding of the doctrine/s and that the open theism argument in a radical departure from the Evangelical view. This study therefore requires an investigation on how the early church fathers understood these attributes. This also provides a platform on which to engage the current knowledge on the subject that illuminates the significance of this study.

Open theists offer a bold re-conceptualization of the nature of God and his/her relationship with the created order. Because those proposing this new model are self-professed evangelicals, and because they claim to do so partly in faithfulness to Scripture, this approach deserves careful consideration.

This chapter will be broken down into three sections. First, I shall consider the traditional understanding of the omniscience as reflected in the writings of the early church fathers; second, I shall consider the evangelical perspective; and in the third section I shall give an overview of the central constructive elements of open theism and discuss how it challenges traditional theism. After each historical analysis I shall provide a critique of open theism, using the works of Boyd to demonstrate that open theism suffers from fatal flaws

that are not consistent with the evangelical belief system. Chapters 5 and 6 will follow the same format.

4.1. Omniscience

At the core of open theism is the belief that God does not possess infallible foreknowledge of future acts. This view stands in stark contrast to the traditional view of God's omniscience that the Christian church held from its very inception. The early church held a very high view of Scripture that affirms the all-knowing nature of God. Hodge (1995:397) states that the infinite knowledge of God is clearly and constantly asserted in Scripture. Hodge (1995:397) elaborates that the knowledge of God does not only comprehend everything, but is also intuitive and immutable. God knows all things as they are: being as being, phenomena as phenomena, the possible as possible, the free as free, and the past as past, the present as present, and the future as future. Thus Hodge sees a God who cannot be ignorant of anything and his/her knowledge can neither increase nor decrease.

4.2. Evidence from the Church Fathers to Reformers

The early church fathers acknowledged and affirmed the exhaustive knowledge of God. While they do not use the term omniscience, the ideas stated in Scripture concerning this doctrine are clearly believed by them and taught in their writings.

4.2.1. Justin Martyr (CE 100-165)

Justin Martyr was one of the early Christian apologists who used eschatology to elaborate on the foreknowledge of God. He states that Christ will return to earth when "the number of those who are foreknown by him as good and virtuous is complete, on whose account He has still delayed the consummation" (in *First Apology* 45 in *ANF V*ol. I:178). He also affirms that God knows beforehand the people who will follow Christ, even before they are born (in *First Apology* 28 in *AFN* Vol. I: 172). Justin Martyr understands prophecy as God's foreknowing all that will be done by all men. He further elaborates on this point (in *Dialogue* 141 in *ANF* Vol. I: 269): "… but if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so". When Justin Martyr (in *First Apology* 54 in *ANF* Vol. I: 177) speaks of future events being prophesied, he does not refer to fatalism but to God's foreknowing them:

> So what shall be told about future events being foretold, we do not say it came about by a fatal necessity; but God foreknowing all that shall be done by all men, and it being *his/her* decree that the future actions of all men shall be all recompensed according to their several value. *He/She* foretells by the Spirit of prophecy that *he/she* will bestow meet rewards according to the merit of action done, always urging the human race to effort and recollection, showing that *he/she* cares and provides for men (*italics added*).

4.2.2. St. Irenaeus (120-202 C.E.)

St. Irenaeus echoes Justin Martyr's argument when he links foreknowledge to prophecy. He (in *Against Heresies* 4.32.2 in *ANF* Vol. I:506) sees prophecy as evidence of divine foreknowledge when he states that the Old

Testament “foreshadowed the images of those things which [now actually] exist in the church, in order that faith might be firmly established; and contained a prophecy of things to come, in order that man might learn that God has foreknowledge of all things”. St. Irenaeus (in *Against Heresies* 4.32.2 in *ANF* Vol. I:506) also see the establishment of the Christian faith with God’s foreknowledge through prophecy. According to St. Irenaeus God even foreknows the doctrine of evil teachers (*Against Heresies*, 3.21.9 in *AN*F Vol. 1:454). St. Irenaeus (in *Against Heresies*, 4.29.2 in *ANF* Vol. I:502) also states that this exhaustive knowledge of God extends also to those who will choose not to believe:

> If, therefore, in the present time also, God knowing the number of those who will not believe, since *he/she* foreknows all things, has given them over to unbelief, and turned away *his/her* face from men of this stamp, leaving them in the darkness which they have chosen for themselves (*italics added*).

At the same time St. Irenaeus (in *Against Heresies*, 4.32.2 in *ANF* Vol. I: 506) connects the establishment of the Christian faith with God’s foreknowledge through prophecy by stating that “in order that our faith might be firmly established; and contained a prophecy of things to come, in order that man might learn that God has foreknowledge of all things”. Thus I propose that St. Irenaeus maintained that God has exhaustive knowledge of all things.

4.2.3. Tertullian (CE160-220)

In responding to Marcion’s understanding of Adam and Eve sinning in the Garden of Eden as rejecting God’s foreknowledge, because this action to sin has shown failure in God to know the future, Tertullian maintained a position

by holding in tension God's foreknowledge and predestination. He declares that God, who is the author of the universe by his very attributes, foreknows all things. When God appointed them their places, he/she did so because of his/her foreknowledge. Tertullian states (in *Against Marcion* 2.5 in *ANF* Vol III: 301) that:

> But what shall I say of his prescience, which has for its witnesses as many prophets as it inspired? After all, what title to prescience do we look for in the Author of the universe, since it was by his very attribute that *he/she* foreknew all things when *he/she* appointed them their places when *he/she* foreknew them (*italics added*).

Tertullian (in *Against Marcion* 2.5 in *ANF* Vol. III: 301) adds that it was by this foreknowledge that God issued a caution against sin under the penalty of death in the Garden of Eden. Tertullian (in *Against Marcion* 2.7 in *ANF* Vol. III: 303) clarifies this point by stating that this foreknowledge of sin and its penalty did not interfere with God's gift of freedom of choice, even if he/she knew that humans would perish if they chose to sin.

4.2.4 Origen (CE 185-254)

In his work against Celsus, Origen (in *Against Celsus* 7.44 in *ANF* Vol. IV: 626) contends that God knows all who will walk worthily and will serve God faithfully until death. In articulating a position on the foreknowledge of God, Origen includes the future of all things, including sins, as part of God's exhaustive knowledge. The principle behind Origen's articulation of God's foreknowledge includes human free will. He argues against Celsus that while God foreknew and predicted Judas's betrayal of Jesus it does not mean God caused it. Celsus imagines that an event, predicted through foreknowledge,

comes to pass because it was predicted; but Origen (in *Against Celsus* 2.20 in *ANF* Vol. IV: 440) argues against this by stating that:

> *God* who foretold it was the cause of its happening, because *he/she* foretold it would happen; but the future event itself, would have taken place though not predicted, afforded the occasion to *God* who was empowered with foreknowledge, of foretelling its occurrence" (*italics added*).

However, Origen in the *Commentary to the Romans* argues that the word "foreknowledge" should not be used for God's knowledge of evil. Origen states, as (cited in Oden 1992:70-72):

> In scripture, words like foreknew and predestined do not apply equally to good and evil. For the careful student of the Bible will realize that these words are only used for good... When God speaks of evil people, s/he says that s/he that s/he never knew them... They are not said to be foreknown, not because there is anything that can escape from God's knowledge, which is present everywhere and nowhere absent, but because everything which is evil is considered unworthy of his knowledge or of his foreknowledge.

In the above statement Origen does not disprove God's exhaustive foreknowledge but demonstrates that God's actual knowledge includes all things, although Origen views acts of evil to be in a different relationship to God. Nonetheless Origen believed that God's knowledge was exhaustive.

4.2.5. St. Augustine of Hippo (CE 354-430)

The theological reflections of St. Augustine dominated the medieval church in the West. In his writings he clearly set forth the idea of God. He proclaimed the infallible exhaustive foreknowledge of God about all future actions and events, including those resulting from free choice. According to St. Augustine

(in *City of God* 11.21 in *NPNF* Vol. II: 216), the foreknowledge of God is like a mirror that reflects future events that are going to happen. Even though God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the event in question, its content is caused by the event itself. Since there is no casual influence that comes from God's foreknowledge, it in no ways jeopardizes human freedom. This foreknowledge is utterly unchangeable, because for Augustine all this takes place in the eternal present. St. Augustine (in *City of God* 11.21 in *NPNF* Vol. II: 216) declared:

> For he/she does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness; so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by *him/her* comprehended in *his/her* stable and eternal presence. Neither does God see in one fashion by the eye and in another by the mind, for *he/she* is not composed of mind and body; nor does God's present knowledge differ from that which it ever was or should be for those variations of time, past, present and future, though they alter our knowledge do not effect God's (*italics added*).

For St. Augustine God is outside of time and so his/her knowledge is timelessly eternal; therefore God can see every future human decision and event in one all-encompassing eternal "present". St. Augustine (in *City of God*, 11.2 in *NPNF* Vol. II: 206) states that God's knowledge is completely independent of time. Thus, because of God's infallible and exhaustive knowledge he/she foreknows exactly how human beings will use their free will. This foreknowledge does not negate human choice or the use of freewill. St. Augustine (in *City of God*, 5.9 in *NPNF* Vol. II: 90-92), in articulating a response to Cicero's denial of God's foreknowledge, very clearly states that God, whose foreknowledge is infallible, knows all of human action. With

regard to God's foreknowledge and the use of free will, St. Augustine (in *City of God*, 5.10 in *NPNF* Vol. II:93) concludes that:

> It is not the case, therefore, that because God foreknew what would be in the power of our will, there is for that reason nothing is in the power of our will. For *he/she* who foreknew this did not foreknow nothing. Moreover, if *he/she* who foreknew what would be in the power of our will did not foreknow nothing, but, something, assuredly, even though God did foreknow, there is something in the power of our wills. Therefore we are by no means compelled, either retaining the prescience, to take away the freedom of the will that God is prescient of future things, which is impious (*italics added*).

For St. Augustine there should be no reason to abandon free choice in favour of divine foreknowledge nor should one deny God's foreknowledge as a condition for holding the free choice of human. Therefore St. Augustine (in *City Of God* 5. 10 in *NPNF* Vol. II:93) argues:

> Man does not sin because God foreknew that he would sin. Nay, it cannot be doubted but that it is the man himself who sins when he does sin, because *he/she* whose foreknowledge is infallible, foreknows not that fate, or fortune, or something else would sin, but that man himself would sin, who, if *he/she* wills not, sin not. But if *he/she* shall not will to sin, even this did God foreknow (*italics added*).

Thus, for St. Augustine God infallibly foreknew from all eternity how human beings would use their free will; therefore future free acts are determined from the vantage point of omniscience, but not from the stand point of our free choice.

4.2.6. Anselm

Anselm (1970:153), who followed St. Augustine's theological insights about the exhaustive knowledge of God, reasoned that God exhaustively foreknows

every future event, and that what God foreknows will occur in exactly the same manner as God foreknows it. “For God foreknows every future event, but what God foreknows will necessarily occur in the same manner as he/she foreknows it to occur”. Anselm also further clarifies that this perspective of God’s foreknowledge includes all the free acts of human beings. Anselm argues (1970:154) that God, who foresees what you are willingly going to do, foreknows that your will is not compelled or prevented by anything else; hence this activity is free will. Thus, for Anselm the foreknowledge of God is not the cause of the event or act that occurs because of human free will. Anselm (1970:162-163) acknowledges that God “sees all things whether they are free or necessary; and conversely, as God sees them so they are”. Therefore because of this exhaustive knowledge of everything, the knowledge of God is unchangeable and eternal. Since God knows from eternity, Anselm argues (1976:185), “the foreknowledge of God is not properly called foreknowledge, for all things are always present to God. And so God does not have knowledge of future things, but knowledge of present things. Thus Anselm observes that future is present to God’s eternity. Therefore God does not have to see or wait for future events to take place for the future to pre-exist in God for all eternity.

4.2.7. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas, influenced by views of St. Augustine concerning God’s omniscience, could not accept Aristotle’s idea that God could not know the world, but insisted that God’s omniscience had as well to include

comprehensive knowledge of the world—past, present, and future. Aquinas (*Summa Theologicia,* Question 14.4)[32] argues that God's knowledge is dependent on him/herself. This knowledge is self-asserting, self-referential and self-sufficient. He thus observes:

> It must be said that the act of God's intellect is his/*her* substance. For if that act of understanding were other than is substance, then something else would be the act of divine perfection of the divine substance, to which the substance would be related, as potentiality is to act, which is altogether impossible; because the act of understanding.... Now in God there is no form which is something other than *his/her* existence. Hence as God's essence itself... it necessarily follows that God's act of understanding must be *his/her* essence and *his/her* existence (*italics added*).

Thus God knows himself/herself by his/her own self-knowledge, as attested by St. Augustine. Aquinas (*Summa Theologica,* Question 14.3)[33]*,* concerning God's understanding and awareness of him/herself, suggests that God knows him/ herself thoroughly and his/her self-knowledge is completely true:

> God perfectly comprehends perfectly... Now it is manifest that God knows Him/Herself perfectly as perfectly as God is knowable. For everything is knowable according to the mode of its own actuality, since a thing is not known according as it is in potentiality, but in so far as to its actuality. Now the power of God is as great as *his/her* actuality in existing because it is from the fact the God is in the act and free from all matter and potentiality, that God is cognitive (*italics added*).

For Aquinas, God knows him/herself fully because the knowledge that God possesses cannot be separated from God. One can then conclude that Thomas Aquinas sees God's knowledge as identical to God's

[32] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm

[33] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm

essence. And therefore God's knowledge and essence would be related to his character as immutable and eternal and simple. Therefore all knowledge pre-exists in God, who is the efficient Cause of all things. Whatever pre-exists must pre-exist in God, who is the efficient cause and God knows him/herself entirely. He also fully knows human beings and all their actions. Therefore one can conclude that God knows all things perfectly insofar as they all pre-exist in God. In clarifying St. Augustine's position that God does not behold anything outside of him/herself, Aquinas (*Summa Theologica,* Question 14.5)[34] argues that:

> God knows things other than himself. For it is manifested that S/He perfectly understands *him/herself*, otherwise God's existence would not be perfect in God's act of understanding. Now if anything is perfectly known, it follows of necessity that its power is perfectly known....God must necessarily know things other than *him/herself*. And this appears still more plainly if we add that every existence of the first cause... viz. God – is *his/her* own act of understanding. Hence whatever affects pre-exist in God, as in the first cause, must be in, must be in God's act of understanding, and all things must be in God according to an intelligible mode (*italics added*).

One can conclude that God sees him/herself in him/herself because God sees other things not in themselves but in him/herself because God's essence and knowledge are one. Furthermore, since God is an eternal Being all time is one eternal present and the future is part of time; therefore God knows the future including the free acts of human beings. Since God is infallible the future known to God is without error. Therefore, as an omniscient being, God knows all future contingents. If something has to

[34] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm

occur then God knows it will occur (*Summa Theologia* 1a. 14.7)[35i] Therefore God sees all things in one (thing), which is him/herself. God sees all things together and not successively (*italics added*). Thomas Aquinas goes even further by stating that an omniscient mind cannot be wrong about what it knows, because the knowledge of God is the cause of things. He states (in *Summa Theologia* Question 14.8)[36]: "Now it is manifest that God causes things by *his/her* intellect, since *his/her* being is *his/her* act of understanding, and hence God's knowledge must be the cause of things, in so far as *his/her* will is joined to it" (*italics added*). Aquinas (in *Summa Theologia,* Question 14.8)[37] in response to objection 1 clarifies this position even futher by stating that the cause of things must be understood in light of God's foreknowledge. That God knows what will occur must happen. This by no means diminished the free will action of human beings.

As stated in Chapter one that Evangelicalism has its roots also in the reformation, therefore it would be appropriate to also take into consideration the views of Luther and Calvin.

4.2.8. Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE)

Martin Luther an Augustinian monk followed the approach of St. Augustine and interprets the all-knowing God from the perspective of God's determined will. Luther (1957:80) states that God foreknows nothing

[35] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm.

[36] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm.

[37] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm.

contingently, but God foresees, purposes, and does all things according to his/her own immutable eternal and infallible will. Therefore one can understand Luther as stating if God will that which he/she foreknows then God's will is eternal and immutable. Luther (1957: 80-81) asserts that "the will of God is effective and cannot be impeded, since power belongs to God's nature; and God's wisdom/knowledge is such that God cannot be deceived". Luther's understanding of the omniscience of God is most clearly enunciated in his on free-will debate with Erasmus. Luther's (1957:80) is unequivocal about the extent of God's omniscience by stating that:

> it is fundamentally necessary and healthy for Christians to acknowledge that God foreknows nothing contingently , but that God foresees, purposes, and does all things according to his/her own immutable, eternal and infallible will. This bombshell knocks "free-will" flat, and utterly shatters it; so that those who want to assert it must either deny my bombshell, or pretend not to notice it, or find some other way of dodging it.

Luther's use of the term contingently speaks to that which was not previously planned or thought about. Therefore God cannot know things contingently, for to do so according to Luther (1957:81) means that God's knowledge is mutable- such is not to be found in God Thus, Luther believed that God knows all reality regarding him/herself and all things outside of him/herself, because God wills everything. God is not just a mere observer but actively involved in the created order. Luther (1957:81) further elaborates that this knowledge of the future God does not establish by "necessity" in the sense of compulsion, but rather out of his/her own free will. Therefore, for Luther God

has infallible knowledge of all future events, including those flowing from free choice.

4.2.9. John Calvin (1509-1564 CE)

John Calvin following the traditional framework of St. Augustine therefore articulates clearly the traditional understanding of omniscience or prescience as Calvin (as cited in McNeill: 3. 21.5: 926-929) describes it:

> The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny; but it is greatly caviled at, especially by those who make prescience its cause. We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say, that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former. When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his/her knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures it .

Like Luther, Calvin acknowledges that this foreknowledge does not lead to fatalism but that God is actively involved in the affairs of his/creatures when Calvin in *Commentary on Genesis*[38] speaks of Joseph's comments to Pharaoh in Genesis 41 that the knowledge of Joseph concerning future events was dependant on the revelation of what God himself/herself would do.

> Though, therefore, the providence of God is in itself a labyrinth; yet when we connect the issue of things with their beginnings, that admirable method of operation shines clearly in our view, which is not generally acknowledged, only because it is far removed from our

[38] http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/m.sion/cvgn2-20.htm

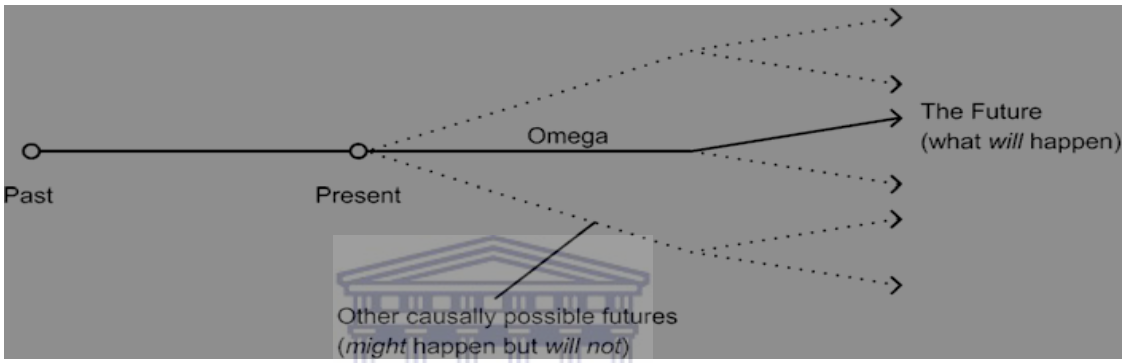
> observation. Also our own indolence hinders us from perceiving God, with the eyes of faith, as holding the government of the world; because we either imagine fortune to be the mistress of events, or else, adhering to near and natural causes, we weave them together, and spread them as veils before our eyes. Whereas, therefore, scarcely any more illustrious representation of Divine Providence is to be found than this history furnishes; let pious readers careful]y exercise themselves in meditation upon it, in order that they may acknowledge those things which, in appearance, are fortuitous, to be directed by the hand of God.

To summarise: In reviewing the early church fathers from Justin Martyr to the reformer John Calvin a clear understanding of the omniscience of God resounds: that God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge from all eternity of everything that occurs, including all free action. This infallible knowledge does not diminish the freedom of the human being, since God knows for a certainty what human beings will do. In the next section I shall engage an evangelical perspective on the exhaustive knowledge of God to show that the evangelical understanding is rooted in historical theology.

