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**Open Theism: "What is this? A new teaching?  
- and with authority!" (Mk 1:27)**

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**Introduction**

Open theism is a controversial theological topic among North American evangelicals. People are becoming aware of it and debates are swirling around it. At the heart of it lies a vision of a relational God and what makes it controversial is the feature of "current divine omniscience." Our aim, when we presented the model in 1994, was to bring evangelicals up to speed on the issues and to encourage them to appreciate God's beauty more in relational and personal rather than abstract and deterministic terms. We knew scholars who held to the model already and hoped that others might be drawn to it, if it were explained. We hoped it might become a source of theological renewal among us or (at least) a catalyst for ongoing reflection.<sup>1</sup>

The model goes by other names than open theism. We chose this term because "openness" was an attractive and unused metaphor which evoked the notion of God's open heart toward his creatures. It suggests the vision that we have of God's glory which is characterised by voluntarily self-limitation and self-sacrificing and which extols a divine power that delights more in nurturing than in subjugating creatures. Inventing a term like this (however) has made open theism a "local theology," that is, a theology developed by certain people in a certain place (by evangelicals within the North American evangelical coalition and pitched toward that audience).. The downside of naming it openness is that it distances us from others who have the same convictions but use other language for it. We named it openness to give evangelicals a clear run at it as something fresh (the word made fresh!) but we left the impression (a wrong impression) that we were peddling novelties which we are not. This in turn energised the opposition against us.

The proposal has spawned vigorous polemics and put a strain on the evangelical social space. Lines are being drawn in the sand and people are being pressed to decide whether they think open theism is tolerable as a legitimate evangelical option or whether it has to be purged from our ranks as a corrupting influence. It is testing our ability to get along with each other. One is taken aback by the way in which normally sound thinkers go ballistic and denounce open theism in inflammatory ways. It is reminiscent of the way in which Arminius (an early free will theist) himself was treated.<sup>2</sup> Then again, it is not unusual for theologians who strike out in new directions to receive both eulogies and vilification in about equal measure. Beside, as the old saying goes, if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen. We have exposed a yawning gap between at least two orientations - it is not surprising that some would take great umbrage.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, Does God Have a Future? A Debate On Divine Providence (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Olson, The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform ((Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), ch 28.

## What is "open theism" theologically?

Theologically, open theism is a version of free will theism. It is a relational and trinitarian doctrine with an emphasis on God as personal and interactive, both in his immanent triune nature and in the economic relationships which he enjoys with creatures. Call it "evangelical personalism" if you like. As a version of free will theism, it holds that God could control the world if he wished to but that he chooses not to - for the sake of loving relationships. We do not think that God is ontologically limited as in process theology but that God voluntarily self-limits so that freely chosen loving relations would be possible. In giving us genuine, that is, libertarian, freedom, God gave up complete control over the decisions that are made and chose to create a world in which humans have significant powers of "say so." It means that creatures can do things that God does not want them to do. Whereas Calvinists hold to meticulous detailed sovereignty, free will theists defend a general or limited sovereignty, more in keeping with God's dynamic world project. Instead of it being a prescribed matter down to the last detail, history is a real story even now unfolding with all its tensions and surprises. By contrast, high Calvinists believe that whatever occurs is willed by God (not merely permitted) and the world now is now exactly as it should be. Even terrible atrocities occur (it is said) for some higher and somehow greater good. Free will theists (however) believe that this would make God the author of evil. In our view, history is full of things that God did not want to happen. We acknowledge that God could dominate the world but chooses not to. By an act of self-limitation, God restrains his power for the sake of the creature such that, at this moment, God's will is not being done on earth as in heaven. It means that God took risks in creating a truly significant world. It means that, although God has goals, he makes use of open routes.<sup>3</sup>

Open theism does however add a new feature to standard free will theism. It has a "twist" which makes it different, namely, its understanding of divine omniscience as "current omniscience" or "present knowledge." As I will argue, it enjoys scriptural support and coheres with the open vision as a whole. We cannot see how humans can possess libertarian freedom, if God knows ahead of time exactly they will do with it. We cannot see how God can be said to take risks, if he knows with absolute certainty exactly what is going to happen. Opting for current omniscience is a significant adjustment to standard free will theism but not (we think) a heterodox idea. We are not theological rationalists in proposing this model. We are well aware of how incomplete and inadequate theology is and we realise how much more truth there is than what anyone presently knows. We agree with the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson and take a modest stance.

"Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they."  
(In Memoriam)

At the same time (however), there are words of knowledge given by the Spirit in which the old message is spoken into a new situation in such a way that the truth

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<sup>3</sup> This happy phrase "goals with open routes" comes from John Sanders, The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 63-66, 230-35.

of Scripture is sharpened and its current meaning comes to light. Just to repeat the received wording of tradition can actually distort the message. God wants to enable us to speak the word of God in relevant ways into the contemporary situation. This is what we are attempting to do.

### **What is “open theism” historically?**

Open theism is a species of non-determinist theology and, to put a label on it ecclesiastically, it is a variant of Wesleyan/Arminian thinking. The model as a whole and for the most part is far from new but belongs to traditions of non-determinist theology which both precede and post-date Augustine. It is not a brew from hell. Many ( I think most) over the centuries have rejected his view that God is the all-determining and sole final cause of every event and have upheld human freedom and the importance of cooperation with God’s will. We read the biblical story as an action packed and tension filled theo-drama which plays itself out in mysterious and complex ways through divine interaction with human agents. In this interaction God is and always remains the senior partner but humans also play a significant role.

Open theism resonates with the Wesleyan/Arminian thought which influences large segments of evangelicalism. This way of thinking has contributed much to the history of the doctrine of God. Most significantly it triggered the rehabilitation of two key truths, God’s universal salvific will and God’s relational nature. Arminius made a modest beginning when he adjusted Reformed theism by means of his insight concerning the divine self-limitation and when he said that determinism was not implied by divine omniscience because the future events themselves are the cause of God’s knowledge of them. It was a beginning along the right path.<sup>4</sup>

In theology of course no one has the last word. Arminius (and Wesley) got us thinking and charted a territory into which we can grow. One can appreciate them for taking risks but they remain men of their time and, all in all, theirs was a modest beginning. They put their foot in the door and opened it a crack. It was the beginning not the end of needed reform. They offered an adjustment to the Calvinist tradition which would over time become an alternative to it.<sup>5</sup> But more work would be needed and the work is continuing today. We have travelled far but not far enough. We have taken a stand against theological determinism but there are other issues. Denying that God is a risk taker will not do. The timelessness of God is not a biblical position. Impassability cannot stand. God’s unchangability must be revisited. We need to continue to grow as hearers of the word of God. Calvinists cannot stop the clock at 1619 AD and take their last stand at the Synod of Dort as if the reformed tradition had not gone on developing since then. Similarly, the Wesleyan/Arminians, however much as we admire our forebears, must move on. We must take developments in theology seriously. Karl Barth proves that Reformed theology has not stood still and that fact that Methodists like Miley and McCabe have debated the issue of divine foreknowledge over the years

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4 Regarding developments in Wesleyan thought, see Thomas A. Langford, Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983). M. Douglas Meeks, The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

5 So Richard A. Muller, God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 281.

since Wesley shows that Wesleyan/Arminian traditions too are undergoing development.<sup>6</sup>

