

## Historical Antecedents to the Open View of God's Nature and Nescience

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Any theological movement seeking to persuade its audience, particularly when offering an understanding of the attributes of God distinct from the traditional view, will inevitably be pressed to show historical precedence. However, before examining the past, a few considerations regarding one's approach to historical research are in order. Though establishing precedence is desirable, the researcher might keep in mind that history is indeed a significant *contributing* factor revealing what one would expect to see if a position were true, but it is rarely, if ever, a *determining* factor in establishing theological truth since history is only a part. There are several reasons for this. First, antiquity does not prove veracity. Simply because an idea or movement is older and perhaps shows a particular consistency with the position under question, it cannot automatically justify open or classical theism since both would measure up adequately. Consequently, one would be left to consider two mutually exclusive positions on the nature of God, knowing logically that both cannot be true. Moreover, many ancient errors have endured through the centuries that would not be widely held today such as the flat earth model or the geocentric view of our solar system. Second, the evaluator of history is dependent upon fallible human senses that can, and do, often make mistakes. This is not to say that fallible investigators cannot make correct evaluations and draw accurate conclusions; rather, it is a call to humility and an acknowledgment of our limitations when approaching historical issues. Third, the historian is rarely presented with the luxury of possessing a complete detailed account of past theological events or viewpoints. Rather, he is offered brief vignettes or isolated portraits of particular theological beliefs, and in some cases, second hand information. Therefore, we must be content with our conclusions based on partial knowledge. This should not deter an attempt for an objective investigation, since all disciplines are confronted with similar historical challenges. The alternative is complete historical agnosticism, which is not acceptable, and may even be self-defeating. Fourth, the crucial issue of particular bias or prejudice and its ability to obfuscate objectivity inevitably enter into any discussion involving historical evaluation. Though bias can be a

real problem, I make no attempt to discount, or altogether dismiss the presence of bias in the foregoing examination since the question is not whether one possesses a certain bias, but whether our prejudices are justified and true. Finally, reminding oneself of the distant vantage point from which contemporary theologians and philosophers interpret ideas and form conclusions should be a call to academic charity. Only when the investigator is diligently submerged into their works can he or she hope to ultimately grasp what the author is saying, which can be time prohibitive and undesirable, unless he approaches the study as a student with a desire to understand. It is with these assumptions and understandings that the current historical research of openness antecedents will be carried out.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, the scope of investigation will span two time periods, giving attention to significant persons or movements that have deviated from the traditional understanding of God's nature and knowledge in favor of an openness approach. The first period of consideration will span from the second century A.D. through modern theology of the late twentieth century. The second period will focus on recent developments within contemporary theology from the 1970's through the present time. The examination will be limited in scope, focusing only on those that have had significant contact with or have been a part of the Christian tradition, including those major figures who have been nominated as precedents by open advocates. There is a two-fold purpose for this investigation—one positive and the other negative. First, to discover the accuracy of open theism's historical claims regarding the nature of God as it relates to divine omniscience, and secondly, to discover if such a view held favor through the history of the church and whether it received widespread acceptance among the theologically orthodox. Widespread acceptance would not be a sufficient condition to vindicate open claims, though it would be what most consider a necessary condition in establishing the view as quasi-mainstream or at least in the pale of orthodoxy. I will argue that instances of limited nature and foreknowledge were not accepted within the orthodox church and did not enjoy widespread favor, but found its place outside the mainstream in association with the unorthodox and heretical formulations of God.

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<sup>1</sup> "Antecedents" primarily refers to any past Christian theological position that rejects or significantly alters the classical view of omniscience towards open model. Only those persons or movements that have had a significant impact on or involvement in/with the orthodox church will be addressed.