4.3. An Evangelical Understanding of Omniscience

Evangelicals understand God's knowledge as being exhaustive. However this exhaustive knowledge should not be seen as fatalism. Helm (1993:218) states that fate suggests impersonality as in astrological beliefs, but providence is personal, the personal activity of God in his/her creation through which he/she brings to its appointed end or destiny. Fate may also suggest the interferences of the gods, whereas providence is the all-embracing rule of the one God. Thiessen (1996:81) elaborates: "God is

infinite in knowledge. He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present or future. He/She knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively and truly". This is illustrated by (Rhoda *et.al*.)[39] in the following diagram.



God knows all true propositions

The future is a true proposition

Therefore, God knows the future.

Grudem (1994:190), in keeping with this evangelical understanding, states that God fully knows all things actual and possible in one simple eternal act. Thus the term omniscience designates God's cognitive awareness. God has knowledge of all time: past, present and future. This knowledge includes even the future and free actions of human beings. However, omniscience should not be confused with causation. Free actions do not take place because they are foreknown, but are foreknown because they take place

[39] http://www.alanrhoda.net/papers/opentheism.pdf

(Thiessen, 1996:82). Tozer (1978:62-63), in trying to explain the exhaustive knowledge of God, states that “God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and every spirit all being and every being … things visible and invisible in heaven and on earth, motion space time life death, good evil heaven and hell. Because God knows all things perfectly, he/she knows nothing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. God never discovers anything and is never surprised, never amazed. God never wonders about anything nor does s/he seek or ask questions”.

The mode of God’s knowledge consists of God’s knowing all things perfectly, undivided, distinctly and immutably. This knowing is thus distinguished from human and angelic knowledge because, God knows all things by him/herself or by his/her essence (not by forms abstracted from things – as is the case with creatures – both because these are only in time with the things themselves, but the knowledge of God is eternal, and because God can have no cause outside of him/herself). Therefore God’s knowledge of him/herself and creation is infinite. It is exhaustive of everything external and internal to God. Thus the knowledge of God is not gained or acquired but is because he/she knows all things. God’s knowledge or knowing thus is not perceived fragmentarily as humans perceive from the perspective of time; God knows exhaustively in eternal simultaneity. Bavinck (1977:187), following the argument of Aquinas, states that “God is an eternal pure being and God’s self-knowledge has for its content nothing less than full, eternal, divine essence. Being and knowing are one in God. God knows him/herself by

means of his/her being". While God's knowledge is not a gradual process of development, neither does God's knowledge increase or decrease. For in God there is no process of becoming, no development or in the words of Aquinas, no potentiality because God is a perfect being. For if God knowledge is not exhaustive, then how could we hold that which he/she promises in the Scriptures to be true. Charnock (1977: 322) states this even more clearly:

> If God were changeable in his knowledge, it would make him unfit to be an object of trust to any rational creature. His revelations would want the due ground for entertainment, if his understanding were changeable; for that might be revealed as truth now which might prove false hereafter, and that as false how which hereafter might prove true; and so God would be and unfit object of obedience in regard of his precepts, and an unfit object in regard of his promises. For if he be changeable in knowledge he is defective in knowledge, and might promise that now which he would know afterwards was unfit to be promised, and, therefore, unfit to be performed. It would make him an incompetent object of dread, in regard of his threatenings; for he might threaten that now which he might know hereafter were not fit or just to be inflicted. A changeable mind and understanding cannot make a due and right judgment of things to be done, and things to be avoided; no wise man would judge it reasonable to trust a weak and flitting person. God must needs to be unchangeable in his knowledge; but as the schoolmen say, that, as the sun always shines, so God always knows; as the sun never ceaseth to shine, so God never ceaseth to know. Nothing can be hid from the vast compass of his understanding, no more than anything can shelter itself without the verge of his power.

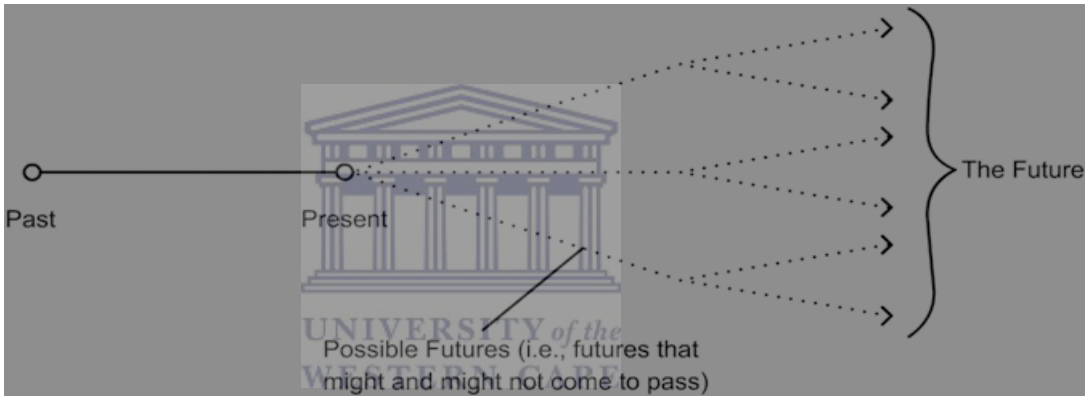
Helm (1993:169) identifies the evangelical understanding of the exhaustive knowledge of God as an extension of the classical tradition and theologians as diverse as Augustus Strong (Baptist) and Ludvig Ott (Catholic) are in agreement that God knows the future.

4.4. Analysis of Omniscience in Open Theism

The denial of God's omniscience by open theist provides a basis for the major lines of difference between open theism and Evangelicalism. This is done by the open theists appeal to Scripture that on the surface appear to limit God's omniscience. These passages can be grouped into two categories: Divine growth in knowledge and God's repentance. Thus open theists have raised serious biblical and theological objections against the traditional view of God's exhaustive foreknowledge. Because God only knows that which is true (that is, the past and present), the future is not a reality and is therefore false and cannot be known to God. Even the possibilities are not known, because this is in the future. This then calls for an engagement to take this proposal seriously and weigh the evidence. In this section consideration will be given to the positive evidence that Boyd and other proponents of open theism offer for their denial of divine foreknowledge based on their understanding of the nature of time and the nature of the future. Boyd (2000:122) argues that God cannot be a- temporal using Hartshorne A theory and B Theory of time, while the Evangelical view of complete divine knowledge coexists with atemporal or the temporal view of God.

With regards to the future Boyd (2000:17) states that the idea that God does not know the future is not a limitation on God's omniscience because the future is no something that is knowable. Therefore, God cannot know the future because there is no future. For Boyd (2000:15-16) the events of the

future might or might not come to pass. This then present us the framework as to how Boyd understands that the future is not a reality and therefore cannot be known by God. To keep the flow of the argument, this section, will also offer a critique on Boyd interpretation of some common passages in Scripture to investigate how Boyd comes to the understanding of God possessing limited knowledge. This is illustrated by (Rhoda et.al)[40] in the following diagram



God knows only true propositions

The future is not a true proposition

Therefore, God cannot know the future

4.4.1. Boyd's Reading of "Divine Growth in Knowledge" Texts

One of the initial appeals of open theism is that it challenges us to read the text of Scripture simply for what it says which at times is taken to be "literalistic". It is evident that open theism brings to the study of biblical

[40] http://www.alanrhoda.net/papers/opentheism.pdf

reading a fairly literal[41] hermeneutics, including those passages that traditionally have been understood as anthropomorphic descriptions of God. Evangelicals in South Africa, especially within the Baptist Tradition use the Grammatico-Historical[42] method of interpretation. Martin (1977:222) states that this method takes seriously God's revelation which God has been pleased to communicate in verbal form in the pages of Holy Scripture" For this reason the Evangelical interpreter begins an investigation of the text into the meaning of the text with a conscious endeavor to know what the words meant in their historical setting. Understanding what those words meant in the historical context, the interpreter will transpose the meaning of the text into present day reality. Martin (1977:223) goes on to state "a true corrective is supplied by our resolve to treat the whole corpus of Scripture with serious intent and to hear what its total witness may be by the rigorous and disciplined application of a method which seeks to elucidate the message in its original setting and in its literal sense". Boyd (2000:60-72) however,

[41] It is acknowledged that Evangelicals adhere to a literal hermeneutical principle of interpreting Scripture, but do not impose onto the nature of God an anthropomorphic understanding by interpreting the text as literalistic e.g. God has eyes. Kaiser (1982:172) states that Evangelicals follow in "the traditions of the Reformers who overthrew the wearisome fiction of the fourfold sense of Scripture. Luther was as incisive as usual that the literal sense of Scripture alone is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology. As Luther analyzed the situation, the problem of his day was this: In the schools of theologians it is a well-known rule that Scripture is to be understood in four ways, literal, allegoric, moral, anagogic. But if we wish to handle Scripture aright, our one effort will be to obtain *unurn, sirnplicem, gerrnanurn, et ertum sensum literalem*. Each passage has one clear, definite and true sense of its own. All others are but doubtful and uncertain opinions.'* Again, Luther affirmed: Only the single, proper, original sense, the sense which is written, makes good theologians. Therefore [the Holy Spirit's] words can have no more than a singular and simple sense which we call the written or literally spoken sense." See *Concordia Theological Quaterly*. It can be stated that open theism departs from the traditional hermeneutical principle that scripture interprets scripture, to project their concept of God unknowing using Feuerbach's theory of projection who claimed that our conceptions of "god" are always just projections of our own value.

[42] For a fuller discussion of this subject see Klien, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* and Mickelson, *Interpreting the Bible*

speaks of interpreting this text straightforwardly and at face value. Boyd (2000:54) states that open theism is rooted in the conviction that the passages that are used to build up the motif of openness should be taken just as literally as the passages that constitute the motif of future determination. What Boyd infers is that this text ought to be taken just as it appears, as giving an exact description of God rather than being understood as anthropomorphic[43] or metaphorical. Thus open theists offer an unusual hermeneutic as seen in the few examples discussed below.

One of the key passages cited by Boyd is Genesis 22:12 (NIV): "And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing for **now I know** you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Boyd (2000:64) states that this verse has no clear explanation if God was certain that Abraham would fear him/her before he offered his son. To support his argument that God literally did not know what Abraham's response would be until Abraham made it. Boyd (2000:54) insist that is God only literally learned what he/she had not known; this was a real test and God learned the results only when Abraham acted. Behind this insistence, is an underlying hermeneutics of a "straight forward" or "literal" or face value meaning as the correct interpretation of these passages. Therefore, Boyd

[43] It is quite interesting to note the similarities between Feuerbach Theory of Projection and Open Theism. For Feuerbach religion is a product of anthropomorphic projection. Open theist tries to understand God through these metaphorical descriptions of God in the Bible, thus projecting man conception of his own nature unto God. Feuerbach moves from the biblical narrative that Man created by God to God created by Man which open theist also do by interpreting God through human projections "our image". However, due to the scope and nature of this study, a comparative analysis is not possible here. I am indebted to one of the examiners in bringing to my attention to Feuerbach's Theory of Projection I find it very interesting as it relates to open theism and how open theist interpret the anthropomorphic images of God portrayed in the Bible .

concludes that God learns (for now I know that you fear the Lord) the state of Abraham's heart as he/she observes Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac on the altar. When Abraham actually raised his knife, then only was God able to say "now I know". God learned something that he/she had not known before, and according to Boyd and other open theist this passage, like other so-called growth knowledge text, illustrates that God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future. Commenting on Exodus 4:1-9, Boyd (2000:67) bemoans the fact that many interpreters fail to acknowledge God's ignorance of how many miracles it might have taken to convince the people of Israel to believe that God had sent Moses. Boyd (2000:65) further cites other Old Testament passages where God tests Israel "to know" whether Israel would fear him/her. He then concludes that these passages cannot be reconciled "with the view that God eternally knows exactly what will happen in the heart of a person to do" – which is in direct conflict with an Evangelical understanding of God's knowledge of the future.

If one had no other information about God, his/her nature and God's eternal purposes, one would have to concede that these passages seem to teach that God's knowledge is growing, that God is learning as history progresses.

A reflection on other similar biblical texts only exposes the problem with this straightforward approach. Using Genesis 3:9, when the Lord calls out to "man" and asks "Where are you?", a straightforward reading of the text here results in an interpretation that:

- ☐ God does not presently know where "man" is; and

- ☐ God is spatially located so that God is unaware of where Adam and Eve are hiding until they reveal themselves to God.

Thus, to read this text in the same manner as Genesis 22:12 and many other texts as Boyd does would result in a denial of God's exhaustive present knowledge and a denial of God's omnipresence. The problem become greater as one reads the narrative of Genesis 3:11-13, when God asks "man": "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I have commanded you not to eat?" Thus, God's question to Adam and Eve taken at face value serves the purpose of informing God of "mans" past action in violating God's prohibition. As one continues to read, verse 13 likewise indicates God's ignorance of Eve's past actions. If the hermeneutical principle of the straightforward reading is applied to these passages then one is forced to deny God's exhaustive knowledge of the past, God's exhaustive knowledge of the present and God's omnipresence. Thus open theists are unwilling by their own stated commitment to deny any of the doctrines that are vital to their understanding that God has exhaustive past and present knowledge, but deny God's future knowledge because the future is not yet reality and that which is not reality cannot be known. Sanders (1998:198) observes: "… though God's knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all things that can be known, the future free actions of free creatures are not yet reality, so there is nothing to be known." Thus if the future truly is "open" it is ridiculous to speak of the content of its reality or that this reality can be in some sense "settled".

Boyd (2000: 59) cites another passage, Numbers 14:11 as evidence that the future is not known to God. “And the Lord said to Moses: “How long will this people spurn me? And how long will they not believe in me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?” His premise is that God does not know while at the same time it reflects on God questioning Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:8-9 as rhetorical. It appears the only way to avoid the undesirable doctrinal implication of this straightforward reading is to deny the inconsistent openness hermeneutics used to motivate that God “grows” in his/her knowledge. Boyd (2000:59) argues as follows:

> Some suggest that in these verses (Num. 14:11 and Hos. 8:5) the Lord was asking rhetorical questions, just as he had done when God asked Adam and Eve where they were. (Gen.3:8-9). This is a possible interpretation, but not a necessary one. Unlike God’s question about location in Genesis, there is nothing in these texts or the whole of Scripture that requires these questions to be rhetorical. Moreover, the fact that the Lord continued for centuries, with much frustration, to try to get the Israelites not to despise *him/her and* to be ‘innocent’ suggests that the wonder expressed in these questions was genuine. The duration of the Israelites’ stubbornness was truly an open issue (italics added).

Boyd (2000:14-15) states that unique interpretation is needed unless one assumes the future is entirely settled. Boyd is unwilling to accept that the literalistic interpretation of anthropomorphic language regarding God’s knowledge brings one to the conclusion that God has limited knowledge of the future.

Furthermore, Boyd believes that God did not know of Judas’s betrayal in eternity. He supports his arguments by arguing that John 6:64 does not demonstrate that Jesus knew in eternity or even early in his ministry that Judas would betray him. Boyd (2000:37) claims that the word *arche* used

here does not imply that Jesus has any foreknowledge that Judas would betray him before Judas decided in his heart to betray him. Using Isaiah 46:9-11 and 48:3-7, Boyd maintains that God knows all things that he/she has planned or determined to know. God chooses not to determine anything involving free choices of human beings. Boyd declares that these passages do not reveal a God who knows the entirety of the future but one who only knows in part. Boyd (2000:30) argues that the future is settled to the extent that God is going to determine it but nothing in the Isaiah 46:9-11 and 48:3-7 texts requires one to believe that everything that will happen will do so because it is settled ahead of time. Boyd claims that should Judas have chosen not to betray him; it is likely that Jesus could have had someone else to fulfill that task. Boyd seems to confuse God's foreknowledge with direct causation. God's foreknowledge therefore, should not be seen as the causation of an event that removes human free will or human self-determination. Boyd (2000:31) argues that:

> Indeed, God is so confident of *his/her* sovereignty, we hold that, God does not need to micromanage everything. God could if *he/she* wanted to, but this would demean *his/her* sovereignty. So God chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents. It takes a greater God to steer a world populated with free agents rather than to steer a world of pre-programmed automatons (*italics added*).

God's foreknowledge should not be seen as curtailing the actions of human freewill or human beings consistent with their natures. Boyd argues that Judas's action of betrayal should not be based on God's foreknowledge but on the very character of Judas. He states that God can predict with great accuracy the action of a person not necessarily through God's foreknowledge

but rather through God's insights into the character of the one performing it. Boyd (2000:35) states:

> Our omniscient Creator knows us perfectly, far better than we even know ourselves. Hence we can assume that God is able to predict our behaviour far more extensively and accurately than we could predict it ourselves. This does not mean that everything we will do is predictable, for our present character doesn't determine our future character. But it does mean that our behaviour is predictable to the extent that our character is solidified and future circumstances that will affect us are in place.

Boyd's argument supposes that a person's character may inevitably lead to a particular action that may be certainly known by God. When presented with circumstances one will choose to act in a certain way. Boyd (2000:35) argues that, given the knowledge that we have of Peter, we or anyone else who knew him could have predicted that he would deny Jesus. Thus, Boyd believes that the betrayal of Jesus was not known by God in eternity and argues that Jesus did have a prior knowledge of Judas's intent to betray Him. Jesus only discovered this at the time of Judas's actual decision to do so, or later, or at the exact moment. He selected Judas as a disciple. One must then also disagree with Boyd's position that Judas's betrayal was not a specific fulfilment of Scripture.

4.4.2. An Evangelical Interpretation of Genesis 22:12

Because Genesis 22:12 is the most quoted text used by open theist to prove that God had no knowledge of future events, it then need to be evaluated a bit deeper to investigate how the straight forward interpretation of Genesis fare?

There are three problems that are raised by Ware (2000:67-71) concerning the literal straightforward reading of the text under investigation.

First, If God must test Abraham to find out what is in his heart, then it call into question God's present knowledge of Abraham's inner spiritual, psychological, mental and emotional state. Ware (2000:68) argues using 1 Chronicles 28:9 and 1 Samuel (16:7) to show that the Lord searches, and understands every intent and thought of the heart of people. In light of the above texts mention that speaks to the issue that God know very thought of human beings, doesn't God know Abraham fully. Ware (2000:68) observes:

> God knows that state of Abraham's heart better than Abraham does himself. Is there any facet of Abraham's inner thought, feelings, doubts, fears, hopes, dreams, reasoning, musings, inclinations, predisposition, habits, tendencies, reflexes and pattern that God does not know absolutely and fully"

Because the openness interpretation of Genesis 22:12 claims that only when Abraham raises his knife to kill Isaac, does God know Abraham's intention, cannot avoid but conclude that God also lacks knowledge of the present. This literal reading poses a problem for the open theist because it contradicts their own commitment to the God's exhaustive knowledge of the present.

Ware (2000:68) engages the second problem by asking the question "Does God need this test to know specifically whether Abraham fear God." While open theist deny also the present knowledge of God (as discussed above), is also their denial of specific content of the present knowledge. Open theists state that God only knew Abraham's true commitment when Abraham raises his knife over his son. It is then reasonable to conclude from this literal

interpretation that God does not know until the *raising of the knife* whether Abraham is God-fearing. Granting that God know Abraham's inner life perfectly, it seems highly doubtful even by open theist's standards that God learns about the intentions of Abraham. Boyd (2000:152) writes that God know the thoughts and intentions of all individuals perfectly." Boyd illustrates this by using the prediction of Peter's denial, Boyd (2000:35) writes:

> Sometimes we may understand the Lord's foreknowledge of a person's behaviour simply by supposing that the person's character, combined with that Lords perfect knowledge of all future variables, makes the person's behaviour certain. As we know, character becomes more predictable over time. The longer we persist in a chosen path, the more that path becomes part of who we are… Our omniscient Creator knows us perfectly, far better than we ourselves. Hence we can assume the God is able to predict our behaviour far more extensively and accurately than we could predict it ourselves.

If one compare the two cases between Peter and Abraham, Abraham's heart seems far more predictable than Peter's three denials. That is, it seems apparent that Abraham's past conduct provides a better basis for knowing that state of his heart. Due to Abraham's consistent obedience to the commands of God, using Boyd's argument Abraham actions could have been more easily predicted, yet Boyd insist that until Abraham raised the knife over Isaac, God did not know whether Abraham feared him/her.

