

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

by

Chuck Goddard

B. S., Liberty University, 1992

M.A., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2010

A THESIS PROJECT

Submitted to the faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGION

at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina

October 2010

Copyright 2010 by Chuck Goddard

All rights reserved

Accepted:

Thesis Advisor, Derek Thomas, Ph.D.

President, Dr. Andrew J. Peterson, Ph.D.

Director of Course Development, Donn DeHart, M.A.

ABSTRACT

The Doctrine of God in the Church of the Nazarene

Chuck Goddard

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate that there are two competing views of the Doctrine of God within the Church of the Nazarene. A survey of the current theological culture within the Church of the Nazarene will reveal that Open Theism is gaining momentum. This paper will also survey the contemporary theological developments that have ignited controversy from various Evangelical sectors. A comparison of founding theological writings with current Nazarene theologians will prove that a doctrinal deviation from the official denominational statement has occurred. Finally, since the Open view is not compatible with the official doctrinal statement on God, the Church of the Nazarene must either reject its founding theological statement on the doctrine of God or revise the official confession to match the current theological position that contemporary Nazarene theologians are advocating.

To my parents who taught me the priority of love for God

To my wife Janet who daily enjoys God

To my son Jared, whose very

life reminds me I am

accountable to

God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Classical Theism	1
Open Theism	3
Open Theology and the Nazarene Church.....	5
2. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROPOSED THEOLOGICAL REVISIONS.....	9
Contemporary Theological Adjustments.....	9
Evangelical Assessment of Open Theology.....	12
The Controlling Motif of Open Theism.....	14
3. AN EXAMINATION OF THE CURRENT DOCTRINE OF GOD DEBATE.....	18
The Ongoing Debate within the Evangelical Community.....	18
The Missing Debate Within the Church of the Nazarene.....	23
4. AN ANALYSIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.....	30
The Doctrine of God From Scripture.....	31
God's Sovereignty.....	31
God's Omniscience.....	34
5. THE NAZARENE DOCTRINE OF GOD ESTABLISHED.....	37

The Doctrine of God in Early Nazarene Documents.....	37
The Theology of H. Orton Wiley.....	39
6. THE NAZARENE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN TRANSITION.....	46
The Theology of H. Ray Dunning.....	46
The Theology of Kenneth Grider.....	51
7. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN CONTEMPORARY NAZARENE THEOLOGY...58	
The Theology of Michael Lodahl.....	59
The Theology of Tom Oord.....	64
The Theology of C.S. Cowles.....	77
8. CONCLUSION.....	85
A Disregard For Their Theological Heritage.....	87
A Devotion to Liberal Theology.....	89
Diversity With No Theological Consistency.....	94

Acknowledgements

To my longsuffering friends who would have preferred to savor a freshly brewed, bold cup of coffee; but graciously participated in theological discussion anyway. To Bill and Beth Watts who tried not to look surprised when my car pulled up to the curb outside their Washington D. C. area home on more than one occasion to attend a class. To Lauren Watts, who gave up her room, bunked with her sweet sister Jen, and started my fan club. To date she remains its sole member. Chuck and Deb Brown who daily demonstrate unparalleled commitment to God; and to Dan and Nancy King (our Hendersonville homies) who have loved us without reservation and adopted us into their family. To David Balty who listened, advised, and gave valuable instruction regarding the structure and content of this project (don't blame him for the shortcomings of this thesis, he tried). I also want to thank Mark Winder. I first met Mark in Jackson, MS shortly after I enrolled at Reformed Theological Seminary. He has been a great friend and study companion throughout the duration of this program. Thanks to Roger Clark, who stood beside me and believed in me; and to Randy Lanham, my Nazarene Pastor friend who encouraged me to pursue this topic. These are friends, my friends. People whose friendship you would be willing to buy (if you had the money) but are thrilled beyond belief to call them friends for free. Last, but not least, to my wife and son. Janet endured graciously, gave up a lot, and offered valuable suggestions. Her love for me is not deserved. Jared Isaac, who endured several family vacations with piles of books, is a young man any parent would be proud to call son. I call him Isaac.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is my thesis that there are two competing views of God within the Church of the Nazarene. The goal of this project is to document the contemporary changes occurring within the Church of the Nazarene regarding the nature and doctrine of God. Conventional Christian belief has for centuries embraced the following core truths about God: God knows the future exhaustively and God is sovereign ruler of the Universe. These doctrinal commitments affirm, at least in part, that God knows everything and is the sovereign Creator of everything. The Scripture is specific in declaring these basic truths. The Psalmist boldly asserts that God spoke the world into existence by the power of His Word and will (Psalm 33:6).

Classical Theism

These traditional beliefs are also affirmed in the founding documents of the Nazarene Church. In a publication known as the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, the following statement delineates what the denomination officially believes about the nature of God:

“We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the Universe. That He only is God, holy in nature, character and purpose, creative and administrative. That He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹

¹ Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, *General Assembly 1908* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1908), 24-25.

This statement defines the doctrine of God using terms familiar to Classical Theology. It also asserts fundamental and core elements essential to the Christian faith regarding the nature of God: He is Omnipotent, He is Eternal, and He is All-knowing.

The God of Classical Theism has centuries of church history as a precedent. God's Sovereignty and His exhaustive foreknowledge are embedded deep within the theological discussions of the early church fathers and assumed by prophets in the Old Testament.² This is also the doctrinal posture that was embraced by the Nazarene denomination when it was established in 1908. What does Classical Theism affirm that is also delineated in the official *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*? According to their doctrinal statement, they affirm that God is immutable. They also confess that God is eternal and all powerful. Specifically, their doctrinal confession acknowledges that God is over the entire universe. It is these core attributes that represent a summary of their stance on the nature of God. God does not change. God is Omnipotent. As sovereign, He reigns over all created things on Earth and in the heavens. God knows everything. God possesses exhaustive foreknowledge of all things past, present, and future. Finally, God is omnipresent. They affirm that God is everywhere and transcends time and space.

The founding doctrinal statement of the Nazarene Church as a denomination has remained essentially the same for over 100 years. From day one the Nazarene denomination embraced an "infinite God", who is the "Sovereign of the Universe. Their early theological writings reflect and present a God who is "holy in nature, character and purpose, creative and

² Isaiah 46:5-11 is a great example of how God is perceived by Old Testament writers.

administrative.”³ It would be difficult to read the official doctrinal statement of the Nazarene Church and conclude that the founding leaders intended to convey something other than the Traditional View of God and His nature.⁴ H. Orton Wiley, the first official theologian of the denomination, interprets the Doctrine of God in Classical terms.⁵

Open Theism

But the Classical view of God is not the prominent interpretive category in the writings of contemporary Nazarene theologians. Open Theists within the COTN⁶ believe that the time has come (and is long overdue) for God to be freed from the confines of Classical Theism. They believe if they are successful in this endeavor, God will be viewed as more accessible and responsive to the post-modern culture we are seeking to reach. John MacArthur, who is a respected Bible scholar, believes that Open Theology will radically alter the God of Scripture and decimate major doctrines of the Christian faith in the process.⁷ Nazarene Open Theists, by contrast, view themselves as theological innovators who are removing ancient barriers that have made God inaccessible and unattractive to our secular and scientific culture. Their theological improvements, they believe, will satisfy the post-

³ Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, *General Assembly 1908* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1908), 24-25.

⁴ Recall that the stated belief of the Nazarene Denomination is “We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the Universe. That He only is God, holy in nature, character and purpose, creative and administrative. That He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

⁵ This will be explored in more detail later in this paper.

⁶ Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

⁷ See John MacArthur, “Open Theism’s Attack on the Atonement,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Spring (2001): 3-13.

modern thirst for a God that truly relates to the sophisticated world in which we live.⁸ It is this sincere belief that our culturally enlightened society will like their new and improved version of God better that motivates them.

Open Theism's Core Commitments

Open Theism generally embraces the following characteristics: First, God is open or receptive to what creatures do. This means God does not unilaterally determine the course of events in the universe. According to John Sanders, God has granted to us a measure of autonomy. Such freedom of choice may not apply to all creatures, but it certainly applies to humans on earth. Since we have autonomy, in freedom we act and then, and only then, does God decide what He needs to do in response to our action.⁹ A second characteristic of Open Theology is the controlling motif that God is Love. They believe love is the essence and the core of who God is. Since love is His defining nature, He waits for us to respond to Him. If and when we respond to Him, God responds to us. A third characteristic of Openness denies that God possesses meticulous providence. Instead, God reacts to the “moves” we make. This means that the future is at least partly open. In other words, Open Theology denies God the ability to know what we are going to do prior to our choice. Finally, Open Theology grants to us the crown jewel of what it means to be human: libertarian freedom.¹⁰ The Open Theist believes that we are free to make choices that may be against our nature. For instance, our desire may be to sin, but we can choose to not be a sinner. Open Theology believes this

⁸ See Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover*, (Grand Rapids, InterVarsity Press, 2000), see also Bryan P Stone and Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

⁹ Open Theology: “Its History and Diversity” John Sanders presented at the Open Theology and Science Seminar, June 18, 2007.

¹⁰ John Sanders, *The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 282.

ability to choose cannot be swayed or influenced by external influences: not even God. Since we possess libertarian free-will, God is in the dark, so to speak, until we make a choice. It is this contrastive and competing Doctrine of God that is finding traction within the COTN.

Open Theology and the Nazarene Church

The Open View has enthusiastic support within the Nazarene community. Professor Tom Oord, who teaches in the Religion and Philosophy Department at Northwest Nazarene University, embraces the Open View of God.¹¹ Professor Oord identifies the following characteristics as similarities that exist among most, if not all, Open Theists. Advocates of Open theology believe the primary interpretive category of God's nature is love. They also believe God experiences others in some way analogous to how creatures experience others. They believe both creatures and God are relational beings, which means, that both God and creatures are affected by others in a give-and-take relationships. God takes calculated risks, because God is not all-controlling. They see the future as open and undetermined; it is not predetermined or fully known by God. Regarding the future, they believe God can only know what is knowable. The future, the Open Theist asserts, is not knowable. God's expectations about the future are often partly dependent upon creaturely actions. Finally, although God is everlasting, God experiences time in a way analogous to how creatures experience time.¹² In

¹¹ Some of Tom Oord's writings on this topic are posted on his web page: <http://thomasjaylor.com/>. See also Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover*, (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2000), see also Bryan P Stone and Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

¹² Tom Oord, "The Emergence of Open Theology" http://thomasjaylor.com/http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/ Novemebr 19, 2009.

a few sentences, Oord has redefined God in ways totally foreign to Classical theology. As we shall see, in one sweeping motion, he has redefined God as only quantitatively different.

From a historical perspective Classical theology floats in deep theological waters. By contrast, Open Theology attempts to swim in a shallow ecclesiastical stream from which virtually no theological context flows.¹³ This fact does not seem to concern those who advocate Open Theology within the COTN. They maintain that these interpretive categories (particularly the “Omni doctrines” of Omnipotence and Omniscience) are not relevant to our postmodern times. However, it is important to note how they frame their case. Open Theist Clark Pinnock (whose teachings both Tom Oord and Michael Lodahl admire) presents the two models of God in the following manner:

“We may think of God primarily as an aloof monarch, removed from the contingencies of the world, unchangeable, in every aspect of being, as an all-determining and irresistible power, aware of everything that will ever happen and never taking risks. Or we may understand God as a caring parent with the qualities of love and responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity, openness and vulnerability, a person (rather than a metaphysical principle) who experiences the world, responds to what happens, relates to us and interacts dynamically with humans.”¹⁴

Pinnock seems to frame the debate in terms that are foreign to the Scriptures. The Bible presents a view of God that is both transcendent AND imminent; sovereign AND loving; above space and time and yet providentially caring for the world; as one who is in control yet loving as a mother or father for His children; responsive to human need but unchanging in

¹³ Some of the tenets held by Open Theists were expressed by Socinus (whose teachings were condemned by both Protestants and Catholics). Methodist theologian Lorenzo McCabe also explored a divergent view of God’s foreknowledge in a book published in the late 1800’s. See Lorenzo Dow McCabe, *The Foreknowledge of God, and Cognate Themes in Theology and Philosophy* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1878).

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 103.

His ways. Pinnock, on the other hand, presents the debate in an emphatic and rigid “either/or” framework. Nazarene theologian Michael Lodahl frames the debate in a similar “either/or” context when he writes, “part of what it means for a man to be truly free must include a God that let’s things be. God’s Word is the word of ‘Let there be’ ---let there be a real creation, a real people, a true ‘other’ that is other than God, that is not ‘under God’s thumb’ or at the end of puppet strings.”¹⁵ He continues, “When God’s Sovereignty is viewed through the lens of love, God becomes the fellow sufferer who understands.”¹⁶ Lodahl seems to suggest that the Classical View of Divine Sovereignty cannot be interpreted in any other context except that of God being a controlling tyrant incapable of love; however, he believes his view of God offers a more balanced view of a God who understands. Such characterization seems to be arbitrary and unnecessary.

While some theologians (who hold to the more traditional interpretation of the nature of God) agree that some doctrinal adjustments may need renewed consideration, they do not find total abandonment of core theological commitments on the Doctrine and nature of God offered by Open Theology (and advocated by COTN theologians) to be the answer.¹⁷ Alterations to ones doctrine of God---though it may appear to be insignificant---can have profound ramifications on the entire matrix of one’s belief system. Most theologians agree that the doctrine of God is the fountainhead from which all other truth flows. The reliability of the Bible, the Doctrines of Assurance, Atonement, the Resurrection, and Eschatology all stand or fall based on one’s doctrinal presupposition of God. The lack of theological context, and the profound ramifications of the proposed alterations to the Nazarene’s historical stance,

¹⁵ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 799-802.

does not seem to concern Northwest Nazarene University's Professor Oord. According to him, a "growing number of evangelical Christians are looking for theological alternatives that better fit their reading of the Bible and deepest Christian intuitions. Open Theology provides a potentially more satisfying alternative."¹⁸

¹⁸ Tom Oord, "The Emergence of Open Theology"
(http://thomasjoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/),
accessed November 19, 2009.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTIFYING THE PROPOSED THEOLOGICAL REVISIONS

Contemporary Nazarene theologians reject the Classical definition of God's nature on the grounds that it is not theologically satisfying. Their dissatisfaction is due in part to a passionate desire to appeal to an American culture that places hyper-emphasis on human autonomy as a fundamental right of all things human. They believe the idea of a Sovereign God who knows all and is over all is out of step with our scientifically enlightened society. John Frame counters that the Open View of God maintains that "God is temporal and lacks exhaustive knowledge of the future, being unsure of the free choices of human beings."¹ Authors Huffman and Johnson observe that the God of Open Theism is "a strictly temporal being who grows in his knowledge of reality as it unfolds in time."² Open Theism, by any definition, is an extreme deviation from the norm for historical Christianity; it is also a major departure from the official teaching of the Church of the Nazarene.³

Contemporary Theological Adjustments

Nazarene proponents of Open Theism believe theological adjustments to the doctrine of God are needed. The goal of those sympathetic to Open Theism is to correct perceived

¹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2002), 6.

² Douglas S. Hoffman and Eric L. Johnson, eds., *God Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 27.

³ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

inadequacies in the traditional view of God. At the heart of the doctrines they would like to redefine is the so called “Omni doctrines.” Although the terms omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient have been used for centuries to describe God, contemporary Nazarene theologians would like to alter (if not eliminate) these historical doctrines. It is their opinion that these doctrines are out of touch with modern times.

Redefining God’s Sovereignty

Although Christian theology for centuries has defined God as being all-powerful, all-knowing, and unchanging, an element within the theological community of the Nazarene Church insists that these are outdated beliefs. Some COTN theologians reject a Sovereign God whose Omnipotence knows no rival. To grant God the right to exercise such raw and unbridled power (they believe) gives God a license to be coercive and tyrannical. In other words, the Classical View of Sovereignty is incompatible with their God whose nature is defined in terms of supreme love. Nazarene advocates of Openness prefer to envision the God of Scripture as one who “shares” His power with us.⁴ Nazarene theologian Michael Lodahl, an ardent proponent for the view of God sharing power with us writes, “The God we call omnipotent does not exercise all power; if indeed power has been shared with us.” He continues, “This is far more than a matter of quantity, of divvying up power; rather, it may be more accurate to say that the very nature of divine power is *empowerment of the other*.”⁵ This is a bold claim that would require a radical theological adjustment to God’s sovereignty if the base line doctrinal norm is H. Orton Wiley.

⁴ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 55. Michael Lodahl, is an ordained Elder in the Church of the Nazarene, and teaches at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, CA.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

Redefining God's Foreknowledge

The doctrinal adjustments necessary to accommodate the Open Theology matrix do not end with limiting God's power, however. The Nazarene Open Theist typically believes that the Classical God (who is perceived to know the future exhaustively) is better viewed as having limited knowledge of the future too. Nazarene theologian Tom Oord maintains numerous modifications are necessary. In an article entitled *The Emergence of Open Theology* Oord contends that if God's primary characteristic is love, then the following assertions about God are true. God cannot know the future. The future is partly open. God takes calculated risks because love is not willing to be controlling of another. God's expectations about the future are partly dependent upon creaturely actions. God experiences time in the same way we do. God experiences others in the same way we experience others.⁶ While these corrections may offer more theological appeal to some within the COTN academic community, such alterations are antithetical to the Nazarene denomination's official doctrinal statement on God.