Though open proponents claim their position is deeply rooted in scripture and is pragmatically advantageous, as Boyd avers, “it is admittedly not the traditional perspective”.<sup>2</sup> Boyd continues as he identifies the fundamental difference between the classical and open views and acknowledges its relative historical silence from the time of the New Testament to the present. Boyd says, “The open view has been relatively rare in church history”.<sup>3</sup> According to Boyd, the primary reason for the apparent absence of open thought is largely due to the overwhelming influence of Plato’s notion that God’s perfection means he is completely unchanging, even in knowledge and experience.<sup>4</sup> Though the open view may be rare and perhaps even under exposed, “it is not altogether new in church history” and seems to be present as early as the fifth century in the works of Calcidius.<sup>5</sup> From this period, Boyd leaps forward fourteen-hundred years and enumerates several modern theological figures who have adopted various tenets of the openness view of God.<sup>6</sup> The rarity of openness doctrines in the church does not deter Boyd, nor indeed should it automatically eliminate a particular theological viewpoint since evangelical Christians have always attempted to interpret their views through the lens of scripture, while simultaneously evaluating what tradition has to offer.<sup>7</sup> Most, if not all, evangelicals would agree that scripture holds final authority in theological matters; however, the current task is to discover prior theological developments that are similar to the concept of God espoused by open theism to discern its historical context. In the first period of evaluation, there are several individuals worthy of consideration.

*Marcion.* The son of the Bishop of Sinope in Pontus was born c. 110 and died c. 160. He was eventually excommunicated by his father on the grounds of immorality.<sup>8</sup> He traveled to Rome where he developed his doctrines and gained a following; soon after he was officially excommunicated.<sup>9</sup> Marcion’s writings have not survived; however, most of what scholars know of his views of God is deduced from Tertullian’s *The Five Books*

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<sup>2</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 113-114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Marcion,” in Cross, F.L. and E.A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1033.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

*Against Marcion*, which was completed in 207.<sup>10</sup> Marcion's view of God emerges from two important themes: His understanding of the relationship between love/grace and law, and his theodicy. It appears he could not accept the Hebrew scriptures since he could not reconcile its God of law with the God of love and grace revealed in select New Testament books. For Marcion, the Hebrew scriptures were a lying product of the "Jewish god" who was preoccupied with rules, legalism and creating natural evil (not moral evil)<sup>11</sup> instead of love. Therefore, he also rejected the Old Testament creator God<sup>12</sup> who he believed was an evil emanation of the Supreme Holy and Good God (otherwise known as the Indivisible, Indescribable, Good God [*aoratos akatanomastos agathos theos*] above).<sup>13</sup> This view led Marcion to not only posit two gods, but to favor the ten Pauline epistles<sup>14</sup> since Paul alone understood grace and rejected all forms of Jewish legalism in any attempt to reinterpret the gospel of Christ. Out of this background, Marcion's unique perspective of God emerges. Since he dismissed the Old Testament Scriptures, anything remotely associated with the Old Testament descriptions of God was discarded, including omniscience. Apparently, this was of such importance to Marcion that he altogether eliminated the gospels of Mathew, Mark and John and preserved an emendation of the gospel of Luke. According to Tertullian, the second problem that hindered Marcion from accepting classical monotheism and divine foreknowledge was his view of the problem of evil.<sup>15</sup> Marcion is described as being "like many other persons now-a-days, especially those who have an heretical proclivity" as being preoccupied by the question of evil.<sup>16</sup> Tertullian describes his argument against omniscience ("prescience") when he states:

If God is good, and prescient of the future, and able to avert evil, why did He permit man, the very image and likeness of Himself, and, by the origin of his soul, His own substance too, to be deceived by the devil, and fall from obedience of the law into death? For if He had been good...and prescient, so as not to be ignorant of what was to come to pass, and powerful enough to hinder its occurrence,

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<sup>10</sup> Tertullian makes mention of Marcion in several other works such as *De Praescriptione*, *De Carne Christi*, *De Resurrectione Carnis* and *De Anima*.

<sup>11</sup> Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, I.2, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition], 272-273. Also see John McClintock and James Strong, "Marcion," in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, V.736.

<sup>12</sup> Also known as the "Demiurge" or in Tertullian's vocabulary the "creator".