The question then arises that If God know us better than ourselves, as shown by Boyd himself in such strong definitive terms with regards to God's intimate and exhaustive knowledge of our inner lives and character leaves one to wonder why does God need to test people to know what is in their hearts. How then does Boyd reconcile his statements that God knows us perfectly

and in another that God only learns what is in our hearts by testing us? Boyd (2000:63) tries to alleviate this problem by using 2 Chronicles 32:31 to show that God is actually ignorant. Consider Boyd's (2000:64) statements with regards to his treatment of Hezekiah: "Similarly, the Bible says that God tested Hezekiah "*to know* all that was in his heart". If God eternally knew how Hezekiah would respond to him/her, God couldn't have *really* been testing him in order to come to this knowledge (*italics* in the original). It is important to notice that while 2 Chronicles 32:31 says that God sought to know "all that was in his heart", Boyd (2000:64) states God sought to know "how Hezekiah would respond". Thus the preceding comment seems to contradict Boyd's open theistic framework about God's exhaustive knowledge. Given this, God really cannot fail to know what is in someone's heart at any point. But for Boyd God can and is ignorant of future free actions. So, it is only by changing "know what is in the heart" to know how *God* will respond that Boyd makes a case that supports the view that God grow in knowledge.

The third critique that Ware (2000:71) engages deals with the open theist commitment to the nature of libertarian freedom. Boyd (2000:64) like Sanders (1998:52-53) asserts that God needed to know the Abraham was a person that could be trusted with that fulfilment of the divine project, and Abraham's actions made God aware that Abraham was a faithful covenantal partner. Thus, Abraham's testing proved that he is was faithful to God and can be trusted with working with God in the fulfilment of God's purposes. But since Abraham possessed libertarian freedom, and since even God can be taken aback by improbable and implausible human action, what assurance would

God have that Abraham would still remain faithful in the future. Therefore, God would need to consistently test Abraham to evaluate his faithfulness to the God and his/her purposes. That this shows how transient the "now I know" is for God. Ware thus clearly illustrates how the open model interpretation fails. In a similar fashion open theist take divine repentance text is a straight forward manner as will be investigated next.

4.5. Boyd's Reading of "Divine Repentance" Passages

As discussed in the above section, a straightforward reading of particular texts also leads Boyd to conclude that God knowledge is limited and that God grow in his/her knowledge as God engages with humanity. In a similar fashion, Boyd interprets divine repentance texts in a straightforward manner. Boyd (2005:56-57) writes:

> Now some may object that if God regretted a decision he/she made, God then must not be perfectly wise. Wouldn't God be admitting to make mistakes? It is better to allow Scripture to inform us regarding the nature of divine wisdom than to reinterpret an entire motif in order to square it with our preconception of divine wisdom. If God says *he/she* regretted a decision, and if Scripture elsewhere tells us that God is perfectly wise, then we should simply conclude that God can be perfectly wise and still regret a decision (*italics added*).

Boyd tries to prove his case by undertaking a survey of biblical passages. Thomas (2001:189) states: "This technique seeks a larger picture in a passage before investigating the details. In fact, it disparages traditional methods that investigate the details first, before proceeding to the larger picture." Thomas has coined the phrase "hermeneutical hopscotch" to

describe the practice of hopping from one carefully selected part of a larger section of Scripture to another. By selecting only parts that support a predetermined opinion, this method can demonstrate just about anything the interpreter desires to prove. For instance, Boyd (2000:56) begins with Genesis 6:6, and says: “The Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” He then uses this to prove that God did not know in advance that humans would come to this wicked state and therefore regrets that he/she created humanity.

Boyd’s interpretation of Exodus 32:14 – “So the Lord changed his/her mind about the harm which he/she said he/she would do to his/her people” – suggests that God was confronted with a previously unknown situation that resulted in God’s reassessing his/her decision about what he/she intended to do. While the straightforward reading of this passage and others like it would lead one to this conclusion, the simplest and most straightforward reading may not be the true reading, as I have shown previously. Ware (1986:441-44) states that “to inquire whether it is possible that such divine repentance text may be best understood as anthropomorphic”. I believe that the best way to understand texts in which God is said to have changed his/her mind or when God is said to repent it indicates 1) God’s awareness that the human situation has altered and 2) God’s desire to act in a willing way to this changed situation. In Exodus 32:14 God is aware of and takes into account the urgent prayer of Moses. It goes against the teaching of Scripture and Evangelical thought to state that God has learned something new by the changed situation. Rather, as indicated by Ware (2001:101), these

expressions of repentance or regret may indicate more narrowly that God was aware of what had changed and chose to act in accordance with this new situation. This awareness and choice to act was known from eternity, yet God interacts in a temporal and existential flow of developing and changing human situation, of which God has full knowledge. Thus God knows and anticipates all future human action and responds to it accordingly.

Second, when God is said to repent it indicates God's real experience, in historically unfolding relationships with people, of changed emotions or dispositions in relation to some changed emotion or disposition. Just because God knows in advance events that will occur, does not preclude God from expressing appropriate emotions and expressing appropriate reactions when it actually happens. While God may have known of the prayer of Moses, God nonetheless reveals his/her experience internally and expresses outwardly appropriate moral responses to these changed situations when they occur in history. This then reveals a God who expresses emotion in human history; while it should be noted that human action cannot generate in God an emotional response that alters or terminates what God has foreknown.

That God repents from or regrets his/her decisions is difficult to reconcile with an evangelical understanding of the all-wise God of Scripture. Foremost, it is at odds with the clear teaching of the Bible that God's knowledge is limitless (Psalms 147:5). Given then that "divine growth" and "divine repentance" passages used by Boyd does not imply that God has learned something that he/she has not known previously, I shall now focus on some Scriptural affirmations of God's exhaustive knowledge of the future and then develop

theological objections to open theism's understanding of God's limited knowledge.

Boyd has proposed some serious biblical and theological arguments against the traditional view of God's omniscience; thus the model presented by Boyd calls for an assessment. It needs to be acknowledged that this re-conceptualization of God and his/her relation to the world has actually contributed positively to how Evangelicals view God. Overall, however, there are many crucial problems attached to this model: it departs from traditional theism and ultimately leads to a departure from how evangelicals view the type of knowledge that God possesses. Boyd's denial of God's exhaustive knowledge provides the first major departure from Evangelicalism.

Because of the interpretive principles that are used in the above text to suggest that God repents, regrets or grows in his/her knowledge, the crucial task here is to analyse how the "biblical evidence" of "divine repentance" and "divine regret: could affect how one understands God's foreknowledge. The question then arises of whether all these so-called "openness" texts should be interpreted literally, that is by their straightforward and literal meaning. While this is always the interpretative starting point, one can often be led astray if one insists that the straightforward meaning is in fact the intended and correct meaning. The answer then awaits a discussion of metaphors, models and anthropomorphisms.

4.6. Metaphors and Anthropomorphisms

Because of the infinite qualitative differences that exist between God and his/her creation, the language used to refer to God is metaphor. Thus through metaphorical language, something that is well known becomes a window through which one gains perspective and insight into something that is less well known. Since God is not identical to human, the use of metaphors expresses both similarities and differences between the two beings. McFague (1982:13) says that metaphorical statements "always contain the whisper, *'it is and it is not'*". Fretheim (1989:7) states that the metaphor does say something about God that corresponds to reality but is never fully descriptive. The metaphor does not stand over against the literal. Though the use of the metaphor is not literal, there is a literalness intended in the relationship to which the metaphor has reference. However the failure to recognize that difference is equally damaging when we fail to hear the "whisper". Open theists have become so accustomed to looking at God through human imagery that they have failed to notice the difference between God and people. Thus Bümmer's (1993:14) caution must remain, even when a metaphor is as fundamental and fruitful as describing God as a person:

> Like all conceptual models, those in theology remain metaphors and therefore what they assert is always accompanied by the whisper "and it is not". The fruitfulness of personalist models for talking about God should therefore never make us deaf to the whisper that God is not like other people.

Anthropomorphism, the representation of God in terms of human physical or emotional experience, abounds in Scripture and reveals the personal

nature of God. The use of anthropomorphic terms in Scripture is not to humanize God but rather to make God accessible to man. God is personal and through the use of anthropomorphistic characteristics God stands before man as a personal and living God. Thus any attempt to spiritualize these anthropomorphic descriptions of God ends up depersonalizing God and impoverishing us. Thus anthropomorphic metaphors retain both similarities with and differences from the divine reality they depict. The similarities are crucial to remember. This helps us to experience God in a very real and literal way.

Yet the differences are also real and significant, and it must be kept in mind that there is a distinction between God and human beings. Since all Scripture is to some extent anthropomorphic and since all biblical descriptions of God are metaphorical to a certain extent, one must hold that the repentance and regret of God is an anthropomorphic metaphor. As such there are some similarities and differences. Piper (1994:191) comments that one can say that there is a sense in which God does repent and there is a sense in which he/she does not. The strong declaration in 1 Samuel 15:29 and Numbers 23:19 that God cannot repent is intended to keep us from seeing the repentance of God in a way that would put God in a limited category like humans. God's repentance is not like ours because God is not caught off guard by unforeseen events as we are because God knows all the future. So, one can conclude that this is an expression and emotion that is different from the regret and repentance that we humans experience; and that differences exist between divine

repentance and its human counterpart. Therefore one must not understand the repentance or the regret of God in any way that will diminish the extent and intensity of God's foreknowledge because God is not a person that he/she should repent.

In the above sections I have endeavoured to demonstrate that neither divine growth-in-knowledge text nor the repentant text imply that God has learned something he/she did not previously know. It is therefore imperative to address the question: Whether there is sufficient and clear teaching is the Bible to reflect that God in fact has exhaustive knowledge? It thus will be shown in the next section that there is more than ample proof to warrant an affirmation in God's omniscience.

4.7. An Evangelical Objection against Limited Omniscience

Due to the lack of biblical and historical support for the belief in the limited knowledge of God, open theists like Boyd fail to provide a compelling theological foundation for the doctrine of limited omniscience. The arguments that open theists offer will be analyzed in light of evangelical theism, which has its roots in traditional theism.

At the center of open theism is the limited omniscience of God. It reasons that:

- ☐ God knows infallibly whatever is possible to know.
- ☐ It is not possible to know infallibly free acts.

☐ Therefore, God does not know free acts infallibly.

Sanders (1998:198) states that though God's knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God know all that can be known, the future free actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and therefore there is nothing to be known. He (1998:132) goes on to state that this gap in God's knowledge of the future does leave open the possibility that God can make mistakes about some points. Open theists believe that with regards to the free acts of human beings God can only prognosticate what human beings are likely to do, based on his/her vast knowledge of human character, events and tendencies. Open theists do make one important proviso by stating that anything God wishes to know about the future, in order to accomplish his/her ultimate plan, God can know by divine intervention. God can tamper with human freedom, if necessary and on occasion, so as to determine the final outcome of things. Ordinarily God does not do this; hence human beings are free to do what even God him/herself does not know (Boyd 2000:34).

Evangelicals have no difficulty with the logical form of this basic argument about God's omniscience, which is that God cannot know the impossible. The disagreement evangelicals have with Boyd and open theists is with the content of the second assertion that it is not possible for God to know infallibly any action of humans that may occur in the future.

These conclusions can be challenged in two ways. First, these conclusions assume a particular view of free choice called "libertarianism" that not all evangelicals accept. Evangelicals who hold to the Calvinistic tradition argue that free acts are actions which one desires. God gives free agents the desire

that God decrees. Hence, future free acts in the sense can be free yet determined. Since they are determined they can be infallibly known by God in advance.

Second, evangelicals who follow traditional theists such as St. Augustine, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas point out that there is no contradiction in claiming that the future free action of human beings is both determined as it relates to God's infallible foreknowledge and free as it relates to the individual's power to do otherwise. Thus, infallible foreknowledge and free choice are not contradictory.

The law of non-contradiction demands that, to be contradictory, two propositions must affirm and deny the same thing in the same sense and in the same relationship. But in this case, an event is determined in one relationship (God's knowledge) but not determined in a different relationship (free choice).

Boyd argues that the future is not a reality and is therefore not true. God could not know events in advance because they have not yet occurred. Earlier, I pointed out that Boyd (2000:34) admits that God can know, intervene in and determine the future action of a free agent to bring about God's purposes. Therefore, Boyd cannot object to the possibility of God knowing future free actions of human beings and the reality of the future. Evangelicals on the other hand believe that God knows in advance events that will occur. Evangelicals have no problem with saying that God can know something is going to occur because an eternal God does not fore-see. All

future events are present to God in the eternal now. Thus the future is reality to God, therefore true.

Barth (1957:558), in keeping with the classical understanding of the attribute of omniscience, states: "… we now take a further step and say of the divine knowledge first that it possesses that character of foreknowledge, in relation to all its objects, with the exception of God *him/herself* in *his/her* knowledge of *him/herself*" (*italics added*).

Brunner further clarifies this position, although critical of the influences of Greek philosophy on Christian theology as espoused by open theists; he nonetheless advocates a traditional view of divine foreknowledge. Brunner (1949:262) argues:

> God knows of an action of the creature, which is not *his/her* own action. *God* knows above all about the free activity of that creature to which *he/she* has granted the freedom to decide for him/herself. The future can only be known by us as contained in the present as it necessarily follows from that which now is. The freedom of The Other is the borderline knowledge of our knowledge. For God this limitation does not exist. *His/Her* knowledge of the future is not a knowledge based upon something that already exists in the present, but that it is a knowledge which lies outside the boundaries of temporal limitations ... God know that what takes place in freedom in the future as something which happens in freedom (*italics added*).

Grudem (1994:191) acknowledges that when evangelicals speak of God's knowledge they understand it as being that God knows everything in one "simple act" and that what God knows is not divided into parts. This means that God knows everything fully. Versfeld (1972:100-101) states the we must not think of time in the impersonal manner to which classical physics has accustomed us i.e. (past present and future) and by quoting St. Augustine

(*Confessions* XI) states that the past and the future must be experienced as the present is experienced. Thus God is always present to him/herself and to all history. Thus St. Augustine see the very substance of God as eternity and by eternity St. Augustine means the act by which God is always present to him/herself and to all history (Versfeld, 1972:101). Thus eternity is time proper to God, who comprehends everything in the present. God thus guides history, so that so that when one looks back at their lives, one can see how wonderfully God operated in guiding all things in him/her.

Summary

The classical understanding of God's exhaustive foreknowledge, which is an essential belief in the evangelical Christian church, should not be abandoned for a position that has no biblical or theological foundation. Open theism, which has its source in process theology, seriously undermines the doctrine of God's unchanging character. In trying to understand human freedom at the expense of forfeiting God's thorough knowledge of the future and by interpreting anthropomorphic text literally, open theists have created a finite or limited God.

Denial of the infallible and exhaustive knowledge of God has serious implications for evangelicals, not the least of which is that it undermines one of the core statements of faith within the evangelical tradition: that is, the infallibility of Scripture.

Chapter 5

God's Immutability: A Literary Investigation

Introduction

In a rapidly changing world, the constancy of God is a comfort. When the Bible states God as being the same yesterday, today and forever, it reflects a God who does not change. This divine immutability involves several aspects. Erickson (1998:395), states that first there is no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything because God is already perfection and if God decreased in anything he/she would cease to be God. Second, there is no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification. God does not change his/her mind, or modifies actions that rest on his/her nature which remains unchanged no matter what happens. Kierkegaard (1958: 256), in articulating a defence for the immutability of God, states that while the world is in a constant flux, God remains unchanged, and no change touches God, not even the shadow of change. For Kierkegaard God remains eternally unchanged. Grudem (1994:163), defines the unchangeableness or constancy of God as follows as "God is unchanging in *his/her* being, perfection, purpose and promise, yet God acts and feels emotion and *God*

acts and feels differently in response to different situations" (*italics added*). Edward (1978:305-306) states:

> that the doctrine of utter unchangeableness of God set severe limits upon understanding other divine attributes such as God's activity, omniscience and eternity in classical supernaturalism. God was required to know a changing world in an utterly unchanging way, to act upon a temporally developing world of nature and human history in a totally a temporal way... rather than successively.

However, Pinnock (1994:120), following in the footsteps of Edward, asks how God can know a changing world if God is unchangeable. Pinnock believes that through God's growing knowledge of a changing world, God cannot be omniscient and unchangeable while engaging a changing world. According to open theists, this changing knowledge develops a God who changes. As Nash (1983:99) observes: "Of all the current debates about the divine attributes, the disagreement over the property of immutability is the most heated. However, Seeberg (1964:114-115) observes that among the early apologists the true Christian doctrines included: "There is One God, the Creator, Adorner, and Preserver of the world … The invisible God is unbegotten, nameless, eternal, incomprehensible, and unchangeable Being".

Ware (1986:434-437) reflects on the immutability of God in the following ways:

- Ontological immutability: God is unchangeable in the supreme excellence of his/her nature, i.e. the immutability of God's eternal and self-sufficient being. Thus in affirming God's ontological immutability, God is attributed with changelessness of his/her own independent

existence, essence or attribute, which qualities of being have ever been his/her alone and to which no future quality or value can be added.

- ☐ Ethical immutability: God is also unchangeable in his unconditional promise and moral obligations to which he/she has freely pledged him/herself. This is referred to as the faithfulness and reliability of God by which he/she is true to his/her word and unfailing in accomplishing that which he/she has promised.

The following section reflects how the early Church Fathers understood God's immutability.

5.1. Evidence from the Church Fathers to Reformers

The early church fathers maintained that the true God was unchangeable in character, while they did not deny that God alerted his/her actions in time, so that humans might see God ostensibly as changing his/her mind. The early church fathers accepted that, from all eternity, these supposed changes were in fact settled. Changes within time are for the benefit of the successions of events to be understood by finite beings.

5.1.1. Novatian (200-258 CE)

Novatian (in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, 4 in *AFN* Vol. V: 614-615) affirms that God is immutable in his/her essential being. In discussing his

view of the Trinity, Novatian embraces the notion that God does not change in essential Being. He argues that the nature of God does not allow God to change. Thus God cannot be both good and evil or be the originator of both good and evil. Thus, for Novatian there is no increase or decrease in any part of God: to do so God would have to be mortal, thus making God imperfect. This immutability, according to Novatian, means that whatever God is, God always is; whoever God is, he/she is always Him/Herself; and whatever character God has, God always has. Therefore God says: "I am God, I change not." Novatian argues that anything not born cannot undergo change, holding his/her condition always. For whatever is in God constitutes divinity and therefore must always exist, maintaining itself by its own power, so that God should always be God.

Thus the attribute of simplicity is directly related to immutability. God's attributes are not independent of each other and they interact without causing any change to the perfect Being. Novatian argues that any change in God's perfect being would make God less than divinity, for if God were to experience change then God would cease to be God. Novatian (in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, 4 in *AFN* Vol. V: 614-615) uses the immutability of God as a criteria to establish and validate the nature of God:

> God is incorruptible, he/she is therefore both immortal and because God is immortal he/she is incorruptible, – each being involved by turns in each other, with itself and in itself, by a mutual connection and prolonged by a vicarious concatenation to the condition of eternity.

5.1.2. Aristides (125 CE)

Aristides, who was renowned for his faith and wisdom, presented books on Christian religion to the prince Hadrian to prove that Jesus was the only God. He (in *Apology 4* in *AFN* Vol. X: 265) uses immutability as evidence for the prince Hadrian that someone is truly God. Those that are subject to change and decay Aristides calls created things. However, Aristides understands God as being immortal, indivisible and immutable. While interacting with the world, God sees, overrules and transforms everything.

> Let us turn now, O King, to the elements in themselves, that we may make clear in regard to them, that they are not gods, but a created thing, liable to ruin and change, which is of the same nature as man; whereas God is imperishable and unvarying, and invisible, while yet *he/she* sees, and overrules, and transforms all things.

5.1.3. Melito of Sardis (160 CE)

In articulating a response to the discourse in the presence of Marcus Antoninus to reveal God to him, Melito states that sin is when a person abandons that which really exists and serves that which does not in contrast to the true God. Melito uses the attribute of God's immutability to argue his point. Melito (in *Remains of the Second and Third Centuries* in *ANF* Vol.VIII: 751) states:

> There 'is', that which really exists by *hi*s/her power, and it is called God. H*e/She* I say really exists, and by *his/her* power doth everything subsist. This being is in no sense made, nor did God ever come into being, but always existed from eternity and will continue to exist forever and ever. *God* changeth not, while everything else changes (*italics added*).

5.1.4. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria (250-328 CE)

While little is known of Alexander's early life, he came to lead the church as the thirteenth Pope in 313 CE. Arius was a fourth century Alexandrian presbyter condemned as a heretic by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea because of his teaching that Jesus Christ the Son of God was not co-eternal and co-substantial with God the Father, but was rather a created being subordinate to the Father. To this Alexander responds (in *Epistle on Arian Heresy* 12 in *ANF* Vol. VI: 295):

> Concerning who we thus believe even as the Apostolic Church believes, in one Father unbegotten, who has from no one the cause of His being, who is unchangeable and immutable, who is always the same and admits of no increase or diminution.

