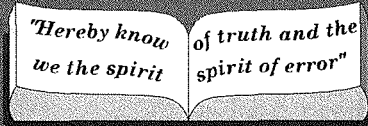


The Discerner



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AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

By William A. BeVier

In our last issue we presented an article by Dr. Roy E. Knuteson addressing the subject called "The Openness of God," also known as "Open Theism." Since then a more extensive article has come to our attention by John Hoeldtke of Flame Ministries. John Hoeldtke is a member of the Baptist General Conference where this view is causing considerable controversy. We have received permission from John Hoeldtke to edit and reproduce a digest of his copyrighted article. Because of its length we will take two issues of The Discerner to make this presentation.

It should be noted "The Openness of God" is not a cult in the traditional sense, but it is an aberration of Biblical Christianity. Bible-believing Christians should be aware of this new movement and its departure from Scripture.

A copy of the complete article by John Hoeldtke can be obtained by contacting him as Flame Ministries, PO Box 3333, Everett, WA 98203-8333, or by e-mail FlameMin@compuserve.com

We also welcome another article by Dr. Roy E. Knuteson. He has been the contributor of numerous articles in the past, so I'm sure our readers will recognize his name. His current article points out only two of many ridiculous events recorded in the Book of Mormon. The best evidence is that the "Book of Mormon," as it is now called, was written originally as a novel (and not by Moroni, as Mormons claim). The two incidents Dr.

Knuteson calls to our attention certainly read more like a novel than a supposed revelation from God.

It is a pleasure to announce with thanksgiving to our Lord for the provision of an Office Manager. Mr. Steve Lagoon began his ministry with R.A.S. on October 1. Pray for him as he undertakes this responsibility.

NOTICE

If your address label reads "XX-4" or the title page reads "Volume 20, Number 4" your subscription expires with this issue. We invite you to renew. The cost is only \$4 per year in the U.S., \$6.32 in Canada, \$6.04 in Mexico, and \$6.80 in other countries. The subscription price is based upon printing and mailing costs. With postage rates scheduled to increase in the U.S., we do not know how much longer we can continue to offer The Discerner at these prices.

Also note that the former listing of "PERM" (Permanent) no longer exists. We abandoned this listing some time ago because we learned it included deceased individuals, ministries no longer in existence, people no longer interested in R.A.S., and those who have moved leaving no forwarding address. We continue to send The Discerner to those with whom we have a publication exchange arrangement.

Looking For Truth In The “Open Theism” Controversy

By John Hoeldtke
President, Flame Ministries

A group of pastors and leaders in the Baptist General Conference sent out a video of Dr. Greg Boyd, professor at Bethel College, and a copy of his book *God of the Possible*, to pastors. This was a promotional attempt to foster acceptance of Boyd’s open theist views.

The Open Theism controversy plaguing the BGC is not going to be resolved simply. We long for unity, but we must not have a false, or biblically incorrect, unity. This paper will help you understand why.

Questions answered are:

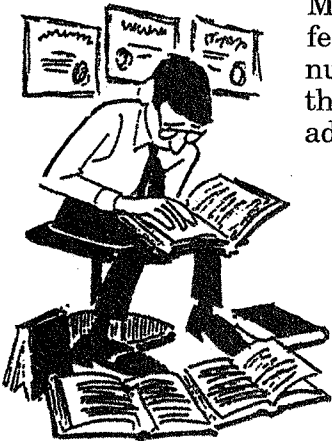
- If you think this is a minor issue.
- If you think this is just part of Calvinism vs. Armenianism debate
- If you think this issue can be easily resolved
- If you don’t understand when people speak of postmodernity
- If you think the “openness of God” view is biblical

Open Theism (This term, chosen by advocates of the view, is commonly used, and so I use it, though it creates a false impression about the classic view of God being “Closed Theism.” I would prefer to call it the Lesser God view. For further information on this and other related matters see my paper, *Do We Really Want What We are Doing?* Available from FLAME MINISTRIES, PO Box 333, Everett, WA 98203-8333, or (425) 347-3216, or E-mail: FlameMin@compuserve.com), the teaching that God knows the future only in part and cannot foreknow what people are going to do, has been growing in the last few years. In 1999, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which represents by far the largest group of Baptists in the United States, overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution referring to the proliferation of openness theology in the larger evangelical com-

munity and strongly reaffirmed classical theism in their denomination.

At the annual meeting of the Baptist General Conference in the same year, however, a long debate ensued over a proposed amendment to the Conference Affirmation of Faith that would have clearly declared God's exhaustive foreknowledge of all things including future actions of free moral agents such as humans, angels and demons. The proposed amendment was narrowly defeated.