Redefining Freewill

Contemporary COTN theologians also believe adjustments are necessary to the typical Arminian view of human will. Why would some within the COTN find the Open View (that limits God's foreknowledge, limits His power, and makes Him subject to change) so

⁶ Tom Oord, "The Emergence of Open Theology" (http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/), accessed January 30, 2010. This is just a sample of what Oord wants to do to the doctrine of God. He also believes the Doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* needs to be rejected. In spite of the belief of the Church has long held to this truth that God created the Universe out of nothing, Oord claims that the Scriptures do not support such a doctrine. When the theology of Tom Oord is examined later in this paper, you will learn that he proposes many divergent views.

attractive? For one thing, Open Theology, in their opinion, provides room for true individual freedom. If God really does not know what we will choose to do prior to our choice, we really do have freedom of choice. Because the COTN claims the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, as its theological father, Open Theism is a welcomed alternative to the doctrinal disagreements the typical Arminian has with Calvinism. COTN Open Theists believe that if God has constrained foreknowledge (rather than exhaustive foreknowledge) then He cannot be held responsible for the existence of evil in the world.⁷ Advocates of Openness also postulate that if human beings are truly autonomous, they can make decisions and exercise their wills without any input from God. And if God truly doesn't know (in advance of one's choice) what they will do, then God cannot be held responsible for their actions. The theological payoff for the Nazarene Open Theist is two-fold: God cannot be held responsible for the presence (and existence) of evil in the world and humans are totally free. Both of these payoffs provide Arminian solutions to the Calvinistic alternative. As we shall see, the Open View solutions advocated by contemporary Nazarene theologians are not compatible with, and stand in direct contradiction to, the original teachings of the Nazarene denomination.

Evangelical Assessment of Open Theism

The premise of my thesis states that there are competing interpretive concepts of God within the Church of the Nazarene. The Doctrine of God embraced by the Founders of the

⁷ The problem of evil is known as theodicy. The argument goes something like this: If God is all powerful then it logically follows that God is responsible for all that happens in the Universe since He obviously wills, causes, or allows events to occur. If He is all knowing (omniscient) God would certainly know in advance about the event. Why didn't He stop it? Theodicy is such a thorny issue that some view the presence of evil in the world as the sole justification for unbelief. Albert Camus, the philosopher, makes such an argument in his work *The Plague*.

COTN would not be comfortable in the clothes contemporary Nazarene theologians want Him to wear. The theological adjustments being proposed by the COTN Open Theist to the nature of God is not just a simple application of wrinkle cream; it is a complete, radical facelift. In contrast to the official doctrinal statement of the COTN that affirms a Sovereign, Omniscient, and unchanging God, advocates within the denomination want to comprehensively alter what Nazarenes have believed since their establishment as a denomination. In its place, they propose a God who resembles us: weak, at times ignorant, and not always capable of unerring judgment. Oddly, it is difficult to find theologians within the COTN who are willing to go on the record and defend the Nazarene's official doctrinal position. On the other hand, the assessment outside the COTN is blunt. It is not difficult to find remarks from theologians who express verbal slap downs to Open Theism. D.A Carson, a well published theologian with a proven track record within the Evangelical community, says that Open Theism "so redefines the God of the Bible and of theology that we wind up with a quite different God."⁸ Wayne Grudem, who taught for twenty years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and is the author of numerous books including a well received work on systematic theology, contends that Open Theism "ultimately portrays a different God than the God of the Bible."⁹ Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, emphatically asserts "that the very identity and reality of the God of the Bible is at stake."¹⁰ John Piper, who is the author of many books, proclaimed that Open Theism "dishonors God, distorts Scripture, damages faith and would, if left

⁸ Bruce Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books: 2000), backcover.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

unchecked, destroy churches and lives.”¹¹ These are all bold words from bright minds; but not one of them is a Nazarene.

My thesis states that there are two competing views of God within the COTN: one is Classical the other is contemporary. One is rooted in theological history and precedent, the other is highly speculative. The Open View of God currently advocated by contemporary Nazarene theologians is clearly a deviation from the norm: their norm. This deviation is not just from what is a benchmark truth for Nazarene theology; it is a deviation from traditional Christianity as well. What is it about Open Theism that some within the COTN academic community find so attractive? Why would a denomination whose theological roots are firmly ensconced in Classical Christian tradition find it necessary to rescue the doctrine of God?

The Controlling Motif of Open Theism

Contemporary Nazarene theology (unlike Nazarene founding theologian Wiley) adopts a controlling theological motif. The current theological trajectory of Nazarene theologians (particularly as portrayed in the writings of Michael Lodahl and Tom Oord) adopts “God is Love” as a controlling motif. It is through this “love lens” that all other doctrine is focused.¹² Their controlling motif has led them to a destination that could not be

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Love as a controlling motif has led Oord and Lodahl to advocate several theological revisions. The sovereignty of God is one doctrine that must be changed. God, as love, cannot exercise absolute sovereignty because love willingly shares authority. Creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) violates the principle of love too. Divine creative action is viewed as coercive. God’s Foreknowledge is self-limited in keeping with the nature of love. The doctrine of God’s Immutability teaches that God is changeless. This too, when viewed through the lens of “God as Love” must be refocused. If God is love, he must be able to experience change. If He cannot experience the emotion of love, He cannot be viewed as available to us nor can He enter into mutual relations with us. These and other doctrines are impacted when this controlling motif of God’s Love is implemented.

more out of focus with the founding statement of belief within the Nazarene Church. Both of these Nazarene theologians (Oord and Lodahl) have embraced a view of God that is more informed by Process Theology than the Bible. Both of these theologians reject the Classical View of God's Sovereignty. If God's defining characteristic is Love, they argue, belief in a God who is the absolute Sovereign of the Universe is antithetical to a God whose supreme characteristic is love. Through their lens of love the Classical View of a Sovereign God (to them) is coercive and controlling. Oord and Lodahl also express theological dissatisfaction with the doctrine of creation out of nothing. That too, is viewed as a violation of their controlling motif of love. Lodahl believes *Creatio ex nihilo* is paradoxical; Oord believes the doctrine is a violation of man's free will.

Starting points matter. The Doctrine of God illustrates this in a profound way. John Frame, a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, skillfully demonstrates this point by observing theological schools of thought are often driven by a "controlling motif".¹³ When theology is restricted to a particular prism through which to view truth; portions of Scripture are often ignored or rejected. Whether it is the motif of feeling, experience, and absolute dependence (Schleiermacher), absolute ground of "Being" (Tillich), holy history (Cullmann), community (Grenz), or the Openness of God (Pinnock), the end result is the same: it reduces Scriptural Truth to scholastic opinion. And more often than not, such endeavors usually arrive at views that are drastically different from the God portrayed in Scripture.¹⁴

Frame's point is vividly illustrated in the current theological trajectory of contemporary Nazarene theologians. Commenting on the sovereignty of God, Nazarene

¹³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

theologian Michael Lodahl redefines God as love.¹⁵ He believes God does not “hoard power but shares power” with us.¹⁶ Nazarene Theologian Tom Oord shares a similar view of sovereignty. Oord asserts that “power is a social concept only meaningful in relation to others.”¹⁷ He also believes that it is essential for God to be viewed as love in order to free Him from being culpable for evil. Specifically he writes, “If God once had the power to create from absolutely nothing, God *essentially* retains that power. But a God of love with this capacity is culpable for failing to use it periodically to prevent evil.”¹⁸ Clark Pinnock advocates a similar view. For example, in *The Openness of God* Clark Pinnock formulates the doctrine of God in the following manner:

“The open view of God invites believers to consider a new perspective on God in relation to the world. It asks us to imagine a response-able and self-sacrificing God of changeable faithfulness and vulnerable power. It invites us to see God as the power of love that creates personal agents able to freely love him. It is not naked power. Love is God’s essence and power only an attribute.”¹⁹

In other words, because God is a gracious God, he grants to humans significant freedom. With this divinely bestowed autonomy we can either work with God or against God. Since humans are extremely fickle, God enters into a dynamic relationship of give-and-take with us. God woos us with his grace and if and when we respond, God again responds with more wooing. God dialogues with us; is open to receiving from us, and, according to Clark, God does not control everything that happens yet there are times when God does intervene. He

¹⁵ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷ Tom Oord, “Creatio ex Creation a Natura Amoris: A New Doctrine of Creation.” *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love* (http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/open_theology_and_the_church_the_nazarene/), accessed Nov 4, 2010.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), x.

states that “God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static.”²⁰ This doctrinal reformulation that Pinnock advocates requires God to relinquish His sovereignty and His foreknowledge. Nazarene theologians Lodahl and Oord appear to agree with Pinnock. Why is this Open View of God so attractive and yet so removed from the official COTN doctrinal statement? They embrace it because it fits with their controlling theological motif: God is love.

In the next chapter, careful consideration will be given to the events surrounding the development of Open Theism over the past twenty years. The section will also note the lack of denominational response within the COTN that is in stark contrast to the uproar Open Theology has created within the evangelical community at large.

²⁰ Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 104.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CURRENT DOCTRINE OF GOD DEBATE

To track what is occurring within the COTN¹ regarding the doctrine of God, it may be helpful to have a better understanding of what has occurred within the greater theological context of the Evangelical community at large. While the content of this chapter is not exhaustive or comprehensive, the objective is to provide the reader with an overview that will enlighten, inform, and provide theological context. As you read this section, keep in mind that the central purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that there are two competing views of God within the Church of the Nazarene and that this proposed doctrinal denominational deviation has faced little opposition within the theological community of the COTN.

The Ongoing Debate Within The Evangelical Community

In 1994, a small collection of essays on the doctrine of God was published under the title of *The Openness of God*.² The goal of the published work was simple: bring to the theological table an alternative to the traditional (classical) view of God. The contributing authors were motivated by a common desire to address what they perceived to be a real

¹ Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

disconnect between the God experienced in the Bible and the God that seemed to be chained in the stoic confines of classical theology. While the work submitted was small in size, the controversy it ignited was not.

In the preface to *The Openness of God*, Clark Pinnock outlines the Open View of God in “broad strokes.” He avers that “God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God’s will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give and take relationships with us.”³ Pinnock stresses the point that these relationships are not illusory; they are real, and the interaction between the divine and the human is genuine. “God takes risks in this give and take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working toward his ultimate goals.”⁴ Everything is not preordained. God does not exercise control over all things either, and in Pinnock’s words, “God is open to receiving input from his creatures.”⁵ In addition, there are other circumstances where God might choose to impose his will without the help of humans. Pinnock believes that “God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation.”⁶ Thus, he concludes, “God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being.”⁷

These concessions to the doctrine of God do not seem to be all that radical to the Open Theist. In the minds of some, these changes are necessary; required perhaps because the God of Classical theism is viewed by the Open theist as aloof and unresponsive.

Commenting on this portrayal of God by those sympathetic to Open Theology, David Burrell

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

says, “The God that emerges is unresponsive and aloof...hardly fit for worship.”⁸ While he agrees that this kind of God more often than not is the view all too familiar to Western consciousness, he flatly denies that the Classical model assigned by Open Theist represents the mainstream of historical Christianity. Yet for those sympathetic to Open Theology, Classical Theism is synonymous with a God who is removed, aloof, and so transcendent he cannot relate to the world.

Representing the “Openness View,” Richard Rice writes, “For most of Christian history, one idea of God has dominated the church’s perspective. In this perspective, God is equally glorified and his purposes are equally well served by the obedience of the righteous, the rebellion of sinners, the redemption of the saints and the destruction of the wicked, He is untouched by the disappointments, sorrow, and suffering of his creatures.”⁹ From this perspective, the God delineated in the ancient Creeds of the Early Church is not kind; rather He is uncaring and unresponsive.

Clark Pinnock’s views infer that the Open model of God is more metaphysically responsive and superior. He pointedly notes,

“God is one whose ways are marked by flexibility and dynamism, who acts and reacts on behalf of His people, who does not exist in splendid isolation from the world of change, but relates to his creatures...God not only directs but interacts. No unmoved mover, God responds sensitively to what happens on earth and relates to us. God is the omnipotent Creator but exercises his power subtly and carefully in the world. By bringing other free agents into being and entering into their lives in love, God is open.”¹⁰

⁸ David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1979), 36.

⁹ *The Openness of God*, 11-12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

But to those who hold to the Classical view of God these basic tenets are a radical departure from the God they believe to be described in Scripture. Because the consequences of such a recasting of the Doctrine of God are clear to them, the response to this theological newcomer, known as Open Theism, has been emphatic rejection. Scott Hoezee, in a book review, states that just as a party in a conversation may go too far in what is said and thus offend, so the Open view has gone “too far” in the argument and thus threatens to “derail the entire discourse.”¹¹ In January of 1995, *Christianity Today* published four reviews on *The Openness of God*. In 1998 *Christianity Today* published an article by Tom Oden entitled, “The Real Reformers are Traditionalist.” In this article he wrote bluntly, “The fantasy that God is ignorant of the future is a heresy that must be rejected.”¹²

John Piper, a prominent pastor in the Baptist General Conference, used Thomas Oden’s charge of heresy to argue that Greg Boyd, a professor of theology at Bethel College in Saint Paul and pastor in the Baptist General Conference should be fired from his teaching position at Bethel College and his pastoral credentials revoked. All attempts by Piper to have Greg Boyd removed failed. Meanwhile, in the Southern Baptist Convention, critics of Openness have had a measure of success. In 1999 they introduced a resolution on Divine foreknowledge. The delegates at the convention voted to include a revision to the *Baptist Faith and Standard*. In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention approved the following statement:

¹¹ Scott Hoezee, review of *The Openness of God*, by Clark Pinnock, et al, in *Calvin Theological Journal* (30 November 1995) 589-593.

¹² Tom Oden, “The Real Reformers are Traditionalist,” *Christianity Today*, February 2, 1998, 46.

“God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures.”

After the 1999 resolution was submitted, *Christianity Today* published an editorial entitled “God vs. God.” Critics of Open Theism were encouraged to continue in friendly debate rather than seek to squelch an exchange of ideas through political means. The editorial observed the following about the traditional view of God: “There is no more boring concept of God than that traditionally presented by philosophical Theism. Besides which, who wants to pray to an abstract and uninvolved deity?”¹³ The editorial further encouraged both sides of this debate to do more homework. For the Open Theist he assigned the task of providing a full account of the biblical language about God’s foreknowledge and immutability and the Greek philosophical influences that helped shape Classical Theism. To the Classical Theist the suggestion was given that they return to a more robustly biblical approach to talking about God. Many within the Evangelical community, after reading this Editorial, wrote letters to the editor questioning if *Christianity Today* could be trusted.

Gerald Bray, Professor of historical theology at Beeson Divinity School, published a critique of Open Theism and said that the authors of *The Openness of God* “supposed that God’s infinite flexibility in dealing with us must indicate that his being is somehow changeable. He cannot change. A word like ‘change’ simply makes no sense when applied to God.”¹⁴ He further suggested that “it is hard to believe that in the late twentieth century a few radicals have arrived at a truth which has escaped generations of sincere searchers.”¹⁵

¹³ Editorial: “God vs. God,” *Christianity Today*, February 7, 2000.

¹⁴ Gerald Bray, *The Personal God: Is the Classical Understanding of God Tenable?* (Carlisle, UK.; Paternoster Press, 1998), 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Douglas Kelly, a theology professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, writes that Open Theists cannot be taken “seriously either by scholars or by ordinary Christian lay folk until its authors rethink their basic approach.”¹⁶ In other words, for Kelly, there should not even be dialogue between the two theological camps until the Open view thinks itself back into the Classical view of God. Albert Mohler believes the Open Theist is guilty of revisioning the doctrine of God and is guilty of rewriting historic Christian doctrine. He identifies much of what the Open Theists are advocating as nothing more than a dime store version of Process theology.¹⁷ In fact, he associates Open Theology with Process Theology.¹⁸

The Missing Debate Within The Church of the Nazarene

Clearly, it can be documented that Open Theism is a hot topic within certain sectors of the Evangelical community. Numerous books, countless journal articles, and conference papers have been written on this subject. Without question, Open Theism has struck a raw nerve in the Evangelical community; but raw nerves are not apparent within the COTN. Charges leveled against Open Theists range from making God in man’s image, of being Socinian,¹⁹ of heresy, of creating a user friendly god, of adding feminine elements to God’s

¹⁶ Douglas Kelly, “Afraid of Infinitude,” *Christianity Today*, January 9, 1995, 33.

¹⁷ R Albert Mohler, “The Eclipse of God at Century’s End: Evangelicals Attempt to do Theology without Theism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, (Spring 1997): 13.