In contexts outside the evangelical sub-culture, the open view of God exists in different formats. John Polkinghorne (who publically endorsed open theism at Baylor University in autumn, 2002) likes the language of kenosis, while others like Moltmann focus on the divine suffering, while Paul Fiddes develops these beliefs in a framework of social trinitarianism. We packaged relational theism for evangelicals under the label of open theism but many embrace it using different language. Besides the three we have just mentioned, other scholars hold to it, like Keith Ward, Richard Swinburne, Nicholas Wolterstorff, J. R. Lucas, W. H. Vanstone, and Eberhart Jungel. Thus it is that open theists enjoy good company and share assets with some fine theological minds. Even the most controversial part of it - the doctrine of current omniscience - even that element is endorsed by them. Is anyone calling Swinburne and Polkinghorne names? Are they being accused of being Pelagian, Socinian, or Whiteheadian? Why then do open theists suffer these indignities practically on a daily basis from evangelical colleagues? What (I ask myself) can one do in the face of such ignorance and malice? One could (I suppose) walk away and abandon evangelicalism. Or, one can take the path of patience and persistence, not wanting to leave the field without making an effort to rescue evangelicalism from being ideologically hijacked. The name calling happens because we operate in a milieu of immature theological reflection where a lot of ignorance lurks.

### **Ninety Percent, Ten Percent**

1. Open theism is a Wesleyan/Arminian model with a twist. Ninety percent of it is in agreement with these evangelically oriented theological traditions, while ten percent of it is contested. Even when it comes to the ten percent, the moves that open theism makes are not unprecedented, although they are certainly in the minority. Let us consider the ninety percent first.

God created the world for loving relations. From scripture as well as experience we know that love must be freely chosen. Therefore, God created us with the capacity for saying "yes" or "no" to God. But creating such a world spells risks for God, the risk that we may not choose to love and obey him. But it seems that God decided that it was a risk worth taking, the kind of risk which we experience as parents, when we hope that our children will follow in God's ways but are not able to guarantee it. The God of Christian faith is not a timeless, unchanging substance, totally in control of the world, but personal, relational, and triune, and characterised by self-sacrificing love. Central to the greatness of God for open theism is God's willingness to be self-limited for the sake of love. God opens himself up to real interaction with his creatures such that they actually have an effect on him. God opens himself to a certain vulnerability symbolised by the cross of Jesus. Theology in the past has not usually wanted to say this but open theists insist that we must say it.

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<sup>6</sup> Randy L. Maddox, "Seeking a Response-able God: The Wesleyan Tradition and Process Theology" in Bryan P. Stone and Thomas J. Oord, editors Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 111-142.

Although it can be validated on other levels, open theism is primarily a biblical theology for me. Unlike process theism and even conventional theism, it does not weigh in with assumptions about what God "must be like" dictated by philosophical ideas which cause us to ignore aspects of the biblical witness. Its foundation is the triune relationality of God himself (the interactive social trinity) and the responsiveness, the pathos, dynamic rule, and risk taking for the sake of love which we see in the biblical narrative. We read the biblical meta-narrative as a real and unfolding story, not as the prescribed text of some pre-historical decree in which the author decides everything and the characters nothing. We object to theologies which deny the dynamism of salvation history. The character in a novel seems real enough but the fact is that she is a fictional literary figure who has no "say so" in the drama. She is not a person but an invention. She has no true reality and no significant freedom. She is only a thought in the mind of God. It's a one way street - there is no real mutuality. History is a novel where the characters do exactly what the novelist decides. God maintains exhaustive control. Nothing happens except what is willed by God. The divine/human relation is causal not personal - God the cause, man the effect.<sup>7</sup>

Authentic love is always accompanied by vulnerability. In human life, love is inauthentic love which seeks control like a possessive parent. Authentic love takes risks. It is precarious and it brings the risk of rejection. It is characterised by involvement rather than detachment. The God of the Bible is affected by his creation, delighted by its beauty and grieved by its tragic aspects. Does not the life of Jesus reveal a God of love who participates in the world's sufferings? God freely chooses self-limitation and bestows human so that it might happen that we will love God in return.<sup>8</sup>