Near the end of the debate, Dick Varberg, long-time missionary to the Philippines, made an appeal for delegates to vote against the proposed amendment. He argued that if we have room in our fellowship for a strong Calvinist such as Dr. John Piper we should have room for an open theist such as Dr. Greg Boyd. (Dr. Piper is pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in



Minneapolis; Dr. Boyd has been a professor in theology at Bethel College for a number of years.) Many resonated with that idea. In fact, that theme has been advanced since by certain individuals with the proposal that the Conference – for the sake of peace and the “irenic spirit” tradition – should pass a kind of “unity resolution” which would endorse a Baptist General Conference, which includes both Dr. John Piper and Dr. Greg Boyd. In other words, they want the BGC to accept Open Theism as a valid doctrinal view.

A serious problem is connected with this approach.

Making this issue a part of the Calvinist vs. Armenian dispute is a false notion. To decide the issue on this basis is to decide it on a lie! Those who persist in framing it in this fashion are guilty of distorting the real situation and obscuring the actual nature of Open Theism.

The question of God's foreknowledge is a much larger concern. It is a view of God contrary to what historic Christian groups have consistently held – even groups not relating to the Calvinist-Armenian debate.

Attacks on the doctrine of God's all-inclusive foreknowledge were spearheaded by Richard Rice and Clark Pinnock. These are the men who launched the so-called "Open Theism" movement of our times. They referred to the view they were rejecting as "traditional theism" (Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, 51. Also Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985, 10, presented his position as "an alternative to the traditional Christian understanding of God's relation to the world.") or "classical theism" (Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 107) and readily acknowledged that this had been the theism of Roman Catholicism (whether Augustinian, Thomistic, or Molinist), Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and yes, Armenianism (Pinnock, in "Systematic Theology," 104, understands why "some critics may speak...as if we were advocating a God other than the God of historic Christianity.")

To treat this as Calvinism vs. Armenianism issue is to operate with a false premise...and false premises...no matter how much evidence is amassed, or how often arguments are repeated, or how strongly emotionalized appeals are made...lead to false conclusions.

So I invite you to follow along as I endeavor to start with basics which need to be considered if the Conference and other Christian groups are going to handle this issue in the proper context.

ASSESSING THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

(Suppose you were going to build a house, and you started with the foundation. In the foundation, you think you are using solid cement blocks. However, in reality they were only gravel and mud easily crumbled. If that is the case the rest of the house will have no firm support.

When we examine the claims of open theism as to Scripture proof, we find something analogous to that. Actually the situation is even worse. Passages open theists use to show God does not know the future do not actually say that! In fact, one pastor took the references Dr. Greg Boyd had listed on the sheet,

God and the Future: A Brief Outline of the Open View (January 1999), and studied them one by one and said afterwards, "They don't really say God did not know what was going to happen!"

Let's take a few examples of texts used by open theists (for a more detailed analysis of various texts in this regard, see my paper, *Does God Know...?* available from FLAME MINISTRIES).

Start with Genesis 6:6: "*And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart* (New King James Version. Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted). The passage does not say that God did not know what people would do. That is an assumption placed on what is said.

Take 1 Samuel 15:11: "*I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me...*" and verse 35: "*...and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.*" The passage does not say God did not know what Saul would do. That is an assumption placed on what is said.

Boyd uses Numbers 14:11 where the LORD says to Moses, "*How long will these people reject Me? And how long will the not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?*" and Hosea 8:5 and 1 Kings 22:20 where God is represented as asking questions to say that God is expressing uncertainty about what is going to happen. But these passages do not say God does not know what will happen. That is an assumption placed on what is said.

On his sheet, *God and the Future*, Boyd makes the statement, "In several passages the Lord explicitly tells us that he *did not know* that humans would behave the way they did," and in support he lists *only three* references: Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35. Jeremiah 7:31 reads this way: "*And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn theirs sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.*" The New International Version says: "*nor did it enter my mind.*" Jeremiah 19:5 and 32:35 are very similar in content and construction as one will see if one reads them. As you study the construction you will see that the most logical meaning is that it never entered the mind of God *to command the people to do*

such a thing. To say that these verses teach that it did not enter God's mind that the people would ever *do* such a thing is to impose an unnatural interpretation. In spite of Boyd's claim, these verses do not say God did not know what would happen. That is an assumption placed on what is said.

I could go on listing passages used, but a person who is seriously interested can simply research the various references used by open theists to see how this is the pattern.

Greg Boyd, in his book, *The God of the Possible*, uses text after text like this to support his idea that God does not fully know the future, that God cannot tell ahead of time what people are going to do. An individual reading through his material without discerning this fact, can be impressed by the verses referred to and easily adopt Boyd's conclusions. What such a reader does not realize is that none of these Bible texts specifically and actually says that God does not know what is going to happen. Everything is built on assumptions, based on a pre-supposition that Boyd has adopted.

Open theism lacks true Biblical foundation.

On the other hand, the Bible has clear declarations and examples in regard to God's foreknowledge (e.g., Isaiah 46:9-10; Acts 2:23; 1 Samuel 23:9-12; Genesis 15:12-16; Luke 22:34 – and numerous prophecies!).