¹⁸ Process Theology advocates a Universe in which everything---including God--- is affected by the actions of others. God is viewed as an interdependent cooperator. Classical Theism holds to the belief that God is Creator and as such is not dependent upon the World; Process theology chooses to situate God and the Universe as mutually dependent. The Classical doctrine of Immutability (God is unchanging) is unappealing to the Process theologian. They would prefer to interpret the God of Scripture through the lens of a loving, caring, and gracious God revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. The metaphysical categories of God as omnipotent, omniscient, or immutable are not compatible with God as love.

¹⁹ Recall that Socinianism denies God’s foreknowledge. It teaches that the future actions of an individual are not knowable prior to the choice of one’s free will. If future contingent

nature, to capitulating to post-modernity. None of these charges have been made on the record by a Nazarene (certainly not by a Nazarene theologian). While the Openness of God debate continues (and shows no signs of weakening) Open Theism has suffered no setbacks within the Nazarene denomination. The evidence seems to suggest that the unofficial position (of the COTN) is to allow the promotion of Open theology as a viable alternative to their official position on the doctrine of God. This can be illustrated with a brief review of the following.

Nazarene Publications

Although other organizations have issued rebukes, rebuttals and resolutions against Open Theology, some within the COTN academic elite have enthusiastically advocated the Openness of God movement. The Leadership of the COTN has said nothing. Instead, books have been published by the COTN publishing house and articles written by Nazarene Professors that mirror many of the tenets of Open Theology. C.S. Cowles, a retired professor from Nazarene academia and an ordained Elder within the COTN, wrote an article that was published in the *Preacher's Magazine*²⁰ in which he examined the foreknowledge of God through the lens of Open Theology. Two observations should be noted: one, that such a favorable article advocating Open Theism was published in a denominational paper; two, there was no significant denominational response from its subscribers. The following issue of *Preacher's Magazine* (Pentecost, 2007) published a response by Don Minter to the article

events are not knowable, then it logically followed that God cannot know the future--- because the future cannot not be known.

²⁰ C.S. Cowles, "Is The Future A Done Deal? Reconsidering Divine Omniscience." *Preacher's Magazine* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2006-2007) 40-52.

written by C.S. Cowles.²¹ While Minter is to be commended for objecting to the conclusions of C.S. Cowles regarding God's exhaustive foreknowledge, Minter's article failed to use Scripture in defense of the traditional view of God.²²

In Nazarene Academia

In 1994 Michael Lodahl, a Nazarene professor, authored a book that promotes several core commitments of Open Theology.²³ Throughout his book (which is used as a text book in COTN academic institutions and is published by the denominational publishing company) Lodahl argues for diminished Sovereignty, denies exhaustive foreknowledge, questions the legitimacy of the omni-doctrines, joins with Process Theology in rejecting *creatio ex nihilo*, and identifies love as THE defining nature of God.²⁴ Instead of finding stiff opposition Open Theology seems to enjoy red carpet reception. Tom Oord, Professor of Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, says that his students usually respond positively when they are introduced to Open Theology. They usually see the advantages Openness offers.²⁵

²¹ Don Minter, "Adam, Where Are You?" *Preacher's Magazine* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2007) 40-45.

²² Don Minter is to be commended for challenging this aberrant view on the doctrine of God within the COTN; however, one may wonder why he did not use God's own words against this teaching. There are 164 texts that teach or affirm God's foreknowledge; one can find at least 271 verses that affirm God's omniscience. There are also 143 texts found in the Bible that speak to God's sovereignty over human choices. Given such overwhelming Scriptural evidence, Minter failed to avail himself to his most effective authority: God's Word. For more on this topic see John Hammett's article, "Divine Foreknowledge and Open Theism," *Faith and Mission*, The Journal of Southeastern Theological Baptist Seminary 21, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 20.

²³ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994).

²⁴ Affinity for the Process view of God as Love appears to be viewed as an attractive alternative. For more evidence of this see *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*, eds. Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

²⁵ Tom Oord, interviewed by the author, July 13, 2007, Charleston, WV., phone interview.

The NazNet Web site

Another Nazarene resource where evidence of support for Open Theism can be found is NazNet.²⁶ This online community for fellow Nazarenes lists numerous posts where supporters of the Open View of God have shared their enthusiasm for this new and innovative definition of God. One such post demonstrates the collective exuberance often expressed when discussion on the forum turns to Open Theology. It reads, “I believe that many Arminian-Wesleyans are drawn to Open Theism because it resonates with our understanding of the character of God. We're not willing to compromise on the all-loving, so all-knowing is able to "go" more quickly.”²⁷ This remark challenges the clear teaching of Scripture, the traditional doctrine of God’s omniscience, and several hundred years of church history. Such a conclusion appears to ignore the Wesleyan emphasis of tradition as an informative source of theology and does not seem to coalesce with the matrix found within the Wesleyan quadrilateral.²⁸ Theological conclusions such as this suggest that some are ignoring at least two of the four core interpretive expressions found in the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture and tradition.

²⁶ Naznet is an online community designed to encourage and promote issues and interests that “build community among Nazarene and friends.” Accessed <http://www.naznet.com/community/index.php> (accessed December 25, 2009).

²⁷ Jeremy Scott
<http://www.naznet.com/community/showthread.php?t=26642&highlight=tom+oord>
(accessed 12 25, 2009).

²⁸ The Wesleyan quadrilateral highlights four interpretive expressions: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. These elements, Wesleyan theologians believe, illustrate the matrix often used to describe John Wesley’s theological prism. Donald Thorsen defines the Wesleyan quadrilateral as “a paradigm, or model, of how Wesley conceived the task of theology.” For more on this subject see Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Nappanee: Francis Asbury Press, 1997).

The Silence of Denominational Leaders

Nazarene Leadership has not questioned any aspect of Lodahl's theology. Not one General Superintendent has even suggested that the COTN question the theological contradiction Open Theism represents to the traditional position of the Nazarene Church. It is worthy of note that while the Evangelical Theological Society pushed back against Open Theology, the Leadership of the Nazarene Church has not issued any official statement in support of, or in opposition to, this controversial subject. Silence is an odd position for COTN Leadership. In the past they have not hesitated to voice their opinion or to speak out specifically on other matters they view to be aberrant. They have clearly delineated their position on the consumption of alcohol. They frown upon dancing. They condemn smoking. While the COTN is willing to speak to orthopraxy, to date, they refuse to provide any official direction on a matter of orthodoxy. Silence is not a strategy. Given the magnitude of theological ramifications that accompany Open Theism, what is one to conclude about the current Leadership of the COTN? In the past, they have not hesitated to publicly castigate a pastor whose church failed to pay their assigned budgets in full. Why the unwillingness to address a subject so core to their beliefs? It is, at best, curiously conspicuous; at worst, it is cowardly capitulation.

Recently a COTN District leader, Orville Jenkins Jr., Superintendent on the North Florida District, wrote a letter expressing alarm with current denominational theological trends. Some of the concerns mirror the issues addressed in this paper. He cites the trend toward Scriptural uncertainty that he believes is being viewed by some as a value and a virtue. This element of "mystery" (that they view as a mark of spirituality) Jenkins observes, is really a "celebration of ignorance" and a "celebration of relativism." As of July 10, 2010,

Jenkins had not received any official response from the Board of General Superintendents. This lack of response to these liberal trends has Jenkins asking, “Who’s in charge? Where’s the leadership? Who’s permitting us to go in this direction? Where is the accountability?”

It is not difficult to document theological enthusiasm for Open theology within the COTN. The emphasis upon human autonomy and the diminished sovereignty of God resonates and finds sympathy given their Arminian heritage. It is true that there are theologians within the COTN who hold to the Classical View of God; however, it is also true that it is like looking for a needle in a haystack to find a Nazarene theologian willing to go on record and ask, “Do we really want a God who is limited in power and does not know what we will do next?” Although belief in the Classical View of God’s Omnipotence and Omniscience are embedded in the COTN founding doctrinal statement, it is difficult to find that belief delineated in contemporary Nazarene theological publications.

The next section will examine the doctrine of God through the lens of Scripture, founding beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene, and contemporary Nazarene theologians.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

My thesis states that there are two competing concepts of God within the Church of the Nazarene.¹ One is ancient and rooted in historical theology; the other is new (in terms of Church history) and is theologically informed by Process theology.² The Traditional view of God is affirmed in the Nazarene denominational statement of faith and practice often called the *Manual*.³ The contemporary interpretation is taught and promoted mainly in the academic community of the COTN.⁴ The Classical view would likely be the majority view of persons who sit in Nazarene pews each week; affinity for the revised view, known as Open Theism, is predominantly disseminated within the Religion and Theology Departments of Nazarene

¹ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² Process theology is philosophically driven and based upon the writings of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). It stands in stark contrast to traditional, Classical Theism. John Feinberg writes that, for the most part, Open Theism sides with the views advocated by process thinkers. See John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 70.

³ The *Manual* contains the official statements of doctrine and polity of COTN.

⁴ The primary support for Open Theology finds both sympathy and voice among those who teach in COTN institutions of higher learning. For instance, Tom Oord is a professor in the religion and theology department at Northwest Nazarene University. Michael Lodahl, who espouses Openness, teaches at Point Loma Nazarene University. Brint Montgomery is a professor of Philosophy at Southern Nazarene University. Dean Blevins is a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary and actively participates in Open Theology conferences. These events are often sponsored by Tom Oord, who in turn has been granted research funding from the Templeton Foundation (see <http://www.enc.edu/history/ot/sponsors.html>). Karl Giberson, a professor at Eastern Nazarene University and team member of BioLogos Forum, also embraces Open Theology. The evidence suggests that that the contemporary interpretation of an Open God finds genesis and support within the academic community of the Church of the Nazarene.

Universities and Seminaries. The doctrinal statement delineated in the in the COTN *Manual* is grounded in Classical Theology; has a long history within the tradition and teaching of the Church.⁵ It is the concept of God with which most are familiar. The Open view of God, unlike the traditional view affirmed and embraced by early COTN documents, is relatively new and offers a view of God that is in many ways antithetical to the traditional view of God.

The Doctrine of God From Scripture

Before we examine the COTN doctrine, it might be helpful to establish what Scripture says about the nature and doctrine of God. The divergent views of Classical theology and Open theism centers on this question: How does the Bible present God? Is He presented as the Open God who does not have infallible foreknowledge of the future? Or is He a God who possesses exhaustive foreknowledge? Does God possess and exercise absolute sovereign control over the Universe (Classical Theism) or does God share His power with humans, as Open Theology teaches? Did God create the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) out of the pleasure of His good will? Or, did God create the world because He needed the world (Process Theology) as much as it needed Him? The Scriptures speak to all of these questions.

God's Sovereignty

Divine sovereignty is usually defined as “God’s power of absolute determination.”⁶ Divine sovereignty is closely related to God’s Omnipotence. However, there is a subtle

⁵ The language contained in the doctrinal statement of the COTN is similar to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Anglican Church and the *Twenty-five Articles* of the Methodist Church (from which the Nazarene Church claims its spiritual heritage).

⁶ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 294.

distinction worth noting. Sovereignty speaks to the extent of how God uses His absolute power. Omnipotence describes which powers God has and how much. When God said in Exodus 3:14, “I am who I am,” he was demonstrating Sovereignty (the power of absolute determination). When God said to Moses, “I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD [*yahweh*] in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,”⁷ was this not God asserting His power of absolute determination?

To affirm that God has this kind of absolute power is to say that God cannot fail at accomplishing His Divine purposes. If He is absolute Sovereign, then God cannot fail at implementing His purposes in the world. Forces may oppose Him but they will not prevail. The evidence in Scripture is overwhelming in affirming God’s power of absolute determination. Even a brief overview of Scripture makes this clear. Jeremiah the prophet declared that there was nothing too hard for God: (32:27). Genesis 18:14 asserts that nothing is impossible for God. In Proverbs the Sovereignty of God is affirmed in simple, but certain, terms: “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.”⁸

The Bible also confirms that God’s rule over all the earth and everything in it. This fact is beautifully declared by the Psalmist when it is written in various Psalms. Read what God says of Himself. “But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Psalm 33:11). “Our God is in heaven, He does whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3). “No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?” wrote Isaiah. (Isaiah 43:13).

⁷ Exodus 33:19.

⁸ Proverbs 21:30 (see also 16:9 and 19:21).

Scripture also affirms that God is in control of the natural world. Creation belongs to Him (Genesis 1:1-31). As John Frame rightly observes, “The biblical writers did not hesitate to ascribe the events of the natural world directly to God.”⁹ The Scriptures are not embarrassed to proclaim, “The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes the clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightening with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.” (Psalm 135:6-7).¹⁰ The bottom line regarding the Sovereignty of God is simple: God is the ultimate, complete, and final authority over everything and everyone.

The COTN would not likely embrace such a strong view of divine sovereignty (such a view would likely be considered too Calvinistic). However, they may possibly concede that this Scriptural description of God’s Sovereignty in terms of power, administration, and comprehensive reach over the universe, conforms to their doctrinal statement in the *Manual* of the COTN. Since the COTN is Arminian in tradition, they would differ on the extent of the power God chooses to exercise. They believe that while God has all power, he chooses not to employ it. Such a decision (by God) is unforced and not coerced. Arminianism (and many Nazarenes would agree) believes that since God willingly limits, or chooses not to exercise full control, God remains completely and perfectly Sovereign and humans remain autonomous. Perhaps the reason why Arminians often make such a distinction is directly connected to their concern with the question of theodicy.¹¹

⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishers, 2002), 51.

¹⁰ See also Psalm 65:9-11; 147:15-18; Job 38-40; Jonah 4:6-7; Acts 14:17.

¹¹ Theodicy, generally speaking, explores the existence of evil and who is ultimately responsible. If God is over all and responsible (ultimately) for all that occurs in His Universe, then He is responsible for evil. To Arminians, the issue of God’s relation to evil is not adequately addressed by Calvinistic theology. For them, it is unacceptable to embrace a

God's Omniscience

The Bible assumes God's foreknowledge. The history of Christian tradition and theology affirms that God knows all things. The doctrine of Sovereignty, as presented in Scripture, would mean very little if God had limited or finite knowledge of events in the world. The prophet Isaiah identified God's comprehensive knowledge of the future as the distinctive attribute that set Him apart from the false God of heathen nations (Isa. 44:7-9). While the Scripture does not use a word equivalent for omniscience in either Hebrew or Greek, it does give descriptions of what God knows and what He does not know. The Biblical record presents a God whose knowledge is all encompassing and comprehensive. Consider a small sample from Scripture. Job declares that God is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16). In another verse the question is asked, "Can anyone teach God knowledge, in that he judges those on high?" (Job 21:22). Isaiah, one of the Major Prophets, voiced a similar observation when he wrote, "With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, and informed Him of the way of understanding" (Isaiah 40:14). In the Book of Hebrews it is written, "Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Hebrews 4:13).

The Scripture is not only adamant about what God knows in general, it is equally emphatic on what God knows specifically. God knows what is possible. In Jeremiah we are told of a King (Zedekiah) who was given two options. God then tells the King what will happen based upon which option he chooses (Jeremiah 38: 17-23). God knows the intricate

theology that (in their view) implicates God as the author of evil. However, COTN Open theists will usually admit that traditional Arminianism has always embraced the Classical view of God's sovereignty.

details of our lives (Jeremiah 1:5). He knows all the stars in the Universe and has given them all a name (Psalm 147:4-5). He knows what happens in the animal kingdom (Matthew 10:29). Jesus declared that God knows the number of the hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30). God is fully aware of our character traits (Exodus 4:14; 33:12). He also knows our deepest thoughts (Proverbs 24:12; Psalm 139:2). God knows our evil deeds. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). The Bible teaches that God can also see our righteousness: “But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

God knows the future. If God has comprehensive knowledge (and the Scriptures present overwhelming evidence that He does) then it is only logical that God possesses knowledge of what will happen in the future. God declares that He knows the future. Isaiah records this in chapter 46:9-10:

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.’”

The Bible records the accurate predictions of both the coming of Christ and the death of Christ centuries before His birth (I Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23).

Summary

The Bible provides for the inquisitive mind solid evidence that the Classical View of the Doctrine of God is resting on a firm, biblical foundation. It also enjoys ample historical evidence. In overwhelming numbers, theologians from the early Church Fathers to the esteemed leaders of the Reformation all affirmed God’s Omniscience. Historical theology

affirms an almost unbroken chain of belief and support for the doctrine of foreknowledge. As we will see in the next chapter, it is this historical and Biblical doctrine of the Christian faith that the founders of the Nazarene denomination embraced.