Open theism calls for theological change. We want to carry "reformation" farther. The tilt towards divine hyper-transcendence has to be corrected. We must overcome the feeling of aloofness and inertness in God and get away from "the solitary narcissistic God who suffers from his own completeness," as Kasper has put it.<sup>9</sup> We seek a more coherent, non-determinist model than we find on offer. We are not rationalists but we do seek a little more conceptual intelligibility, even in the midst of what we know is a complexity of data. Theological confusion has been created by the merger of the Christian confession of God as compassionate, suffering, victorious love with speculative ideas about what must constitute true divinity - such as immutability, impassibility, eternity, unchangability. Theology (for example) has often given the impression that God could not grieve over the suffering of the world and could not experience compassion within his being, etc. As a result, certain of the traditional attributes of God (I will not call them perfections) need to be re-formed in the light of the gospel. The God and Father of Jesus Christ is not the God (at least of some) of the world's philosophers. We have to speak somewhat differently. We have to say that the unity of God is no mathematical oneness but a living unity which includes diversity. We have to say that God does not have dead immutability but a dynamic constancy of character and purpose which includes movement and change. We have to say that God's power is not raw

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7 John Frame, The Doctrine of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2002), 156-59.

8 Might it not be that the long history of creation signals a gentleness on God's part and his preference for a non-coercive creative process? Nancey Murphy and George Ellis, On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

9 Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 306.

omnipotence but a sovereignty of love which is strong even in weakness. We have to say that God's grace is righteous and his righteousness always gracious. We have to say that God's omniscience is not a trivial know-it-allness but a deep wisdom accompanied by infinite resourcefulness. Open theists strive to learn who God is from God himself in the scriptures and not speculate so much about what God "must be" in contrast to the world.<sup>10</sup>

Although not speculative and chiefly biblical, open theism enjoys a certain "fit" with contemporary concerns. For example, it is apologetically promising in that it entertains a vision of God which yields a dynamic cosmology and facilitates a dialogue of science and theology. For example, it is existentially fruitful in positing human "say so." It gives people a reason to live passionately for God because our lives make a difference and our prayers can change things. Such practical implications are often what tip the balance for people in its favour. Isn't it part of what makes Christianity different in relation to Islam? That humankind is in the image of God and can say yes or no to God. Freedom is at the heart of the Christian story in a way it is not at the centre of the Muslim story. When you think of it, isn't theology's function, not to identify the heretics, but to help people come to know and respond to God more completely? We are not to treat God as an "it" (are we?) but to foster the divine/relationship.

2. The smaller part of open theism, the ten percent, the twist, consists mostly of the idea of current omniscience.<sup>11</sup> It affirms divine omniscience but denies exhaustive definite foreknowledge. It grants that God knows everything that can be known but that the future free actions of creatures, including even God's own future actions, are not yet reality and (therefore) cannot be known with complete certainty. God is free (for example) to do something new. We do not see this as "limited" foreknowledge because it views God as knowing everything that can be known at this point. On the other hand, open theists know, that while to some people this move may seem intelligible, to others it is an unwise and even a dangerous idea. It seems to involve many far-reaching implications the extent of which can seem (at least initially) disturbing. Even though for us the notion causes no great distress, it does draw fire from critics and constitutes a point of vulnerability. Though not a new topic for the Wesleyan tradition, even our theological allies are often disturbed by this move. So, why do open theists think that the idea of current omniscience strengthens the model? Why do they carry what can seem like a millstone around their necks?

The most important (if not the only) reason why I as an open theist believe in the category of current omniscience are the scriptures which refer to aspects of the future which are unsettled and to possibilities in the future which are not yet actualised. Time and again, God is seen as confronting the unexpected or as being surprised by something that has happened or as experiencing regret, or a changing of his mind, or a showing of anger and frustration. God also speaks in conditional terms, tests people to know their character, and appears to be flexible. Are we wrong to take this line of teaching seriously? Does anyone doubt that such

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, Faith Seeks Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 72-74.