He goes on to state that Jesus Christ, being of the essence of the Father, is also immutable: "He is equally with the Father unchangeable and immutable, wanting in nothing". This again affirms that the immutability of God was the belief of the early church.

5.1.5. St. Augustine Of Hippo (354- 430 CE)

According to Gilson (1983:22), the question of God's immutability was for St. Augustine not simply one aspect of his doctrine, but was "perhaps, the most profound and most constant element in his metaphysical thought".

For Augustine, God is unchanging, because his/her immutability follows his/her supremacy. The intrinsic nature of God's immutability is the evidences of divinity. St. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPNF* Vol. II 12.2: 277) states that since God is a Supreme Being he/she cannot change and being God, he/she

created all things. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPFF* Vol. II 11.1: 203) affirms that only God is immutable, for no created thing can be immutable. Thus there can be only one true unchangeable good, the blessed God.

According to St. Augustine, anything that is open to change is mutable; thus St. Augustine (in *Confessions in NPNF Vol. I 1*2:15: 181) conclude that even God's will is immutable and eternal:

> Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the very eternity of the Creator, that *his/her* substance is in no wise changed by time, nor that God's will is separate from his/her substance?.... God willeth not one thing now, another anon, but once and forever God willeth all things that *he/she* willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards what *he/she* willeth not before…Such a will is mutable and no mutable thing is eternal; but our God is eternal (*italic*s *added*).

God's mind also cannot change, for to change means that God then is created and therefore not divine. For St. Augustine (*ibid*) God does not operate in our three-dimensional understanding of time but operates in a manner different and profoundly unlike our way of thinking. St. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPNF* Vol. II 11.21: 216) states:

> God's mind does not pass from one thought to another. God's vision is utterly unchangeable. Thus, God comprehends all that takes place in time – the not yet existing future, the existing present and the no-longer-exiting past in an immutable and eternal present... [Neither] is there any then, now or afterwards in *his/her* knowledge, for unlike ours, it suffers no change with triple time present, past and future. With God there is no change, no shadow of alteration (*italics added*).

The divine mind and will cannot change because they are identical with his/her essence. If God's will is part of his/her substance and God's substance cannot change then it remains true for St. Augustine that the will and mind of God cannot change. For God, to change his/her will or

mind means that God cannot be eternal or divine because God is forever identical with him/herself.

5.1.6. Anselm (1033-1109 CE)

Anselm found grounds for the immutability of God in God's perfection, simplicity, supremacy and his/her unique immateriality. One of Anselm's proofs (1962:2) for God's existence is the argument from degrees of perfection in the world:

- Some beings are more nearly perfect than others.
- But things cannot be more or less perfect unless there is something wholly perfect by which they can be compared and judged to be less perfect than it.
- Therefore, there must be a most perfect Being which we call God. But if God is absolutely perfect *he/she* cannot change, since any change would be for the worst, and God would then not be perfect.

Anselm also based God's immutability on his/her simplicity, with the basic idea that God cannot be analysed or divided. For Anselm God is ontologically one being without dimensions, poles or divisions. God is therefore, the ultimate reality of him/herself".

Anselm, like the other early church fathers, continues with the argument that sees the immutability of God as evidence for divinity and eternality. However, for Anselm (1962:87) God's immutability follows from his/her unique immateriality: that is, God being spirit has no parts and so there

cannot be more than one spirit of this kind. And this spirit must be an indivisible spirit. With regards to eternality, Anselm uses the immutability of God to argue for God's eternality. Thus Anselm (1962: 83) understands that God must be eternal without beginning or end. God cannot be temporal or transient but is immutable and indivisible.

Anselm (1962:161) sees God's immutability as a basis for his/her infallible knowledge. For Anselm even the free choices of men are fully known by God even before they come to pass. Because God's attributes are identical to him/herself, his/her knowledge does not change due to the free action of human will. For Anselm, God cannot change in his/her nature, since he/she is perfect, unique, spiritual and supreme and that God has an infallible ability to "foresee the future".

5.1.7. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE)

In articulating a defense against the question that God is not immutable, Aquinas (in *Summa Theologica* 1. 9 1)[44] offers three basic arguments in favour of God's immutability. He first argues that a God of pure actuality has no potentiality to be other than what he/she is, while change can only come from potentiality to be something other than what one is. The second argument of Aquinas that confirms God's immutability relates to simplicity. He uses arguments (*Summa Theologica* 3.1.7)[45] that draw on St. Augustine's conclusion that God is truly and absolutely simple; and

[44] See http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1009.htm.
[45] See http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1003.htm.

that God is without parts and therefore cannot change. The reasoning is that only something that does not change attaches itself to self-identity. If God changes then God would not be God. Because, according to Aquinas, this would not be a change but an annihilation of that being. The third argument for the immutability of God extends from absolute perfection. Whatever changes requires something new. But an absolutely complete Being cannot acquire anything new. God is perfect. Therefore God cannot change.

5.1.8. Martin Luther

Luther understanding of God's immutability can also be derived from his argument on the *Bondage of the Will.* Althaus (1966:105) reflects that central to all of Luther's theology is his understanding of God that can be summarized as *Gottes Gottheit*, which means "God is God." In the deepest sense, Luther believes that God is above all and in all. God, through his creative power, reveals that he is free and immutable. He alone can bring life into existence. He alone sustains life. He alone freely wills. Moreover, what God wills cannot be impeded or resisted by a mere creature. God is all-powerful and therefore, God's will is alone immutable. Luther acknowledges that God and his/her knowledge in one that is; God's will cannot be changed, altered or impeded. The immutability of God's will is the logical conclusion to the freedom of God's will. God's sovereignty and almighty power demands that whatever God wills happens by necessity. Nothing occurs contingently. God's will does not

act independently of reality, as the human will does, but rather, God's will creates reality. In Luther's theology, the will of God is not contingent and so likewise, the foreknowledge of God is also not contingent. For whatever God wills, he/she foreknows and so, whatever he/she foreknows must, by necessity, happen. For if it did not happen, then God would be fallible and his/her will contingent which Luther (1957:105) declares “is not to be found in God!” It is the immutable will of God, acting freely, that provides the Christian with “the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1), namely that the promises of God will be fulfilled. As Luther (1957: 81) suggests, “the Christian's chief and only comfort in every adversity lies in knowing that God does not lie, but brings all things to pass immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, altered or impeded. Therefore to change his/her will God must then also change in his/her plan and purposes making God mutable. Luther (1961:178) in discussing the wrath of God against falsehood as oppose to those who live on the “immutable truth of God” causes us to be comforted if believed because God does not change. Luther (1961:117) declares that God is unchangeable; however God is magnified in our knowledge and experience when we greatly esteem and highly regard God. God nature does not change based on how humanity views him/her or on how God inter acts with humanity.

5.1.9. John Calvin

Calvin considered it settled in Christian theology that God is immutable.

The immutability of the Word of God is inherent is the very essence or nature of God. Calvin (as cited in McNeill: I.13.7:129) asserts:

> John at once attributes to the word of God a solid abiding presence and ascribes something uniquely his/her own, and shows how God, by speaking, was creator of the universe….Unchangeable, the Word abides everlasting one and the same with God and is God him/herself.

Because God is immutable thus any attempts made to thwart the purposes or promises of God will fail. In discussing Psalm 110:1 Calvin (as cited in McNeill: 2:15:497-498) states:

> The Psalmist declares that no matter how many strong enemies plot against the church, they do not have the power to prevail against/over the God's immutable decrees which God appointed to Jesus Christ. Hence it follows that the devil, with all the resources of the world, can never destroy that which is eternally decreed.

Calvin (as cited in McNiell: 3.20.43:906) drawing on St. Augustine the perspective and understanding of prayer directs Christian to pray according to the will of God. A will that is not hidden and unchangeable. Calvin therefore understands that there is no tension between the will and the very nature of God. For God to change his/her plan must include a change in his/her very nature.

The above historical review illustrates that the immutability of God was affirmed by the early church fathers and reformers, who stressed that it is impossible for God to change for better or for worse. God cannot gain value, since God eternally encompasses all such values in his/her intrinsic being. Because God is immutable so too are his/her plans and promises.

5.2. An Evangelical Understanding of Divine Immutability

The doctrine of the immutability of God held by evangelicals is grounded firmly in biblical contexts from both the Old and New Testaments and through the writings of the early and medieval church. The definition of God's immutability having the attributes of being unchanging in nature, desire, purpose and promises as espoused by evangelicals finds its roots in the teaching of the early church fathers and in Scripture. Grudem (1994:163) states God is unchanging in being, perfection, purposes and promises. Yet God does act and feel emotion, and he acts differently in response to different situations. Grudem (1994:163) goes on to state that that while God created a changing universe, but in contrast to this change God is " the same" referring to Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17. Bavinck (1977:149) notes that the fact that God is immutable is of the utmost importance in maintaining the Creator/creature distinction, and for our worship of God:

> The doctrine of God's immutability is of highest significance in religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds rest in God, in *him/her* alone, for only God is a pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the Rock (Italics added).

Erickson (1988:304) speaks of God's constancy as involving several aspects:

> There is first no quantitative change in God. God cannot increase in anything because he/she is already perfect. Nor can God decrease, for

> if God were to decrease, God would cease to be God. There is also no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modifications. Therefore, God does not change his/her mind, plans or actions, for these rest on *his/her* nature (Italics added).

While, Karl Barth's perspective concerning scripture is different from an Evangelical understanding that the Bible is the Word of God, Barth' understanding of God's attributes or perfection is worthy of our consideration here. For Barth (1957:491-493) God constancy (immutability) means that God remains who God is, a living immutable God. This perfection of God's constancy does not mean immobility, for this type of abstract immutability for Barth (1957:494) cannot be equated to the God of the Bible. Barth (1957:494) therefore describes God's perfection by stating that God is immutably the living God in his/her freedom and love. However, this love and freedom does not negate the constancy of God but rather affirms it. God is what God is in his/being and actuality and therefore God cannot deny him/herself. Barth (1957: 494-495) states:

> At every place *God* is what *God* is continually and self-consistently. *His/Her* love cannot cease to be *His/Her* love nor *His/Her* freedom *His/Her* freedom. God alone could assail, alter, abolish, or destroy Himself/Herself. But it is just at this point that *He/She* is the "immutable" God. For at no place or time can *God* or will *God* turn against *Himself/Herself* or contradict *Himself/Herself*, not even in virtue of *His/Her* freedom or for the sake of His love (*italics added*).

Barth's perspective of the immutability of God is in keeping with an Evangelical understanding.

5.2.1. Arguments for the Immutability of God

Geisler (2001:108-110) presents arguments for the immutability of God

that resonate within Evangelicalism:

- The argument from Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality. God is being; everything else merely comes into being. Evangelicals understand that God is the great I Am, the Self-Existent One. To speak of "pure actuality" does not only mean that God is completely determinate and without any residual indeterminacy or "potency" but also that God is existence or "actuality" pure and simple, without any limitation. God exists in the fullest possible sense exhibiting all pure perfections to the highest degree. God's essence is therefore said to be identical with his/her existence. What God is, the very fullness of being, guarantees that he/she is. Creatures exist in a diminished sense, however, and exhibit perfections only to a limited degree as constrained by their natures or essences. From this perspective, that which is created has the "potency" to change. God is essential a Pure Act who lacks no "potency". Therefore, what has no potentiality cannot change, because change is passing from one state of potentiality to a change of actuality, or from actuality to potentiality. Therefore evangelicals understand that God cannot change. To change means that God is temporal; but God is atemporal and thus to deny God's non-temporality is to deny who God actually is. This is inconsistent with evangelicalism and disastrous for the divine attributes under investigation.

- The Argument from Simplicity

God is infinite and an infinite being cannot be divided, because God cannot be divided into infinite parts. Therefore to speak of the argument from

simplicity is to state that nothing can be added or subtracted from God. Therefore, to diminish any attribute is to diminish God him/herself because God's attributes are what God is. Every attribute of God is identical with his essence.

Bavinck (1977:176) explains:

> The simplicity is of great importance, nevertheless, for our understanding of God. It is not only taught in Scripture (where God is called "light," "life," and "love") but also automatically follows from the idea of God and is necessarily implied in other attributes. Simplicity here is the antonym of "compounded." If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of genus (class) and differentiae (attributes of different species belonging to the same genus), substance and accidents, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence and immutability cannot be maintained.

God is not an abstract Absolute Idea who happens to have knowledge and power. Rather, God in his/her very essence, within him/herself and by him/herself, is omniscience, immutability and omnipotence. God is whatever he/she has, for he/she has nothing that he/she is not.

- ☐ The Argument from Perfection

The third argument that Geisler (2001:108) uses for the immutability of God comes from God's absolute perfection. The perfection of God means that he/she is devoid of all change in essence, attributes, consciousness, will, and promises. No change is possible in God, because all change must be to better or worse, and God is absolute perfection. No cause for change in God exists, either in him/herself or outside of him/her. Since God is absolutely perfect he/she cannot be more complete or find improvement. Therefore God cannot change.

- The Argument from Infinity

Evangelicals affirm that God is infinite as his/her being has no limits. Temporal beings, however, do have limits and has a beginning because whatever is temporal must have a beginning and therefore must have a cause. As discussed in argument from simplicity, an infinite being cannot be divided. Hence it is impossible for an infinite being to have parts. For change involves the loss or gain of parts; hence an infinite being cannot change.

- The Argument from Necessity

Geisler (2001:267) holds to the view that God is a Necessary being. If God is a Necessary being, then he/she cannot change. That is to state that God has no potential in his/her being not to be. If God has no potentiality in his/her being, then God is a Pure Actuality and thus cannot change.

- The Argument from an Unchanging Cause

Geisler (2001:72) asserts that the Bible declares and logic demands that God is the First, Uncaused Cause. This means that God existed before and beyond the space-time universe. Thus to argue that God becomes temporal at creation makes no logical sense, because God is non-temporal by nature before and after creation. Therefore the act of creating beings with free will does not in any way make God finite or temporal. Creation brought about a difference in relationship, not in essence. Prior to creation the Creator had no relationship with creation.

Based on Geisler's arguments, evangelicals understand that owing to

God's constancy his/her intentions are always consistent with his/her purposes, which are also always consistent because God's will does not change. Evangelicals therefore understand that God's immutability can be applied in the following ways:

5.2.2. The Immutability of God's being

Immutability is a property which belongs to the divine essence in the sense that God can neither gain new attributes that he/she didn't have before, nor lose those already his/hers. To put it simply, *God doesn't grow*. There is no increase or decrease in the Divine Being. If God increases (either quantitatively or qualitatively), he/she was, necessarily, incomplete prior to the change. If God decreases, he/she is, necessarily, incomplete after the change. The deity, then, is incapable of development either positively or negatively. God neither evolves nor devolves. His/her attributes, considered individually, can never be greater or less than what they are and have always been. God will never be wiser, more loving, more powerful, or holier than he/she ever has been and ever will be.

This is at least implied in God's declaration to Moses: "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14); and is explicit in other texts. For example: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (Jam. 1:17). "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed" (Mal. 3:6). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

5.2.3. The Immutability of God's Life

When Evangelicals talk about the immutability of God's life, they are very close to the notion of eternality or everlastingness i.e. God never began to be nor will ever cease to be. God simply is. He/She did not come into existence (for to become existent is a change from nothing to something), nor will he/she go out of existence (for to cease existing is a change from something to nothing). God is not young or old: God is. Thus one can read: "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Ps. 102:25-27). "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2; cf. 93:2).

5.2.4. The Immutability of God's Character

Immutability may also be predicated on God's moral character by stating that God cannot become better (morally) than who he/she already is. If God could change (or become) in respect to his/her moral character, it would indicate that he/she had been morally imperfect or incomplete antecedent to the time of change, and hence never God. If for the worse, it would indicate that he/she is now morally less perfect or complete, i.e., subsequent to the time of change, and hence no longer God. It will not do to say that God might

conceivably change from one perfect being into another equally perfect being. For then one has to specify in what sense God has changed. What constitutes God as different in the second mode of being from what he/she is in the first? Does God have more attributes, fewer attributes, better or worse attributes? If God in the second mode of being has the same attributes (both quantitatively and qualitatively), in what sense is he/she different from what he/she was in the first mode of being?

5.2.5. The Immutability of God's Plan

To deny immutability to God's purpose or plan would be no less an affront to the deity than to predicate change of his/her being, life, and character. There are, as I understand, only two reasons why God would ever be forced to or need to alter his/her purpose:

- ☐ If God lacked the necessary foresight or knowledge to anticipate any or all contingencies (in which case God would not be omniscient, contrary to the claims of open theism); or
- ☐ If God had the needed foresight or knowledge but lacked the power or ability to effect what he/she had planned (in which case he/she would not be omnipotent).

But since God is infinite in wisdom and knowledge, there can be no error or oversight in the conception of his/her purpose. Also, since God is infinite in power (omnipotent), there can be no failure or frustration in the accomplishment of his/her purpose. The many and varied changes in the

relationship that God sustains with human beings, as well as the more conspicuous events of redemptive history, are not to be thought of as indicating a change in God's being or purpose. They are, rather, the execution in time of purposes eternally existing in the mind of God. For example, the abolition of the Mosaic Covenant was no change in God's will; it was, in fact, the fulfilment of his/her will, an eternal will which decreed change (i.e., change from the Mosaic to the New Covenant). Christ's coming and work was no makeshift action to remedy unforeseen defects in the Old Testament scheme. It was but the realization (historical and concrete) of what God had from eternity decreed.

5.3. Boyd's understanding of Divine Immutability

God immutability has been challenged by advocates of process theology, a theological position described in my introduction that views God as in a constant state of flux. Process theologians believe that process and change are essential aspects of that which genuinely exists; therefore God must be changing over time also. Process theologians like John Cobb and David Griffin believe that God is continually changing, adding to him/herself all the experiences that happen anywhere in the universe. Boyd who endorses the teaching of Hartshorne (1967:248) viewed God as:

> "An enduring society of actual entities" — not an "I" who endures through change but an "I-I-I-I" series that is created partially anew each moment. God in *his/her* present concrete state is not identical to what *he/she* was in *his/her* previous concrete state. The God one may serve

> now is not the God one may have served yesterday nor the God one may serve tomorrow — or even the next second (*italics added*).

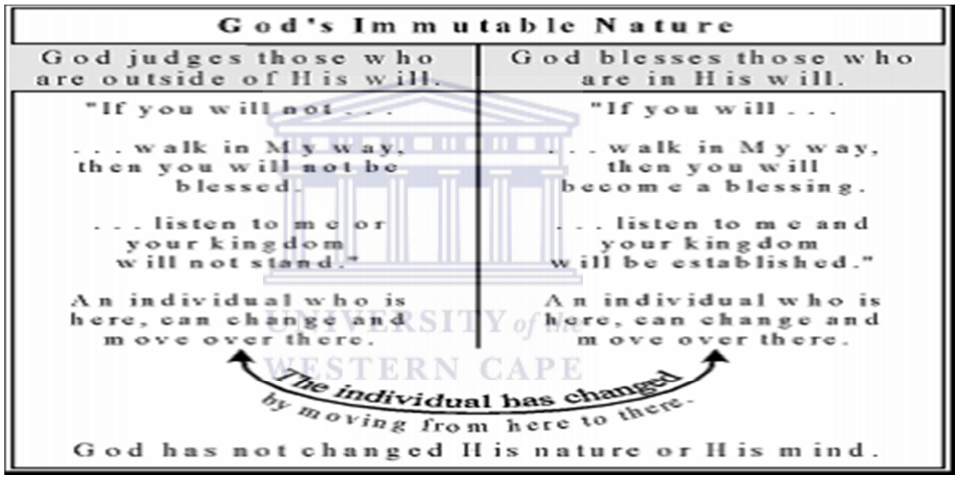
Boyd adopts and modifies much of Hartshorne's position. Boyd (1993) agrees that God has two poles: one represents God as God is necessarily (eternal) and the other what God experiences moment-by-moment (temporal). In other words, God is supremely consistent in his/her character while also supremely changing in his/her responsiveness to creation and his/her relationship to the Godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This for Boyd (1993: 232) means "the *totality* of what God is at any given moment is contingent". What God experiences in and outside of him/herself changes him/her. Thus for Boyd (1993: 386) God is "an eternally on-going event, and an event which is dynamic and open." Within God, there is "eternally 'room for expansion'" Boyd in modifying Hartshorne's view comes up with a neoclassical model that tries to satisfy the biblical portrayal of God.

