



# An Evangelical Discourse on God's Foreknowledge in Relation to Moral Evil<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Within the long tradition of Christian reflection on the problem of evil, different approaches to justify God are developed. More specifically, this article focuses on the school of thought within evangelical theology known as "Open Theism" of which Gregory Boyd is one of the main exponents. Open theism is concerned with how God experiences the world. It asks and attempts to answer questions such as, "What does God know?" and "When does God know it?" The questions that open theists raise are not so much about how God knows the future, but if God knows it at all. To absolve God from the responsibility of suffering induced by human beings, Open Theist portrays God as taking risks by allowing human freedom since God cannot know the future actions of free moral agents. This article will examine the position adopted by Gregory Boyd<sup>2</sup> on the theodicy problem as it relates to God's foreknowledge. In this article, I shall ask whether Boyd's approach may be regarded as a fruitful extrapolation of an understanding of divine foreknowledge within the evangelical tradition in relation to human suffering.

**Keywords:** Evangelicalism, Open Theism, Foreknowledge, Theodicy.

## Introduction

Throughout history, the church has always been challenged both philosophically and theologically by the problem of evil. In attempting to answer this challenge, many theodicies were developed. Two dominant theodicies that are modified slightly within the Evangelical<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article comes out of my second PhD done under the promotion of Prof E. Conrdie at UWC.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd is an evangelical pastor, Christian theologian and author. He is Senior Pastor of the Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul Minnesota, United States. Boyd graduated with a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Minnesota, earned his master's degree (cum laude) from Yale University Divinity School and a doctorate (magna cum laude) from Princeton Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Theology at Bethel University for sixteen years. Boyd's was Charles Hartshorne's Process theology which Boyd considered "essentially correct" in the philosophical and theological understanding of the nature of God and the future. See Strobel (1998) *A Case for Christ*.

<sup>3</sup> The term Evangelical is a movement in modern Christianity that covers a diverse number of Protestant traditions, denominations, organizations, and churches. It originates in the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning "the good news," or, more commonly, the "gospel." During the Reformation, Martin Luther adapted the Latinised form of the term *evangelium*, dubbing his breakaway movement the *evangelische kirche*, or "evangelical church"—a name still generally applied to the Lutheran Church (See "Evangelicalism" in Elwell, 2001:405-409). In the English-speaking world, however, the modern term usually describes the religious movements and denominations which sprung forth from a series of revivals that swept the North Atlantic Anglo-American world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provides summary of Evangelical distinctive, identifying four primary characteristics of



tradition is that of St Augustine understanding of Free will or Soul Deciding Theodicy of which Alvin Plantinga is its modern proponent and Irenaeus's Soul-Making or Person Making Theodicy of which the late John Hick was its most vocal spokesperson. However, it might be said that the Soul-Making Theodicy is a minority view held with Evangelicalism. Other minority views are also held within Evangelicalism, e.g. Protest Theodicy developed by John Roth or Informed Consent Theodicy by Antony Haig. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with every theodicy. In this paper, I have deliberately limited the focus to the theodicies of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus due to their dominance and long history within Evangelicalism over other theodicies. Open theism is a theological development that seems to be gaining popularity within Evangelicalism will also be evaluated in light of the claim made by open theists that their understanding of God puts them in a better position to deal with the problem of evil than that of St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus. It is because of this claim of a "better position" that a review of open theism needs to be undertaken, by asking does this "better view resonate" with an Evangelical understanding of God and his nature.

## Responses the Problem of Evil within Evangelicalism

### Augustinian Theodicy

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) proposed a solution to the problem by blaming suffering on the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From this perspective, humans are responsible for suffering by being led astray by Satan. For Augustine, God is the author of everything. He also believed the world had been created literally out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), according to the Divine will. This meant that as far as Augustine was concerned, *everything* in the world is created good or perfect. He also believed that, although there is an abundance of variety in the world, this is ordered in varying degrees, according to the fullness of a creature's nature. This means that there is no totally evil thing in the world.