A KEY PASSAGE

A very important passage that is used by open theists to seek to establish their case is Jeremiah 3:6-7 in the NIV version where concerning Israel's sin and unrepentant ways, God says, "*I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not....*" They also use verses 19-20: "*I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me, but....*" Boyd claims this is an instance of God encountering the unexpected. That obviously God had thought one thing but another had happened.

Boyd says some have tried to avoid this conclusion by saying that the Hebrew word amar can be translated as "said" but claims this is no help to the classical view of divine foreknowledge in that is "only transfers the problem of God *thinking* something was going to happen, to him *saying* he expected

something to happen that he knew would not happen” (Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000, 60).

Boyd’s claim in this regard is very misleading as you will discover if you consult another version such as the NKJV. There verse 7 says, “*And I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return....*” And verse 20 reads, “*And I said: ‘You shall call Me, ‘My Father,’/And not turn away from Me.’*” The whole meaning has been transformed from expressions of expectation to commands and the passage doesn’t fit what the open theists are saying at all!

But for the sake of making an important point, let’s leave it as the NIV has it – even though I don’t think that version renders the Hebrew well here. Let’s say that God expressed surprise. This, in itself, is proof for anthropomorphic interpretation – which open theists disavow.

Why is this?

An important fact. Back in Deuteronomy 31:16-21, God had forecast, long before Jeremiah ever lived, that the people of Israel would be unfaithful to Him and break His covenant, that He knew how they would behave “*even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them.*” In fact, the next chapter, Deuteronomy 32, known as “The Song of Moses,” was given to be a witness to the people over the generations how God had foreknown their unfaithfulness.

The biblical record clearly indicates that God knew beforehand how Israel was going to act. Therefore, when He expresses Himself as saying, *I thought... she would... but she did not*” it makes little sense to take it literally and say God is speaking falsely; it makes a great deal of sense to understand it anthropomorphically and say God was speaking in terms that vividly made clear the unreasonableness and horror of the people’s behavior.

Similar explanations could be given for certain other passages cited in this connection by open theists, such as Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5 and 32:35.

AN UNSOUND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC

Proponents of so-called "Open Theism" take passages in Scripture where God is represented as saying that He repents or is sorry for doing something, or because of people's response does something other than what He announced He was going to do, as representing God changing His mind. They say these Scriptures indicate God does not know in advance what people are going to do. They claim they are biblical in their position because they interpret what these Scripture texts say as literal.

For example, passages such as 1 Samuel 25:10-26 – where God says, "*I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king*" and rejects him as leader (v. 23) – Exodus 32:7-14 – where God says He will destroy the Israelites for their sin and Moses intercedes for them and "*the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people*" – Isaiah 38:1-5 – where Hezekiah is told he will die and then prays and God says He has heard the prayer and will add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life – are used to demonstrate that God cannot know ahead of time what people are going to do, and that He changes His mind and plans in accordance with what He learns as time goes by.

Greg Boyd and others of this persuasion say they take these non-poetic passages at face value while classical Christian theologians have anthropomorphized them – that is, explained them as God revealing Himself in human terms so people can understand.

The crucial question is: Is literal interpretation (By "literal interpretation" here I mean explaining these expressions as literal and not figurative. I am not referring to the larger question of literal interpretation of the Bible, which includes understanding figurative statements as figurative, as a valid method of interpretation) a proper method of interpretation for these passages? Is this a valid hermeneutic?

Two significant things need to be said in response.

First, this method of interpretation is inadequate for producing an understanding compatible with the totality of the Scriptural revelation about God. There are Bible passages where God is declared as knowing all things and being unchanging (e.g., Isaiah 46:9-10; Acts 2:23; Acts 15:18; 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). It has been observed that the open theists talk much about those passages which

could be seen as representing God as changing, but do not deal adequately with those passages which represent Him as unchanging.

Second, this method of interpretation applied consistently to revelations from God would destroy other truths about His being. For example, if we say that when God says He “repents” (changes His mind) that must be taken literally because there is no reason not to, then it would logically follow that we should use the same method in Genesis 11:5-7 – a non-poetic passage – in regard to the tower of Babel: *“But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men have built. And the LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language....”* Since God had to “go down” and said, “Let Us go down,” He obviously was not there! So God is not omnipresent (present everywhere). The same would be true of Genesis 18:20-21: *“And the LORD said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.’”* Here again we find God saying, “I will go down now,” which would mean that He was not present there – indeed that He was not even sure what was going on there! So using this hermeneutic we can conclude that God is neither all-present nor all-knowing (even of past and present events).

By this method vital aspects of God’s nature can be denied. This is not some hypothetical discussion. The implications are profound. For example, we cannot be sure that God hears our prayers. Maybe He is not present when we pray so our prayers are not heard. Or maybe we would have to conclude that some other being has to take our prayer requests to Him.

Other examples could be cited. In Genesis 9:12-17, God gives the rainbow as the sign of the covenant, and says, *“It shall be... that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant...”* and *“I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature....”* By this method of literal interpretation, we deduce that God’s memory needs reminders. As one man wrote me: “I hope this doesn’t mean He is a forgetful God who needs to tie a string around His finger to remember important things!”