<sup>13</sup> J.P. Arendzen, "Marcionites," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume IX Online Edition* (copyright 2003) accessed [www.newadvent.org/cathen/09645c.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09645c.htm) accessed on April 1, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> He either rejected the Pastoral Epistles or they were unknown to Marcion.

<sup>15</sup> Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, I.2, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. volume 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 272-273.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

that issue would never have come about, which should be impossible under these three conditions of divine greatness. Since, however, it has occurred, the contrary proposition is most certainly true, that God must be deemed neither good, nor prescient, nor powerful. For *as* no such issue could have happened had God been such as He is reputed—good, and prescient, and mighty—*so* has this issue actually happened, because He is not such a God.<sup>17</sup>

Marcion's basis for denying divine "prescience" along with God's complete goodness and power, is not altogether foreign to other ancients,<sup>18</sup> or to modern philosophers of religion. There are many, like Marcion, who have offered solutions to the problem of evil by concluding that God would be good and powerful only if he would and could stop evil. For Marcion, the logic is clear. If God knows the future, and yet permitted evil to exist in this world, God would most certainly be likened to his previously rejected Jewish "creator god". For if a completely good and powerful God knew ahead of time that evil and sin would touch humankind, God would have orchestrated events in a very different way. As a result, Marcion rejected exhaustive divine foreknowledge. Unlike open theism, Marcion's rejection apparently emerged from his theodicy, having little to do with free will and the nature of time, especially that of the future.

*Celsus*. A pagan writer of the late second century A.D. (c. 170-180), Celsus wrote during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and penned a work titled *A True Discourse (alethes logos)*,<sup>19</sup> which offered a polemic against Christianity and its doctrines.<sup>20</sup> His treatise did not survive on its own, though, and Origen's rebuttal to Celsus (*Against Celsus*)<sup>21</sup> has preserved most of the work. Though very little is known of the personal history of Celsus, from extended quotations in Origen's work, he appears to be a Roman Middle Platonist who was extremely familiar with the core doctrines of Christianity, especially its sacred literature, Judaism and paganism. Upon receiving a copy of Celsus' attack on Christianity by Ambrosius in A.D. 240, Origen did not initially answer its objections, but waited eight years to release the reply.<sup>22</sup> Origen preserves the words of Celsus who argues against

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<sup>17</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, II.5, in *Ibid.*, 300-301.

<sup>18</sup> See Marcus Tullius Cicero's (106-43 BC) argument against divine foreknowledge in his *On Divination*.

<sup>19</sup> Also known as *The True Word* or *On True Doctrine*. Celsus' criticism of Christianity is obvious throughout Origen's *Against Celsus* showing his rejection of the bodily resurrection (V.14), man made in God's image (VI.63) and the Christian concept of God (VII.42).

<sup>20</sup> Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: The 1886 Bampton Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913, 1968), 301-316.

<sup>21</sup> Also known by the Latin title *Contra Celsum* and the Greek *Kata Kelsou*.

<sup>22</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, I.1, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 4, 395.

foreknowledge on the basis that it is counterproductive to the plans of God. In this context, Celsus offers an example of Christ's betrayal when he writes:

These events...he predicted as being a God, and the prediction must by all means come to pass. God, therefore, above all others ought to do good to men, and especially to those of his own household, led on his own disciples and prophets, with whom he was in the habit of eating and drinking, to such a degree of wickedness, that they became impious and unholy men. Now, of a truth, he who shared a man's table would not be guilty of conspiring against him; but after banqueting with God, he became a conspirator. And, what is still more absurd, God himself plotted against the members of his own table, by converting them into traitors and villains!<sup>23</sup>