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

Those things are good which yet are corrupted, which, neither were they supremely good, nor unless they were good, could be corrupted; because if supremely good, they were incorruptible, and if not good at all, there was nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption harms, but, less it could diminish goodness, it could not harm. Either, then, corruption harms not, which cannot be; or, what is most certain, all which is corrupted is deprived of good. But if they be deprived of all good, they will cease to be. For if they be, and cannot be at all corrupted, they will become better, because they shall remain incorruptibly. And what more monstrous than to assert that those things which have lost all their goodness are made better? Therefore, if they shall be deprived of all good, they shall no longer be. So long, therefore, as they are, they are good; therefore whatsoever is, is good. That evil, then,

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evangelicalism: Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born-again" experience and a life-long process of following Jesus. Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts. Biblicism: a high view for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority. Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity. (See Bebington, 2006. *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*.)



which I sought whence it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good. For either, it would be an incorruptible substance, and so a chief good, or a corruptible substance, which unless it was good it could not be corrupted. I perceived, therefore, and it was made clear to me, that Thou made all things good, nor is there any substance at all that was not made by You; and because all that You have made are not equal, therefore all things are; because individually they are good, and altogether very good, because our God made all things very good

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

St. Augustine's theodicy is often associated with the supposed free will defence – which suggests that suffering is essentially a function of human freedom and therefore, God cannot be blamed for such suffering.

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

### **The Irenaean Theodicy**

St. Irenaeus (130-202 CE) taught that the existence of evil serves a purpose. From his point of view, evil provides the necessary problems through which we take part in what Hick (1981:40) calls "person-making". It follows that evil is a means to an end in the sense that, if it did not exist, there would be no means of spiritual development. So the foundational principle of the theodicy of Irenaeus is that we have been placed in a hostile environment to learn to become better people. Philosophers such as John Hick and Richard Swinburne have adopted the idea of Irenaeus in recent times. According to this view, the pains and sufferings of the world are used by God to serve as a method to build a truly good person. God could have created us perfect beings, but God is more interested in our choosing to become who God wants us to be (at some point), rather than forcing us to be this way (no matter how long this takes).

Leibniz explained the reality of human suffering by saying that God allows it temporarily for the greater good (cited in Stumpf 1989:257). Leibniz, like Plato and St. Irenaeus, maintained that everything in the universe was explicable, and God must indeed create the best while allowing suffering temporarily for the greater good of his creation (cited in Stumpf 1989:64-67). Another modern adherent to this position is Quinn. Quinn (1982:199-215), like Leibniz, argues that we cannot know the effect of removing certain evils in the world since we cannot see the world from an infinite perspective. Hick (1966), in his proposed "soul/person making" theodicy, views suffering not as evil but rather as a necessary stage in the development of a relatively immature creation into a more mature state. Following St. Irenaeus, Hick does not consider that suffering in the world is because of the fall from a once-perfect state but rather emphasises suffering as a process that will bring about a gradual improvement in the human



race. Hick (1981:25) sees humans as endowed with real but limited freedom that enables a relationship with God through which they can find fulfilment. This relationship gives meaning to our human existence “as long as the process, through which we are being created by our free responses to life’s combination of good and evil, ultimately leads to good”. The good that outshines all evil is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom that is yet to come in its full glory and permanence.

## Open Theism

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

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

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

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

The above statement is an acceptable explanation for God granting humans significant freedom within the evangelical tradition, but Pinnock goes on to explain that the freedom humans and how it relates to God's knowing seem to run counter to the evangelical view of God’s foreknowledge. He (1994:7) states:

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

Hasker (1994:139) argues that the openness model is “in a better position than Calvinism or Molinism” in dealing with the issues brought about by the problem of evil. In particular, it is

asserted that traditional Christian theism fails to vindicate God of guilt or responsibility for evil and should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of the attractive openness model of divine providence.