In Genesis 3, God asked four questions of Adam and Eve after they had sinned. Let's see what we learn about God from each of these questions using the literal hermeneutic of open theists. "Where are you?" (v. 9) – God did not know where they were. "Who told you that you were naked?" (v. 11a) – God did not know where they got the idea. "Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (v. 11b) – God did not know what had happened. God said to Eve, "What is this you have done?" – After all that God still hadn't figured out what was going on. So God not only does not know some things that are going to happen in the future, He doesn't even know some things which have happened in the past and the present!

I am not saying that Greg Boyd, or other Open Theists, say this. I am simply making the point that when the hermeneutic they use in regard to their selected Scriptures is carried out consistently and logically it utterly destroys the concept of God Jews and Christians have believed in.

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY

It is for this reason, that interpreting these passages literally rather than anthropomorphically is an unsound hermeneutic, all Christian theologians of significant stature throughout the history of the church have rejected the notion that God knows only some of the future, that He is surprised by what people do, and that He changes His mind.

This is important to understand. Opposition to so-called Open Theism is not based on some sort of slavish adherence to human theological authorities. To think that is to miss the point. Opposition to so-called Open Theism is based on the truth that it misinterprets Scripture. Reference to theologians is only to show that they concurred with this position. The lineage of the faith is not something to be set aside lightly.

Among those who believed in God's foreknowledge of all things – according to their writings – can be listed: Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Cranmer (Calvinist), John Wesley (Armenian), Charles Hodge (Calvinist), Donald Bloesch (Calvinist), Louis Berkhof (Calvinist), Stephen Charnock (Calvinist), Karl Barth (Neo-orthodox), Emil Brunner (Neo-

orthodox), Thomas C. Oden (Armenian), and Millard Erickson (Calvinist).

Anthropomorphisms in Scripture – expressions attributing to God human forms, parts, passions and activities – properly understood are not really a problem. Instead they convey tremendous truth in a special way. They show how the infinite, transcendent God relates to us as humans personally in terms meaningful for us. It is part of His condescension to interface with us in our finite human condition, and I believe anthropomorphisms do it in a way that could not otherwise be done. To force such statements to literalism destroys their intended meaning! Let's ponder this. I believe definite reasons exist for the way things are put in Scripture. A simplistic literal explanation out of sync with doctrine, such as God's foreknowledge, taught in the rest of the Bible, misses the real intent.

Properly understood, anthropomorphism conveys something no simple literal statement could.

Oh, how I like swimming and diving in the ocean of God's immensity! In deep places I discover things of beauty and wonder. Of course, there are depths too profound for me. No matter what insights and devices modern man thinks he has, he can never plumb the depths of God's wisdom, love and knowledge. Just because there are depths into which we cannot go, however, is no reason to settle for the shallowness of Open Theism and its mistaken and superficial treatment of Scripture.

Baptist theologians holding to the view that God has exhaustive foreknowledge include such individuals as John Gill (English), John Alexis Edgren (Swedish), Augustus H. Strong (American), James P. Boyce (SBC), E. Y. Mullins (SBC), and Hershel Hobbs (SBC).

Greg Boyd, in *God of the Possible*, tries to come up with some names of people in Church history who have held ideas similar to his and mentions Calcidius, a fifth-century theologian (as a possibility), Lorenzo McCabe, former chancellor of Ohio Wesleyan University, and Billy Hibbard, a circuit preacher in the United States. He also names as those who "in one form or another" (note that) espoused such views the theologians G. T. Fechner, Otto Pfeiderer, and Jules Lequier (though he documents little evidence for this) and the Bible commenta-

tor Adam Clark. And he also suggests it is a position commonly assumed in the African-American Christian tradition (*God of the Possible*, 115).

What Boyd doesn't say is that the leading advocate for this notion was the anti-Trinitarian heretic, Socinus (1539-1604).

Sometimes those favoring acceptance of Open Theism say, "Oh, we don't know what other people in Christian history might actually have held this view."

That reminds me of the story about the enterprising proprietor who put Meramec Caverns, in Missouri on the map. He advertised that the outlaw Jesse James had used the caves as a hideout. When people would say, "You have no proof that he did," he would respond by saying, "You have no proof that he didn't!"

The bottom line isn't who thought what, but what is truly biblical.

THE CENTRALITY OF THIS ISSUE

Some, who believe we should have room for Open Theism, having said this is a matter of minor importance. They have claimed it is a peripheral concern and does not involve a central and essential doctrine. One individual said it was of no more consequence than someone putting a car in a parking space backward.

But is this really true?

To help put things in perspective, I suggest thinking in terms of a target with a bull's-eye. [In Hoeldtke's original article he included a diagramed target, as he did other diagrams and illustrations.] On the target are various doctrines and ideas that can be the subject of controversy in churches. The further from the center, the less important the issue; the closer to the center, the more important. No matter what I would do with other questions, I would not remove the issues of the nature of *God*, the doctrine of the *trinity*, and the truth of the *deity of Christ*, from the center.