Origen understands Celsus as incorrectly concluding "that an event, predicted through foreknowledge, comes to pass because it was predicted".<sup>24</sup> Apparently, the rejection by Celsus is based in the notion that predictions of future events based in foreknowledge *necessarily* requires the absence of freedom and the presence of direct divine efficient causality as the primary mover in their fulfillment. This is made clear by Origen's immediate response when he says, "but we do not grant this, maintaining that he who foretold it was not the cause of it happening, because he foretold it would happen".<sup>25</sup> Origen continues to argue that when God foreknows a particular event he is not "secretly taking away the possibility of its happening or not."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, to reinforce his point, Origen cites the prophetic Psalm that declared Judas would betray Christ saying, "you will find that, as it was foreknown that he would betray the saviour, so also was he considered to be himself the cause of the betrayal".<sup>27</sup> For Celsus, the hard determinism associated with foreknowledge breeds a morally reprehensible view of the Christian God since for God to lead away the disciples into what Celsus called "wickedness", "impiety" and "unholiness" is tantamount to "converting them into traitors and villains!"<sup>28</sup>

Although Celsus clearly articulated what he viewed as the significant problems with the Christian view of foreknowledge, his evaluations were part of a much broader criticism of Christian doctrine. That is to say, he posited that any true doctrines within Christianity were merely borrowed from the Greeks and other cultures, most likely being a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., II.20, 439.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 439.

misunderstanding of Plato, Heraclitus, Socrates, the Egyptians and Persians.<sup>29</sup> Celsus also rejected the incarnation of Christ,<sup>30</sup> while affirming the worship of idols and invoking demonic beings (*daimones*).<sup>31</sup> Consequently, like Marcion, it seems that his denial of the classical concept of foreknowledge originated from paganism rather than from within the orthodox church.

*Audians.* Unlike Marcion and Celsus, the obscure fourth-century A.D. ascetic group known as Audiani, named after their Syrian born leader Audius,<sup>32</sup> emerged from *within* the Christian church. They were initially founded in Syria and later banished to Scythia by Constantine where they continued as missionaries among the Goths.<sup>33</sup> What is known of this group comes through the heresiologist, Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310-403), in his recently translated work *Panarion*, and Theodoret (393-460) in *The Ecclesiastical History*. Both writers identify the most cherished of the Audian doctrines as *quartodecimanism*<sup>34</sup> and the *anthropomorphic* nature of God, both of which engendered controversy and stiff rebukes from the church in the West and eventual banishment of Audius.<sup>35</sup> The anthropomorphic focus of the group is described by Theodoret when he writes:

At first he [Audius] understood in an absurd sense the passage ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ From want of apprehension of the meaning of the divine Scripture he understood the Divine Being to have a human form, and conjectured it to be enveloped in bodily parts.<sup>36</sup>

Epiphanius adds that the Audians “are orderly in their behavior and way of living, hold the faith exactly as the Catholic Church does, and most of them live in monasteries”.<sup>37</sup> As for their theological characteristics, he says:

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<sup>29</sup> See *Ibid.*, V.44-48, 562-565; VII.61, 635.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, V.2-5, 543-545.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.68, 638.

<sup>32</sup> Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History*, IV.9, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1896, 1897 [reprint edition]), 114. Audius is also known as Audeus or Udo.

<sup>33</sup> “Audiani,” in Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary*, 126. Most likely Mesopotamian in origin; see Epiphanius, *Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, translated by Frank Williams, (Leiden: Brill, 1987, 1994), III.70.1.1.

<sup>34</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III.70.9.2-6, 410-411. Quartodecimans insisted that Passover be celebrated on the Jewish time-frame of 14 Nisan, rather than the official date set by the Roman church, which fell on the following Sunday. It was later condemned in A.D. 341 and those who held the belief were generally condemned as heretics. Later, Theodosius I and II would institute punishments for those who held the doctrine.

<sup>35</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III.70.

<sup>36</sup> Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV.9, 114. Brackets mine.