Boyd (1992: 2003) therefore sees God as one who is in a constant change of flux as he/she responds to the free actions of human beings. Boyd also rejects the immutability of God because he sees that as a product of the influence of Greek philosophy. Boyd (2000:109) states that the view of God as eternally unchanging in every respect (and thus possessing an eternal, unchanging foreknowledge of all of world history) owes more to Plato than it does to the Bible. However, God's immutability, rightly understood, is not a philosophical abstraction. The immutability of God as presented in Scripture should not be confused as the immutability of the 'god' referred to by Greek philosophers. In Greek thought immutability meant not only unchangeability

but also the immobility of “god”. Sanders (1998:86) describes Aquinas as the “apex of medieval theology who sought to harmonise the biblical classical synthesis he inherited from the Christian tradition with the newly discovered works of Aristotle”. But with regard to the view of God’s foreknowledge Aquinas offers a different perspective from that of Aristotle, as reflected in Chapter 3. Oden (1990) states that overestimating the strong hold the influence of Greek philosophy had on the traditional understanding of God and his/her attributes is to understate the counter Greek influences that one reads in the Psalms and Isaiah and in the writings of Paul

Boyd follows the argument of Sanders (1998:187) who states that: “The essence of God does not change but God does change in experience, knowledge, emotions and actions.” Pinnock (2001:72) expresses it this way: “If God is personal and enters into relationships God cannot be immutable in every respect, timelessly eternal, impassable or meticulously sovereign.” Boyd (1993:379-81) contends that God freely experiences our hurts, joys, and sins by entering into solidarity with us. Boyd (1993:357-58) states that if God did not then God would be indifferent to us and our lives wouldn’t matter to God, nor would God matter to us. Charnock (1977:121-122) however repudiates such an argument by observing that God does not change because of the action of creation because he willed to create from eternity. He states that while the work of creation was new, the decision to create was as ancient as God him/herself. Charnock (1977:122) makes an even clearer statement about God’s immutability when he says that if God had willed the creation of the world only at a time when the world was brought into being,

and not before that, then indeed God had been changeable. According to Charnock (1977:121), creation therefore was not a new counsel or new will of God but that which was from eternity. The Bible clearly demonstrates that God is faithful to his/her promise, that God expresses love and mercy towards repentant sinners and executes judgement on the unrepentant sinner. How human beings change, then, determines how God will apply his/her absolute standards of love, goodness, wrath and judgement, as illustrated by (Howe 1999:10) in the diagram below:



So it can be see that what open theists interpret as change in God when dealing with creation is really only God's manner of interaction with creation; and that God's response to the acts and attitudes of his/her creation is compatible with his/her eternal nature. Since human decision often conflicts with what God wills to do, open theists maintain that God's will and plans must change to accommodate human decisions – thus making God mutable. Otherwise there would be no integrity in human decision making. Isaiah (14:24, 46:9-10) depicts God's immutability as a characteristic of his/her

deity. Barth (1957: 495-497) states that human actions do not constrain the perfection of God. He sees Exodus 3:4 in support of God's immutability. If God is said to "repent", God is still immutable, that is he/she is the one God in his/her freedom and love. For God is said to repent from his/her threatened judgement. Barth (1957:500) cautions against two errors, first, is to regard the world as an integral part of God's nature, and second, to oppose the world's mutability to God's immutability as though creation does not live by the constancy of God.

Open theists have obscured the meaning of immutability by failing to distinguish between immutability and the idea of immobility, and have thus presented the stilted view that God as an immutable God cannot interact with his/her creatures. Pinnock (2001:48) writes: "A static and immobile God is not more perfect than our heavenly Father." For this reason God should not be seen as immobile but unmoved: thus reflecting not on a conception that in and of itself implies static or incapability of relating with the external, but rather indicates a being that has not been "moved" or brought into being by another.

Oden (1992:112) reflects the same position:

> That biblical witness views God not as immobile or static, but consistent with *his/her* own nature, congruent with the depths of *his/her* personal being, stable not woodenly predictable. If God promises to forgive, '*He/She* is just and may be trusted to forgive our sins' (1 John 1:9) because *his/her* character is dependable (*italics added*).

Boyd therefore argues that God's flexibility is seen especially in his/her response to our prayers. Boyd uses the extension of Hezekiah's life as an example of God changing his/her mind (2000:82):

> Now, if we accept the classical view of foreknowledge and suppose that the Lord was certain that *he/she* would not let Hezekiah die, wasn't God being duplicitous when *he/she* initially told Hezekiah that he would not recover? … If we suppose that the Lord was certain all along that Hezekiah would, in fact, live fifteen years longer after this episode, wasn't it misleading for God to tell him that *he/she* was going to add fifteen years to his life? Wouldn't Jeremiah [Jer. 26:19] also be mistaken in announcing that God changed *his/her* mind, when *God* reversed *his/her* stated intentions to Hezekiah – if, in fact God's mind never changes? (*Italics added*).

Boyd, in using Jeremiah 26:19, gives an example from the Bible in order to show that God can, in fact, make one decision on what he/she will do, and then change that decision. Boyd (2003:78) argues that:

> When a person is in a genuine relationship with another, willingness to adjust to them is always considered a virtue. Why should this apply to people but not to God? On the contrary, since God is the epitome of everything we deem praiseworthy, and since we ordinarily consider responsiveness to be praiseworthy, should we not be inclined to view God as the most responsive being imaginable?

Sanders sees God as changing his/her mind as he/she responds to human needs and requests. Sanders (1998:53), understands this by means of God's invitation to Abraham "into the decision-making process" before he/she decided what to do with Sodom. Sanders (1998: 64) states that Moses too influenced God to change his/her mind:

> Being in relationship to Moses, God is willing to allow Moses to influence the path *he/she* will take. God permits human input into the divine future. One of the most remarkable features in the Old Testament is that people can argue with God and win (*italics added*).

Pinnock (2001:42) writes:

> God does not will to rule the world alone but wants to bring the creature into his decisions. Prayer highlights the fact that God does not choose to rule the world without our input.

Barth (1957:502) on the other hand argues that that while God engages his/her creation, this engagement cannot change the actions of God; this immutability does not prevent God from having a real history with his/her creation in revelation and reconciliation. The creature's resistance to God bring no conflict or change in God.

However, Boyd following Sanders (1998) and Pinnock (2001) understanding of God as one who is changes his/her mind because of the free decisions of human beings because future contingents are not reality. Boyd (2000:170) states that "future free decisions do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them." Boyd (2000:75) suggests that "God's mind is not permanently fixed ... some of what God knows regarding the future consists of things that *may* go one way or another.

Therefore, Boyd affirms that God is so affected by human action that God changes his/her intention or decisions. Thus for open theistic God may change his/her mind or will according to what human beings do and thus mutable.

From an Evangelical perspective, God does not change his/her mind in eternity but changes his/her acts towards human beings in accordance with his/her foreknowledge of the acts and attitudes of human beings. God keeps his/her word and promises. Thus God acts with human free choices and therefore is proactive rather than reactive. Boyd fails to realize that God's communication gives genuine respect to human decisions and the sequential process of human reason and emotions.

The Bible is clear in its statements that God is immutable (Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17). In addition, God's counsel is immutable (Heb. 6:17). Ward (1977-53-55) contends that divine changelessness is essential to divine providence, considered especially as preservation. If God is subject to change, then he might cease to be, or to be the sustaining ground of the world. Thus we have a guarantee of the stability, regularity and ordered continuity of temporal change only if there is a changeless God. The problem arises both on a theoretical and a practical basis. If God is changing, then he/she is not the God of preservation and providence. Geach (1977:6) asserts that the confidence in God and his promises that Christians have can only be experienced and justified on the basis of the immutability of God. This guarantees that God can and will fulfil his promises. If this is not the case, then Christianity as it has ordinarily been understood is destroyed

Erickson (1998: 304-308) summaries the reason for the belief in the immutability of God

- ☐ Because God is perfect, he/she cannot change, because all change is either, increase or decrease, improvement or decline, and perfection can neither be improved upon nor lost.
- ☐ Because God is pure actuality, there can be no change in him/her, for all change is actualization of potentialities which are present.
- ☐ If God could change, he/she would not be uncaused, and therefore could not be the cause of anything else either.
- ☐ If God could change, we could not have confidence in his preserving all things that are, since his ability to do so might decline or alter.

- If God could change we could not have confidence in him to keep his promises, thus losing an essential component of Christianity.

Thus the argument of Boyd can be concluded in the following way: that an eternal, immutable God cannot have a real relationship with a changing world. The essence of the argument can be formulated as follows:

- All real relationship involves change.
- An unchanging God cannot change.
- Therefore, an unchanging God cannot have a real relationship with a changing world.

Open theists therefore place emphasis on God's relational nature. Accordingly they oppose the Augustinian perspective because they find it difficult to reconcile an unchanging God with a God who can maintain tangible personal relationships with human beings. Sanders (1998:12) calls this "relational theism": meaning that any understanding of the divine-human relationship must bring into focus that there is receptivity and change in God. Such an approach implies a radical recasting of the doctrine of God as traditionally held by evangelicals.

5.4. Summary

Boyd argued that the doctrine of God's immutability is derived from Greek philosophy rather than the Christian text. Therefore, Boyd is his attempt to

make God relative to human beings overlooks the fundamental Christian foundation on which the traditional conception of God's immutability is derived from Scripture and held as fundamental to God's nature by the early church fathers.

Because God's character does not change, there is therefore no change in God. Because God is a simple Being, all of his/her attributes are in perfect harmony and do not change to fit external circumstances (Jam. 1:17). To speak of God's simplicity means that God cannot be analysed or divided. God is one being without dimensions, poles or divisions. In contrast to the changing world God remains the same. Psalm 102:26 reflects the character of God that does not change. God does not change in his/her power (Rom. 4:20f), his/her plans and purposes (Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:10); his/her promises (1Kngs. 8: 56, 2 Cor.1:20); his/her love and mercy (Ps. 103:17), or his/her justice (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 28:17). Thiessen (1977:83) argues that because God is one, he/she does not change because God is *one*. God's immutability is due also to his/her necessary being and self-existence: that which exists uncaused, by the necessity of his/her nature must exist as he/she does. Because of this perfection there can be no change in God. Any change in his/her attributes will make Godless "Godly" or a limited God. While the created order changes and decays, God stays the same. This however must not be confused with God's immobility. Oden (1992:111) states that divine "immutability" is a religious affirmation that God will not change, but that does not mean that God cannot relate to changing human circumstances. God's

responsiveness in human affairs does not imply changes in his/her character, intention or will.

Conclusion

In an endeavour to take seriously the attribute of God's immutability, the goal has been to form our conception of God's changelessness from Scripture and the Church Fathers. As a result I have presented the view that was traditionally held that God is both independent and self-sufficient and hence immutable in respect of his/her supreme existence. Boyd, in attempting to undermine this fundamental teaching about the immutability of God, states that those who hold to an unchanging God do so by understanding God in Aristotelian terms. This understanding of God lacks the vital energies of the biblical witness and reduces God to one who is unresponsive to human needs. However, I have argued that the Greek philosophical understanding of God has not permeated the classical/traditional proclamation of God's constancy because in Scripture we find a clear teaching of God's immutability. The proposition that God is ignorant of the future and therefore changes his/her plans and purposes to accommodate human inconsistencies and circumstances must be rejected. This is because the open theistic understanding of God's immutably does not resonate with the evangelical understanding of God's immutability that is rooted in Scripture, Church history and sound reasoning.

Evangelicals do not obscure the meaning of God's immutability with the idea of immobility. The Greeks had this understanding of "the unmoved mover" that God cannot change therefore; he/she must be disinterested in the creature he/she created. Thus the view provided of immobility is closer to Deism than to a loving God shown to us through Christ. While God's nature is settled with no possibility of change, his/her actions in the world are predetermined in accord with how humans relate to God's immutable nature. For there to be a real relationship, an unchangeable God must have changing relationships with changing people, yet remain constant in character and purpose.

Chapter 6

God's Omnipotence: A Literary Investigation

Introduction

The omnipotence of God can be defined as the perfect ability of God to do all things that are consistent with the divine character. Bavinck (1977:243) defines omnipotence as God's absolute power; as his/her ability to do whatever is in harmony with all of his/her perfections and God's ordinate power; as God's ability to perform whatever God decrees. While open theists do not directly deny the omnipotence of God, by default this divine attribute is undermined because of the attack on omniscience and God's immutability. Whitehead (1978) views God as "dipolar". He sees God as one who is influenced but also one who can be persuaded. Because God interacts with human beings in time and space (temporally), God is influenced by them. Thus for the process theologian God is affected and influenced by the world. Thus process theologians redefine God's omnipotence in terms of persuasion or influence in the overall world process. God is seen as one agent among many in the world, and has as much power as any such agent. This power is not absolute, but limited persuasive or passive power.

The greatness of God's power is ground for religious praise. In such praise the Christian regards God's power as an absolute, the very standard of

power. To attribute weakness to God is incompatible with Evangelicalism and the stance of worship. Omnipotence is inseparable from God's omniscience and God's immutability. Another important reason to study this attribute is its relationship with the problem of evil. In this chapter an historical and literary investigation of the Early Church Fathers and their understanding of God's omnipotence will be undertaken. This study will show that the view of an all-powerful God held by the Church Fathers still resonates within the Evangelical tradition and that the problem of evil does not cause a barrier to our understanding of God's omnipotence. However, this understanding needs to be clarified by the acknowledgement that omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything:

- ☐ God cannot do anything logically impossible.
- ☐ God cannot do anything that contradicts his/her nature.
- ☐ God cannot make decisions that limit the possibilities of what God can do.

These so called "limitations" of God's power do not delimit God but rather enable the Christian to have even more confidence in the constancy of God.

6.1. Evidence from the Church Fathers to Reformers on God's Omnipotence

6.1.1. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE)

Clement argues against the foolishness and absurdity of images by which gods are worshipped because he sees this as the worship of the products of human hands. These products are made because human beings choose disbelief in God and a licentious rather than restrained life style. Clement compares human art with the power of God. He (in *Exhortation to the Heathens* in *ANF* Vol II. 185-190) states: "How great is the power of God! *His/Her* bare volition was the creation of the universe. For God alone made it, because *he/she* is truly God. The mere willing was followed by the spring into being that *he/she* willed" (*italics added*). In this statement Clement reflects on the power of God as God's perfect ability to do all things consistent with the divine nature. God can do all that he/she wills to do and God's power is not limited to the influence of this temporal world. God's power works according to the divine will. Thus for Clement God's power is expressed in his/her will. As a result Clement sees God exercising influence everywhere and overall in such a way as to empower and enable the freedom of other things. The extent of this influence is called omnipotence. Thus, for Clement God's omnipotence means that there is nothing that God cannot do.

6.1.2. Origen

Origen, in articulating a defence against Celcus's understanding of the nature and power of God, states (in *Against Celcus* in *ANF* Vol. IV:553) that God possesses not only the power but the will to act– but that God cannot do anything which is contrary to reason or contrary to the divine nature. Origen defines God as good, just and omnipotent. God is eternal, invisible and incorporeal. But by definition his/her qualities are not absolute; he/she cannot act out *any* action, since his actions are limited to absolute goodness, justice and wisdom. Origen views God as having natural limitations: for example, God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2); and God cannot tempt anyone to sin (Jam. 1:13). But this by no means interferes with God's omnipotence.

6.1.3. St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine also understands God's omnipotence as God's being able to do anything that is not in contradiction to his/her own nature. St. Augustine (in *City of God* 5.10 in *NPNF* Vol. II: 92-93) states:

> For God is called omnipotent on account of *his/her* doing what *he/she* wills, not on account of *his/her* suffering what *he/she* wills not; for if that should befall him/her, *he/she* would by no means be omnipotent. Wherefore, *he/she* cannot do some things for the very reason that *he/she* is omnipotent (*italics* added).

This by no means diminishes God's power because God cannot contradict him/herself, God cannot die or sin. If God were able to sin then God could not be described as omnipotent. St. Augustine (in *City of God* 5.10 in *NPNF* Vol. II:92-93) also states that God is omnipotent on the basis of that which he/she wills, and not on that which he/she does not will. According to St. Augustine,

this is because the will/knowledge of God God's consists of all the decisions creatures will make. However, this power is not always coercive, thereby honouring human freedom.

6.1.4. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas discusses divine omnipotence in a number of places. The following remarks will be based principally on *Summa Theologica*, Question 25[46], which answers the question whether there is power in God. Aquinas notes six sub questions:

- ☐ Whether there is power in God
- ☐ Whether his/her power is infinite;
- ☐ Whether he/she is omnipotent;
- ☐ Whether he/she can make the past not to have been;
- ☐ Whether he/she can do what he/she has not done or do away with what he/she has done;
- ☐ Whether he/she can make better what he/she has already made.

In answering the first question Aquinas[47] states that active, not passive, power is found in God and his/her power is infinite and unrestricted. If any act is performed by God is a pure act. Therefore, active power belongs to God preeminently in the highest degree. Aquinas like St. Augustine makes no distinction between the power of God and the will of God because that God's active power is his/her perfection. The second question argues: Active

[46] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1025.htm
[47] *ibid*

power is found in God because he/she is a perfect act. God is perfect and unlimited. God's power is the same as his/her nature therefore infinite.

In answering the third question on the omnipotence of God, Aquinas asks if God is omnipotent. If God can do anything, what is the meaning of "anything"? The correlative of power (*potentia*) is the possible and anything that can possibly be or be done falls within the scope of the divine power that does not contradict his/her nature. Aquinas[48] state:

> It must, however, be remembered that since every agent produces an effect like itself, to each active power there corresponds a thing possible as its proper object according to the nature of that act on which its active power is founded; for instance, the power of giving warmth is related as to its proper object to the being capable of being warmed. The divine existence, however, upon which the nature of power in God is founded, is infinite, and is not limited to any genus of being; but possesses within itself the perfection of all being. Whence, whatsoever has or can have the nature of being, is numbered among the absolutely possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent

God's power relates to a possible *absolute,* i.e. that which is possible without qualification. Therefore, for Aquinas there is nothing impossible for God

6.1.5. Martin Luther

Luther was unflinching in his recognition that divine omnipotence implied that God was the original cause of all things and actions, including the actions of Satan. Luther's (1960:145) understanding concerning the omnipotence of God is clear: "God works all in all...God even works what is evil in the impious ... [Judas'] will was the work of God; God by his almighty power

[48] *ibid*

moved his/her will as he/she does all that is in the world." Luther, therefore, understands all action then is extensions of God's will, including the will of Satan. "Since God moves and does all, we must take it that *he/she* moves and acts even in Satan and the godless;...evil things are done with God himself setting them in motion." Luther did not believe in the concept that human beings have free will. He (as cited in Kerr, 1966:91) states that a word is not even found in the Scriptures. Thus, Luther believed that in God's presence the human will or free-will ceases to exist because only God has free-will (as cited in Kerr, 1966:88). Such is the power of God that all things are drawn into the accordance his/her will. The following passage from *The Bondage of the Will* not only continues the point, but shows Luther's (as cited in Kerr, 1966:35) supreme rhetorical skills: "The human will is like a beast of burden. If God mounts it, it wishes and goes as God wills; if Satan mounts it, it wishes and goes as Satan wills. Nor can it choose its rider....The riders contend for its possession." In Luther's reading of divine omnipotence, there is no basis for human autonomy and self-determination. For Luther, what was at stake was divine omnipotence and any amount of self-reliance for salvation takes away from the power and glory of God, and our reliance on God. Thus, for Luther all power and the exercise of all power belongs to God.

Luther is not always philosophically astute, but his (as cited in Kerr, 1966:35) definition of omnipotence contains an important clarification: "By the omnipotence of God I do not mean the potentiality by which *he/she* could do many things which he does not, but the active power by which *he/she* potently works all in all...." (*italics added*). Thus God has no passive power,

but has complete active power. The notion of God as some passive source of power is of course totally foreign to Luther. Luther (as cited in Kerr, 1966:29) believed in the "Almighty God Maker of heaven and earth." Luther's understanding of God is in contradiction to the Aristotelian concept of a God who does not have the power to engage and govern the world. For Luther God's will is his/her power and nothing can hinder it.