The purpose of the illustration is simple. It is not to get people arguing over the relative importance of different doctrines and practices. (I know this is chancy because some have a ten-

dency to latch on to a minor feature and miss the main point!). For someone to dispute where some item such as *speaking in tongues (glossolalia)*, or *Bible versions*, or *prophecy schedule (eschatology)* is placed, will only distract. I am not saying these issues are not important: many of them are *very* important to me. **The point is that the nature of God (involving His transcendence His omnipotence, His omnipresence, His omniscience, etc.) is central among the doctrines of the Christian faith!**

This is no peripheral matter.

One man said to me, "Don't you think you should put *justification by faith* in the bull's-eye? Isn't that central?"

I replied, "That's a very important doctrine, but I don't think it goes in the center. For example, if we were to show the difference between Hinduism and Christianity, what would you start with? *Justification by faith*?"

"No," he said, "I guess I would start with God and what He is like."

"Precisely," I responded. "An idea like *justification by faith*, vital as it is, grows out of and is related to our concept of God. That is why I say our understanding of the nature of God is central."

Even an open theist like Clark Pinnock recognizes that "no doctrine is more central than the nature of God. It deeply affects our understanding of the incarnation, grace, creation, election, sovereignty and salvation" (Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 8).

Just as the Almighty, Eternal One is presented to us as seated on the throne of heaven encircled by a glorious rainbow (Rev. 4:2-3), so He is central to *everything*. It is an axiom of spiritual existence that how we think about God will affect, in some way, our thinking about everything else. To have a wrong conception of God will ultimately lead to wrong conceptions of other things.

SLOGAN THINKING DOESN'T HELP

Some of the arguments for not making Open Theism an issue have simply been appeals to slogans. One that has been

used is the line: **“In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity.”** That may be a good line but to simply throw it out as a debate-stopper is to miss the point. The issue of the nature of God is an essential to the faith. So we must strive for unity – which we do not have. It is no solution to allocate it to a non-essential status and say we should just agree to disagree and have charity. That distorts the magnitude of this problem.

The Bible indicates clearly that there are times when God’s people must contend for the faith. To do so is neither wrong nor unloving.

Another slogan that has been tossed into the discussion is: **“All truth is God’s truth.”** I am not sure how that has any logical, direct bearing on the question at hand, but it sounds impressive, and some people will rally to it. The slogan, by itself, does have some merit in that it affirms there is such a thing as “truth” and that from whatever source we may find it, it comes from God. However, a corresponding statement needs to clarify this pronouncement: **“Not all that claims to be truth is truth.”** Simply because someone puts forth some idea as truth does not mean it comes from God.

Considerations must be based on something other than slogans.

A DIFFERENT GOD

The God of the Open Theists is a different God from that of classical Christianity. (I use the term “Classical” as referring to the core beliefs about God, which have consistently been held in the major churches of Christendom for almost 2000 years of history. The word “orthodox” is a good word, but a number of people misunderstand it today: some think it refers solely to such groups as the Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox; others associate it with the adjective “dead” – dead orthodoxy.

Some of the ways in which the God of open theists is different from the God of classical Christianity are depicted in the chart below:

GOD OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIANITY	GOD OF OPEN THEISM
Transcends Time	Subject to Time
Ever-Immediate Knowledge	Sequential Learning
Infinite (Unlimited)	Finite (Limited)
Immutable (Unchanging)	Mutable (Changing)
Perfect in Knowledge	Capable of Mistakes

Those familiar with what open theists have written and said know that this chart represents a true picture of their concept of God.

Some may argue that open theists believe in an infinite God. To do so will be to misuse and play with words in the same way that some have said that they believe in God's "omniscience" or "exhaustive foreknowledge" – namely that they have redefined or misrepresented the terms. When Greg Boyd wrote that he believed in "omniscience" and that his difference had to do with "creation," what he did not want people to realize is that by believing God has created things so that He could not know what "free agents" would do, and claiming such future actions were unknowable, he was in actuality redefining what "omniscience" means. To claim that he believed in "omniscience" as others have was really misleading. So open theists, to claim that they believe God is infinite, have to redefine "infinity."

Because infinity is a key concept in this question, a bit more needs to be said about it here. Sometimes infinity has been confused with totality: the notion that infinity means "all." Some think that to say God is infinite is to say God is everything.

That, of course, is Pantheism. Infinity, as applied to God, simply means that no limits can be set on His attributes. To say that God is infinite in immensity and omnipresence – which relate to space – is to say that He is present everywhere with all His creatures and creation, at all times and all places. That is not to say no other beings are present. The uniqueness of God is that He is present everywhere – there are no limits on His presence.

The infinitude of God relative to duration is His eternity. Just as He is beyond all limitations of space, He is beyond all limitations of time. He is not limited to a particular duration of time. Past, present and future are all always present to Him. His existence is an eternal now. As humans we can comprehend how this can be but not what it is like – for we are finite and bound to time.