CHAPTER 5

THE NAZARENE DOCTRINE OF GOD ESTABLISHED

The Church of the Nazarene¹ was founded in 1908 in Pilot Point, Texas. The Church has, from its beginning days, identified itself with the one, holy, universal, and apostolic Church. For the Nazarene denomination this means that they embrace the first five centuries of the Christian Church ecumenical creeds and doctrines. As a denomination they also align themselves with the Wesleyan revival of the Eighteenth Century that witnessed the rise and establishment of the Methodist Movement. This movement emphasized the doctrine and the experience of entire sanctification. On October 13, 1908 a motion was passed that united various Holiness groups under one heading: *The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene*.²

The Doctrine of God in Early Nazarene Documents

From the official proceedings of the second General Assembly the following doctrinal statement on God was adopted:

“We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the Universe. That He only is God, holy in nature, character and purpose, creative and administrative. That He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”³

¹ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² For more complete history of the Church of the Nazarene see Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness, Vol. 1: The Formative Years* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1962).

³ Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, *General Assembly 1908* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1908), 24-25.

This doctrinal statement has remained essentially unchanged since the publication of the first official proceedings recorded in the *Manual* of the COTN. In the most current edition of the *Manual* the doctrinal statement on God reads,

“We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the Universe. That He only is God, creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purposes; That He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁴

For over one hundred years the above statement has been the official stated belief of the Nazarene denomination. It still is; however, over the course of the COTN existence, one word has been changed.⁵

The official statement of the COTN delineates a position most theologians would identify as orthodox.⁶ This model tends to emphasize a couple of general concepts about God: what God is like and what He can do. Regarding what God is like, Classical Theism usually will cite a cluster of predicated attributes of God. When carefully examined, one can

⁴ *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, Twenty-sixth General Assembly 2005-2009* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2005), 30.

⁵ The word “character” found in the 1908 statement, now reads “attribute” in the most current edition of the *Manual*. In addition to the General Assembly’s making a slight nuance change with one word, they also approved a variation on the original arrangement of some words. The rearrangement of phrase order does not merit or justify a new interpretation. The essence of doctrinal meaning is not fundamentally altered by exchanging the word “character” for “attribute”. The original intent of meaning conveyed in the statement on the doctrine of God remains unchanged.

⁶ Classical Theism includes, but is not limited to, the following attributes about God: immutability, impassibility, simplicity, necessity, omniscience, and omnipotence. Some of the attributes highlighted will be defined and explained in greater detail later in the paper; however, the following brief definitions are offered. Immutability embraces the belief that God cannot change. Impassibility suggests that God cannot be moved in an emotional sense. Timelessness infers more than God having no beginning and no end; rather it means that God exist totally outside of time. When one says that it is impossible for God not to exist, they are speaking of God’s necessity. Simplicity means that God is not divided into parts. To say that God is omnipotent is to acknowledge that God is Almighty Sovereign. Affirming that God is omniscient is to say that God knows all things past, present and future.

easily identify many of these attributes in the doctrinal statement embraced by the COTN. The phrase from the manual, “eternally existent,” embraces the attributes of timelessness, necessity, impassibility, and immutability. In addition, the COTN doctrinal statement makes a propositional truth statement about God’s authority and power. The declarative statement that God is “sovereign of the universe” implies God is omnipotent (all powerful) and that God knows everything (omniscience). After all, if God does not possess the attributes of Omnipotence and Omniscience, would not His sovereignty over the universe be meaningless? How would He know what was happening in the Universe over which He exercised absolute control? These concepts (of omnipotence and omniscience) are reinforced and expanded by the phrase which follows in the doctrinal statement: “creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose.”⁷

Clearly, the doctrinal commitments delineated in the founding documents of the COTN are meant to align the denomination within the orthodox tradition of the Christian faith. As we shall soon see, the founders of the COTN wanted to demonstrate that they were not doctrinal innovators. The founding leaders identified their belief on the doctrine of God as closely associated with the Church of England and the Methodist movement founded by John Wesley. This assertion can be affirmed by briefly reviewing the theology of H. Orton Wiley.

The Theology of H. Orton Wiley

⁷ See Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, *General Assembly 1908* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1908), 24-25. See also Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, *Twenty-sixth General Assembly 2005-2009* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2005), 30.

Theological publications from the early days of the COTN⁸ denominational history provide valuable insight into original doctrinal meaning, definition, and interpretation. One such source is H. Orton Wiley, the first official theologian of the COTN. Wiley defines God as “a Spirit, holy in nature and attributes, absolute in reality, infinite in efficiency, perfect in personality, and thereby the ultimate ground, adequate cause and sufficient reason for all finite existence.”⁹ He further delineates the meaning and intent of the Nazarene denominational stance by situating their stated belief on well-known creeds. Wiley is quick to acknowledge that all definitions of God ultimately prove to be inadequate when he states, “The mind can define only by limiting the object of its thought, it is evident that the finite mind can never adequately conceive of the infinite God.”¹⁰ With the noted limitation, he then cites historic creedal statements in order to demonstrate that the doctrinal position of the COTN is situated in the grand tradition of the Christian faith. He cites the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England whose statement on God reads, “there is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”¹¹ The statement of faith on the doctrine of God found in the *Twenty-five Articles* of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America contains similar language. Wiley notes a couple of word changes but concludes that these nuances do not alter the overall meaning. He believes that the statements held by the Church of England and

⁸ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

⁹ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 218.

¹⁰ H. Orton Wiley, *Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1946), 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

Methodism to be essentially identical. Wiley also notes that the *Larger Westminster Catechism* uses similar language when it defines God as “A Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”¹² Wiley concludes that “all of these definitions are but various summaries of the truths found in the revealed Word of God.”¹³ Clearly, Wiley goes out of his way to insure that the reader fully understand that the COTN is not interested in doctrinal innovation. He wants to make it clear that the doctrinal position of this infant denomination (the Church of the Nazarene) is situated in the center of the well defined boundaries of other traditions within historical Christianity.

Wiley on God’s Immutability

On specific aspects of the doctrine of God Wiley demonstrates that the COTN is not straying from Christian tradition. For example, in commenting on God’s Immutability (that God does not change) Wiley says that God is changeless “in essence or attribute, purpose or consciousness.”¹⁴ Such changelessness in character means that God is the same after Creation as He was before Creation.¹⁵ Wiley’s position would not support the position held by Process Theology. The God presented by Wiley is not in the process of becoming. There is no possibility of Him changing. His fullness in life, light, and love all are equal in measure and constant. He further enjoys the promises of Scripture that reveal that God is immutable observing such references “are peculiarly rich and satisfying.”¹⁶ Wiley likes Psalm 102:27 that confirms “Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” From the New Testament

¹² Ibid., 84.

¹³ Ibid., 84.

¹⁴ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 340.

¹⁵ Ibid., 340.

¹⁶ Ibid., 341.

he quotes from James 1:17 that reads, “Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

Wiley on God’s Omnipotence and Sovereignty

Regarding Omnipotence and Sovereignty Wiley expresses theological exuberance when he writes, “omnipotence is the ground of all that we call efficiency or causality.”¹⁷ In a footnote Wiley endorses a quote from Dr. Raymond’s *Systematic Theology I* that states that any teaching or theologian that limits God’s Omnipotence or Omniscience must be rejected “since truth requires us to conceive that the Divine essence is unlimited and fully and as perfectly as are the divine attributes. God, as to all that is God, is everywhere always; the infinite essence is incapable of division and separation; essence and attribute, immutably inseparable, fill immensity; all of God everywhere is a truth cognized both by piety and sound philosophy.”¹⁸

Divine Omnipotence is understood by Wiley to be “that perfection of God by virtue of which He is able to do all that He pleases to do.”¹⁹ Wiley regards this definition to be Scriptural. He cites two verses to reinforce his belief in the veracity of his doctrinal assertions. Jeremiah 32:17 emphatically states, “There is nothing too hard for thee.” Psalm 115:3 affirms “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” Wiley clarifies the Scriptural declaration of absolute Sovereignty with this succinct observation: “Whatever is impossible to Him, is not such because His nature makes it so, in

¹⁷ Ibid., 349.

¹⁸ Ibid., 349 fn.

¹⁹ Ibid., 349.

the same sense that His holiness is incompatible with sin.”²⁰ In other words, for Wiley, this Omnipotent God possesses all power and can do anything and all things that are not contrary to His Nature and Will. For Wiley, no doctrine is of greater significance than Divine Omnipotence. He believed no truth was of greater value to Christianity than the doctrine of Divine power.²¹ Wiley seems to go out of his way to make certain that the reader knows that this relatively new denomination known as the Church of the Nazarene is doctrinally situated in the center of orthodox Christianity.

Wiley on God’s Omniscience

Wiley defines Divine Omniscience as, “perfect knowledge which God has of Himself and of all things.”²² This is a theological statement on God’s foreknowledge that is grounded in historic Christianity. While Wiley is careful to make distinction between the Calvinistic interpretation of God’s foreknowledge and the Arminian view, he concludes that the COTN holds to a view of God’s foreknowledge that is consistent with Church History and Classical Theism. It is striking (particularly in light of the current theological trends within the COTN) that Wiley rejects the Socinian theory²³ of foreknowledge and embraces the historic Arminian view (which he points out is in reality the Roman Catholic view dating back to the Apostolic era).²⁴ It is of further interest to note that Wiley observes that Dr. Adam Clark

²⁰ Ibid., 350.

²¹ Ibid., 353.

²² H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 350.

²³ Socinianism, among other things, denies God’s foreknowledge. Instead they believed that future contingent events, such as the future actions of responsible agents, are *not* knowable. If they are not knowable, then God does not know the future, because the future cannot be known.

²⁴ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 1940), 351.

“advanced the peculiar view that God can know all future events but does not choose to do so.”²⁵ Wiley seems to associate the view proposed by Adam Clark with Socinianism.²⁶

Wiley on the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*

Wiley is comfortable with *creatio ex nihilo*.²⁷ This doctrine delineates that God created the World as we know it, and all that is in it, out of nothing. God did not start with pre-existing material. He started from scratch. This doctrine of the Church holds that God created the World, the Universe, out of nothing. Hebrews 11:3 affirms that “we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear” (RSV). He embraces the historic view embraced by Christian theology for centuries.

Summary

This brief survey of Wiley’s theology should demonstrate that he articulated and interpreted the doctrine of God within the bounds of Christian tradition. His theological formation of God is expressed with terms familiar to the traditional church lexicon. Wiley employs terms like Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Omniscience, and delineates their meaning within the bounds of historic Church doctrine. Wiley believed God to be above time and space; and yet presented a God willing to identify with humanity. For Wiley, one need only look to the Incarnation for proof of a personal God. In the next section we will review the

²⁵ Ibid., 359.

²⁶ Ibid., 358-359.

²⁷ *Creatio ex nihilo* has implications for our understanding of God. It reinforces two distinctions regarding creation. First, there is a vast and clear line between God and the created world. Creation is completely dependent on God and without Him would return to nothing.

theology of Kenneth Grider and Ray Dunning. These Nazarene theologians represent COTN theology in transition. As we shall see, both articulate positions that are distinct from Wiley.

CHAPTER 6

THE NAZARENE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN TRANSITION

Nazarene theologians post Wiley demonstrate dissatisfaction with the theological trajectory he established. Wiley was first commissioned by the Church of the Nazarene¹ to write an official theological text in 1918. Twenty-two years would pass before he would complete his first volume was published. Similarly, a generation would pass before other Nazarene theological works would be published. For the purpose of this paper, two theologians from this transitional period will be reviewed: Kenneth Grider and Ray Dunning.² H. Ray Dunning's work was published in 1988 and was entitled, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*. The COTN publishing house released Kenneth J. Grider's theology in 1994. It was entitled, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology*.

The Theology of H. Ray Dunning

H. Ray Dunning taught at Trevecca Nazarene University from 1964-1995. As a graduate of Trevecca, Nazarene Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt University, Dunning was in many respects, homegrown. Throughout his academic career, he wrote many books,

¹ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² In the next section the writings of two contemporary COTN theologians will be reviewed. The theology of C.S. Cowles will be explored also. Although he is retired, he did write an article in 2006 that was published in the *Preacher's Magazine* (an official publication of the COTN). In the article Cowles questions God's foreknowledge and explores Divine omniscience God from an Open theistic perspective.

including a systematic theology entitled, *Grace, Faith & Holiness*.³ His work was the first officially sanctioned theological text by the Nazarene denomination since 1918. The publication of Ray Dunning's work was intended to replace H. Orton Wiley's 3-volume set. As we will soon discover, Dunning's theology departs from Wiley on several core doctrines.

Dunning's Controlling Theological Motif

Dunning identifies holiness as the essential character of God's nature.⁴ He also asserts that the introduction of the term "Father" by Jesus when referring to God brings the central Christian affirmation of God as love to the fore. God's Holiness, Dunning believes, distinguishes God's character from humans as well as nature. Dunning believes the unifying principle of God's essential nature is love: "All the affirmations of the Christian faith about God are clustered around the central idea of God's *agape*."⁵ Dunning situates the love of God in His holiness but believes that the basis for the claim that God is love is "decisively defined by Jesus Christ and His work."⁶ Dunning continues by asserting, "To the question of 'why does God love?' there is only one proper answer: because that is the way God acts, and thus that is the way that God is."⁷

With holy love as the guiding expression of God's nature, Dunning proceeds to explain the nature of God through the prism of God's holy love. When viewed through the lens of holy love, all the attributes of God are seen with greater human/divine distinction. Holy love helps maintain the transcendence of God. "God's otherness," he writes, prohibits

³ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 191. As we shall soon discover, Grider will take the opposite position and suggest that love is not a part of God's nature.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

interpreting His character and nature in complete continuity with human categories.” He also avers that the prism of holy love “serves as the barrier to reducing theology to anthropology.”⁸

Dunning on the Immutability of God

Dunning’s theology departs from Wiley on Immutability. Unlike Wiley, who believed God is changeless “in essence or attribute, purpose or consciousness,”⁹ Dunning believes that the “Biblical support for this quality presents us with an ambiguous picture.”¹⁰ Contrasted to Wiley’s belief that changelessness in character means that God is the same after Creation as He was before Creation;¹¹ and that the immutability of God means He is not in the process of becoming; that there is no possibility of Him changing, Dunning asserts that “there are balancing tendencies the other direction. God is frequently pictured as changing His mind in response to human repentance or other behavior, that is, as dynamic in character.”¹² While Wiley found the Scriptural support for God’s Immutability to be “peculiarly rich and satisfying,”¹³ and quoted the Psalm (102:27) that confirms “Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” He also quoted from the Book of James noting “every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”(1:17). Dunning, on the other hand, prefers to view God’s essential nature as holy love, which he believes helps maintain a balance of both truths that God is unchanging yet responsive to human need. Dunning suggests that perhaps

⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁹ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology Vol. I* (Kansas City: 1940), 340.

¹⁰ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace Faith, and Holiness*, 202.

¹¹ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 340.

¹² H. Ray Dunning, 202.

¹³ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 341.

“a more satisfactory way of describing this attribute is in terms of faithfulness, the faithfulness of love to promises made.”¹⁴

Dunning on the Omniscience of God

Dunning departs from Wiley on the doctrine of Divine omniscience. He regards the doctrine of omniscience to be riddled with “numerous problems.”¹⁵ He does not believe it is productive to view God’s knowledge as comprehensive stating rather that God’s foreknowledge ought to be expressed as the “unerring certainty of God’s judgment.”¹⁶ Dunning presents God’s omniscience on a personal level, rather than comprehensive knowledge. Specifically he states God “knows me. His is the all-seeing eye of love that sees everything in crystal-clear light. Every attempt to hide something from His all-seeing eye is doomed to failure.”¹⁷ That’s it. If one turns to Dunning’s theology expecting to find a wealth of information on the doctrine of omniscience, they will be disappointed.

Dunning on the Doctrine of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

In Christian tradition, this doctrine has been defined as creation out of nothing. Dunning embraces the doctrine of creation out of nothing with theological enthusiasm. He summarizes the important implications of this teaching with the following observations. *Creatio ex nihilo* presents God as the sole Source of all that is. Dunning makes the point that God created all that is effortlessly and out of nothing.¹⁸ Since all has its source and being rooted in the will of God, “nothing in existence can be intrinsically evil; not matter, or finite

¹⁴ H. Ray Dunning, 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

reality as we have already observed, or no other form of existence, either personal or impersonal.”¹⁹ It is interesting that Dunning believes that preoccupation with the origin of evil has led some within the theological community to deny *creation ex nihilo*.²⁰ He observes that it must be shocking for persons who embrace such a view to read the Old Testament. The Old Testament writers attribute everything to God----including evil.²¹ The existence of the devil, Dunning observes, “must be seen as having a dependent existence, or else *creation ex nihilo* is compromised.”²² Since God is the Source of everything, God alone is worthy of worship; but continues by concluding that such worship worthiness reinforces Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as “the feeling of absolute dependence.”²³

Dunning further observes that the doctrine of Creation implies that we, as created beings, are dependent upon God. This excludes pantheism.²⁴ By contrast, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, when taken to its full implications, means that creation was not taken out of God, but out of nothing. This affirms “that the world with all the finite beings within it are not a part of God but possess real, though dependent, existence.”²⁵ It is this teaching that sets Christianity apart from most, if not all Eastern religions, “which see all creaturely existence as more or less illusory manifestations of the real.”²⁶ Dunning concludes that this fundamental teaching on creation from nothing implies that the continued existence of creatures is totally “dependent upon the sustaining power of God. If or when this is removed,

¹⁹ Ibid., 241.