But they make an immoderate use of a number of apocryphal works. They do not pray with us because they find fault with our bishops, and call [some of] them ‘rich,’ and others by other names. They keep the Passover separately from the rest of us, on the Jewish date. They also have an ignorant and contentious belief, and take the doctrine of our creation in God’s image with extreme literalness.<sup>38</sup>

Of crucial importance in both descriptions by Epiphanius and Theodoret is the matter of interpreting “Let us make man in our image”<sup>39</sup> in a most literal fashion, which led to the view that God has a corporeal nature. The Audians support their position with passages that describe God as possessing a literal throne (Isa. 66:1), footstool (Ps. 110:1), hands and eyes (Isa. 41:20), walking (Gen. 3:8), learning (Gen.18:21), changing (Jon. 3:10) and forgetting.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the obvious mutability of matter, the inherent limitations of God’s knowledge and the corporeal content seen in scripture’s spiritual visions led them to accept divine mutability and to remain at odds with the traditional belief of divine omniscience. For Audius, the *image* of God (*imago dei*) in man, with all its creaturely components (Gen. 2:7), was inextricably connected to the *vision* of God (*visio dei*) as discovered in scripture through various corporeal theophanies and appearances. Audius would strongly reject the notion, and according to Epiphanius this rejection was with good reason, that the image of God in man was lost after the fall of Adam and Eve. Rather, Audius argued that the *imago dei* continued as the basis for God’s prohibition of murder in Noah’s time (Genesis 9:6).<sup>41</sup> To the idea that the *imago* extends to man’s corporeal nature Epiphanius agrees, but this is not without mystery or qualification. He does not hesitate to claim the *imago* resides in the entire individual, both immaterial and material, yet it cannot be located in one particular part of the human being, lest one makes God’s nature corporeal.<sup>42</sup> One would do well to assume that Epiphanius’ logic has merit, especially since it reveals an overemphasis on the *imago* as material rather than as spiritual of which it is a part. Though one may attempt to argue that they are not *rejecting* the image as it is identified with God’s spiritual non-corporeal nature, they are most likely *affirming* the

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<sup>37</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III.70.1.5-2.1

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, III.70.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>40</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III.70.6; According to John Cassian, there is good reason for interpreting passages of scripture that attribute finite limitation to God, whether of a material or immaterial kind, in a way that first strips the limitation from the word and applies the concept to God metaphorically (*Institutes*, VIII.2-4).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, III.70.2.6-5.5

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, III.70.5.1ff

image in God's corporeality. This leaves one with many irreconcilable differences as to the inherent capacities of spirit and matter. Of special concern is God's extension in space, scope of knowledge, degree of power and his ontological relationship to time. Despite the theological and philosophical differences between the Audians and classical theology and its minimal impact on church doctrine,<sup>43</sup> it appears that Audius provides a corrective to the allegoricism of Origen and the Alexandrian Platonists.<sup>44</sup> Though there were other individuals known to hold anthropomorphic views during the fourth century, the Audians seem to be the first to organize a *group* emphasizing the doctrine.

*Egyptian Anchorites.* There is good evidence to believe that anthropomorphic theology was not confined to Syria or Scythia alone. Fifth-century A.D. church historians, Sozomen, Socrates and John Cassian, who spent many years among the Anchorites in the deserts of Scete, Egypt, speak of the anthropomorphic views held by Egyptian Anchorites<sup>45</sup> in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>46</sup> Socrates describes the group's response to a festal letter sent by Theophilus of Alexandria, which openly condemned anthropomorphic theology:

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<sup>43</sup> The Audians existed through the late fourth-century A.D. and eventually disappeared by the end of the fifth-century.

<sup>44</sup> See Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 85-87, 172-190. See Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* VI.7, 13 in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 143. The vehement disdain for Origen's allegorical approach by the anthropomorphites can be seen in Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* VI.7 when he writes of the tumult between Theophilus of Alexandria and the Egyptian monks. He writes, "If you [Theophilus] really admit that God's countenance is such as ours, anathematize Origen's book; for some drawing arguments from them oppose themselves to our [Egyptian anthropomorphite's] opinion". Brackets not in original. According to the translator's notes (A.C. Zenos), Origen's views were met with controversy eventuating in his condemnation at Alexandria during his own lifetime, and even as late as the fifth general council in Constantinople in A.D. 553.