This relates to God's knowledge, of course, because God does not look toward the future as we do, but sees it as now. His relationship to time is totally different from that of humans (In this regard Boyd in *God of the Possible* engages in some double-talk. On one hand he says God is "above time," but denies "He experiences all of time in a single, changeless, eternal moment." Instead, he says the Bible pictures a God who experiences, thinks and responds to things *sequentially* (131). On the other hand, in answering a question about Einstein's Theory of Relativity, he writes: "This means that for God – but for no one else – there *can* be an all-embracing 'now' in which all the relative 'nows' experienced by finite observers coincide" (133). By such semantic gymnastics he can appear to believe in a God who transcends time while denying the logical implications of that concept by claiming it is Platonic.). A number of Scripture passages relate to this. A couple of examples are Psalm 90:4, which reads:

*For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night,*

and 2 Peter 3:8 says "*that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*"

Since infinity means unlimited it also means incapable of increase. To say God is infinite in knowledge and wisdom is to

say His knowledge and wisdom are so complete they cannot be increased. This is crucial to understand. If God doesn't know what a person is going to do, as open theists claim, and then "learns" after the person has done it, there is an increase in His knowledge. In other words, His knowledge is not infinite.

Against this an open theist would probably argue that God is not infinite.

So no matter what protests may be raised, we are talking about two different "Gods."

The God of the open theists is incomplete and subject to surprises, failures, and mistakes. In contrast classical Christianity professes, "*As for [our] God, His way is perfect*" (2 Samuel 22:31).

TO BE CONTINUED

The Incredible Boat Stories of Mormonism

By Dr. Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.
Fort Collins, CO

Recently I completed reading the entire Book of Mormon – something that few Christians have ever done and, as I've discovered, very few Mormons. Frankly, I found it to be a very boring book filled with repetitious phrases and bland and monotonous prose. Little wonder that Mark Twain called the Book of Mormon “chloroform in print.” With little exception it is dry reading, filled with many doctrinal, historical, and grammatical errors in spite of numerous revisions of the original text.

The exceptional sections, in my judgment, have to do with two unbelievable boat stories describing the migrations of numerous people to the New World. The first of these stories is recorded in the Book of Ether and describes the Jaredite migration from the Tower of Babel in 2,200 B.C. to Central America. It is claimed Jared and his brother, their friends and families did not have their language “confounded” as all others did. God allegedly told Jared’s brother, who incidentally remains unnamed throughout the entire narrative, to take with him: “male and female flocks of every kind, and seed of the earth of every kind and thy families, and also Jared, thy brother, and his family, thy friends and their families and the friends of Jared and their families” (Ether 1:14).

In addition to this vast company of people, they were to “catch fowls of the air [with nets] and fish of the waters to carry with them,” plus “swarms of bees” (Ether 2:2-3). Besides all the other cargo, they were to take seed from all the plants of the earth and transport it overland from Babylon to the Mediterranean, a distance of over 500 miles. When they came to the “great sea, they dwelt intents on the seashore for a space of four years” (v. 13). Next, they were to “build eight *small barges* (italics mine) (Ether 2:16) to carry this immense cargo across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to the “Land of Promise.” How they herded all those animals into these vessels is not explained, as it is in the case of Noah.

The details regarding the actual construction of the barges are hilarious and totally unbelievable. Here are the instructions of God to Jared's brother, who apparently was the construction boss for this project:

They were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like a dish and the bottom was tight like a dish; and the sides were tight like a dish and the ends were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like a dish and the length thereof was the length of a tree (v. 17).

How long were those barges anyway? Are we being asked to believe that all the trees in Mesopotamia were the same length in 2,200 B.C.?

Upon completion of the barges, Jared's brother complained to God regarding the divine design, because, for some unexplained reason, the Lord had forgotten to include an

“Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top and also in the bottom...”

interior lighting system, and a mechanism for steering, and a means of ventilation! So, in response to the brother of Jared, God gave him these instructions for a means of ventilating these extremely tight vessels: “Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top and also in the bottom, and when thou shalt suffer for air, thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air, and if so be that the water shall come in upon thee, behold you shall stop the hole so that ye not perish in the flood” (v. 20).

Can you envision such a system, especially since we are informed in chapter 6 of Ether, that these barges were “many times buried in the depth of the sea” (v. 6)? Why the hole “in the bottom” of each barge? Was this to let water out? Could they have made this long journey with such limited air supply for all these people and animals? Of course not! The Mormons explain this very simply as a “miracle”!

To care for the need of their interior lighting in these otherwise dark submarine-shaped barges, God asked Jared's brother what he, the Lord, should do? The Almighty is stymied! He asks: “What will ye that I should do that you may have light in your vessels?” (v. 23). There is no answer, so the Lord then

reminds this construction foreman that he cannot have windows, because they will break in the storms of the ocean, and likewise he cannot take fire into these barges. Instead, he is instructed to go to a high mountain and “molten out of a rock sixteen small stones and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass” (Ether 3:1). God then reportedly touched the stones with “his finger of flesh and blood” (v. 6) and they became as fluorescent lights, one in each end of the barges.