6.1.7. John Calvin

Calvin in defining his understanding of God's omnipotence disputes the distinction made between the absolute power of God (the set of all possible that God could enact) and the ordained power of God (the subsets of those possible that God decides to act on. This distinction was largely held by medieval theologians as a means of safeguarding God transcendence and unknowability, while maintaining the fundamental reliability of the created order. Steinmetz (1995: 40) quotes the following passage from Calvin's commentary on Isaiah 23 in which he rejects out of hand the scholastic distinction between God's absolute and ordained power:

> The invention, which the Schoolmen have introduced, about the absolute power of God, is shocking blasphemy. It is all one as if they said that God is a tyrant who resolves to do what he pleases, not by justice, but through caprice. Their schools are full of such blasphemies, and are not unlike the heathens, who said that God sports with human affairs.

While Calvin rejected the distinction made, Steinmetz (1995:40-52) argues that it was not with the content that Calvin disagreed with but rather the

terminology used to describe God's power. Calvin's understanding of God's power stems from the primacy of divine will in his/her thought.

6.2. An Evangelical Understanding of Omnipotence

Evangelicals understand omnipotence to mean "all power". A biblical synonym is Almighty. Grudem (1994:217) states: "omnipotence means that God is able to do all his/her holy will". Barth (1957: 523) connects the omnipotence the constancy or immutability of God and states that all of God's perfections are omnipotent. He argues therefore that God's omnipotence is not power without connection, that is power in and of itself is not God, but rather that God is power. Bath understanding of omnipotence therefore is to be understood to be both a *potentia* (a power within possibility) and a *postestas* (an authority or rule), simultaneously and without separation. The criterion for the manifestation of this power does not lie outside of God but in God himself/herself. Therefore Barth (1957: 535-536) argues thus "God cannot do a thing because it is impossible; it is impossible because God cannot do it. The limits of the possible is not self- contradiction….but contradiction of God"

Therefore, to say that God can do all things would be incorrect as God's power must be interpreted in accordance with God's own character. God can only do things that are in harmony with his/her character (Thiessen,

1977:82). Thus there are some things that God cannot do. Frame (2002: 518-520) list six actions that God cannot perform:

- ☐ Logically contradictory actions: like making a square circle.
- ☐ Immoral actions: God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2, Heb. 6:18) or sin (Hab. 1:13).
- ☐ Actions appropriate only to finite creatures: like buying shoes, celebrating birthdays or getting sick.
- ☐ Actions denying his/her own nature: like making another God equal to him/herself, abandoning his/her divine attributes and denying him/herself (2 Tim 2:13).
- ☐ Changing his/her eternal plans: God's eternal plans are unchangeable.
- ☐ Making a stone so large that he/she cannot lift it. For God to make a stone so large that he/she cannot lift it means that God must contradict his/her omnipotence. God cannot contradict him/herself.

However, these are not objects of power and so do not limit the power of God but rather reflects God's holiness and character. There are two ways that God exercises his/her power; thus a distinction may be drawn between God's absolute power and his/her ordinate power. Absolute power means that God may work directly without secondary causes e.g. in creation. The works of providence illustrate the ordinate power whereby God uses secondary

causes (Thiessen, 1996:82). In either case, God is exercising his/her divine efficiency.

Evangelicals (Grudem 1994, Erickson 1998) all affirm the omnipotence of God, however they do not hold to the nominalist tradition in theology, of which William of Occam was the most famous representative. He developed the distinction between God's absolute power and his/her ordinate power. It is to this distinction that Calvin objected. Some nominalists took a more extreme view, God has the power to do logically contradictory thing as cited by Bavinck (1977:243):

> God was able to sin, to go astray, to die, to be changed into a stone or an animal, to change bread into the body of Christ, to effect contradictions, to undo the past, to make false what was true and true what was false. God is pure indifference or arbitrariness, absolute potency, without content: God is nothing but may become anything.

This is how nominalist views the absolute power. God is in their view above the laws of rationality, truth and morality, free to act against them or change them as he/she wishes. Others like Schleiermacher and Strauss denied the absolute power of God and insisted that God's power is limited to what he/she accomplishes. Berkhof (1981:80) repudiated the view of Schleiermacher and Strauss by asserting that:

> In that sense we can speak of the *potentia absoluta*, or absolute power, of God. This position must be maintained over against those who, like Schleiermacher and Strauss, hold that God's power is limited to that which He actually accomplishes. But in our assertion of the absolute power of God it is necessary to guard against misconceptions. The Bible teaches us on the one hand that the power of God extends beyond that which is actually realized, Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:27; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 3:9; 26:53. We cannot say, therefore, that what God does not bring to realization, is not possible for Him. But on the other hand it also indicates that there are many things which God cannot do. *He/She* can

> neither lie, sin, change, nor deny Himself, Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18; Jas. 1:13,17. There is no absolute power in Him that is divorced from *his/her* perfections, and in virtue of which *he/she* can do all kinds of things which are inherently contradictory (*italics added*).

Erickson (1994:302-303) states that there are certain qualification to the all-powerful character of God i.e. God is able to do all things that are proper objects of his/her power. These qualifications have been previously listed as the things God cannot do.

I shall therefore present an evangelical definition of omnipotence as God who can do anything that is logically possible and is consistent with his/her other attributes**.** This definition is in keeping with the historical teaching of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

6.3. Boyd's understanding of Omnipotence

Process theology, the father of open theism, insists that God is limited in his/her power. This system of thought in which God is portrayed as having something less than perfect power is the reasoning that open theists use to deal with the problem of evil. Within this view, one could speculate that although God is perfectly good and thus would prefer a world devoid of evil, it is not within his/her power to bring such a world about. Just as open theism robs God of his/her perfect knowledge, especially his/her infallible

foreknowledge, so it subverts God's almighty power. The open theist cannot confess the first line of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Thus Pinnock (2001:121) argues: "We must not define omnipotence as the power to determine everything but rather as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises." God's power is restricted by the freedom of human beings and the fulfilment of God's plans for history is dependent on the choices we make. In many particulars, therefore, the course of history is finally contingent upon human choices rather than divine wisdom. Boyd (2000:97) articulates this position most clearly when he states that:

> It might help if we think of God's power and our say-so in terms of percentages. Prior to creation, God possessed 100 percent of all power. He possessed all the say-so there was. When the Trinity decided to express their love by bringing forth a creation, they invested each creature (angelic and human) with a certain percentage of their say-so. The say-so of the triune God was at this point no longer the only one that determined how things would go. God's personal creations now possessed a measure of ability to influence what would occur. This was necessary (as was the risk that went with it) if God's creations were to be personal beings who had the ability to make authentic choices, including the choice whether to enter a loving relationship with him.

Open theists therefore, in their redefinition of God's omnipotence, replace it with "omnicompetence". Ironically, Boyd who decries the Calvinistic determinism as God creating pre-programmed automatons, are quite comfortable with the figure of God as a chess master who is able by his/her "omnicompetence" to outmanoeuvre his/her opponents and so, despite setbacks along the way, finally checkmate his/her adversaries and achieve his/her goals. Boyd (2000:127-128) asserts the following:

> God's perfect knowledge would allow him to anticipate every possible

> move and every possible combination of moves, together with every possible response which he might make to each of them, for every possible agent throughout history … Isn't a God who perfectly anticipates and wisely responds to everything a free agent might do more intelligent than a God who simply knows what a free agent will do? Anticipating and responding to possibilities takes problem-solving intelligence. Simply possessing a crystal-ball vision of what's coming requires none.

Thus the assumption of the "omnicompetence" of God within open theism has the added feature of resourcefulness. Sanders (1998:162) in articulating his opinion on the omnicompetence of God states: "Sometimes the desires of God are stymied, but God is resourceful and faithfully works to bring good even out of evil situations." Therefore, since God is ingenious, rather than sovereign, it will come as no surprise that open theism rejects the idea of God's will. There is no room in the open theistic version of God for his/her eternal, unchangeable, all-comprehensive counsel, in which he/she has eternally purposed what he/she will do in time

Sanders (1988: 88) clearly explains this approach:

> God's activity does not unfold according to some heavenly blueprint whereby all goes according to plan. God is involved in a historical project, not an eternal plan. The project does not proceed in a smooth, monolithic way but takes surprising twists and turns because the divine human relationship involves a genuine give-and-take dynamic for both humanity and God.

Open theist therefore, believes in a God who is not in control of all things because he/she is restrained in his/her power. Thus, open theists understand the power of God to be that of "coercive" power which God uses very sparingly. Boyd (1994:45) responds to question concerning coercive power

by declaring that, subsequent to the creation of free moral agents, “God necessarily surrendered a degree of *his/her* power.” According to Boyd (1994:46), this measure of unilateral divine condescension was necessitated by the Creator’s desire to maintain the libertarian freedom of human beings created in his/her image. As a consequence of this self-imposed restriction, God does not “always get his/her way”. In this regard, God may be said to be both omnipotent and sovereign in that he/she is fully able to place boundaries upon the exercise of divine power when it is necessary to safeguard the contra-causal freedom of human choices and actions. As Boyd sees it, it is *utterly impossible* for God to be always in control, and yet allow free beings to exercise some control. Thus, to the extent that God ‘lends’ power away and thus God’s power only becomes persuasive. In articulating this perspective Boyd calls for a redefinition of how Evangelicals understands God’s sovereignty. In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views,* Boyd (2001:44) states that “some Christians use the word sovereignty as though it is synonymous with control” This loss of control thus limits the power of God to do that which God will to do. To delimit the will of God is to limit his/her power because God’s power is the outworking of his/her will. For Boyd limits God’s power to human free-will rather than God’s will. This strips God of his/her sovereignty and makes God dependent upon his/her own creatures. Boyd therefore must concede that God is not the only power in the universe that he/she has created. Not only does God have to rule with them in mind, God may even have to contend with them. Boyd therefore does not see God as a being who is completely in control and exercising exhaustive sovereignty because open

theist believe that there is no single and all-determining divine will that controls all things. Boyd (2001:45) also claims that God shares power:

> Despite the various claims made by some today that we must protect the sovereignty of God by emphasizing his absolute control over creation and denouncing the openness view, I submit that we ought to denounce the view that God exercises total control over everything, for a truly sovereign God is powerful enough to share power and face a partly open future.

Frame in his criticism of open theism demonstrates that open theism even denies that God has complete control over creation. Frame (2001:112) states that open theism limits the power of God to espouse human libertarian freedom.

6.4. Summary

In the preceding section I have articulated a historical understanding of the omnipotence of God and also reflected on how open theists view God's power. It has been established from history that the early Church Fathers understood that God is the all-powerful Creator who preserves and governs everything in the universe as well.

It has therefore been established that the open theistic interpretation of God's power limits God to the direction of his/her creation. This perspective of God's relationship with creation is not found in Scripture or in the history of the early church. Within Evangelicalism the term "omnipotence" is used to describe an all-powerful God's on-going relationship with his/her creation.

The acceptance of the biblical doctrine of omnipotence enables one to avoid common errors in thinking about God's relationship with creation. The biblical teaching is not *deism* (which teaches that God created the world and then essentially abandoned it), or *pantheism* (which teaches that the creation does not have a real, distinct existence in itself, but is only part of God), but *providence* – which teaches that although God is actively related to and involved in the creation at each moment, the creation is separate from him/her. Moreover, the biblical teaching does not demonstrate that events in creation are determined by *chance* (or randomness); nor are they determined by impersonal *fate* (or determinism), but by God, who is the personal yet infinitely powerful Creator and Lord. The open theistic perspective stands in stark contrast to this evangelical understanding.

Conclusion

Boyd attempts to delimit God and thereby convince his readers that such an open view is the best way to a good God and evil. He (2001:8) concludes that, based "on the authority of God's Word", the future is not exhaustively settled or known by God. Basinger (1995:133) writes:

> It is important to note that this debate is not, as some have implied, over whether God is omniscient (or fully omniscient). To say that God is omniscient is to say simply that God knows all that can be known. And those of us who deny that God has exhaustive knowledge of the future do not deny that God knows all that can be known. The debate is over what it is that can be known. That is, the debate is over what it means to say God is omniscient.

However, Boyd's development of the case for openness does not limit itself to Scripture. Even while claiming to be a thoroughgoing Biblicist and evangelical on this issue, Boyd's (2000:8-12) statements reveal the foundation of his view. He argues that open theism is the "best philosophically compelling view available", while at the same time claiming to base his beliefs exclusively on Scripture.

Boyd, who has strong philosophical training and leanings, states categorically (2000:17): "The debate between open and traditional understandings of divine foreknowledge is completely a debate over the nature of the future: … that is the question at hand, nothing else." From these statements, it seems clear that Boyd's approach is essentially a philosophical one, and not a theological one. It is based far more on the logic of human thought than on Scripture, which Evangelicals hold to be divinely inspired. I therefore conclude that Boyd understanding of God and the knowability of the future by God has been influenced by philosophers, rather than extracted from the biblical text through exegeses.

Boyd appears to have been so driven to demand human freedom at the expense of God's sovereign will and exhaustive foreknowledge that he, in effect, deifies humans and humanizes God. Open theism treads dangerously close to fulfilling the atheist Voltaire's (1694-1778 CE) often quoted observation: "If God made us in His image, we have certainly returned the compliment." The open theistic concept of God's attributes is rather an extreme view outside the acceptable and appropriate boundaries of Evangelicalism. Even more so, open theism is found to be a radical

reformulation of this doctrine under investigation and by in its own admission a radical departure from Evangelicalism. Tertullian (in *Five Books Against Marcion* 2.5 in *ANF* Vol. III: 301) in his response to Marcion notes that we must vindicate those attributes in the Creator that are being called into question.

Chapter 7

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

Introduction

The problem of evil is regarded as one of the most serious objections to theism and to Christianity. In *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoyevsky (1954:224) states "the earth is soaked from its crust to the centre with the tears of humanity". The cries of humanity have constantly been a challenge to the church to reconcile the attributes of God's knowledge, power and goodness with all the suffering in the world. Richard Dawkins[49], an atheist, would use the suffering of this world to conclude that there is no God. In trying to deal with the problem of evil Boyd in his book *Is God To Blame?* (2003: 21) asserts: "The most important aspect of faith is our mental picture of God. The way we actually envision God may be reflected in the theology we articulate." In articulating a picture of a limited God, open theism leaves suffering people with a God who is not able to deal with evil and suffering.

[49] Professor Richard Dawkins was the first holder of the Charles Simonyi Chair in the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford. (Simonyi was chief architect of Microsoft Word, Excel etc.) . For 18 years Dawkins attacked Christianity and the God of the Bible from this well-funded position, with rather more passion than he promoted "the public understanding of science"! See "Dawkin, Richards" in *Science in a Contemporary World*

This image thus distorts their concept of God. In this chapter I will articulate how the traditional view of God can, in fact, help us to cope with evil and suffering.

The Evangelical view of God (which finds its understanding of God's attributes rooted in historical theology) is held by open theists as particularly vulnerable to the argument that arises from the problem of evil due to God's attributes and direct activity in the world. Boyd's works are aimed at persuading his readers that open theism better shields God from the accusation of cruelty, injustice or malevolent apathy; thus suggesting that open theism is better suited to deal with the problem of evil and suffering. In this section I will show that it is within the classical understanding of God that Christians can find their best resources for dealing with the problem of evil from a theological, practical and even philosophical perspective. Evil is categorized as "moral" or "natural" evil. The first refers to the wrongful action of human beings. Natural evil, on the other hand, includes pain and suffering that are not attributable to immorality: earthquakes, famine and flooding etc .. To define evil, then, is no easy task. St. Augustine maintains that evil is the "absence of good". Aquinas, following a similar argument, (in *Summa Theologia* Question 48. 1&2)[50] writes: "Being and perfection of any nature is good. Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature, Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good …. For since being, as such, is good, the absence of one implies the

[50] http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1048.htm.

absence of the other." Thus evil can be defined as a departure from the way things ought to be: whether morally as in the case of sin, or naturally as in the case of pain and suffering. Therefore from a practical perspective there arises difficulty in relating to God, given the abiding presence of evil in our lives and the world. How can I trust a God who allows so much injustice and suffering to continue? I will set out to demonstrate that the best strategy for dealing with this type of question arises from a classical view of God rather than that of open theism.

Helm (1993:193) writes that in order to address the problem of evil one must reflect on the nature of evil, its origin and character. Thus, using the biblical data, evil is not to be identified with the body, or with certain places, but its source is in the human will, in rebellion against and departure from God's rule (1Jn. 3:4). The mystery is that those whom God created as good defected from that goodness, evil being instigated by satanic influence.

7.1. An Evangelical perspective on evil and suffering

Evangelicalism begins theologically with the sovereignty of God: the transcendent, personal, infinite Being who created and rules over heaven and earth. He/She actively identifies with the suffering of his/her people, is accessible to them through prayer and has by his/her sovereign free will devised a plan whereby creatures may be redeemed.

Evangelicals understand natural evil and suffering as a result of the disobedience of Adam. Adam and Eve while still sinless are placed in an

idyllic garden, where they live in a happy relationship with their creator and creation. The “day” they disobey God they commit moral evil (Gen. 3). In trying to articulate the nature, essence or identity of evil, John McArthur (2000), in a sermon on “The Origin of Evil”, gives a very clear understanding of how Evangelicals understand evil by explaining that to disobey God was to initiate evil. Evil is not the presence of something. Evil is the absence of righteousness. You can’t create evil, because evil doesn’t exist as a created entity. It doesn’t exist as a created reality. Evil is a negative. Evil is the absence of perfection. It’s the absence of holiness. It’s the absence of goodness. It’s the absence of righteousness. Evil became a reality only when creatures chose to disobey. McArthur (2000) further explains that evil is not a created thing. Evil is not a substance. Evil is not an entity. Evil is not a being. Evil is not a force. Evil is not some floating spirit. Evil is a lack of moral perfection. God created absolute perfection. Wherever a lack of that exists, sin exists. And that cannot exist in the nature of God or in anything that God makes. Evil comes into existence when God’s creatures fall short of the standard of moral perfection. Evangelicals, like Aquinas reject the idea that God is the author or the cause of evil, while at the same time to agree that God did not create all things is to deny the sovereignty of God. Like St. Augustine, evangelicals respond that evil is not a thing or a substance that can be created. It is rather the lack of a good thing that God has made. Therefore evil is a deprivation of some particular good. The essence of the position can be stated in the following way:

- God created every substance.

- ☐ Evil is not a substance (but a privation in a substance)
- ☐ Therefore, God did not create evil.

Evil is not a substance, but a corruption of the good substance that God made. It exists only in another but not by itself. Thus, evangelicals understand the origin of evil as a result of creatures using their freewill to disobey God. Therefore it can be argued that evangelicals follow St, Augustine or the classical understanding of the origin of evil.

However, another important part of evangelical faith is that God cares for us, and the details and direction of our lives are under the purposeful control of God, who does use suffering to build character, and therefore makes it worthwhile (Rom. 8:27).The life of Joseph as recounted in the book of Genesis provides evangelicals with a vivid portrait of how moral evil can rebound for the greater good. It should also be noted that evangelicals do not presume to be able to explain things. Admittedly, some moral evils are so horrific that they defy the imagination and one can only ask “Why”? Evangelicals confess that no matter how impossible a situation might seem it is always redeemable, for God’s power has no limits. To limit God’s power because of our limited and finite understanding would be presumptuous and arrogant. Thus evangelicals would have an *a fortiori* (‘from the stronger’) biblical ground for believing that God has good purposes in all moral evil and that we are just blind to or limited in our understanding of these purposes. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross shows how God is able to use the murder of Jesus to redeem humanity. Evangelicals understand that God is thus capable of redeeming the worst of all evils. Therefore, an *a fortiori*

argument is used to show that there are no acts “too evil” for God to redeem, thus bringing out the greater good. It then can be argued that within evangelicalism there seems be a combination of the theodicy’s of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus, both of whom explain evil and suffering without limiting the attributes of God.

7.2. How do Evangelicals Resolve the Problem of Evil?

To resolve the philosophical problem of evil, evangelicals propose an explanation as to why God would permit evil by merging the views of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus. Harold (2009:210-216) suggests that we evangelicals should not ask “Why am I suffering?” but rather “What is the meaning of this suffering?” I propose that in this way evangelicals are better able to give a reason for the evil and suffering in this world. Helm (1993:200) states that God could have prevented evil in the world by creating human beings who freely only choose to do that which is morally right, but God who is omnipotent and omniscient chose not to create such humans.

Evangelicals generally take the approach St. Augustine (Enchiridion XI)[51] held to:

> For the Almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being *him/herself* supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if *God* were not so omnipotent and good that *he/she* can bring good even out of evil (*italics* added).