Blount (2005:178) views the open theist understanding of God as a God who takes risks and adapts his/her plans for changing human situations. God's doing so, results from the fact that God has created us as free creatures together with the assumption that God cannot know in advance what humans will freely do. Such an understanding of the divine nature stands in marked contrast to traditional theism, according to which God not only exhaustively knows the future, but also is timeless, immutable and passible rather than impassible, which leads to an entirely different understanding of the divine attributes.

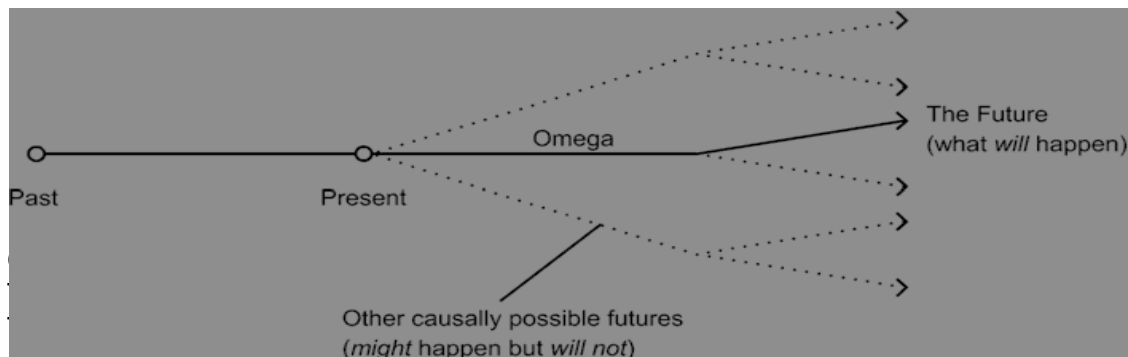
## Divine Foreknowledge

### *Traditional Evangelicalism*

Evangelicals understand God's knowledge as being exhaustive. However, this thorough knowledge should not be seen as fatalism Helm (1993:218) states that fate suggests impersonality as in astrological beliefs, but providence is personal, the personal activity of God in his/her creation through which he/she brings to its appointed end or destiny. Fate may also suggest the interferences of the gods, whereas providence is the all-embracing rule of the one God. Thiessen (1996:81) elaborates: "God is infinite in knowledge. He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present or future. He/She knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively and truly" (See Figure 1).

Image 1. God is infinite in knowledge

Source: Rhoda et al. <http://www.alanrhoda.net/papers-opentheism.pdf>



Grudem (1994:190), in keeping with this evangelical understanding, states that God fully knows all things actual and possible in one simple eternal act. Thus, the term omniscience designates God's cognitive awareness. God has knowledge of all time: past, present and future. This knowledge includes even the future and free actions of human beings. However, omniscience should not be confused with causation. Free actions do not take place because they are foreknown, but are foreknown because they take place (Thiessen, 1996:82). Tozer (1978:62-63), in trying to explain the exhaustive knowledge of God, states that "God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and every spirit all being and every being, things visible and invisible in heaven and on earth, motion, space, time life death, good evil heaven and hell. Because God knows all things perfectly, he/she knows nothing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. God never discovers anything and is never surprised, never amazed. God never wonders about anything nor does s/he seek or ask questions".

The mode of God's knowledge consists of God's knowing all things perfectly, undivided, distinctly and immutably. This knowing is thus distinguished from human and angelic