²⁰ Ibid., 242.

²¹ Ibid., 242.

²² Ibid., 243.

²³ Ibid., 244.

²⁴ Pantheism is the belief that there is no distinction between God and Creation.

²⁵ Ibid., 245.

²⁶ Ibid., 245.

the creature lapses back into nothing.”²⁷ He underscores this point by quoting the words of Paul (Acts 17:28) who said, “In Him we live and move and have our being.”

Summary

Clearly, Dunning rejects the notion that the traditional doctrine of Creation from nothing is coercive and a violation of man’s free will. On the other hand, he goes out of his way to demonstrate that man is from nothing, and would be nothing were it not for the sustaining power of an Omnipotent God. One does not find a total revisioning of the doctrine of God in Dunning. He does seem to push the door of doctrinal reformulation open slightly regarding God’s foreknowledge and immutability. It will be these doctrines (along with a few others) that later Nazarene theologians will call into question with vigor.

The Theology of Kenneth Grider

J. Kenneth Grider was a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary for 38 years. Grider’s theology demonstrates (among other things) a lack of clarity and consistency that exists within the Nazarene denomination regarding doctrine. This lack of clarity, unfortunately, is not on matters of orthopraxy; but rather on matters of orthodoxy.

As an epistemological starting point, Grider removes authority away from the Bible. He seems to place knowledge of God in the Christ event. He begins his fourteen page essay on God with this statement: “Using Scripture (and nature to some extent), and taking into account what we know about God through the prophesied, incarnated, crucified, resurrected, interceding, returning Lord Jesus Christ, an attempt is here made to suggest some aspects of

²⁷ Ibid., 245.

what God is like.”²⁸ In contrast to a scant fourteen pages devoted to the doctrine of God, Grider uses enough ink and words to fill one hundred pages to establish his epistemological starting point. For example, regarding authority, Grider concludes that God only, and not Scripture, is absolutely authoritative.²⁹ Soteriological inerrancy is embraced by Grider. Specifically he states that the Bible should be “regarded as inerrant on matters of doctrine and practice” but acknowledges that the Bible may not be reliable in matters “such as geography, mathematics, or history.”³⁰ Starting points matter. According to John Frame, controlling motifs often lead to disappointing destinations that are often not even biblical. Will Grider avoid these pitfalls?

Grider on God’s Defining Nature

Grider views the defining disclosure of God’s nature to be holiness when he states, “God’s holiness is basic to Scripture’s disclosure of Him. It is the summation of what He is. As we will soon discover, this is not in agreement with contemporary Nazarene theologians. In fact, contrary to the current view of God’s defining nature as being love, Grider says, “God is never called the Loving One, but He is called the Holy One.”³¹ Grider concedes that “Donald Metz is probably correct in suggesting that in reference to God the word denotes ‘both ontological and moral transcendence.’”³²

God as Personal

²⁸ Kenneth J. Grider, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

³² *Ibid.*, 110-111.

Grider sees abundant evidence of God as personal. Not the least of which is that “Scripture portrays God as personal.”³³ He reinforces God’s personal interaction with the world by noting what A.C. Knudson refers to as God’s free relation to both nature and history. This is illustrated by referring to God freely creating the world out of nothing. It is reinforced by the miracles recorded in Scripture.

God as Love

He has already affirmed that God’s basic nature is characterized by holiness. “As infinitely holy”, he writes, “His basic nature is to love only creatures who have similar natures.”³⁴ Grider is adamant about not defining God’s basic nature as love. “If love is an attribute of God, then when God loves us, He is only doing what is His nature to do and not what He is His free decision to do in spite of what His nature is like which is holy.”³⁵ He believes it a mistake on the part of theologians to describe God’s basic nature as love just because the Scripture twice (First John 4:8, 16) states that “God is Love.” Grider believes the context of these two verses (often used by contemporary Nazarene theologians to bolster their case for defining God as love) is decisional. By decisional Grider suggests that God “is loving in His actions.”³⁶ For Grider, God’s love is not an attribute but rather it is an action.

Grider on the Immutability of God

He rejects the doctrine of God’s immutability. Grider believes that too many attributes have been ascribed to the nature of God. Many of the categories used to describe God, Grider asserts, are unnecessary. Aseity, for instance, which is God’s self-causedness, is

³³ Ibid., 112.

³⁴ Ibid., 116.

³⁵ Ibid., 116.

³⁶ Ibid., 117.

not necessary to list as an attribute. He does not like the attribute that identifies God as eternal, either. He quotes Olin A. Curtis who agrees with Grider's view that such distinctions multiply terms beyond the need for them.³⁷ Immutability is not an attribute. Unlike Aristotle, who believed that God does not change, Grider rejects such a notion in emphatic and personal feeling when he says, "immutability is one of the most fantastically incorrect understandings ever introduced into the Christian faith. Since God is personal, He is immutable. Since He is taking history to a somewhere to a somewhen, He is not immutable."³⁸ Unlike Dunning, He believes it would be "silly" to presume that God did not change (in some way) once He had a world to relate to.³⁹ It should be noted that Grider's view is in stark contrast to Wiley.⁴⁰

Grider on God's Omnipotence

Omnipotence means that God has all power. Grider defines omnipotence as God having "unlimited power to implement what His infinite goodness and His infinite wisdom see to be desirable."⁴¹ He cites Scripture to reinforce the comprehensive nature of God's power. According to Scripture, no one can prevent God from doing what He wants to do. "Scripture is so clear in teaching that God has all power," Grider writes, "that the view has always been taught by Christians far and wide."⁴² Usually, when considering God's Omnipotence, one must also examine the doctrine of Creation. For Grider, Creation does not

³⁷ Ibid., 117-118.

³⁸ Ibid., 118.

³⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁰ Wiley believed that God was changeless "in essence or attribute, purpose or consciousness." Such changelessness in character, he believed, means that God is the same after Creation as He was before Creation. See H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 340.

⁴¹ Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology*, 120.

⁴² Ibid., 120.

originate in His nature; rather it flows from His will. Creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) means that “it is not made out of previously existent material.”⁴³ However, because God is all powerful, creation is sustained by the power and authority of God’s word.⁴⁴

Grider on God’s Omniscience

He believes that God knows everything: exhaustively. For Grider (unlike Dunning) this doctrine is just a matter of fact.⁴⁵ It is the kind of being God is. He states, God “simply is all-knowing.”⁴⁶ He continues by noting that the theologians of the Middle Ages “were correct in saying that God knows not only all things that were, are, and will be but also all things that never were but might have been, that are not but might be, and that never will be but could possibly be.”⁴⁷ Grider believes that James Arminius “said it correctly that God does indeed foreknow our free acts but that His foreknowing them does not cause or necessitate them.”⁴⁸ E.S. Brightman, the Boston Personalist, and the Socinians all denied the foreknowledge of God. But, Grider concludes, both Calvinist and Arminians have both agreed that God has knowledge of the future. Grider regards his position to be a clear doctrine of Scripture and further states that predictive prophecy is the strongest argument for the exhaustive foreknowledge of God.

Summary of Grider’s Theology

⁴³ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁵ Recall, Dunning rejected Divine exhaustive foreknowledge on the grounds that it was riddled with “numerous problems.” He proposed that God’s knowledge be viewed as “unerring certainty” rather than exhaustive. See H. Ray Dunning, *Grace Faith and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 202.

⁴⁶ Grider, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology*, 121.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 122.

Grider departs from the typical classification of God's nature and rejects listing attributes that describe and delineate God's nature. While Grider does not completely reject the Classical view of God, he does deviate on from the traditional view of God on some core theological themes regarding the Doctrine of God. In summary, this is what Grider has said about God's nature: God is personal, but He is not to be defined as Love, or Righteousness. Grider removes from God, in a metaphysical sense, these characteristics. By doing so, he believes that this places such expressions within the realm of God's free decision to do; if God expresses love because it is His nature to do, then He is only "naturing" when He expresses love toward us. Rather, Grider views God's basic nature (attribute) as holiness. Grider rejects the doctrine of Immutability opting instead for a positional belief that affirms that God is unchanging in His faithfulness. Grider embraces the "omni" doctrines and even mentions particular theological streams from the past that have rejected them in one form or another.⁴⁹ It should be noted, however, that Grider moves authority away from Scripture opting instead to place authority in the Christ event. This distinction effectively moves truth from propositional to personal; and from the objective to the subjective. This distinction becomes Grider's controlling motif. By assuming the posture that Scripture is not reliable, Grider arrives at some disappointing doctrinal destinations. Starting points matter.

In the next chapter we will review the theology of contemporary Nazarene theologians. The doctrine of God in the theology of Michael Lodahl, Tom Oord, and C.S. Cowles proposes radical revisions. Unlike Wiley, who wanted to demonstrate that the newly founded COTN was situated in the center of orthodox theology, these men express strong

⁴⁹ Ibid., 122. Grider mentions in particular Socinianism, Boston Personalism (specifically E.S. Brightman) and notes that both Arminians and Calvinists have traditionally embraced and taught divine foreknowledge.

theological dissatisfaction for traditional theology. As we will soon see, theological themes found in Process theology will be more common than quotes from the theology of the Church fathers. Contemporary Nazarene theologians will propose radical revisions to the Doctrine of God. The revisions they propose are antithetical to the official doctrine of the Nazarene Church as stated in the Manual.

CHAPTER 7

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN CONTEMPORARY

NAZARENE THEOLOGY

The doctrinal statement of the COTN¹ affirms a traditional view of God. We have established that the Classical View of God believes that God is the Sovereign, Omnipotent, Omniscient Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. But this is not the God some post modern Nazarenes find theologically satisfying. In contrast to the Article of Faith on God found in the COTN Manual (which attempts to strike a balance between God's transcendence and God's immanence) contemporary theologians within the COTN find more affinity with an Open view of God. This view, we have established, is aberrant to the official statement found in the doctrinal statement of the COTN. We have established that Open theology embraces a controlling motif that places an emphasis upon God as love. The love of God is viewed as the essence of whom and what God is.² In addition, Open theology proposes that God be viewed as open and receptive to what creatures do. They reject the Classical view (that God is sovereign) and opt instead for a God who shares His power with us. Finally, Open theology proposes that the doctrine of omniscience be replaced. They prefer to view God as one who reacts to the moves we make. The future, they believe, is open. Since we have a free will, God does not know exactly what we are going to do prior to our choosing it.

¹ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² Thomas J. Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 71.

This chapter will explore the theology on the Doctrine of God as presented in the writings of three contemporary Nazarene theologians: Michael Lodahl, Thomas J. Oord, and C.S. Cowles.

The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Michael Lodahl

Michael Lodahl, a Nazarene theologian who teaches at Point Loma University, has written several books and many articles. In his book entitled *The Story of God*, he establishes his controlling theological motif: God's preeminent nature is love. Recall, Nazarene theologian Kenneth Grider's theology vehemently opposed the love of God as a starting point for theology. Dunning, on the other hand, believed that God's "holy love" was the interpretive lens through which to view theology. As we shall see, Lodahl's bolder and more clearly defined starting point in his theology will lead him to doctrinal destinations that are clearly in conflict with the official doctrinal belief of the Nazarene Church. Like Grider, Lodahl reinforces the doctrinal inconsistency within COTN theology.

Lodahl on the Sovereignty of God

Lodahl defines God's Sovereignty as "a sovereignty of love."³ He continues by observing that God's self-giving, self-emptying love has led Him to share His power with His creatures. He concludes that because God's preeminent nature is love, God does not "hoard power but shares power."⁴ Lodahl believes that God does not exercise all power; rather, since He shares His power with us He is self-limiting. God has divested Himself out of deference to the free will of man. Free will, Lodahl believes, "opens the door" to a more

³ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

adequate way of understanding divine omnipotence.⁵ Part of what it means for man to be truly free must include a God that let's things be. "God's word is the word of 'Let there be'—let there be a real creation, a real people, a true 'other' that is other than God, that is not 'under God's thumb' or at the end of puppet strings."⁶ When God's Sovereignty is viewed through the lens of love, Lodahl asserts, God becomes the "fellow sufferer who understands."⁷ As with the other Nazarene theologians whose theology is diverse and inconsistent with the other on many points, Lodahl's is no exception. While Wiley sought to situate the COTN within the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, the trajectory of Lodahl's theology is informed by Process Theology and Whiteheadian philosophy.

Lodahl on the Doctrine of God's Omniscience

Lodahl's controlling theological motif is God is love. When the supreme characteristic of God is love (which is the starting point of Lodahl's theology) God's sovereignty is not the only doctrine that undergoes a significant rearticulation. Several major doctrinal commitments are recalibrated. Omniscience gets interpreted differently. Contrary to the traditional, Classical View that embraces a God who has full knowledge of future events, Lodahl finds it more theologically satisfying to reformulate God's knowledge in terms of His love. With love as the driving motif, God cannot possess a "disinterested, passive, computer-like knowledge of every detail of the universe."⁸ Rather, this model, when filtered through His love, becomes an "omniscience of love that probes deeply into our lives."⁹ Please

⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁹ Ibid., 60.

observe that Lodahl, like Clark Pinnock, positions the doctrine of God in a stark, contrastive, and antithetical framework. Recall that Pinnock states,

“God is one whose ways are marked by flexibility and dynamism, who acts and reacts on behalf of His people, who does not exist in splendid isolation from the world of change, but relates to his creatures...God not only directs but interacts. No unmoved mover, God responds sensitively to what happens on earth and relates to us. God is the omnipotent Creator but exercises his power subtly and carefully in the world. By bringing other free agents into being and entering into their lives in love, God is open.”¹⁰

Scripture does not portray the nature and the character of God in such stark terms. It presents a God who is both above us but also with us. Scripture offers a Creator who knows that we are but dust; but also presents Him as Lord both of the dead and the living.¹¹

Lodahl on the Doctrine of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

Lodahl is not shy about declaring his position regarding the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. He believes that this doctrine has a barren ring to it. While Dunning delineated (with enthusiasm) why he believed in the doctrine of creation from nothing, Lodahl rejects the doctrine. Lodahl believes any doctrine that essentially declares there isn't anything prior to God creating is a non sequitur. To reinforce his position, he quotes from philosopher Peter van Inwagen, who observes, “To say that that there is nothing is to say that there isn't anything, not even a vast emptiness. If there were a vast emptiness, there would be no material objects---no atoms or elementary particles or anything made of them--- but there would be nevertheless be something: the vast emptiness.”¹² Lodahl concurs with Inwagen

¹⁰ Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Biblical Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 124-125.

¹¹ Romans 14:9.

¹² Peter Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 72.

and elaborates by adding “to claim, then, that God has created the universe *out of nothing* appears, at first glance, to be at least paradoxical, if not sheer nonsense.”¹³

While Lodahl believes that God did indeed create the world, he does not embrace the traditional explanation that has been a part of the Christian tradition. Rather, he believes that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not grounded in data from the Bible but rather is rooted in theological and religious necessity. Lodahl does not mince words when he emphatically states belief that God created out of nothing “appears perfunctory and arbitrary.”¹⁴ He also asserts the traditional explanation (*creatio ex nihilo*) devalues the world, cheapens the meaning and purpose of our lives, and paints God as arbitrary and capricious.¹⁵ Quoting Mark William Worthing, Lodahl believes that a creation out of love is necessary to preserving God as God and man as free:

“A creation out of *absolute* nothingness is an impossibility; a creation out of God’s own substance leads to a pantheistic deification of the physical world. *Creatio ex nihilo*, therefore, signifies the theological recognition that God created a universe distinct from the divine being, not out of any preexisting matter or principle, but out of nothing other than the fullness of God’s own being.”¹⁶

For Lodahl such an admission as this must lead one to conclude that this Doctrine of Creation from nothing must be challenged. What should replace this doctrine? Lodahl proposes the doctrine of *Creatio ex amore*: creation out of love!

The theological adjustment of creation out of love fits better with a Process model. Quoting from Whitehead, Lodahl observes, “it is as true to say that God creates the World, as

¹³ Thomas J. Oord and Bryan P. Stone, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 218.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

that the World creates God.”¹⁷ Whitehead believed that God and the world were in some kind of metaphysical tug of war: God needs the world, but the world needs God too. To say that the World creates God is theologically shocking, Lodahl concedes. In fact, he acknowledges that “no matter how Whitehead’s language might be soft-pedaled, even the most sympathetic reading cannot ease the jolt that most traditionally religious people feel when they try to imagine God ‘in the grip’ of something or anything else---especially when that grip allegedly belongs to ‘the ultimate metaphysical ground!’”¹⁸ The theological payoff of overcoming the traditional *creatio ex nihilo* position is simple: God is not responsible for evil. He writes “In the process view, God is doing the best that God can do to lure the elements of the world toward greater beauty and richer harmony; but since those elements are ultimately not God’s creation, God cannot be blamed if they do not behave as God would like. God does the best that God can do, given what God is given to work with from one moment to the next.”¹⁹ Why is this recalibration of this doctrine so theologically satisfying to Lodahl and other Nazarene theologians? Such a view, it is believed, frees God from the responsibility of all the pain and suffering in our world. Such a Wesleyan understanding of Creation means that God cannot exercise coercive power. He cannot because such a display of raw power would be contrary to the compassionate, self-emptying love nature of God. Lodahl writes, “God cannot force us, or the world, to go the way of Love Divine because it would not be consistent with the Love Divine to do so.”²⁰

A Summary of Lodahl’s Theology

¹⁷ Ibid., 223.