[51] See http://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/augenchiridion/enchiridion01-23.html

Thus, St. Augustine asserts that God would not have allowed evil to occur unless he/she had not been able to bring good out of that evil. This is not the same as the Irenaean view that states that God allowed evil to bring out good but rather that God uses that which is evil to bring out good. Evangelicals do not hold to the view that God created evil but rather that its source is in the use of human will, in rebellion against and departure from God's rule, in lawlessness (1Jn. 3:4). God created humanity as good and with free will, which deflected it from that goodness. Thus evangelicals would concur with St. Augustine that God is not the cause of evil because God cannot be morally bad, and the problem of evil cannot be used to show that God is morally bad. So, while evangelicals assert that God allowed evil to occur in the world, those reasons for the suffering and evil are revealed to us in two possible ways, namely: through the greater good defence: punitive evil (justification) and the greater good defence: non-punitive evil (ethical). I shall deal with non-punitive evil first.

7.2.1 The Greater Good: Non-punitive evil

Evangelicals would argue that the justification for permitting of suffering which is a necessary condition for the production of certain good is simply that suffering produces these goods. The good that suffering produces outweighs the evil. This is an application of the theodicy of St. Irenaeus and John Hick. Although evangelicals would disagree that God's creation of the

first human beings were not perfect, they would agree with St. Irenaeus that God allows evil to bring human beings into their perfect state.

- ☐ Suffering builds character

Evangelicals would argue that there is justification for God to allow evil as it is necessary for the building of character. The value of the good that suffering produces far outweighs the suffering itself. Evangelicals view as part of the Christian life through which the comfort of God can be experienced and character is transformed. Thus evangelicals justify the non-punitive approach to God's permitting of evil by maintaining that it produces in everyone benefits which outweigh the evil and which logically would not have occurred if the evil had not occurred. Evangelicals understand that suffering comes only if God permits it and that God's purposes are accomplished through the suffering we experience. Thus we understand evil as not aimless, nor inflicted by fate. God's aim in allowing suffering is to encourage Christians not to rely on themselves but on the God who delivered Jesus – and will deliver us. Clement (1994:24-24) interpreting Paul in 2 Corinthians. 1:8-9 writes:

> Paul is convinced that his descent into abject despair was deliberately engineered by God's providence … Doubt, uncertainty and intellectual insecurity are experiences we pass through to discover faith. The opposite of faith, according to Paul, is not doubt but confidence "in the flesh"… that one can cope on one's own; … that one does not need the grace of God …. The people who are farthest from the faith are … those who are too sure of themselves … God had to teach even him, the great apostle, not to rely on himself, but "on God who raises from the dead".

Thus evangelicals respond to evil and suffering by focusing on God and remaining steadfast in hope during suffering because of who God is and what he/she is teaching us through suffering. Despite the pain that suffering brings, evangelicals also understand that suffering is part of the purifying process of the Christian life. Grudem (1988:78) comments that the image of a refiner's fire suggests that such a suffering purifies and strengthens the Christian. Marshall (1997:157) states:

> Are we to say that God intends his/her people to suffer? Hard though it may seem, the answer to this question is affirmative. It was God's will that Christ should suffer to redeem his/her people and Christ was obedient to that will. To be sure, the need arose only because of the evil in the world, but in the world where evil exists defeat is possible only through suffering …. It is right to say that God's will for us is suffering because there is no other way that evil can be overcome. When we suffer, it is not a sign of God's lack of love or concern for us …. Those who suffer can confidently place themselves in the care of God.

The Christian who suffers has to trust God, rely on his/her perfect will, entrust their life to God. Evangelicals understand suffering as something to be expected because through suffering God fulfils his/her divine plan by moulding his/her people and demonstrates his/her glory, when Christians persevere and are triumphant by being faithful to God. This perseverance in the midst of suffering brings an understanding of who God is but perseverance also builds character and character hope. McGrath (1995b:73) states that suffering gets rid of the dross of all the worldly support we foolishly invent for our faith. Through suffering we come to learn that God is our strength, sustenance and life and hope.

- Suffering and Hope

Suffering and hope are interrelated. McGrath (1995b:50) observes that there is a strong sense in which it is true that the only way that leads to hope passes through suffering. I define hope as the unshuttering confidence that God is faithful to do all that he/she has promised. Hope is sensible in the light of God's character and suffering then finds meaning and is endurable in the light of hope.

Thus hope lives between the "now and the not yet". How then do evangelicals know that what hope looks forward to will come to pass? I suggest that hope is inseparably linked to God's promises. Bruce (1994:130-131) states that "our hope is fixed in the general order of things, where the promises of God will be made good to his/her people in perpetuity". It is this hope in God and who he/she is that spurs us on to trust him/her while we participate in and work through the pain and suffering, knowing that God will ultimately deliver us from our predicament. Because Evangelical view the Bible as being trustworthy for faith an life, it gives the evangelical believer unshakeable hope to know that God has promised to be with us when we pass through the raging fires and trough deep suffering and affliction. It is the promise that God will not forsake us but will remain with us to the very end (Heb 13:5; Matt 28:20). God's promises become an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Jewett (1981: 112) point out that, "hope is the anchor to the soul, not in the sense of guaranteeing the immortality of the soul, but in the sense of providing a stabilising effect on the whole person; being a basis for mental health in a world that seems to defy sanity. It hold firm and safe when everything deteriorates."

- Suffering and the Cross

The framework of an evangelical response to suffering is based on the cross. Evangelicals thus understand this hope more clearly as seen through the cross. Suffering and the cross go together. Only within the context of the cross is the basis of the evangelical response to suffering provided. Zacharias (1998:216-217) correctly noted that:

> When we come to Jesus at the cross, where love, holiness and suffering combine, we find both the answer to why we suffer and the strength to live this mortal frame for him. As we come to the cross and from there live our lives for him; we make the extraordinary discovery that the cross and the resurrection go together.

The cross then becomes the focus where evil, innocent suffering, malice and human suffering is portrayed at its climax. For in the cross we see the wrath of God on one hand and on the other hand we see his love and righteousness revealed. The cross is the manifestation of God's power, identification, participation, endurance and transformation. For in the cross lies the overwhelming and ultimate victory over evil. The understanding of the cross and our solidarity with the suffering of Christ combined with the perfectly redemptive nature of his work guarantee that none of our pain or sorrow is wasted. The whole of Christ suffering achieved good, and so would our suffering. Our suffering and sharing in pain as Christ did on the cross is valuable for the direct knowledge of God that it imparts. Adam (1990:219) states that "our deepest suffering as much as our highest joys may themselves be direct vision into the inner life of God. From this perspective pain and suffering endured is yet another portal into the mind and glory of God. Adam (1990:218) again notes:

> The good of the beatific vision, face to face intimacy with God is simply incommensurate with any merely non-transcendent good or ills a person might experience. Thus, the good of the beatific face-to-face intimacy with god would engulf... even the horrendous evils humans experience below.

To know the beauty of the Lord in an intimate fashion is an incomparable good and suffering is a vehicle for closer divine acquaintance. Many Evangelicals will report the experience of drawing closer to God came through their trails.

Thus, for evangelicals God remains the sovereign Creator and Lord of history who is not apathetic to the world or to humanity; God is not simply a transcendent power of destiny to whom one must submit. God is not an impersonal sphere of all being in one sense of pantheism, in which the individual forgetting the joy of suffering is lost to him/herself; but rather God is a loving God who offers him/herself in Christ Jesus. God in Christ is a sympathetic God who understands our pain and suffering. In Christ the theodicy question arises between God the Father/Mother and Christ when Jesus Christ cries out: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Mk. 15:34). In the resurrection of Christ, one who dies in the space of the sinner and one who makes the ungodly righteous, the theodicy between God and Jesus Christ is finally completed. In this evangelicals see from the perspective of the cross that suffering is overcome as we live through the power of Christ’s resurrection. The cross is the ultimate symbol of God’s victory over sin and suffering. In the cross therefore God has done something about our suffering in the present and will do something about suffering in the future. King (1963:46) rightfully observes that evangelicals therefore see the

cross as a magnificent symbol of love conquering suffering and light overcoming darkness. For the suffering we face prepares us for glory when suffering and evil shall ultimately be defeated.

Because God knows everything, he/she knows the good purpose for all evil, even if we do not. Since God is both omniscient and good, he/she has a good purpose for everything. Therefore, this can be stated in the following way:

- An omniscient and good God has a good purpose for everything.
- There is some evil for which we see no good purpose.
- Therefore, there is a good purpose for all evil, even if we do not see it.

The fact that human beings do not see the purpose for some evil does mean there is none. This inability to see the purpose for evil does not disprove God's omniscience, omnipotence and goodness: it merely reveals our ignorance. Therefore one occasions suffering can be a part of God's loving parental discipline that he/she uses on his/her children in holiness (Heb. 12:5-11). Suffering can at times be appointed by God for the strengthening, purification and spiritual growth of his/her children (e.g. Rom. 5:3-5; Jam. 1:2-4). Suffering and pain can expose human frailty and weakness so that the strength of God shines all the more gloriously.

7.2.2. Punitive Evil

Evangelicals also understand that God uses moral evil, evil actions flowing from human decisions that are permitted by God, in part as punishment for

other evils. St. Augustine (as cited in Helm 1993:209) claimed that “Vices in the soul arise from its own doing; and the moral difficulty that ensures that vice is the penalty which it suffers”. While God allows evil, like St. Augustine evangelicals do not see God as being the author of evil. St Augustine (as cited in Helm 1993: 209) also states that if one believes that God is good, then God cannot be the do evil. God assigns rewards to the righteous but judgement to the wicked, punishment that are evil for those who endure them.

If God is not the author of evil, it follows that the one reason God allows evil for only one reason, is that the justice of God might be upheld. Therefore it can be concluded that evil is ordained by God as a punishment of that first evil. Why then does God allow this evil in the first place since it is presumably perfectly consistent with the justice of God that no moral evil should be permitted? St Augustine proposed an answer that finds agreement within evangelical circles (Grudem 1994, Erickson 1998) because human beings using their free-will to make an immoral decision, as were in the first evil in the Garden of Eden that God allows evil and suffering to be. Thus evangelicals understand that some suffering (not all) is punishment for sin and God bringing his/her judgement on those who are opposed to him/her (e.g. Is. 10:5- 19, 2 Thess. 1:6). It is therefore consistent within the evangelical tradition to argue that God allows acts of free-will, some of which are evil, however also ordains other evil which are punishment for the evil done. Thus God allows evil as punishment so that justice can reign in the universe as a moral order.

Therefore, it can be concluded that God allows evil and punishment but also for development and discipline. Helm (1993:215) states in Christ both are linked, in that his atonement is both the enduring of punishment for moral evil and the source of renewal through which the character of God is fully manifested.

7.3. Boyd's Open Theism and the Problem of Evil

Clearly, one of the crucial commitments of open theism is the rejection of God's knowledge of the future and free actions of human beings. Tied very closely to this is God's inability to control such future free actions including at times, some deeply tragic occurrences. So while, God feels the pain of our suffering, God is often unable to prevent it because God himself did not know that it is going to occur. Thus when evil occurs, we are not to blame God because he/she feels as badly about our suffering as we do. In the midst of suffering Christians can be comforted with the assurance that God had nothing to do with their suffering and that God's disposition towards them is one of uncompromising love. Therefore, Hasker (1994:139) confidently argues that the openness model is in a better position than classical theism to deal with the issues raised by the problem of evil. Open theists take the problem extremely seriously, and they believe they address it more satisfactorily than do traditional theists.

Hasker (1989:191-201) argues at length that open theism handles the problem of sin far better than the traditional way of viewing sin. In particular, it is asserted that traditional Christian theism fails to absolve God of guilt or responsibility for evil and should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of the attractive openness model of divine providence.

According to open theists, the problem originates with the initial sin of Adam – a view that most theists would agree with. Furthermore, Hasker argues that God's lack of control over human actions makes him/her a risk taker. Boyd (2001:23) agrees that when God created human beings with free will, he/she took a risk, because creatures will not necessarily choose what God wants. However, God values human freedom so much that he/she has placed it beyond even God's ability to curtail, despite his/her foreknowledge and relationship with the future. Griffin (2004:292) ties the expression of value to the degree of freedom when he writes that "no significant degree of intrinsic value would be possible without a significant degree of freedom".

Regarding this idea of freedom, Boyd opens his book *God at War* with the story of Zosia, a child tortured and killed by Nazis in front of her mother. Viewing her experience through the words of the hymn, My Times Are in Thy Hand by foster Loyd, Boyd (1997:38-39) writes:

> Again, if we have the courage to allow the antinomy between the lyrics of this hymn and Zosia's tortured screams to engage us on a concrete level, the antinomy borders on the unbearable. What does it mean to assert that the hand of the all-powerful and all loving Father "will never cause his child a needless tear" when asserted in the vicinity of a child who has just had her eyes plucked out and of the screams of Zosia's terrorised mother? In this concrete context, does not suggesting that this event came from the hand of God, and that it came about "as best as it seemed to thee", come close to depicting God on Hitlerian terms?

> What is more, would not such a conception significantly undermine the godly urgency one should have to confront such evil as something that God is unequivocally against? The Nazis' agenda somehow here seems to receive divine approval. Yet while we are to view the Nazis' agenda as being diabolically evil, we are apparently supposed to accept that God's agenda in ordaining or allowing the Nazis' behaviour is perfectly good.

Further to this, Boyd argues that the Bible was written from the perspective of a "warfare worldview". As Boyd (1997:20) describes it, this world-view:

> … is predicated on the assumption that divine goodness does not completely control or in any sense will evil; rather, good and evil are at war with one another. This assumption obviously entails that God is not now exercising exhaustive, meticulous control over the world. In this worldview, God must work with, and battle against, other created beings. While none of these beings can ever match God's own power, each has some degree of genuine influence within the cosmos. In other words, a warfare worldview is inherently pluralistic. There is no single, all-determinative divine will that coercively steers all things, and hence there is here no supposition that evil agents and events have a secret divine motive behind them. Hence too, one need not agonize over what ultimately good, transcendent divine purpose might be served by any particular evil event.

Unfortunately statements such as this imply, according Payne and Spencer (2001:267), that God is not able to prevent evil events from happening, a conclusion that does little to reinforce one's hope for the future. Open theists, however, scoff at this conclusion, for they believe that God can intervene. As a result, they claim that God will surely overcome his/her enemies in the *eschaton*. As Boyd (1997:287) writes, "hence the ability of any within the angelic or human society of God's creation to rebel freely against God shall someday come to an end". Boyd (2001:14-15) also argues that it is impossible that a good and loving God can allow evil to prevail and that God

cannot bring about good from that which is evil. Boyd (2001:430) thus develops the term “warfare theodicy” as:

> The understanding of evil that follows from a Trinitarian warfare worldview argues that the scope and intensity of suffering we experience in the world are not adequately accounted for when viewed against the backdrop of a cosmic war between God and Satan. Much evil in the world is the cross fire of this age-long (but not eternal) cosmic battle. It is in most cases futile; therefore, to search for divine reasons for some episodes of suffering, though God will always work with his/her people to bring good out of evil, often with such effectiveness that it may seem that the evil was planned all along. The reason why God created a world in which a cosmic war could break out is articulated in the six theses that structure the Trinitarian warfare theodicy.

Therefore, the answer to the problem of evil for Boyd (2001:16) “lies in the nature of love”. God created the world for the sake of love, to establish a loving relationship with humanity. Because of this God created human beings with the capacity to love, but also with the capacity to withhold love as well. Therefore, Boyd (2001:14) asserts that it is not reasonably possible to create creatures with the ability to love without risking the possibility of great evil.

Boyd develops this in six theses:

- ☐ Love must be chosen

Boyd (2001:53) argues that the very nature of love requires that it either be chosen or rejected. To demonstrate this, Boyd (2001:55) uses the example of a man who implants a computer chip in his wife’s brain to make her always do loving things. He (2001:59) asks if the actions of the wife would be considered genuine love. Boyd concludes that the action cannot be out of love because her “love” is caused by external forces not

chosen freely. Thus being free to choose is the final cause of and an explanation for the problem of evil: therefore God is not to blame.

- ☐ Freedom implies risk

If love implies choice and human beings are the final cause of their own actions, God took a risk when he/she created such beings. According to Boyd (2001:86), this requires one to believe that the actions and decisions of God are based on ignorance. Since human beings are the ultimate creators of their actions, not even God can know their actions in advance. Hence we cannot blame God for the evil that breaks loose and creates suffering in a world he/she has created.

- ☐ Risk entails moral responsibilities

When God bestows on human beings the capacity to love, he/she gives them the ability to help others; thus God also gives them the capacity to reject love and harm others. Boyd (2001:165) states that God cannot protect us from the harm that others might cause us because by God doing so means robbing them of their freedom to choose. Thus the nature of love itself requires that God puts us at risk from each other and thereby makes us morally responsible for each other.

- ☐ Moral responsibility is proportionate to the potential to influence others

Boyd (2001:170) argues that the greater a creature's ability for good, the greater its capacity for evil. He states that lower animals have a lesser capacity for love and therefore a lower capacity for evil. Human beings

have a greater potential to love, therefore a greater capacity to do evil. Angels have the greatest capacity to love therefore that greatest capacity for evil. Using this principle Boyd explains why God took such great risk. The greater the good God aims to realize in creation, the greater the evil God risks should his/her creation turn against him/her. Thus God is always at risk, not knowing how his/her creatures would respond to love.

- ☐ The power to influence is irrevocable

In this fifth thesis Boyd argues that God cannot immediately destroy every creature that turns to evil. The power of a creature to love or hate has no meaning without time or what Boyd (2001:181) calls “temporal duration”. Thus time gives meaning to love, freedom and moral responsibility and when God gives his/her creatures the power to choose, God has to within limits endure its misuse.

- ☐ The power to influence is finite

Creatures are by nature finite, thus their possibilities for choice, actions and influence are inherently limited. In the use of our choices we determine the eternal being we become (Boyd, 2001:188). Those who continue to choose evil will eventually give up their freedom and as it were become evil itself. Once this has happened, God will no longer allow them to influence others.

7.4. The Function of Satan

In his book *God at War* (2001) Boyd develops a view of spiritual warfare. In this work Boyd concludes that history is a picture of a war propelled by an on-going spiritual battle between God and his/her angels and Satan and his angels. Satan, according to Boyd (2001:206), is the source of all natural evil. Blaming Satan for natural evils such as death, diseases, birth defects, mental illness, storms and earthquakes enables Boyd to encompass all forms of evil in his synthesis warfare theodicy. Every instance of evil originates in the choice of the creature that was given freedom for the sake of love. Boyd (2001:129) elaborates:

> When one possesses a vital awareness that in between God and humanity there exist a vast society of spiritual beings who are quite like humans in possessing intelligence and freewill, there is simply no difficulty in reconciling the reality of evil with the goodness of the supreme God.

Boyd declares that God created a good and non-defective creation and that God does not will the destruction and terror that come upon humanity through evil. Boyd (2001:182-183) asserts that Satan invades and disturbs God's good creation and uses it as a weapon to cause harm and spread destruction. Thus Satan's aim is to destroy God's work by recruiting human beings into his service. In Boyd's view the understanding of spiritual warfare is another advantage for the development of an adequate theodicy. For Boyd the power of Satan prevents God from merely controlling evil and makes it

necessary for God to war against him. Thus, God's power to deal with the opposing forces of the devil is limited.

Thus, for Boyd, this position is consistent with the omnipotent and perfect goodness of God. God is omnipotent but limits him/herself to certain actions based on the freedom that he/she has granted to his/her creatures. Because God has created beings who love, he/she must allow for the possibility of evil. Boyd (2001:61) concludes that once we see free will as the total origin of evil there should be no problem in understanding why God's character is not impugned by the evil in the world.