knowledge because God knows all things by him/herself or by his/her essence (not by forms abstracted from things – as is the case with creatures – both because these are only in time with the things themselves, but the knowledge of God is eternal, and because God can have no cause outside of him/herself). Therefore, God's knowledge of him/herself and creation is infinite. It is exhaustive of everything external and internal to God. Thus the knowledge of God is not gained or acquired but is because he/she knows all things. God's knowledge or knowing thus is not perceived fragmentarily as humans perceive from the perspective of time; God knows exhaustively in eternal simultaneity. Bavinck (1977:187), following the argument of Aquinas, states that God is an eternal, pure being and God's self-knowledge has for its content nothing less than full, eternal, divine essence. Being and knowing are one in God. God knows him/herself by means of his/her being. While God's knowledge is not a gradual process of development, neither does God's knowledge increase or decrease. For in God there is no process of becoming, no development or in the words of Aquinas, no potentiality because God is a perfect being. For if God knowledge is not exhaustive, then how could we hold that which he/she promises in the Scriptures to be true. Charnock (1977: 322) states this even more clearly:

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

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

### **Open Theism**

The denial of God's omniscience by open theist provides a basis for the major lines of difference between open theism and Evangelicalism. This is done by the open theists appeal to Scripture that on the surface appear to limit God's omniscience. These passages can be



grouped into two categories: Divine growth in knowledge<sup>4</sup> and God's repentance<sup>5</sup>. Thus open theists have raised serious biblical and theological objections against the traditional view of

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<sup>4</sup> One of the initial appeals of open theism is that it challenges us to read the text of Scripture simply for what it says which at times is taken to be "literalistic". It is evident that open theism brings to the study of biblical reading a fairly literal hermeneutic, including those passages that have traditionally been understood as anthropomorphic descriptions of God. Boyd (2000:60-72) speaks of interpreting this text straightforwardly and at face value. Boyd (2000:54) states that open theism is rooted in the conviction that the passages that used to build up the motif of openness should be taken just as literally as the passages that constitute the motif of future determination. What Boyd infers is that this text ought to be taken just as it appears, as giving an exact description of God rather than being understood as anthropomorphic, anthropopathic or metaphorical. Thus, open theists offer an unusual hermeneutic as seen in the few examples discussed below. One of the key passages cited by Boyd is Genesis 22:12 (NIV): "And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing for **now I know** you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'" Boyd (2000:64) states that this verse has no clear explanation if God was certain that Abraham would fear him/her before he offered his son. To support his argument that God literally did not know what Abraham's response would be until Abraham made it. Boyd (2000:54) insist that is God only literally learned what he/she had not known; this was a real test and God learned the results only when Abraham acted. Behind this insistence, is an underlying hermeneutics of a "straight forward" or "literal" or face value meaning as t

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<sup>5</sup> As discussed in the above section, a straightforward reading of particular texts also leads Boyd to conclude that God knowledge is limited, and that God grow in his/her knowledge as God engages with man. In a similar fashion, Boyd interprets divine repentance texts in a straightforward manner. Boyd (2005:56-57) writes "Now some may object that if God regretted a decision, he/she made, God then must not be perfectly wise. Wouldn't God be admitting making mistakes? It is better to allow Scripture to inform us regarding the nature of divine wisdom than to reinterpret an entire motif in order to square it with our preconception of divine wisdom. If God says *he/she* regretted a decision, and if Scripture elsewhere tells us that God is perfectly wise, then we should simply conclude that God can be perfectly wise and still regret a decision "*(italics added)*".

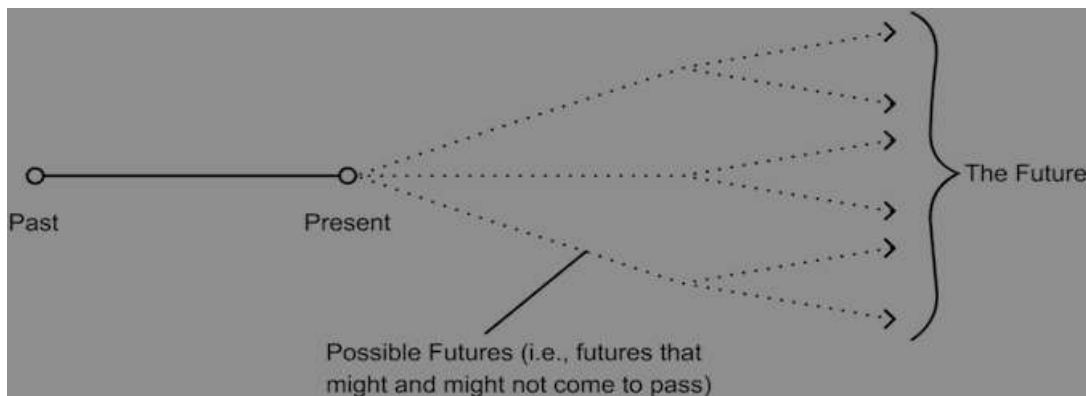
Boyd tries to prove his case by undertaking a survey of biblical passages. Thomas (2001:189) states:

God's exhaustive foreknowledge. Because God only knows that which is true (that is, the past and present), the future is not a reality and is therefore false and cannot be known to God. Even the possibilities are not known, because this is in the future. This then calls for engagement to take this proposal seriously and weigh the evidence. In this section, consideration will be given to the evidence that Boyd and other proponents of open theism offer for their denial of divine foreknowledge based on their understanding of the nature of time and the nature of the future. Boyd (2000:122) argues that God cannot be a-temporal using Hartshorne A theory and B Theory of time, while the Evangelical view of complete divine knowledge coexists with a-temporal or the temporal view of God.

With regards to the future Boyd (2000:17) states that the idea that God does not know the future is not a limitation on God omniscience because the future is not something knowable. Therefore, God cannot know the future because there is no future. For Boyd (2000:15-16) the events of the future might or might not come to pass. This then presents us with a framework as to why Boyd understands that the future is not a reality and therefore cannot be known by God (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: The future is not a reality

Source: Rhoda et al. <http://www.alanrhoda.-net/papers/opentheism.pdf>



God knows only true propositions  
The future is not a true proposition  
Therefore, God cannot know the future

### Open Theism and the Problem of Evil

One of the fundamental commitments of open theism is the rejection of God's knowledge of the future and free actions of human beings. Tied very closely to this is God's inability to control such future free actions including at times, some deeply tragic occurrences. So, while

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This technique seeks a larger picture in a passage before investigating the details. In fact, it disparages traditional methods that investigate the details first, before proceeding to the larger picture." Thomas has coined the phrase "hermeneutical hopscotch" to describe the practice of hopping from one carefully selected part of a larger section of Scripture to another. By selecting only parts that support a predetermined opinion, this method can demonstrate just about anything the interpreter desires to prove. For instance, Boyd (2000:56) begins with Genesis 6:6, and says: "The Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." He then uses this to prove that God did not know in advance that humans would come to this wicked state and therefore regrets that he/she created humanity.

Boyd's interpretation of Exodus 32:14 – "So the Lord changed his/her mind about the harm which he/she said he/she would do to his/her people" – suggests that God was confronted with a previously unknown situation that resulted in God's reassessing his/her decision about what he/she intended to do.





God feels the pain of our suffering, God is often unable to prevent it because God himself/herself did not know that it is going to occur. Thus, when evil occurs, we are not to blame God because he/she feels as badly about our suffering as we do. In the midst of suffering Christians can be comforted with the assurance that God had nothing to do with their suffering and that God's disposition towards them is one of uncompromising love. Therefore, Hasker (1994:139) confidently argues that the openness model is in a better position than classical theism to deal with the issues raised by the problem of evil. Open theists take the problem extremely seriously, and they believe they address it more satisfactorily than do traditional theists.