¹⁸ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹ Ibid., 223-224.

²⁰ Ibid., 234.

Clearly, Lodahl's theology charts a new course for the COTN as a denomination. He departs from the traditional and founding position of the COTN on several core doctrines. His driving theological motif is love. As a consequence, God cannot do anything without man's input and cooperation. To do otherwise is coercive and arbitrary. He departs from the founding core understanding of the COTN doctrine on Divine sovereignty, *Creatio ex Nihilo*, the nature of God, Divine foreknowledge, omnipotence, and theodicy. As a matter of fact he boldly acknowledges that his views are divergent, controversial, and not within the original theological boundaries established by the founding documents of the COTN. He also embraces theological positions that are, in fact, heavily informed by Process Theology. As a school of thought, Process Theology is not compatible with the doctrinal statement recorded in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*.

The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Tom Oord

While the official doctrinal statement of the Nazarene Church is clearly within the bounds of Traditional Theism,²¹ the contemporary theological interpretation of God espoused by some within the academic community of the Nazarene Church seeks to redefine the historical and classical doctrine of God in ways that are antithetical to their founding beliefs. Tom Oord teaches at Northwest Nazarene University. He is an ordained Elder in the Church of the Nazarene. Before we examine Oord's views on the Doctrine of God, perhaps it may be helpful to establish some theological and interpretive context. Specifically, what he believes about Truth, Scripture and language.

²¹ Recall the official statement of the COTN, "We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the Universe. That He only is God, creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purposes; That He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene Twenty-sixth General Assembly* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2005), 30.

Oord on the Doctrine of Truth

Professor Oord believes that truth is not a concept that can be comprehended. On his blog he recently posted an article entitled *Truth and Postmodernism* and wrote that “truth is difficult, if not impossible to fathom fully.”²² He is quick to assure the reader that the absence of certainty should not be viewed as bad news for the Christian. As Christians, our number one quest is to be believers, not defenders of propositions. He further consoles the reader by observing that truth is not propositional rather it is personal and situational. He believes that truth lies in the context of humility (personal) and community (situational). Regarding the personal nature of truth he says, “Postmodern Christians can live faithfully between the absence of certainty and the abyss of extreme relativism. This middle ground (he believes) promotes both humility and conviction.”²³ Oord invites the reader to view truth through a narrative postmodern lens.²⁴ When truth is filtered through this prism it “rightly reminds us that truth is bigger than what we can condense in logical propositions and perceive through our sensory organs.”²⁵ For Oord certainty should not be the aim. In the place of certainty Oord proposes intuition. With intuition as a guide, one will be able to ascertain that some truths are truer than others. Some truths, Oord suggests, are local while other truths are universal in nature. Oord asserts sincere truth seekers adapt and “sometimes

²² Tom Oord, “Truth and Postmodernism” (http://thomasjyoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/test_entry/, Nov, 19, 2009), accessed June 9, 2010.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Narrative Postmodernism seeks truth in the context of community. While denying the universal nature of reason, narrative postmodernism believes that when truth is situated in the common life a particular people share it overcomes the pressure to conform to individual relativism.

²⁵ Thomas J Oord “A Story to Orient our Lives: Narrative” (http://thomasjyoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/a_story_to_orient_our_lives/ December 29, 2009), accessed June 9, 2010.

recast, generalize, and adapt what they believe to be true in light of new experiences and information. For this tradition, experiences of all types—personal, communal, religious, and even experiences recorded in the Bible or enjoyed Scripture---can lead to ultimate truth.”²⁶

He identifies this posture toward truth as revisionary postmodernism which he defines as “a humble confidence that some statements or views of reality are truer than others are.”²⁷

Oord believes that truth is found when one embraces humility and conviction. For Oord truth is better served when it is situated in the context of community rather than certainty (truth) being found in one place. Oord believes that truth is better apprehended (and comprehended) in the context of community. His position is similar to that of Stanley Grenz who wrote,

“The problem with evangelical propositionalism is its often under-developed understanding of how the cognitive dimension functions within the larger whole of revelation. Therefore evangelical theologians tend to misunderstand the social nature of theological discourse. More than its advocates have cared to admit, evangelical theology has been the captive of the orientation to the individual knower that has reigned over the Western mindset throughout the modern era. But this orientation is now beginning to lose its grip. Therefore, if our theology is to speak the biblical message in our contemporary situation, we must shed the cloak of modernity and reclaim the more profound community outlook in which the biblical people of God were rooted.”²⁸

This is in keeping with the postmodern premise that declares that the one essential, non-negotiable demand that postmodernism makes of everyone is this: No one is supposed to

²⁶ Thomas J Oord, “Postmodern and Wesleyan” pt. 2 (http://thomasjyoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/postmodern_and_wesleyan_2/ May 12, 2010), accessed June 9, 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1993) 79. Other books by Grenz’s such as *A Primer on Postmodernism*, *Theology for the Community of God*, and *Beyond Foundationalism* explore similar premises.

think he or she knows any objective truth.²⁹ This posture toward truth and authority prompted Al Mohler to insightfully observe,

“The Emergent movement represents a significant challenge to biblical Christianity. Unwilling to affirm that the Bible contains propositional truths that form the framework for Christian belief, this movement argues that we can have Christian symbolism and substance without those thorny questions of truthfulness that have so vexed the modern mind. The worldview of postmodernism—complete with an epistemology that denies the possibility of or need for propositional truth—affords the movement an opportunity to hop, skip and jump throughout the Bible and the history of Christian thought in order to take whatever pieces they want from one theology and attach them, like doctrinal post-it notes, to whatever picture they would want to draw.”³⁰

Oord clearly identifies with many premises found within the postmodern matrix. He rejects propositional truth. He is more comfortable with the idea that truth is better served in the context of community than in Scripture. He believes that truth is subjective and can only be found as long as one pursues truth with humility. How one determines the certainty of the truth they choose to embrace is left to community, experience, and humility.

Oord on the Doctrine of Scripture

According to Professor Oord, Open Theist put Scripture first. He candidly admits that “Open and Relational Theists are typically not committed, however, to affirming everything the Bible says about science, history, or culture. Most Open Theologians are not biblical inerrantists, if biblical inerrancy is defined as the notion that the Bible is without any error whatsoever.”³¹ This balanced view on Scripture, Oord believes, “distinguishes open and

²⁹ John MacArthur. “The Perspicuity of Scripture: The Emergent Approach” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Fall: 2006: 141-158, p. 149.

³⁰ Albert Mohler “A Generous Orthodoxy: Is it Orthodox?” (<http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/06/20/a-generous-orthodoxy-is-it-orthodox/> June 20, 2005), accessed June 9, 2010.

³¹ Tom Oord, “Characteristics of Evangelical Open and Relational Theology,” (www.thomasjoord.com), February 2, 2010.

relational theology from Fundamentalism.”³² Oord observes that the emphasis Open Theists place on the primacy of Scripture “steers them away from more liberal theologian traditions.”³³ According to Oord, this position is more in keeping with the Wesleyan tradition.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement and embraced by the COTN as part of their theological heritage, believed the Scriptures were the rule of faith and practice and clear in all necessary points. Oord extrapolates from Wesley that this forms the basis for the Wesleyan view of Scripture. This view is unique from fundamentalist who claim that the Bible is (and must be) inerrant in all things to be trusted as veridical. Most Wesleyans, Oord contends, reject this narrow view. Quoting from the COTN denominational *Manual* which says that the Bible inerrantly reveals “the will of God concerning all things necessary to salvation” Oord concludes that “this emphasis upon salvation corresponds with Wesley’s emphasis upon clarity about what is necessary: the Bible’s primary purpose is that God uses it to provide salvation. I call this idea, ‘soteriological inerrancy’.”³⁴ Oord does not say how one determines which scriptures are necessary to salvation.

Oord on the Adequacy of Language

Language, especially language about God, has limitations. He writes that Open Theist realize that “language about God and the world has limitations.”³⁵ However, he is quick to add that some language about God “better identifies what is true about God and the world

http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/characteristics_of_evangelical_open_theology/), accessed June 13, 2010.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Tom Oord, “Reading Scripture with Wesleyan Eyes”

http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/reading_scripture_with_wesleyan_eyes/ (March 26, 2010), accessed June 15, 2010.

³⁵ Ibid.

than other language.”³⁶ Oord does not delineate how one determines language about God to be reliable. The reliability of language appears to be determined by subjective assessment. From this brief review of Oord’s writings, his starting point should be easy to identify. Oord believes that his epistemological starting point of uncertainty, subjectivity, and doubt is a reliable place to begin.

Open Theism in the Theology of Tom Oord

Oord is committed to advancing Open Theism. While he acknowledges that it is a source of controversy, he also sees Open Theology as a source of theological renewal.³⁷ As you will soon see, the positions Oord assumes on core commitments of Open theism can be seen in the following examples.

Oord on the Doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*

The Nazarene Church was founded on the belief that God created the world out of nothing. Early theologians within the COTN embraced this doctrine as the prevailing belief. Wiley affirmed it; Dunning wrote extensively on the subject in his theology. Tom Oord, on the other hand, commenting on this core doctrinal commitment (which has been affirmed throughout Church History and embraced by most of the denominational history of the COTN) writes, “I believe God created the heavens, the earth, and every living thing. But I think Christians should reject the idea that God created the universe from absolutely nothing.”³⁸ Professor Oord confesses that he first became “suspicious” of this doctrine in the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Tom Oord, “The Emergence of Open Theology” (http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/, Nov 19, 2009), accessed July 22, 2010.

³⁸ Tom Oord, “Creatio ex nihilo: The Problem”, ([www.thomasjaylor.com/http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/creatio_ex_nihilo_the_problem/](http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/creatio_ex_nihilo_the_problem/)).

1990's. His concern with the doctrine centered on the presence of evil in the world.³⁹ If God created the world from nothing, then He would have certainly had the power to create a world in which evil did not exist. But evil exists. When giving consideration to this dilemma, Oord “began to entertain the idea that *creatio ex nihilo* may not be worth affirming.”⁴⁰

Why has this doctrine been so prevalent in Church History and believed by so many? Oord proposes it is because few Christians have questioned or studied “the biblical, historical, theological, and scientific dimensions of the doctrine.”⁴¹ Oord observes that until we have some reason to question a doctrine or teaching of the Church we tend to just embrace and accept what we are told without strong objection. Unlike Dunning who cited several reasons why *creatio ex nihilo* is important to the Church and to the doctrine of God, Oord lists nine reasons why he rejects *creatio ex nihilo*. The reason he rejects the doctrine of creation from nothing, he says, is rooted in his profound commitment to the Bible and the role it plays in his theology.⁴² Oord provides a list of several problems he sees with the doctrine.

“Theoretical problem: absolute nothingness cannot be conceived. Historical problem: *creatio ex nihilo* was first proposed by Gnostics – Basilides and Valentinus – who assumed that creation was inherently evil and that God does not act in history. It was adopted by early Christian theologians to affirm the kind of absolute divine power that many Christians – especially Wesleyans – now reject. Empirical problem: We have no evidence that our universe originally came into being from absolutely nothing.⁴³ Creation at an instant problem: We have no evidence in the history of the

³⁹ Recall that Nazarene theologian Ray Dunning observed (before Tom Oord wrote any theology) that theologians who become preoccupied with the existence of evil often reject *creatio ex nihilo*. See H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 242.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ It is interesting to note that while Oord says the basis of his doctrinal shift is rooted in the deep belief and commitment to Scripture he does not cite scripture to bolster his claims. In fact, he candidly acknowledges the writers of the biblical text “do not explicitly endorse the

universe after the big bang that entities can emerge instantaneously from absolute nothingness. Out of nothing comes nothing (*ex nihil, nihil fit*). Solitary power problem: *Creatio ex nihilo* assumes that a powerful God once acted alone. But power is a social concept only meaningful in relation to others. Errant revelation problem: The God with the capacity to create something from absolutely nothing would apparently have the power to guarantee an unambiguous and inerrant message of salvation (e.g. inerrant Bible). An unambiguously clear and inerrant divine revelation does not exist.⁴⁴ Evil problem: If God once had the power to create from absolutely nothing, God *essentially* retains that power. But a God of love with this capacity is culpable for failing to use it periodically to prevent genuine evil. Empire Problem: The kind of divine power implied in *creatio ex nihilo* supports a theology of empire, which is based upon unilateral force and control of others. Biblical problem: Scripture – in Genesis, 2 Peter, and elsewhere – suggests creation from something (water, deep, chaos, invisible things, etc.), not creation from absolutely nothing.⁴⁵

Oord cites several notable theologians and Bible scholars who are sympathetic to his position. A citation by Catherine Keller summarizes the general consensus: “Among biblical scholars there has existed on this matter a near, if nervous, consensus for decades. The Bible knows only of the divine formation of the world out of a chaotic something.”⁴⁶

For Oord, the only thing this doctrine has in its favor is the fact that Christian theologians for centuries have affirmed the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. He concedes that while the majority of Christian tradition supports affirming the doctrine, he still believes that his list of nine problems will over ride centuries of Christian tradition. Specifically, he writes,

details or label I propose, I believe the biblical data supports my theory better than alternatives. He cites only one verse from the Bible. For the full article, please refer to the article “Creatio ex Creation a Natura Amoris: A New Doctrine of Creation.”
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/creatio_ex_creationem_a_natura_amoris_an_new_doctrine_of_creation/.

⁴⁴ Oord demonstrates throughout his writings that he rejects the Scripture as authoritative in all things. He limits the trustworthiness of Scripture to matters that relate to Salvation only. Just how Oord determines the trustworthiness of Scripture in matters that relate to Salvation is not clear to the writer.

⁴⁵ Tom Oord, “Creatio ex Creation a Natura Amoris: A new doctrine of creation.”
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/creatio_ex_creationem_a_natura_amoris_an_new_doctrine_of_creation/.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

“In my mind, however, the nine problems I have listed above are so strong that opposing the majority of the Christian tradition seems the sensible thing to do. Besides, the tradition does not jive with the Biblical witness on this issue. I typically opt for the Bible over tradition.”⁴⁷

According to Oord, this “Bible over tradition” posture will lead one to embrace a theory of creation that views God as the creative initiator or primary actor in creation. And one will embrace the idea that “God involves both the human and the nonhuman in the continuing process of creation.”⁴⁸ Because God creates out of love, and is love, “creatures play a role in the coming to be of all things. In love, Creator God invites contingent creatures to co-create.”⁴⁹

Oord on the Doctrine of Divine Foreknowledge

When Open Theology is reduced to its core, Oord believes that four basic beliefs are affirmed. “Love is uniquely exemplified by God. Love is the human ethical imperative. God and creatures enjoy free and mutually-influencing relations. And the future is open and is not settled.”⁵⁰

Reflecting on the foreknowledge of God, Oord asserts that the Bible is not clear on the subject. In his mind, the Bible does not provide a clear-cut answer. In the Bible there are

⁴⁷ Ibid. Oord, however, does acknowledge that “biblical authors do not explicitly endorse the detail or label I propose.” He is still insistent that his position better represents the intent of Scripture better than the alternative positions, namely that God created *ex nihilo*. To accept the traditional stance of the Church is embrace a coercive Creator. He further asserts that denying the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is supported by biblical, historical, logical, ethical, scientific, and theological implications. What Oord does not address is how so many scholars and theologians from Church History failed to recognize the latent error of this timeless doctrine of the Church.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Oord, Thomas J. “Open Theology and the Church of the Nazarene” (*For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love* February 19, 2010 [http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/open theology and the church of the nazarene/](http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/open%20theology%20and%20the%20church%20of%20the%20nazarene/)), accessed June 14, 2010.

a number of passages that state or imply that God does not know all the details of the future. Open Theists believe that the majority of passages in the Bible support the view that God does not know the future exhaustively. He writes, “Open theologians are deeply committed to the authority of the biblical witness, and they believe the Bible more strongly supports their view than the alternatives.”⁵¹ He cites the passages that declare that God repents. He cites the account in II Kings and the story of Hezekiah as an example that God seems to know the future but Hezekiah persuades God to change his mind and add fifteen years to his life. This suggests that the future was, in fact, open. It is either open or God lied to Hezekiah, Oord writes.⁵²

Oord believes that the Bible further supports Open Theology with the conditional statements attributed to God. II Chronicles 7:14, 19-20 which reads,

“If my people who are called by name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then...I will forgive their sins and heal their land...but if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from the land that I have given you.”