<sup>11</sup> Viewing God as temporal is a new element which would be centre of controversy were our critics Thomists rather than Calvinists. As it is, the Calvinists do not use it against us because many of them have already conceded it (like Feinberg, Reymond, and Tiessen).

material exists? Of course, we also celebrate passages which extol God's massive knowledge of the future. It's just that the evidence we adduce on the other side prevents one from concluding that God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge. Our case rests, not on a few odd texts, strangely interpreted, but on an important biblical theme. If our critics choose to suppress this evidence, they may, but let them not charge us with treating scripture lightly. At the same time, I do not suppose that the issue can be resolved by proof texting. What people think about it will also be influenced by broader considerations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> An exhaustive presentation of the data in support of current omniscience is to be found in Lorenzo D. McCabe, The Foreknowledge of God and Cognate Themes in Theology and Philosophy (Cincinnati, OH: Hitchcock and Walden, 1878) and Divine Nescience of Future Contingencies a Necessity (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1882). The two volumes are still available from Revival Theology Promotion, Box 9183, St Paul, Minnesota 55109. Gregory S. Boyd has re-presented some of this material in God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

Indeed, Scripture aside, we are drawn to the scriptural motif of a partially unsettled future partly because it makes a lot of sense as an idea. If humans have genuine freedom, which the biblical narrative assumes and our experience confirms, how could it be otherwise? How could genuinely free decisions, which are (almost by definition) unpredictable in advance, be foreknown in their entirety even by God? If libertarian freedom is what God gave us, how can the hypothesis of exhaustive definitive foreknowledge be true? On this point we are in agreement with the Calvinist critics that it just doesn't add up. What could the ontological grounding be for believing it? It seems to undermine what we are defending, if we cling to exhaustive definite foreknowledge. Conversely, we believe that belief in current omniscience strengthens the Wesleyan/Arminian understanding. If God created the world and human beings in it possess free will, it will not be possible even for God to know precisely how they will use their freedom. Creating them limits what God can know.<sup>13</sup> Philosopher Keith Ward writes: "God acts in such a way as to make creaturely freedom possible. It may seem that God could know the future completely and in every detail but in fact God renounces such knowledge in order to let finite creativity exist. There are necessities of the divine nature which mean that God cannot exist in a state of unmixed bliss, of all-determining power and unrestricted knowledge, if there is to be a world of free and creative personal agents."<sup>14</sup>

John Polkinghorne is drawn to divine current omniscience as something that (he thinks) is implied by modern science. The passing of mechanistic theory, signalled by the rise of quantum physics and chaos theory, yields a vision of the universe which is open to both divine and human agency. It reveals a supple and subtle world of true becoming and whose future is open. We did not need science to tell us this but neither do we decline its witness. The future is not yet formed - in significant ways it is being made as we go along. Of course, God knows what can happen and what he would have to do in reply. God is prepared for whatever may be but he can also accomplish his purposes by contingent paths.<sup>15</sup>

Besides, what would be gained from believing in exhaustive definite foreknowledge? What's the big deal? Knowing exactly what's to come doesn't allow God to change anything. It's too late for that. It doesn't help to know the future, if it can't be altered. Not only are our hands tied but God's hands are bound too. Exhaustive definite foreknowledge offers God little or nothing by way of providential control. Even God cannot regulate a future which is settled. It doesn't seem to me that Wesleyan critics have anything to offer. As for the Calvinist critics, it's determinism that they are after - what God foreknows is what he has decided. God is a know-it-all quite independently of foreknowing anything.

So why do people hold on so tightly to exhaustive definite foreknowledge and resist what we think is a sensible option so strongly? Basic conservatism

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13 Bruce A. Ware, God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), ch 2. Richard L. Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), ch 10.

14 Keith Ward, "Cosmos and Kenosis" in John Polkinghorne, editor The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 161.