Another aspect that is worthy of investigation is Boyd's understanding of metaphysical dualism. Boyd (2001:424) defines metaphysical dualism as the conflict between good and evil that is a metaphysical necessity. However, Boyd (2001:424) declares that his spiritual warfare theodicy mediates between metaphysical dualism and metaphysical monism (only good in the ultimate reality) by maintaining that the conflict between good and evil is real, but not a metaphysical necessary and thus not eternal. So according to Boyd (2001:421) God' power is limited is dealing with evil because of shared power given to participating agents (also Satan) in bringing out the purposes of God. I define Satan as follows: A created, but superhuman, personal, evil, world-power, represented in Scripture as the adversary both of God and humanity. However, I posit that there is no war between God and Satan... no cosmic battle. Boyd's metaphysical dualism is unattainable because of who God is. Conway (2000: 74) defines of God as, which is also accepted within evangelicalism: [God is] the Being who possesses the following attributes:

immutability, immateriality, omnipotence, omniscience, oneness or indivisibility, perfect goodness and necessary existence. A plausible argument against dualism comes from Lewis (1958:33-34):

> Now what do we mean when we call one of them the Good Power and the other the Bad Power? Either we are merely saying that we happen to prefer the one to the other . . . or else we are saying that, whatever the two powers think about it, one of them is actually wrong, actually mistaken, in regarding itself as good. Now if we mean merely that we happen to prefer the first, then we must give up talking about good and evil at all. For good means what you ought to prefer quite regardless of what you happen to like at any given moment. If "being good" meant simply joining the side you happened to fancy, for no real reason, then good would not deserve to be called good. So we must mean that one of the two powers is actually wrong and the other actually right. But the moment you say that, you are putting into the universe a third thing in additional to the two Powers: some law or standard or rule of good which one of the powers conforms to and the other fails to conform to. But since the two powers are judged by this standard, then this standard, or the Being who made this standard, is farther back and higher up than either of them, and He will be the real God. In fact, what we meant by calling them good and bad turns out to be that one of them is in a right relation to the real ultimate God and the other in a wrong relation to Him

This very meaning of good and evil implies the nonsensical nature of any explanation of reality that says God and the devil have to coexist equally. This is the reason for Boyd as to why God cannot overcome evil in the present reality. Because if Satan influences human being to make poor moral decisions that causes pain and suffering God cannot intervene because of the free choice he/she had given to humanity. This understanding of metaphysical dualism is untenable because of the meaning God is omnipotent. Metaphysical dualism undermines the omnipotence of God. This is the case because any doctrine that implies Satan must exist in equal

power to God also implies that God is not omnipotent. The following argument explicates this point:

- ☐ If God is omnipotent, then God possesses the power to destroy (if he/she freely chooses) any, and every, being.
- ☐ If God possesses the power to destroy (if he/she freely chooses) any, and every, being, then no being (except God) is an all- powerful being'
- ☐ If Satan is not all powerful, then metaphysical dualism is false.

As Schaeffer (1990: 186) emphasized that Christianity is a creation-centred system. It begins with the fact that there is a Creator God who has existed forever. He/She has created all things, so there is nothing autonomous from him/her. While I do acknowledge that Satan tries all attempts to mess up the plan of God, Satan does not and will not succeed. However, divine revelation (1 Jn. 4:4) explicitly states, ". . . He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world" There is no shared power but rather "allowed power". Guthrie (1981:150) provides an excellent summary statement:

> There is a general belief that although the *kosmos* is God's world, it is under the influence of evil to such an extent that the word itself can be used of mankind at enmity with God. An impression of dualism is unavoidably created by this means, but it is never a metaphysical dualism, only an ethical. . . .There is also general agreement that spiritual agencies have a powerful influence. . . .There are constant evidences of the clash between God and Satan, but never any doubt about the ultimate issue. What is adumbrated in other NT books comes to expression in the ultimate overthrow of Satan in the book of Revelation.

Boyd in articulating his position on the function of Satan while claiming to have a mediated position does not define the position clearly. He describes as at the end God will triumph over Satan. In view of Boyd's open theism he seems to contradict himself. If God does not know the future because the future is not a reality this victory cannot be assured, this positions Boyd closer to metaphysical dualism than he wants to admit.

7.5. Some Problems with Boyd's Open Theodicy

Having described the argument that Boyd posits for suffering, I will now point out its weakness and its contradiction with the evangelical position.

Boyd, in trying to deal with the problem of evil, has diminished the attributes of God. When Boyd declares that God takes risks, he attacks the omniscience of God. In order to move away from putting the "blame on God" for evil he has created a metaphysical dualism: a war between good and evil whose outcome not even God knows because the future is open to God. Thus, in order to consider the theodicy of Boyd one needs to assess the cost of placing several evangelical Christian doctrines in jeopardy.

The first doctrine to come under attack is the doctrine of creation. Boyd argues that because God created creatures with free will, he/she therefore cannot act as the continual sustenance source. In other words, God has to do nothing for created agents to act. Thus Boyd adopts a form of deism, because Boyd's theodicy depends on the premise that God is not involved in

our events because free will is supreme: giving creation the power to exit and act by itself without any interaction with God.

The second doctrine to come under attack is God's foreknowledge. Because God takes a risk in creating creatures with free will, not knowing how they will respond to the use of this love, Boyd therefore denies God's knowledge of any evil acts. Boyd's theodicy therefore requires him to exclude God from knowing also the good acts of will. God cannot foreknow any free acts, be they good or evil, because free acts are self-determining. Boyd argues (2001:57) that we must be able to determine ourselves in relation to God's invitation to use our free will for both good and bad acts. Thus any future acts exist only as indeterminate possibilities that no one can actually know.

The third doctrine that is reformulated in the theodicy is that of God's power. While I do not dispute the activity of Satan and the activity of powerful evil spirits, what Boyd presents in his cosmic war perspective is a form of dualism. To understand God's power in light of the activities of the "demonic" forces that are formidable and running the cosmos … is no easy matter, even for God" is to limit the Divine. But is the power of the Devil the same as the power of God? I would argue that it is not, for the strength of the creature has nothing to do with the issue. What Boyd (2001:16-17, 359) proposes in his assessment of the activity of the Devil is that creatures are given freedom to do whatever they choose and God cannot intervene for to do so would be a "logical contradiction". God cannot give us the power to love and withhold it at the same time. Granted the assumption that the power to love is the same as the power to withhold, Boyd is correct in his assessment that one cannot

operate without the other. However, Boyd (2001:359) concludes that God's "inability" to involve him/herself in a "logical contradiction" limits God's ability to do his/her will – thus limiting God's power. Evangelicals understand that God's omnipotence is reflected in creating human with free-will. This by no means delimits God for only an omnipotent God can in the words of Kierkegaard (as cited in Versfeld 1972:121) "The most which, in the end, can be done for a being, more than any other thing which any being can do for itself is to make it free. It belongs precisely to the omnipotence of God." In this we see the goodness of God by making a dependent finite being independent. As Versfeld says (1974:121), only Omnipotence, which by his/her strong hand can so heavily grasp the world, can at the same time make him/herself do light that the created thing received independence to choose. If God in creating human beings had lost a little of his/her power, God then could not have made human beings with free-will.

Lastly, Boyd emphasises the love as "God's preeminent moral attribute." However, as Payne and Spencer (2001:277-278) cites McGrath who notes:

> That idea can easily be misleading. The full impact of culture upon the concept of God which we *want* to discover inevitably means, given the richness of the Christian understanding of God, that we isolate and identify one aspect of that understanding of God as normative. In western culture, this has led to the hard-won insight that "God is love" being construed to mean he is a sugar-coated benevolent God who endorses all the insights of western culture and lends them a spurious sanctity. This concept of God—which owes more to nature-religion than Christianity, and continually threatens to degenerate into sheer sentimentalism—arises largely, if not entirely, through dissociating the insight that "God is love" from the source of that insight—the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Stating the point succinctly, God's love must be viewed in the light of the atonement, not the atonement in the light of God's love. The Cross poses a particularly strong challenge to the assumptions of open theism.

Another challenge to open theism is the giving of thank in the midst of suffering as reflected in and Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4. Both of these text commands us to rejoice in suffering because God has promised to bring out good through suffering. But open theist believe that our suffering is gratuitous, with no divinely ordained good purpose in it, or that a good purpose that God has might not necessarily be accomplished in our lives, how then could we rejoice. These theological convictions within open theism would lead us from a confident rejoicing even in the midst of pain, to uncertainty, anxiety and perhaps even despair. Ware (2003:71) make is similar point with this regard to the biblical command to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18) and to give thanks for everything (Eph. 5:20) – including suffering. This makes sense only in light of that God has promised to work in and through everything to accomplish his/her good purposes. But this situation would be very different id the teaching of open theism were correct. If the suffering that comes into our lives is pointless, if God has no good intent, and all that that is does is harm, then there could no reason to give thanks in suffering and certainly not for suffering.

Another major problem arises from Boyd's open theism is how does God answer my prayers in a way I ask it. If God cannot know the future, then to what extent can one trust God? It is clear from the New Testament that God

delights to answer the prayers of his/her children. Jesus encourages his followers to ask (Matt. 7:7-8).

Jesus promises in Matthew 7:11 that God delights to his/her children good gifts in response to their prayers. This then constitutes another problem, If God does not have exhaustive knowledge how then we can trust him/her to give us that which is good.

Conclusion

Blount (2005:178) views the open theistic understanding of God as a God who takes risks and adapts his/her plans to changing situations. God's doing so results from the fact that he/she has created human beings as free creatures together with the assumption that God cannot know in advance what we will freely do. Such an understanding of the divine nature stands in marked contrast to traditional theism, which leads to a completely different understanding of the divine attributes. Evangelicals who uphold the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible must search for, develop, and clearly articulate a theodicy that does not deconstruct the traditional view of God, but must tenaciously preserve the integrity of biblical claims regarding God's nature and attributes. In short, any truly Christian evangelical theodicy must not sacrifice those non-negotiable elements that define and describe a "Christian Evangelical" position for the purpose of

providing a convenient answer to life's most vexing and perplexing problem, the problem of evil.

My conclusion is that the only genuine source of comfort and hope for evangelicals who are grappling with suffering and evil is a God who knows the future exhaustively and is not surprised by our suffering; a God who does not change in word and promise; and a God who has the power to act in any given situation. It involves our trusting in God who knows when to intervene to take away the suffering, and who is assuredly working out his/her good purposes wisely and efficaciously for his/her children. In this understanding of God one can rejoice and put one's trust and ultimate hope ... even when we suffer.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In this study I have attempted to address one of the deepest and most intractable problems in Evangelical theology: God and the presence of evil in the world. This study has engaged an historical investigation of the three attributes of God: God's omniscience, immutability and omnipotence; and discusses how they are interpreted by open theists in light of the problem of evil.

The doctrine of God profoundly affects virtually every major doctrine of Christianity. Evangelicals who hold to the claim that the Bible is the Word of God are entirely dependent on what is meant by God's nature or attributes. The strength of the traditional view concerning the attributes of God lies in after the fact, that through the years of the church's history, this understanding has predominated. Almost without interruption there has been a steam of testimony in the omniscience, immutability and omnipotence of God. Evangelical understanding of these attributes is within the orthodox understanding concerning these attributes. Tozer (1961:1) rightfully observes: "What comes into our mind about God when we think about God is the most important thing about us." So the concept of God that is developed in our minds will have a marked effect on our practical lives.

8.1. Some Good Features within Open Theism

Despite the open theist's disagreement with to how Evangelicals view the attributes of God, there are some good features that its advocates have brought to the table for theological consideration. Erickson (1988:84-85) notes six positive things that could be said about open theism:

- ☐ There is a genuine attempt to be biblical.
- ☐ There is an attempt to be holistic theologically, taking into account biblical, historical, philosophical, and practical theology.
- ☐ There is a recognition that theology is not done in a cultural vacuum and so we must be aware of cultural influences that affect our own interpretations.
- ☐ There is a correct understanding that Greek philosophy has probably been read into the Bible too much.
- ☐ There is a commendable desire to relate doctrine to the practical issues of life.
- ☐ The proponents have largely treated the issue "coolly and rationally, rather than emotively".

Stallard (2001:12) adds another three positive contributions from open theism:

> First, fatalism is viewed as a flawed option. Open theism, although it goes too far, rightly refuses to view the biblical data as expressing a stilted kind of theological determinism that removes the mystery of God's dealings with man. It is tempting, however, to note that open theism itself has removed the mystery of God's dealings with man only from the human side of the equation. Second, open theism has focused

> attention on passages that have had little attention in some evangelical circles. This is linked to a third good consequence of the discussions about the open view of God. There are some pockets of evangelicalism that are known for a posture of scholastic rationalism that leaves little room for the relational side of God. In spite of whatever faults it has, open theism does force evangelicals to think about the passages that assert the feelings and relationships that God has with respect to the world in general, and believers in particular.

However, as reflected in chapters four to six, open theists deny the immutability of God, the exhaustive knowledge of God and the omnipotence of God. In many ways the God of open theism is finite and imperfect, which is radically different from how evangelicals view God and his/her attributes. Tillich (1965:7-8) states that" religion involves an ultimate commitment and any commitment to a God who is less than ultimate is ultimately unworthy."

8.2 Some Practical Considerations

By their own admission, open theists confess an imperfect God, who is radically different from the God of the Bible and who said "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6). In times of joy and pain, it is in this God of the Bible that Evangelicals can place their absolute confidence. Our spiritual confidence in God can be no greater than the nature of God, thus impacting our godliness. Our confidence in God can be no higher than our concept of God. The view of the open theist falls short of being worthy of our utmost for God's highest. Evangelicals also look to the Bible because we understand that the Bible speaks with divine authority and is evidence of that which is infallible. The God of the open theist only makes guesses about free acts in the future. Thus it is plausible to assume that God is wrong at least part of

the time. Likewise if God's Word, the Bible, is fallible, then all predictions are conditional; this in turn undermines our confidence in the promises of God. If we cannot be sure that even God can keep his/her word, our uncertainty undermines our belief in God's faithfulness and care towards us.

The evangelical Christian life depends on being able to take God at his/her word, knowing that what God promises God will do. According to open theism, God does not know all things infallibly, so how do we know God can keep any of his/her promises? The Bible is filled with promises from God. These promises are said to be irrevocable and immutable (Rom. 11:29; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, in times of suffering the Evangelical understands that God will defeat evil or help the Christian overcome evil by giving him/her the strength to overcome. As seen in the narrative of Job and his suffering, the classical view of the attributes of God challenges and enables us as followers of God to turn our gaze towards God. One cannot allow circumstances – even horrific occurrence – to overwhelm one's view of God. Adams (1990:287) states that "a face to face vision of God is a good for human incommensurate with any non-transcendent good or ills". In this sense then all suffering and evil are swallowed up and defeated in the vision of who God is. Therefore the classical understanding of God's attributes enables evangelicals to seek God's presence and comfort in the midst of turmoil.

The classical understanding of the attributes of God also spawns an attitude of humility, for to affirm complete divine control in the midst of suffering is to militate against the instinct of pride because it calls for trust in God. Adams (1987:19-20) states:

> In Christian faith we are invited to trust a person so much greater than ourselves that we cannot understand him/her very fully. We have to trust God's power and goodness in general without having a blue print of what he/she is going to do in detail. This is very humbling because it entails a loss of control of our own lives.

In this respect the traditional understanding of God promotes faith because evangelicals who take this position believe that God is ultimately in control and that nothing is left to chance. The belief in the traditional attributes enables a Christian to view suffering *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity). Evangelicals go through suffering with the prospect of their heavenly rewards putting the temporary pain of this life into proper perspective. The classical view of God enables evangelical Christians to keep these truths about God at the forefront on their minds, and their behaviour is motivated accordingly.

The traditional view of God also enables Christians to pray vigorously and continuously before God regarding the suffering experienced by humans: such prayer could be called a theodicy of protest. Such complaints are bold in their challenge of divine wisdom and control and appear repeatedly in the Old Testament (Ps. 44:13-23; Ps. 13, 22, 59, 64, 74, 88 and 142). These prayers are the affirmation of faith, thus assuring the believer that God is sovereign and merciful and works to redeem all the situations of his/her people. These prayers enable us to understand that God has the power to redeem; and also enable us to pray according to the will of God. The model Jesus teaches is to pray that the will of God be accomplished on earth (Matt. 6:10). Prayer helps to conform our will to God's will. It also helps Christians to

handle disappointments when what we ask for does not come to pass: our confidence is in God's foreknowledge and the fact that God's plans for us are better than what we petition God for.

The traditional view of God most inclines the Christian to recognize the value of our subjection to God; to sense our utter dependence upon him/her from moment to moment; and to affirm that our finest deeds are but the result of God's gracious work in the life of a Christian. What one believes often affects how one behaves. Crabb (1998) states that in order to change behaviour one must change what one believes. The practical consequences of open theism are enormous for the Evangelical believer because it undermines the confidence we place in the character of God, the Word of God and the actions/ promises of God.

Evangelicalism does not divide itself over "peripheral" issues; however the nature of God is no peripheral matter. It is fundamental to Evangelical Christianity because every evangelical doctrine is connected directly or indirectly to who God is. Since these traditional doctrines are based on the classical view of God, an errant view will infect other areas of faith. It is evident that evangelicalism embraces the teaching of the early church fathers on the crucial attributes under investigation: God's omniscience, immutability and omnipotence. The denial of these classical attributes of God proposes a new kind of theism. The attributes of God are crucial to evangelical theology and Christian faith. Who God is in his/her being impacts directly on everything related to faith life and to the problem of evil. The evangelical understanding concerning the attributes of God thus is found in scripture

continued within the tradition of the church through its confessions. Thus I have proved that open theism is contrary to the teaching of the early church and evangelicalism and is destructive to the integrity of Scripture.

8.3. What the Confessions Teach

It is evident as seen in chapters 4-6 that the Church Fathers embraced the classical view of God's attributes that is denied by Boyd. The following tables reflect the continuing tradition of the classical view of God that is evident in the early Creeds and Confessions. Given these facts, it can be seen that Boyd's open theism if fundamentally different from that of historical orthodox Christianity.

Document	Reference	Simplicity	Impassibility	Relatability	Sovereignty
Ante-Nicene Creed by Gregory Thaumaturgus Date: 270	P. Schaff *Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 24–25	There is one God, the Father of the living Word, who is substantive wisdom and eternal power and image of God . . . a perfect Trinity not divided. . . .	The true Son of the true Father . . .Incorrupt-ible of Incorruptible The Trinity is ever the same unvarying and unchangeable.	. . . the power which produces all creation. . . .	. . . a perfect Trinity not divided in glory eternity and sover-eignty. . . .
Apostles' Creed (Italian) Date: 350	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 50			We believe in God the Father Almighty, Ruler and Creator of all ages and creatures.	
Athanasian Creed Date: 373	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 66	We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance [essence].			
Augsburg Confession Date: 1530	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 7	. . . there is one divine essence, which is called and is God . . . indivisible [without parts]			
French Confession Date: 1559	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 359	We believe and confess that there is one God, who is one sole and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible.			
The Formula of Concord Date: 1576	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 149				
Westminster Confession Date: 1647	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 606	There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise . . . working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will. . . .			

Table1 (as cited in Geisler*, Battle for God*. 2001;304)

Document	Reference	Omniscience	Eternality	Immutability
Ante-Nicene Creed by Gregory Thaumaturgus Date: 270	P. Schaff *Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 24–25	The wisdom which comprehends the constitution of all things. . . .	. . . is substantive eternal power. . . . the true Son of the true Father . . . Everlasting of Everlasting . . . a perfect Trinity not divided in glory eternity and sovereignty. . . .	The true Son of the true Father . . . Incorruptible of Incorruptible . . . the Trinity is ever the same unvarying and unchangeable.
Apostles' Creed (Italian) Date: 350	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 50		We believe in God the Father Almighty, ruler and Creator of all ages and creatures.	
Athanasian Creed Date: 373	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 2, 66		. . . the Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.	Who although he be [is] God and Man; yet he is not two but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by taking [assumption] of the Manhood into God.
Augsburg Confession Date: 1530	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 7		. . . there is one divine essence, which is called and is God eternal. . . .	. . . there is one divine essence, which is called and is God . . . indivisible [without parts]. . . .
French Confession Date: 1559	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 359	We believe and confess that there is one God, who is one sole and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible . . . who is all wise. . . .		
Formula of Concord Date: 1576	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 149	The attributes of the divine nature are . . . to know all things. . . .	The attributes of the divine nature are . . . to be . . . eternal. . . .	
Westminster Confession Date: 1647	*Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 3, 606	There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise . . . working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will. . . .		

Table 2 (as cited in Geisler, *Battle for God*. 2001:305)

The attributes of God are permanent and intrinsic qualities, which cannot be gained or lost, God's attributes are essential and inherent dimensions of his/her very nature. Although our understanding of God is filtered through our own mental framework, his/her attributes are not our conceptions projected upon God. These attributes are objective characteristic of his/her nature; therefore they cannot be separated from the essence of being of God. Boyd in trying to develop a "modern" articulation to the problem of evil by articulating an Aristotelian conception of substance and attributes by distinguishing God's essence from his/her attributes. The "Boydian" understanding of the attributes is fragmentary parts or collections of God or an addition to his/her essence. Thus Evangelicals understand the attributes of God as those qualities of God that constitute what God is, the very characteristic of his/her nature. These attributes are qualities of the entire Godhead and to change an attribute so that one can understand God working with humanity is to change who God is because every attribute of God qualifies each other. Thus, I have proved my hypothesis that open theism is a radical departure from Evangelicalism

"I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.
I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please"
(Isa. 46: 9-10. NIV)

To this great God be glory and honour forever and ever! Amen.

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