To answer Jered’s brother’s complaint regarding the lack of a rudder to steer each vessel, we are informed that, while they were buried in the deep, that: “It came to pass that the wind did never cease to blow toward the promised land, while they were upon the waters and thus they were driven forth by the wind... whether it was above the water or under the wastes” (Ether 6:8, 10). Can you believe that? Underwater currents were affected by the winds above the surface for 2,000 miles!

Finally, we are told that the entire journey took “three hundred and forty and four days” (Ether 6:11). We wonder how could they have ever carried enough food and water for all the people and all those flocks and herds, plus the live fish and bees they allegedly took on board? And how did they dispose of the tremendous amounts of human and animal waste during that long journey? Obviously, it never happened. Yet this is the story we are asked to believe regarding the origin of the Jaredite nation, which later perished in America because of their sin (Ether 11).

The second migration allegedly took place in 600 B.C. as reported in 1 Nephi 17-18. God, we are told, led Nephi and his extended Jewish family out of the “land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 16:35) by means of a mysterious “brass ball” that had two spindles, and the one would point the way “whither we should go in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:10). Following the directions written on the ball, they traveled for eight years in the Judean wilderness before they came to the Mediterranean Sea, which along with the Atlantic Ocean is called “Irreantum, which being interpreted is ‘many waters’” (1 Nephi 17:5). Here, on the shores of the “bountiful land,” Nephi is instructed to build a ship designed by God, to “carry thy people across these waters” (v. 8).

After making construction tools by forging iron out of molten rock, he single-handedly built a ship, which he says “was built after the manner which the Lord had showed unto

me, therefore it was not after the manner of men” (1 Nephi 18:2). Nephi further boasts, “the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine” (v. 4). No dimensions are given for the construction of this ship as in the previous story. Instead, we are told that they loaded the ship, which was apparently anchored in the Mediterranean Sea, with “much fruits and meat and honey in abundance” (v. 6).

Then they were “driven forth by the wind toward the promised land” (v. 8). Enroute to Central America, a fight broke out on board ship and Nephi reports that his brothers “had bound me so much that I could not move, the compass which had been prepared by the Lord, did cease to work, wherefore they knew not wither they should steer the ship, insomuch that there arose a great storm... for the space of three days” (v. 13). Two days later, when they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea [the Atlantic Ocean] “... my brethren began to see the judgments of God were upon them... wherefore the loosed the bands that were upon my wrist” (v. 15).

Suddenly, the “compass” started working again, the storm ceased, and “after we had sailed for the space of many days, we did arrive at the promised land” (v. 23) which would be Central America. Here they found “cows, and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat, and of silver and of copper” (v. 25). Incidentally, cows, asses, and horses were not native to the Americas. Hermando Cortes in A.D.1519 according to the World Book Encyclopedia brought them to Mexico. Thus we have the incredible story of early America and the origin of the “Lamanites,” the Jews who were later cursed by God with dark skin and therefore became the progenitors of the American Indians (2 Nephi 5:21).

What shall we say to all of this? Obviously, to the knowledgeable reader, the God who instructed Noah to build the ark is not the same God who reportedly gave these ridiculous instructions to these fictitious characters. The whole story is a hoax, a deception of Satan that needs exposure and refutation. Indeed the entire Book of Mormon is a farce, one of the greatest fairy tales of all time. In these days when Mormons are trying to be accepted as just another Christian denomination, discerning Christians can use this material when witnessing to Mormons to cast doubt upon their religion and hopefully lead them to Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth and life.”

BOOK REVIEW

Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements

By H. Wayne House

Copyright 2000, 351 pages, 8 1/2 by 11

Reviewed by Steve Lagoon

This large volume by H. Wayne House will serve as a very useful reference work on cults and false religious movements. Each of its nineteen chapters examines a particular cult or aberrant movement. It should be pointed out, as the author does in his preface, that most of the book was completed in 1995. Therefore some of the information may not be up to date as of publication. This is most noticeable in the choice of groups that are analyzed, some of which are no longer nearly as active or influential as they have been in the past (i.e., The Church Universal and Triumphant). However, this does not distract from the overall value of the book.

The format of the book is extremely user friendly. The layout of the chapters is as follows. Each page is divided into three columns. A summary statement of the group's position on a particular issue is stated in the left column. In the middle column, actual quotations from the group's primary source material are given, documenting the group's positions. This information is invaluable to the reader/ researcher, because instead of just saying that this is what a group believes, the actual source (or sources) of the information is given.

One point of criticism is that occasionally, what the authors assert that the group believes in the left column isn't always proven in the middle column (the primary material from the group). It is likely that the author can support his statements with solid primary information. However the reader should take caution before confronting a group member in such cases. In fairness to the author, however, this is an infrequent problem.