15 John Polkinghorne, Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), ix, 41, 54.

prompts one to stick with the tried and true and not experiment. Plus, one can worry about the consequences (real or imagined) of holding to "only" current omniscience. Above all, I think we have taken away a security blanket. In open theism one has to trust God as wise and competent much more than you had to in traditional thinking. Our critics are into "protecting God" from getting into situations from which he may not be able to extricate himself. And, especially for conservative evangelicals like Tim LeHay and millions like him, what about biblical prophecy? How can predictions, especially fairly precise sounding predictions, be explained without positing exhaustive definite foreknowledge?<sup>16</sup> It would be true to say that the open theists have some explaining to do along these lines and that they owe it to the wider constituency to explain what their beliefs may mean for a whole range of doctrines. I accept that. Being a new kid on the block is exhilarating but it has its own burden.

### An Evangelical Mini-Crisis

Unintentionally, open theism is responsible for creating a mini-crisis in evangelicalism. Conservative evangelicals as traditionalists prefer a defence of traditional opinions to any reform of them. Especially so when they are confronted with something as surprising as divine present knowledge. Some of us have been discussing these ideas for years but, for most evangelicals, open theism came on like a thunder clap. For many, unfamiliar with the idea of new thinking in theology, open theism had to be "a whole new ball game" and "way-out there." This has become a startling example of post-conservative evangelical thought. Their first reaction was to ask how it could possibly be part of the faith once delivered? Thus some of them have pledged themselves sweep the movement clean of it. Within evangelicalism in the past fifty years, Calvinists and Arminians may have lived together in relative peace. We have agreed to differ and allowed a both/and approach on many issues. But open theism has stirred things up and has brought to the surface in a provocative way the ancient differences between monergists and synergists. It has rocked the boat on many levels - the exegetical, the historical, the philosophical, and the existential that it is difficult to ignore. Add to that the fact that the evangelical world is not the best place to do constructive theology. It attracts a suspicious eye. Evangelicals like to be thought of as "biblical" Christians when in fact they are often stubborn traditionalists who strongly resist fresh insight into Scripture.

To understand the heat of the debate, one has to consider that the evangelical coalition is "neo-Calvinist," that is, it is dominated intellectually by paleo-Calvinists for whom open theism poses a real threat. Though used to

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<sup>16</sup> Biblical prophecy is a complex phenomena. The Bible places the emphasis more on God's promises than on his foreknowledge. For centuries people have hyped its witness for apologetic purposes and still do it today. They have not considered much how imprecise and figurative most of it is. Witness the incredible "Left Behind" films and their absurd "precision." We have underestimated the conditional aspect of prophecy and the degree to which predictions are really promises of what God plans to do. Plus, we fail to take account of God's prescience based on what has happened to this point and what is likely to happen. The foreknowledge of God is vast even from the point of view of current omniscience. I was amazed to find Gregory Boyd open to call his own position "neo-Molinist" and what that implies for a vast foreknowledge. See James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, editors Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 144-48.

tolerating what they call "classical" Arminianism because of its perceived inconsistencies, they cannot so easily tolerate a version of it which removes the main problem and goes on the offensive. The Calvinists sense (rightly, I think) that this particular version of free will theism poses a greater threat than the older forms of it did. Therefore, it cannot be tolerated. A coherent form of free will theism is (to them) a very dangerous error indeed. Therefore, we have become a target and can do little to lessen the fury. The better we explain it, the worse its errors will seem. To them, open theism is an alternative to the Christian faith, not a legitimate option. For our part, we would prefer to continue to have the peaceful relations which we have had historically. But it may not be possible - something has changed. Open theism has raised the bar and forced the opposition to dig deeper. But what if they are out of answers? That would explain the panic.<sup>17</sup>

