

crossroads



RESOLUTION CONCERNING OPEN THEISM

A recent theological movement that calls itself “Open Theism” has entered the evangelical milieu. Open theology rejects or redefines the classical doctrine of God’s omniscience. Its proponents declare that God is “open” to the future, meaning He does not fully know all events and is bound by time. As one proponent states, “...if history is infallibly known and certain from all eternity, then freedom is an illusion... I stand against classical theism which has tried to argue that God can control and foresee all things...” (1) As a result of this challenge, the meaning of “Classical Theology” has come under careful scrutiny. Openness theology claims to be a reaction to “classical” views of God that result in an ultra-transcendent, impersonal, static, and intransigent divine being that arises from a predominantly philosophical theology. Openness theologians have attempted to offer another paradigm for God’s relationship with the world. Openness thinkers over-emphasize God’s traditional transcendent aspects, underscore His immanence, and understand Him as more relational. As with most attempts at ‘correction’ in church history, this new school of thought has produced an unsettling revision—one that has created great concern among evangelical theologians.

At base, this debate comes down to the understanding of “classical theology.” “Classical theism” can be easily misunderstood in the present theological context. The best of classical theism offers a concept of God who is the Creator of time and thus is outside of time but enters into time and knows, without coercion, the implication of all human choices. The eternal Triune God knows all details of future events without manipulation or the production of any illusion. This theological tradition, out of which the Evangelical Methodist Church is birthed, has found that an orthodox and biblically-based Trinitarian theology best guides the crucial issue of God’s omniscience and human free will.

The Evangelical Methodist Church stands in the consensual guidelines of the historic Christian tradition. Orthodox Christian thought has sensitively and adequately dealt with the relation of transcendence and immanence for two millennia. The transcendent God is eternally personal, and from creation through eschaton, the three-in-one God has created humans to imagine that triune life in holy love. The transcendent Holy One has revealed Himself in immanent self-giving love. A Trinitarian view of God helps us focus on His relationships with humanity. “One of the benefits of a Triune approach to understanding the nature of God is that it holds together the biblical data on both the transcendence and the immanence of God.”(2) The Old Testament prophets consistently upheld God’s understanding of future



events in such a way that He would have to know all the details of the future. This is what separates Him from pagan gods and His creation (Is 41:21-24; 44:6-8; 46:9). The Bible has many prophecies concerning future events—many that foretold the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ) and that remain to be fulfilled with His second coming. These events require God’s foreknowledge in detail. God is the Alpha and the Omega. He is “I Am,” implicating that He is eternal, unchanging, and timeless.

The Evangelical Methodist Church stands with the classical formulation of God’s omniscience, as it has historically been understood. God knows all details of the past, present, and future, and Him knowing such details does not take away our free will.

Bibliography:

1. Predestination and Free Will, ed by David Basinger, 1986. InterVarsity Press. p. 150-151
2. Trinitarian Theism by Allan Coppedge, unpublished manuscript. Passed by The 28th General Conference of the Evangelical Methodist Church meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, in July 2006.