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

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

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

Again, if we have the courage to allow the antinomy between the lyrics of this hymn and Zosia's tortured screams to engage us on a concrete level, the antinomy borders on the unbearable. What does it mean to assert that the hand of the all-powerful and all-loving Father "will never cause his child a needless tear" when asserted in the vicinity of a child who has just had her eyes plucked out and of the screams of Zosia's terrorised mother? In this concrete context, does it not suggest that this event came from the hand of God and that it came about "as best as it seemed to thee", come close to depicting God on Hitlerian terms? What is more, would not such a conception significantly undermine the godly urgency one should have to confront such evil as something that God is unequivocally against? The Nazis' agenda somehow here seems to receive divine approval. Yet while we are to view the Nazis' agenda as being diabolically evil, we are apparently supposed to accept that God's agenda in ordaining or allowing the Nazis' behaviour is perfectly good.

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

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



divine motive behind them. Hence too, one needs not agonise over what is ultimately good. The transcendent divine purpose might be served by any particular evil event.

Unfortunately, statements such as this imply, according to Payne and Spencer (2001:267), that God is not able to prevent evil events from happening, a conclusion that does little to reinforce one's hope for the future. Open theists, however, scoff at this conclusion, for they believe that God can intervene. As a result, they claim that God will surely overcome his/her enemies in the *eschaton*. As Boyd (1997:287) writes, "hence the ability of any within the angelic or human society of God's creation to rebel freely against God shall someday come to an end". Boyd (2001:14-15) also argues that it is impossible that a good and loving God can allow evil to prevail and that God cannot bring about good from that which is evil. Boyd (2001:430) thus develops the term "warfare theodicy" as:

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

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

Boyd develops this in six theses:

- Love must be chosen

Boyd (2001:53) argues that the very nature of love requires that it either be chosen or rejected. To demonstrate this, Boyd (2001:55) uses the example of a man who implants a computer chip in his wife's brain to make her always do loving things. He (2001:59) asks if the actions of the wife would be considered genuine love. Boyd concludes that the action cannot be out of love because her "love" is caused by external forces not chosen freely. Thus, being free to choose is the final cause of and an explanation for the problem of evil: therefore. God is not to blame.

- Freedom implies risk

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

- Risk entails moral responsibilities

When God bestows on human beings the capacity to love, he/she gives them the ability to help others; thus, God also gives them the capacity to reject love and harm others. Boyd (2001:165) states that God cannot protect us from the harm that others might cause us



because by God doing so means robbing them of their freedom to choose. Thus, the nature of love itself requires that God puts us at risk from each other and thereby makes us morally responsible for each other.

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

Boyd (2001:170) argues that the higher a creature's ability for good, the greater it's capacity for evil. He states that lower animals have a lesser capacity for love and therefore a lower capacity for evil. Human beings have a greater potential to love, therefore a greater capacity to do evil. Angels have the greatest capacity to love therefore that greatest capacity for evil. Using this principle, Boyd explains why God took such a great risk. The greater the good God aims to realise in creation, the greater the evil God risks should his/her creation turn against him/her. Thus God is always at risk, not knowing how his/her creatures would respond to love.

- The power to influence is irrevocable

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

- The power to influence is finite

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

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

## Implications

The first doctrine to come under attack is the doctrine of creation. Boyd argues that because God created creatures with free will, he/she, therefore, cannot act as the continual sustenance source. In other words, God has to do nothing for created agents to act. Thus, Boyd adopts a form of deism because Boyd's theodicy depends on the premise that God is not involved in our events because free will is supreme: giving creation the power to exit and act by itself without any interaction with God.

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



## Conclusion

Boyd understands God as a God who takes risks and adapts his/her plans to changing situations. God's doing so results from the fact that he/she has created human beings as free creatures together with the assumption that God cannot know in the future action of human beings or the future. Such an understanding of God's knowledge stands in marked contrast to traditional theism, which leads to a completely different understanding of the divine attributes. Evangelicals who uphold the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible must search for, develop, and articulate a theodicy that does not deconstruct the traditional view of God but must tenaciously preserve the integrity of biblical claims regarding God's nature and attributes. In short, any truly Christian evangelical theodicy must not sacrifice those non-negotiable elements that define and describe a "Christian Evangelical" position to provide a convenient answer to life's most vexing and perplexing problem, the problem of evil.

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