Commenting on this passage, Oord states, “God apparently does not know what Solomon and the people of Israel will do when presented with these options. This passage loses significance if God already knows all future choices.”⁵³

Oord does acknowledge that Open Theology is not the traditional position of Arminian theology in general or of the Nazarene Church specifically. He accepts the fact that

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

James Arminius and John Wesley believed and embraced the belief that God knew the future in exhaustive detail. “The majority of their writings suggest God does foreknow.”⁵⁴

While the theological heritage of Methodism reveals that the vast majority of their theologians supported the doctrine of God’s foreknowledge, some strayed from the path. COTN theologians are not the first in their theological tradition to explore divergent ideas. Drew Seminary theologian Lorenzo McCabe broke with the Methodist/Wesleyan tradition and wrote extensively and passionately that God did not know all future events. Others followed his lead. Methodist theologian John Miley also speculated about theological alternatives regarding aspects of limited Divine foreknowledge in his theology.⁵⁵ Methodist Circuit rider Billy Hubbard is also on record for his denial of God’s foreknowledge.⁵⁶

Oord on Divine Sovereignty

For Oord, the most compelling Biblical way to view the nature of God is as love. God as love fits well with his matrix of relational theology. In a book Oord coauthored with Michael Lodahl, God is described in terms often found in Process Thought. For instance, the following theological concepts are examples of Process thought. God is viewed as interacting with creation in a moment by moment basis. God is portrayed as one who is not independent or isolated from others. Oord observes “God is not entirely independent, because God is love, and love is expressed in relationships. To exist, of course, God does not depend upon creatures. God was not born and will not die; God does not depend upon others in order to

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* 2 vols. (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892).

⁵⁶ Thomas J. Oord and Bryan P. Stone, eds. *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 111-142.

be. Rather, to say that God is dependent is to affirm the relational dependence that love requires.”⁵⁷

For Oord, God cannot be viewed as sovereign in the Classical sense simply because this kind of power is raw, tyrannical, and coercive. Process Thought, on the other hand, views God (and humans) as becoming as each moment is experienced in light of the previous. According to Oord, “each person, in each moment chooses among a variety of options and alternatives based upon his or her relations with the past.”⁵⁸ Just as we are a product of our past decisions, so too, is God. He enjoys the give and take of the relationship He shares with humans. Oord observes that “God is open and affected by others, because the Creator and the creatures enjoy mutual relations. To say that these relations are mutual is to say that God interacts with us and we inter act with God.”⁵⁹ He further avers that “a God of love desires and seeks this kind of dependent relation.”⁶⁰

Regarding the sovereignty of God, Oord wants a God who is powerful, but not culpable “for failing to prevent evil.”⁶¹ In order to present a God who is not coercive, Oord must formulate a doctrine that allows for God to be both powerful and loving. He achieves this with a theory he calls “Essential Kenosis.”⁶² Essential Kenosis teaches that “God cannot fail to offer, withdraw, or override the freedom/agency God necessarily gives. This means that creatures, not God, are morally responsible for the evil, confusion, and injustice in the

⁵⁷ Thomas J. Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 34-35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶¹ Oord, Thomas J. “A Theologian Evaluates Intelligent Design: Part 3 of 3” (*For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love* January 13, 2010

http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/a_theologian_evaluates_intelligent_design_part_3_of_3/), accessed June 15, 2010.

⁶² *Ibid.*

world.”⁶³ Rather than a top down rule of a sovereign God, Oord proffers a God who never engages in coercion; rather, God chooses to cooperate with Creation. Oord sees this cooperative stance of God in the story of Creation: “God calls upon creation many times to ‘bring forth’ creatures of various kinds. This idea of divine-creaturely cooperation persists throughout the Bible.”⁶⁴ To view God as the Creator who acted on His own as sovereign strips God of the love. For God to act alone would not demonstrate divine love at all according to Oord:

“Acting all alone when creating would not be loving at least for two reasons: First, love requires relationship. Relationship requires cooperation and collaborating, at least to some degree. Acting all alone as a sufficient cause amounts to forcing one’s way on others. This is coercion. Almost everybody believes that love and coercion---when coercion is defined as total control---are incompatible. The God in whom Christians believe is foremost a Lover who would NEVER act unloving...A God who always loves and never coerces would always act in relationship. God would never act as a sufficient cause. God’s loving and creating action would persuade, call, woo, lure, summon, inspire, and empower others. God creates in cooperation with creatures.

The second reason we should not think that God acts alone to design irreducibly complex organisms is that God’s acting all alone---being in complete control of the situation or creature---implies that God has the capacity to control anyone at anytime and at any place. A God with this capacity would be morally responsible. After all..

- A loving God who can completely control others should prevent the genuine evil of the world.
- A loving God who can completely control others should provide crystal-clear and inerrant revelation.
- A loving God who can completely control others should distribute the goods and resources of the world fairly.

Because genuine evil, ambiguous revelation and injustice occurs, God must not completely control others.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Michael Lodahl interprets the phrase “Let there be” as God letting nature have space. See *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 35.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Regarding Sovereignty, Oord concludes that one should use language about God's power that denies God has the capacity to coerce. "Persuasive force", says Oord, "cannot entirely control others."⁶⁶

A Summary of Oord's Doctrine of God

The evidence seems to suggest that Oord wants to break the core mold that helped shape and form COTN theology. He appears to want to see God through a Process window that is focused by an Open View. Clearly, with Process Theology, he shares a view of God's power (or lack thereof) that is foreign to Classical Theism. He joins Process Theology when he rejects *creatio ex nihilo*; and yet holds hands with Open Theologians who share the view that God cannot know the future exhaustively. God can only know what can be known and the future is not one of those things that can be known. This view seems to relegate God to the past. This is not the kind of Doctrine of God the founders of the COTN would recognize.

The Theology of C.S. Cowles

C. S. Cowles is professor emeritus of Bible, Theology, and Preaching at Northwest Nazarene University. He is also an adjunct professor at Point Loma Nazarene University. Following the lead of Oord and Lodahl, Cowles has become an advocate for Open Theology also. Professor Cowles, like Oord and Lodahl, departs from the traditional understanding of the nature of God. In an article that appeared in the *Preachers Magazine*⁶⁷ Cowles posed the question "Is the Future a Done Deal?" in which Cowles wants the reader to consider the question of whether or not God knows the future exhaustively. Does God know the color of

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *The Preachers Magazine* is published three times a year by Beacon Hill Press and is owned by the Church of the Nazarene.

your unborn great-grandchildren's eyes, he asks? God does, writes Cowles, if you embrace the Classical view of God. He further observes one is especially enthusiastic with this conclusion if a Calvinistic interpretation of the nature of God is embraced. Calvin was a champion of the belief that God must know the future in exhaustive detail and concluded that what God predestines He foreknows. However, Cowles conceded that Calvin is not alone in that belief. Cowles concedes that while James Arminius was not in agreement with Calvin on the role of free will in determining human destiny, he nonetheless accepted the Classical view of Divine Omniscience that teaches that God is above space and time and therefore must see the past, present, and the future.

The shared view of Calvin and Arminius on God's foreknowledge has been the predominant view since Saint Augustine postulated it in the Fourth Century. God's exhaustive foreknowledge is a fact that Methodist Theologian Tom Oden does not hesitate to affirm when he writes, "God does not perceive fragmentarily as humans perceive, as if from a particular nexus of time, but knows exhaustively, in eternal simultaneity."⁶⁸ Cowles disagrees. If God knows (in advance) what a human will do, then that human act is not free. While he acknowledges that Scripture often portrays God as the Sovereign Lord over all, Cowles finds equally compelling evidence in Scripture to support the belief that God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge. Cowles believes "the classical model of omniscience drains all the drama out of life."⁶⁹ It robs the individual of true freedom. How can we be truly free if the future is already a done deal? Would not our "freedom" be illusory since the only option available to us is already known by God?

⁶⁸ Thomas C Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 70.

⁶⁹ C. S. Cowles "Is the Future a Done Deal? Reconsidering Divine Omniscience" (*Preacher's Magazine*, Advent 2006), 41-52.

Cowles uses C.S Lewis as an example of how our concept of time is flawed. Lewis once used the example of viewing a parade from a tall building to illustrate the difference in perspective one would have with another spectator who was viewing the same parade from the ground. The one on the tall building sees both the beginning and the end of the parade; while the one on the ground only sees a small segment of the events. Cowles points out that this analogy works great until one asks, “What if there is no parade?”⁷⁰ In other words, Cowles is suggesting that God does not (and cannot) know what has not happened yet. “Can that which as yet has no existence be known exhaustively?”⁷¹ If humans are truly free Cowles believes that God cannot be granted access to the future.

To bolster his case for Open Theology, Cowles suggests that the “whole sweep of the biblical narrative strongly favors an open view of the future. From his point of view, Cowles believes that beginning with the six days of creation one can see the uncertainty with which God had to cope. For example, God said, “Let there be” (Genesis 1:3). This act of letting be demonstrates the uncertainty of knowing on the part of God. Since there is no being before the act of “letting be” God really doesn’t know what He is going to get. Specifically Cowles writes, “Can that which as yet has no being be known exhaustively before it actually exists, especially in its myriad interactions with other beings that have also have inherent autonomy and potencies?”⁷²

Cowles continues to postulate that God was curious about what Adam would name the animals. That would not be the case if God already knew. As a side note he observes that in the Qur’an Allah tells Adam what to name the animals which would be in keeping with

⁷⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁷¹ Ibid., 44.

⁷² Ibid., 45.

their deterministic view of God. He further avers that God is surprised that Eve and Adam have succumbed to the wiles of the serpent. Cowles believes that when God called to Adam asking, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) it is because God really did not know. In another passage of Scripture it is revealed that God is “shocked” at the depths and depravity of mankind (Genesis 6). If God could foresee the wickedness of mankind, why would he express surprise? Cowles cites numerous places in the Bible that suggests that God changed His mind:

- God changes His mind about the perpetuity of both the house of Eli and the house of Saul (First Samuel 2:30-31; 13:13; 14:35).
- He changes His mind about destroying Nineveh (Jonah 3:10).
- Over forty times God changed His mind in the Old Testament; most often in response to intercessory prayer (Numbers 11:1-2; Judges 10:13-16; Second Samuel 24:17-25).

For Cowles, it takes a far more innovative theology to believe in the Classical view of God than it does to believe in a God who takes risks and does not know the future in detail. Specifically, he states, “it takes far greater and more innovative sovereign to govern a dynamic and changing world populated by truly free moral agents than it does to direct a world of automatons where the outcome of everything is already known in advance.”⁷³

Cowles advocates a view of God that affirms human freedom and denies Divine control. He agrees with Clark Pinnock who states, “God is absolutely sovereign, yet for love’s sake has surrendered His sovereignty at the point of human freedom.”⁷⁴ He embraces the God portrayed by John Sanders who offers to people a relationship that “is not one of control and domination but rather one of powerful love and vulnerability...the divine project

⁷³ Ibid. 46.

⁷⁴ (Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover* 2000) 106.

of developing people who freely enter into a loving and trusting relationship with God that lacks an unconditional guarantee of success.⁷⁵

While Cowles invites the reader to embrace many of the benefits he sees to Open Theology, he does not explain how Openness upholds the traditional Doctrines of the Atonement, Scripture, Soteriology, or Eschatology.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ John Sanders, *The God Who Risk: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove), 88-89.

⁷⁶ For more reading on this topic, refer to John MacArthur, "Open Theism's Attack on the Atonement", *The Master's Seminary Journal* (12/1 Spring, 2001), 3-13.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The Nazarene Church, it is safe to say, is in theological crisis. This is not my biased assessment. This stark conclusion has been documented elsewhere. *Christianity Today*, in an article published in their July 2007 issue attributes this dire assessment of the COTN¹ to their General Superintendent, Jerry Porter. Porter made this observation at a Global theology conference. Tom Oord, professor of theology and philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho (and an ardent advocate for Process and Open theologies) believes theological adjustments are desperately needed. Oord prefers a theology that has as its driving motif love. It is his belief that the old way of delineating doctrinal positions is no longer effective. For the sake of remaining relevant in a post modern world Oord believes that the COTN will either make the necessary adjustments or it will end up with a faith that has little to offer.²

Rob Staples, a retired Professor who taught in Nazarene academic institutions for years, said the following at a recent theological gathering: “Today, the Church of the Nazarene has largely forgotten who she is and does not know what she really believes.”³ It is his contention that the COTN is in danger of losing its identity as a denomination; and that

¹ The Church of the Nazarene will be noted as COTN.

² Brad A. Greenberg “Identity Crisis: Nazarenes Rethink Entire Sanctification” *Christianity Today*, July 2007.

³ Rob L. Staples, *The Edwin Crawford Lecture, Conference on Revisioning Holiness*. February 09, 2007.

this loss has little to do with the recent efforts of some within the movement to make adjustments to their doctrinal positions. Rather, Staples views the main threat to denominational theological integrity to be “the almost unconscious acceptance of relativism.”⁴ It is his opinion that the evidence of the existence of relativism is easily identified by the one who has “ears to hear and eyes to see.”⁵

At a Missions Conference ten days later, Nina Gunter, a General Superintendent in the COTN identified what she believed to be the defining issues facing the denomination. In a plenary session she listed the following concerns: Calvinism, the Emergent Church, and Reformed Theology.⁶ In her remarks she expressed concern for Nazarene students who are being influence by Calvinistic theology. She further delineated that the theological commitments (or lack thereof) within the Emergent Church movement posed a grave threat to Nazarene theological identity. Finally, she single out Reformed theology as a concern.

In the closing paragraphs of this paper, I want to propose three potential reasons for the current theological climate within the COTN. These personal observations are not intended to be comprehensive or prescriptive in nature. These observations may be descriptive and perhaps serve as potential exploratory discussion points that will encourage meaningful dialogue. My personal studies have revealed three areas of weakness in contemporary Nazarene theology: a disregard for their theological heritage; a devotion to Liberal theology; and a theological diversity that lacks doctrinal consistency. Let’s explore each of these points briefly.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dr. Nina Gunter, “*M7 Mission Conference, Into Faith; Out to the World*” (Kansas City, MO) February 19-21, 2007.

A DISREGARD FOR THEIR THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

In theology, the most fundamental issue is the nature of God. Without God, there is no theology. It is upon the Doctrine of God that all other doctrines are formulated. My thesis for this project is not a complex statement. I stated from the outset of this paper that there are two competing concepts of God within the Church of the Nazarene. It has been the goal of this paper to demonstrate that in the beginning days of the denomination, the COTN embraced a view of God that affirmed a Classical and orthodox interpretation of the Doctrine of God. I have further sought to show that their doctrinal statement (as presented in the *Manual*) has remained essentially unchanged for over one hundred years. The evidence has shown that contemporary Nazarene theologians have systematically assaulted the traditional stance of the denomination. Those advocating radical change may be guilty of what C.S Lewis called, “chronological snobbery.” Lewis defines chronological snobbery as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.”

Tom Oord’s posture lends itself to this critique. Several examples of this can be cited from the blog article he wrote entitled, *Creatio ex Creatioe a Natura Amoris: A New Doctrine of Creation*. The purpose of the piece is to convince fellow believers that the doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo* is wrong. Even though this has been the doctrinal heritage of the COTN for over 100 years, and has been the prevailing orthodox position of the Christian Church, Oord writes, “Our habits of mind are the major obstacle to affirming that God creates out of creation through a nature of love. Although we normally think of the creating we see every day as bringing something new from something else, we habitually think of God’s creating as bringing something new from nothing at all. The Christian tradition, not

the Bible, has formed our habit in this regard.” Such an assessment seems to suggest (by inference) that all the scholars before him were bound by tradition to such a degree that it blinded them to the truth of his theological insight.

Oord acknowledges that this new theory may be unsettling to some of his readers; but don't worry, he comforts. The unsettling feeling is rooted in unfamiliarity. There is nothing about his view that is “logically problematic.”⁷ Most Christians, he reasons, intuitively believe that God exists everlasting. If that is true (and he believes it is) then it should not be difficult to embrace his new theory. To believe that God creates from what God previously has created breaks no rule of logic, he writes. The problem with this logic is its disregard for Scripture and the theological heritage of his own denomination. The best evidence Oord has to offer (biblically) is to suggest that that the Bible “sustains” his theory. “While Biblical authors do not explicitly endorse the details I propose,” he writes, “I believe the biblical data supports my theory better than the alternatives.”⁸ And just what is the biblical data that Oord cites? He believes when one combines the Genesis 1 account (which he believes God creates from something) with the *chesed* of God's everlasting love for creation and insight of *kenosis*, “*creatio ex creation a natura amoris* enjoys solid biblical justification.”⁹ Regarding his disregard for his own theological heritage, he doesn't interact with any of them. He cites no previous stated claim from the Methodist theological forebears. Oord fails to even explain to the reader what the official position of the COTN has been or why. Wiley, the first official theologian of the Nazarene Church was commissioned in 1918 to write and publish a theology for the denomination. Wiley, like theologians before him, embraced, supported, and

⁷ Thomas Jay Oord “*Creatio ex Creation a Natura Amoris: A New Doctrine of Creation*” (www.thomasjaylor.com) accessed January 21, 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

delineated *Creatio ex nihilo* as an official theological stance of the Church. Oord, on the other hand, doesn't demonstrate from Scripture or theological tradition where the Church made a wrong turn. He seems to disdain the doctrine on the grounds that it does not fit with his desire to rearticulate God in a Process Theology motif. Oord's desire to mold God in the image of Process thought is so strong that it would require one to lay the COTN Doctrine of God in the proverbial "Procrustean bed."¹⁰

This brings us to my second observation about the contemporary COTN theological landscape: it is devoted to Liberal theology.