The fact is, that open theism is a variant of Wesleyan/Arminian theology which enjoys a respected place in the evangelical tradition and what happens to it may depend a great deal on what its natural allies do. I refer of course to other evangelical theological non-determinists which exist in large numbers, especially Wesleyan/Arminians, but also Pentecostals with their highly relational faith, free church believers, uncounted numbers of Baptists, etc, all these in large numbers who delight in the basic impulses of open theism as a whole but hesitate a little with the details. They recognise how close to their own way of thinking the open view of God is, as loving, relational, and self-sacrificing but they are quite uneasy about the idea of current omniscience. It is a moment of high suspense. What will they do? Will they refuse to countenance open theism as an option and join with the high Calvinists to sweep it from the table? Or, will they say, wait a minute? Let's give it more time. Let's think it through. I hope and pray that they will see Roger E. Olson's point and affirm open theism as a legitimate opinion for evangelicals in thinking about divine providence.<sup>18</sup> Renowned Wesley scholar, Randy L. Maddox, has shown that open theism, including current omniscience, has been discussed within Methodism for centuries and he even posits as likely that Wesley's response to open theism would have been one of acceptance. He also points to the John Miley exchange with Lorenzo D. McCabe over foreknowledge in the late 1880's as evidence that for Wesleyans this debate is not new or extra-ordinary.<sup>19</sup> It would be nice then that the paleo-Calvinists would stop dictating the proper issues for our discussion. They should back off and let us enjoy our liberty.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The reader must remember that "Reformed theology" for these evangelicals means paleo-Calvinism, the stern tradition of the Westminster Confession and the Synods of Dort. It does not describe the Reformed theology of a Barth or a Moltmann or a H. Berkhof. For these scholars, paleo-Calvinism is a bit of a fossil. But in this discussion with such evangelicals, one has to deal with this anachronism and play the game.

<sup>18</sup> Olson, The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 194-6.

<sup>19</sup> Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 50-58. See also his essay on the Wesleyan tradition referred to above in Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love.

<sup>20</sup> I am sometimes asked how I have been able to stay calm in the face of fierce criticisms. Part of it is that I heed the gospel imperative to love my enemies and part of it is to see past the malice to the ignorance. So many of the charges are so wide of the mark that I entertain the possibility that they do not know what they are saying. In other words, I keep hoping that the ignorance is corrigible and remain hopeful.

I come cup in hand. I would really like it if Wesleyan/Arminians and others like them would declare that open theism is not a threat to evangelicals but a fresh version and a legitimate variant of their own relational and non-determinist thinking. I think it would be in their own self-interest to do so too. To speak frankly, I believe that the attack on open theism being engineered by paleo-Calvinist sectarians within evangelicalism is not limited to us but extends to every form of synergism. Do we not hear them wondering out loud whether any Wesleyan/Arminians are evangelicals, given that they are synergists. Olson refers to this in his article: "Don't hate me because I'm an Arminian."<sup>21</sup> Wesleyans need to consider the possibility that the present attack on open theism is part of a rejection of every form of free will theism. I think it would be wrongheaded for Wesleyan/Arminians to view open theism as a threat (like process theism is, for example). They need to try and see open theism as a version of their own vision, and perhaps even see its potential, under God, to re-invigorate these convictions and prompt a theological renaissance and spiritual awakening. What I urge them not to do is to join with the paleo-Calvinists who are bound and determined to kill the openness baby in the cradle. If they do so, I predict, that they will be the next to be attacked.

I have a suggestion and, in the words of Paul, "I think that I have the Spirit of God." (1 Cor 7:40) I offer it as a word of wisdom. Let's put off making a final judgment about open theism and allow the discussion to go on. (It will go on in any case.) Let's heed Gamaliel who said, if something like open theism is of human origin, it will fail. But, if it is of God, no one will be able to overcome it (Acts 5:33-39). Let's talk, let's research, and let's pray. It has not yet been proven that open theism is incompatible with other non-determinist traditions. Let's leave the door open for dialogue. Let's listen to one another. Let open theism be a player along with the others. Let's give it time to say what it has to say. By all means, let's work with the other options too. There are other ways to view the divine foreknowledge, for example: there is simple foreknowledge, middle knowledge, and timeless knowledge. Maybe support for the "twist" will grow, maybe not. At least, open theism can be a catalyst for further reflection as it is already proving to me. I think that this is a great time for all non-determinists. It is a day of opportunity - it is not a time for fratricide.

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<sup>21</sup> Roger E. Olson, Christianity Today September 6, 1999 87-94.