In the right column, the author gives an "orthodox response" to the teachings of the group being evaluated. I am impressed with the quality of these orthodox responses. Too often, similar works in the past, have offered weak and superficial "orthodox responses" that don't seem to be very effective when one encounters members of the groups involved. In this case, however, the responses are very well researched, so that the reader

is left with an accurate understanding of the group, and not merely a popular, but misleading caricature of the group.

The book also contains some very useful appendixes. Appendix A is entitled "Orthodox Christian Doctrine," and is 35 pages long. It is laid out as a sort of mini- systematic theology, but one that is most useful in refuting the false teachings, not only of the groups critiqued in the book, but most of the cults active today.

Appendix B is a short appendix (2 pages) entitled "Creeds of the Church." It gives the texts of the following creeds of the early church: The Apostles' Creed, The Creed of Nicea, The Constantinopolitan Creed, The Athanasian Creed, and The Definition of Chalcedon. It is quite useful to have these creeds gathered together at your fingertips.

Also included is a thorough Bibliography of both primary materials and secondary works involving the groups critiqued in this volume.

The author is to be commended for his inclusion of a chapter on the Christian Identity Movement, in light of the controversial nature of the movement, and lack of quality information available.

This book is very well researched and easy to use. Therefore, I highly recommend it to our readers.

BOOK REVIEW

Reorganized Latter Day Saints Church: Is It Christian?

By Carol Hansen

Copyright 2000, 291 pages, 8 ? by 11

Reviewed by Steve Lagoon

If you are anything like me, you are quite aware of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) and their cultic doctrines and practices. On the other hand, you may know very little about other groups that owe their origin to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The largest of such groups is The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS hereafter). Many have only a vague understanding of the RLDS Church and it's beliefs and practices. Into this

vacuum comes an outstanding book by Carol Hansen on the RLDS church called *Reorganized Latter Day Saints Church: Is It Christian?*, subtitle: "A Biblical and Historical Perspective of the RLDS Church." This is a revised and enlarged book by the same author first published in 1983.

Carol Hansen is well prepared to write this book, having been a member of the RLDS church for 48 years, and a graduate of the RLDS "Graceland College." Although, Carol Hansen is an ex-member of the RLDS Church, the tone of the book is not at all bitter or angry. Rather, it is a very well researched volume that contains a wealth of information on the RLDS church. Carol Hansen gives her purpose for writing the book in the preface:

My wish is to share the truths the Lord has opened to me and challenge RLDS members to make an in-depth study of the life and teachings of Joseph Smith with an open mind and sincere prayer for the Holy Spirit's Guidance. I would admonish those who are considering joining the RLDS Church to become grounded in the truths of the Bible, and therefore be able to discern the true gospel from a counterfeit one. Only those whose loyalty to Jesus Christ surpasses their loyalty to Joseph Smith will benefit from this writing.

Anyone wondering if such a work is necessary need only read the quote of Joseph Smith given at the beginning of the book (*Memorable Quotes from Joseph Smith, Jr.*: "I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam.... Neither Paul, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I..." (LDS History of the Church, Vol. 6, pp. 408-409)

I applaud the author for the user-friendly layout of the book. For example, I particularly like the use of footnotes at the bottom of each page (instead of endnotes). I also like the fact that the actual text of biblical verses quoted is given, and not just the references.

The first section of the book (chapters 1-3) is called "The History We Never Heard in Sunday School." It gives a fascinating, and carefully documented history of Joseph Smith Jr. and the early Mormons, and then gives an overview of the history of the RLDS Church up to the present day. The reader is left with a profound sense of sadness that a group deceives so many today whose foundation and history is so shameful and unbiblical. The biggest

surprise to me is learning about the battle for control of the RLDS Church between the old time “conservatives” who wanted to abide by the strict “Restorationist” teachings of Joseph Smith Jr., and others (among them the so-called Prophets of the church) who wanted to move in the direction of liberal Protestantism. Also, surprising (perhaps it shouldn't be) is the level of involvement in New Age ideas among leaders of the RLDS.

The second section of the book (chapters 4-14) is entitled “The Anatomy of a Cult.” It looks at the question of whether the RLDS Church should be classified as a cult. Carol Hansen analyzes the doctrinal teachings of the RLDS church in light of the Bible, and proves conclusively that the RLDS church is indeed a cult, and not genuinely Christian.

In Chapter fifteen, Carol Hansen gives tips on how Christians can share their faith with a member of the RLDS Church and help them escape from this demonic deception. It is interesting that the advice is somewhat different depending on whether you are speaking with a liberal or old line RLDS member. The author provides a very helpful list of questions (40 in all) that are designed to show the fallacy of RLDS teachings and open up the conversation to the Gospel.

In chapter sixteen, the author presents the testimonies of fourteen ex-members of the RLDS Church who have escaped and found freedom in Jesus Christ. This is must reading.

For those interested, there is an appendix documenting the polygamous practices of the so-called prophet Joseph Smith.

I highly recommend this book for anyone wanting to understand the RLDS Church.

[Editor's note: These books will be carried by RAS if there is sufficient desire by our readers.]

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