A DEVOTION TO LIBERAL THEOLOGY

The theological trajectory of the COTN has, from the beginning, been informed by Liberal theologians. It is a common fact that Wiley (the first official theologian of the denomination) was influenced by Personalism.¹¹ It can also be demonstrated that Dunning's theology was greatly influenced by Liberal theologian Paul Tillich (at least on his doctrine of God); and both Michael Lodahl and Tom Oord find theological satisfaction in the philosophy of Alfred Whitehead and other known well-known Process Theologians. These Nazarene theologians all embrace and demonstrate an affinity for the core tenants of Liberal theology.

The core commitments of Liberal theology are a weak view of Scripture, sympathy for

¹⁰ The Procrustean bed is from Greek mythology. Procrustes would invite guest to spend the night; however, as soon as they entered his house, he would tie them to the bed. If they were too short for the bed, he would stretch them until they did fit. If they were too tall for his bed, he would cut off their limbs to make them fit. Either way his "guest" died. In a similar fashion, COTN theologians are trying to force God into the theological procrustean bed of their own making. In their zeal to rearticulate God, they have radically altered the God of Scripture.

¹¹ J. Matthew Price, *We Teach Holiness: The Life and Work of H. Orton Wiley 1877-1961* (Holiness Data Ministry, 2006), 51-87. See also "Wesleyan Theology, Boston Personalism and Process Thought" in *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*. Bryon P. Stone and Thomas J. Oord, eds. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

higher criticism, an anthropocentric epistemology, and correlation between God and man. Classical Theology viewed God as distinct in both quality and quantity. Liberal theology tends to blur the lines of metaphysical distinction (both Oord and Lodahl seem to present a God in quantitative terms). While Classical Theology made the distinction that God was different in both the quality and quantity (that is to say that God is not only different from humans in terms of quantity but also in quality also). This short list is not an exhaustive list of Liberal commitments; however, it does shine enough light into the theological room of the COTN theologians to reveal who and what they are standing next to. A brief examination of their writings reveals talking points commonly found in Liberal theology. The following liberal core commitments can be easily found in Nazarene theology.

A Rejection of the Authority of Scripture

It is common knowledge that Reformed theologians situated the possibility of the knowledge of God in the Divine Revelation of Scripture. They believed we could know very little about God apart from the revealed truth of Scripture. By contrast, not one of the above mentioned Nazarene theologians recognizes the authority of Scripture (as the Reformers did) and all of them reject inerrancy. Even Wiley, the first official theologian of the COTN, was very reluctant to make a strong commitment to Scripture. Dunning is only willing to give the Scripture “basic source” status.¹² He continues his tentative endorsement with this qualifier: “every evangelical, conservative Christian theologian accepts the authority of the Bible. The question to be discussed is related to the nature and shape of that authority.”¹³ As an example, Dunning illustrates the “nature and shape” of this authority with the following analogy. Using a policeman with a badge as prop, he says this visible expression of authority

¹² Ibid., 58.

¹³ Ibid., 58.

is effective because it is rooted in the power of the badge. People, for a variety of reasons, ascribe authority to the badge. This practical example illustrates that authority is personal in nature.¹⁴

For him, reality and knowledge are only verifiable through the sensory portal. Knowledge of God is only perceptible through the Christ event. Of such (the Christ event) Dunning writes, “it is the central Christian affirmation at this point that has indeed descended into our realm by His saving acts in history, climaxing in the event in which the Divine took on the conditions of finite existence, tabernacle among us and so became knowable and visible to us.”¹⁵

Language is Inadequate

Tom Oord and Dunning are equally disappointing on the ability of language to convey truth about God. These men do not believe that it is possible for God to communicate reliable information about Himself through language. H. Ray Dunning, for example, rejects the belief that God can communicate truth through language. He writes, “God can be known only as He enters the world of experience.”¹⁶ For Dunning the Scripture cannot reveal anything reliable about God. Language is not adequate. Dunning affirms for the reader that the only way in which objective truth about God can be known is through the subjective window of experience. Knowledge of God comes only when one has a personal encounter with Him. To establish that Dunning embraces core Liberal commitments is not difficult. Dunning reinforces the point that God can only be known through personal encounter. He cites Donald M. Ballie who observes, “God can be known only in direct personal

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 116.

relationship, an 'I' and 'thou' intercourse, in which He addresses us as we respond to Him. He eludes all our words and categories. We cannot objectify or conceptualize Him."¹⁷ In other words, cognitive understanding of God is not possible. Therefore, the inadequacy of language is replaced with a personal encounter of religious feeling and experience. Quoting from Ballie, Dunning again reinforces the Liberal notion that language is incapable of communicating anything to us about God: "God does not give information by communication; He gives us Himself in communion."¹⁸ With these claims Dunning brushes aside the possibility that God can communicate to humanity anything remotely resembling propositional truth. Truth can only come through the Christ event as we experience Him in a personal relationship. Similarly, Oord avers, "in terms of epistemology, open and relational theists tend to be realist or critical realists. They realize that language about God and the world has limitations."¹⁹ Oord does believe that the Bible is "principally authoritative" for the big questions of life. He does not say how one determines the Bible to be reliable for the big questions of life. This leads us to the final observation regarding Liberal theology.

Uncertainty

Liberal theology involves a willingness to affirm faith without certainty. For those who assume this uncertain posture they are quick to add that this does not mean they do not have conviction. What it means is that they never have their feet firmly planted on the ground. Or perhaps it means they do not know where they are going to put their feet next. Liberals have a difficult time delineating who and what they are (theologically or religiously). Some COTN theologians seem to wear this badge of uncertainty as a badge of

¹⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Oord, "Characteristics of Evangelical and Open and Relational Theology" (www.thomasjoord.com) accessed February 2, 2010.

honor to demonstrate their tolerance and diversity. Uncertainty is inherent in Liberal theology. For example, COTN theologian Grider believes that truth is not eternal. He explains his position this way: much in the same way that “cowness does not exist before cows do, the same is true as it relates to truth.”²⁰ Oord does not believe one can really know the truth with certainty either.²¹ How Oord is “certain” of that fact is unclear. Promoting a theological culture of uncertainty, denying God the ability to communicate through language and rejecting the possibility of truth does not seem conducive to building confident faith for the Nazarene denomination. Now I submit a final observation about the Nazarene Church.

DIVERSITY WITH NO THEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

The COTN recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. To commemorate the milestone, Tom Oord posted a blog in which he praised the culture of diversity among Nazarenes. With the help of fellow Nazarenes the following diversity list was compiled to demonstrate just how progressive the denomination has become. Oord states, “Members of the denomination - both clergy and lay -- are engaging a wide array of ideas, cultural trends, and theologies.”²² He further identifies the various ways in which these new Nazarenes (on a quest for change) are embracing diversity. Breathe deeply and peruse just how diverse the new Nazarenes have become. There are eco-Nzarenes - those concerned about ecological and environmental issues; emergent/emerging Nazarenes - those engaged in the emergent/emerging movement or conversation; process Nazarenes - those interested in the resources process theology

²⁰ J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 54.

²¹ Thomas J. Oord, “Truth and Postmodernism” November 19, 2009. http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/test_entry/ (accessed June 08, 2010).

²² Thomas J. Oord, “The New Nazarenes” December 2, 2009, http://thomasjaylor.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_new_nazarenes/ (accessed January 4, 2010).

provides; radical orthodox/post-liberal Nazarenes - those interested in the resources radical orthodoxy and post-liberal theology provides; missional Nazarenes - those engaging missional theology in its various dimensions; open and relational Nazarenes - those accessing the resources of open and relational theology; post-colonial Nazarenes - those wishing to emphasize the importance of contextual theology and liberation; ecumenical Nazarenes – those who believe engaging other Christian communions is vital; social justice Nazarenes – those concerned about economic, environmental, and political justice; immigrant Nazarenes – those concerned with what immigration means for Christian identity; nondenominational Nazarenes – those who play down denominational structures and hierarchies; liturgical/sacramental Nazarenes – those who believe the sacraments and liturgy should be central; front-door Nazarenes – those who will not slip out the denominational back door when fundamentalists exert control; ancient-future Nazarenes- those wishing to retain some particular aspect of the past but express it in a radically new way.²³

This list represents the ultimate Procrustean bed. This is not just a list of various types of people seeking the same thing. Rather, this is a list of people groups all seeking to achieve different goals through various prisms of perceived truth. Oord pensively asks, “What is the core of the Church of the Nazarene?”²⁴ He believes this core is the emphasis on the centrality of love.

Love indeed. It may be true that love will build a bridge (as the Judd’s sang); but it is equally important to know to what destination the bridge leads. It is doubtful that the Nazarene Church will maintain theological consistency with such a high concentration of doctrinal and theological deviation. The vast majority of interest groups on the above list are

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

liberal in nature. With such a concentrated mass of uncertainty leading the way there is little hope that the Nazarene Church will find all these theological motifs leading to the same place. It is difficult to presume that the theological journeys of the “process Nazarenes” and the “post-colonial” Nazarenes will lead to the same theological destination --- even with love leading the way.

It is equally doubtful that the two competing views of God (Open Theism and Classical theology) will be able to co-exist side by side either. C.S. Lewis argues in *Mere Christianity* that the clock needs to be turned back only if it's telling the wrong time. He further elaborates if we have taken the wrong road, we need to go back and take the right one as soon as possible; or if we have started to do a math problem the wrong way, we need to correct it before going further. Lewis writes:

“As to putting the clock back, would you think I was joking if I said that you can put a clock back, and that if the clock is wrong it is often a very sensible thing to do? But I would rather get away from that whole idea of clocks. We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man. We have all seen this when we do arithmetic. When I have started a sum the wrong way, the sooner I admit this and go back and start over again, the faster I shall get on. There is nothing progressive about being pigheaded and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world, it is pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistakes. We are on the wrong road. And if that is so, we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.”²⁵

²⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1952), 28-30.

You certainly don't "turn the clock back" or go back to the past for its own sake. Much in earlier ages of past history can show us how *not* to do things as well as in some cases how to do them. In the former case, the classic proverb applies: If we don't learn from history's mistakes, we are bound to repeat them. However, in the latter case, there are some wise words and teaching that need to be preserved and passed on. Some have pointed out that Jesus was not a "revolutionary" wanting to overthrow everything in the established religious order of his day. Jesus was also not a mere "conservative" holding to all the traditional practices of his day, although there was much that he did want to conserve—particularly the truth of Scripture. Jesus reacted with particular and forceful certainty against places where traditions had overturned or obscured the Scriptures. The Nazarene Church would do well to sift through what is good from its heritage and pass on that valuable inheritance to others. It would also be well served to fan the flame of faith and pass that flaming torch on to succeeding generations.

The Church of the Nazarene's one hundred year journey needs to be evaluated. Their leadership needs to define and confirm both their belief and identity---with certainty. Those in leadership would advance their cause by emphasizing their theological heritage. Perhaps in the process they might discover who they are and what they believe. If the Leadership of the COTN continues to pursue a strategy of silence, the best axiom they can hope to pass to the next generation of Nazarenes is the core value of Liberalism: uncertainty.

Bibliography

- Assembly, Manual of 1908 General. "Manual." *Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene*. Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1908. 24-25.
- Assembly, Twenty-Sixth General. "Manual 2005-2009 Church of the Nazarene." *Manual*. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2005. 30.
- Bassett, Paul. "In Honor of J. Kenneth Grider." *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1999: 281-286.
- Bray, Gerald. *The Personal God: IS the Classical Understanding of God Tenable?* . Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998.
- Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001.
- Burrell, David B. *Aquinas: God and Action*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1979.
- Chiles, Robert E. *Theological Transition in American Methodism*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- Cowles, C S. "Is the Future a Done Deal? Reconsidering Divine Omniscience." *Preacher's Magazine*, 2006-2007: 40-52.
- Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988.
- Feinberg, John S. *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*. Wheaton : Crossway, 2001.
- Forlines, F. Leroy. *The Quest for Truth*. Nashville: Randall House, 2001.
- Frame, John. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002.
- Geisler, Norman. *Creating God in the Image of Man*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997.
- Geisler, Norman L. *Inerrancy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993.
- Grider, J. Kenneth. *A Wesleyan Holiness Theolgy*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994.
- Hills, A M. *Phineus F Bresee*. Kansa City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997.
- Hoezee, Scott. "The Openness of God." *Calvin Theological Journal*, November 1995: 589-593.

- Inwagen, Peter van. *Metaphysics*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Helseth. *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003.
- Johnson, Douglas S. Hoffman, Eric L., eds. *God Under Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Kelly, Douglas. "Afraid of Infinitude." *Christianity Today*, January 9, 1995: 33.
- Kliever, Lonnie D. *The Shattered Spectrum*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.
- Langford, Thomas A. *Wesleyan Theology*. Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1984.
- Lodahl, Michael. *The Story of God*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994.
- MacArthur, John. "Open Theism's Attack on the Atonement." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12/1, no. Spring (2001): 3-13.
- MacArthur, John. "Perspicuity of Scripture: The Emergent Approach." *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Fall 2006: 141-158.
- McClung, Dave. *Naznet*. 04 15, 1996. <http://www.naznet.com/community/index.php> (accessed 12 25, 2009).
- Miley, John. *Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892.
- Minter, Don. "Adam, Where are You?" *Preacher's Magazine*, 2007: 40-45.
- Mohler, Albert. "The Eclipse of God at Century's End: Evangelicals Attempt to do Theology Without Theism." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 1997: 13.
- Nash, Ronald, ed. *Process Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1987.
- . *The Concept of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983.
- Oden, Thomas C. *The Living God*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987.
- Oden, Tom. *Christianity Today*, February 2, 1998: 46.
- Oord, Thomas J. *A Story to Orient Our Lives: Narrative*. December 29, 2009. http://thomasjajoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/a_story_to_orient_our_lives/ (accessed June 08, 2010).
- . "A Theologian Evaluates Intelligent Design Part 3 of 3." *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. January 13, 2010. http://thomasjajoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/a_theologian_evaluates_intelligent_design_part_3_of_3/ (accessed June 15, 2010).

—. *Postmodern and Wesleyan pt 2*. 12 2010, May .
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/postmodern_and_wesleyan_2/ (accessed June 9, 2010).

—. "Reading Scripture with Wesleyan Eyes." *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. March 26, 2010.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/reading_scripture_with_wesleyan_eyes/ (accessed June 15, 2010).

—. *The Emergence of Open Theology*. November 19, 2009.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/ (accessed 09 08, 2010).

—. "The New Nazarenes ." *The Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. December 2, 2009.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_new_nazarenes/ (accessed August 03, 2010).

Oord, Thomas J. "Open Theology and the Church of the Nazarene." *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. February 19, 2010.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/open_theology_and_the_church_of_the_nazarene/ (accessed June 14, 2010).

Oord, Thomas Jay. *Thomas Jay Oord* . November 19, 2009.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/the_emergence_of_open_theology/ (accessed January 30, 2010).

—. *Truth and Postmodernism*. November 19, 2009.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/test_entry/ (accessed June 08, 2010).

Oord, Tom. "Characteristics of Evangelical Open and Relational Theology." *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. February 2, 2010.
http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/characteristics_of_evangelical_open_theology/ (accessed June 07, 2010).

Oord, Tom, interview by Chuck Goddard. *Open Theism in the Class* (July 13, 2007).

—. "Truth and Postmodernism." *For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love*. November 19, 2009. http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/test_entry/ (accessed 05 20, 2010).

Pinnock, Clark. *The Most Moved Mover*. Grand Rapids: IVP, 2000.

—. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Price, J. Matthew. *We Teach Holiness: The Life and Work of H.Orton Wiley (1877-1961)*. Nampa: Holiness Data Ministry, 1993.

Rasor, Paul. *Faith Without Certainty*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2005.

Sanders, John. "Open Theology: Its History and Diversity." *Open Theology and Science Seminar*. Boston, 2007.

—. *The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Scott, Jeremy. *NazNet.com*. 05 09, 2009.

<http://www.naznet.com/community/showthread.php?t=26642&highlight=tom+oord> (accessed 12 25, 2009).

Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl. *Relational Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005.

Toon, Peter. *The End of Liberal Theology (Contemporary Challenges to Evangelical Orthodoxy)*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1995.

W.T Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, Willard H. Taylor. *God, Man, and Salvation*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1977.

Ware, Bruce A. *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000.

Wiley, H. Orton. *Christian Theology*. Vol. I. III vols. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940.

—. *Introduction to Christian Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1946.