<sup>45</sup> "Anchorite," in Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 59, says it refers to "a person who withdraws from the world to live a solitary life of silence, prayer, and mortification. Technically the term covers coenobites as well as hermits, but is commonly restricted to the latter, i.e. persons who live entirely alone.... In the early church, this way of life was at the will of the anchorite, who was free to leave his retirement if necessary...". Anchorites differ from another order of ascetic called *Coenobites*, which unlike the Anchorites, dwell within a community of monks that usually share a common dwelling (see Cassian, *Institutes*), answer to one elder (see Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII), and according to Abbot Piamun's description found in the 18 are the oldest of the orders dating back to the first-century. A third category of monk is the *Sarabaites*, which Cassian and later St. Benedict looked upon with disfavor. Their distinguishing characteristic is that they acknowledged no monastic superior and lived either alone in their own homes or close to cities in small groups of two or three. See John Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.1-8, for more information regarding these orders. The term "monk" will be used interchangeably with "anchorite". The particular Anchorites addressed in the text refer to those of Scete, Egypt, who were involved in the anthropomorphic heresy.

<sup>46</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI.7.

The question had been started a little before [by Audius], whether God is a corporeal existence, and has the form of man; or whether he is incorporeal and without human or, generally speaking, any other bodily shape? From this question arose strifes and contentions among a very great number of persons, some favoring one opinion on the subject, and others patronizing the opposite. Very many of the more simple ascetics asserted that God is corporeal, and has a human figure: but most others condemn their judgment, and contend that God is incorporeal, and free of all form whatever. With these latter Theophilus bishop of Alexandria agreed so thoroughly that in the church before all the people he inveighed against those who attributed a human form, expressly teaching that the Divine Being is wholly incorporeal. When the Egyptian ascetics were apprised of this, they left their monasteries and came to Alexandria; where they excited a tumult against the bishop, accusing him of impiety, and threatening to put him to death. Theophilus becoming aware of his danger, after some consideration had recourse to this expedient to extricate himself from the threatened death.<sup>47</sup>

According to Cassian's tenth *Conference*, which provides the lengthiest extant passages describing and refuting the anthropomorphite views among the Egyptians, by A.D. 399, Theophilus had circulated a festal letter addressing, among other things, the "foolish heresy of the anthropomorphites".<sup>48</sup> Obviously, the Anchorites disdained the letter's contents and considered it heresy of the highest order, and the letter was read only in one of four anchorite churches.<sup>49</sup> Cassian describes the Egyptian view of God's corporeal nature without significant difference to Epiphanius' understanding of the Audians. This is well documented in Cassian's description of the anthropomorphite doctrine while he articulates the main reason why the monks rejected the festal letter. Namely, that it "seemed to impugn the teaching of the holy scripture by the denial that Almighty God was formed in the fashion of a human figure, though scripture teaches with perfect clearness that Adam was created in His image".<sup>50</sup> The debate again was centered on the meaning of Genesis 1:26 and the *imago dei* in Adam. To answer this question, Presbyter Paphnutius called upon Photinus, a deacon who is described by Cassian as a "man of very great learning who had arrived from the region of Cappadocia".<sup>51</sup> Cassian records Photinus' explanation:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Bracket is translator's note. Socrates tells us how the bishop "extricated" himself to avoid certain death, namely, by kindly proclaiming to the monks "In seeing you, I behold the face of God". Sozomenus (Sozomen) describes another occasion in which Theophilus intentionally brought together Origenists and anthropomorphites in order to inflict intellectual or even physical harm on the Egyptian monks.

<sup>48</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences*, X.2 in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 11, 401. See Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII.11, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 405-406.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. It appears the lone dissenter among the Egyptians was Presbyter Paphnutius.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., X.3, 402.

And when he explained that the image and likeness of God was taken by all the leaders of the churches not according to the base sound of the letters, but spiritually, and supported this very fully and by many passages of Scripture, and showed that nothing of this sort could happen to that infinite and incomprehensible and invisible glory, so that it could be comprised in human form and likeness, since its nature is incorporeal and uncompounded and simple, and what can be neither apprehended by the eyes nor conceived by the mind.<sup>52</sup>

The explanation offered by Photinus gives us insight into the limited extent of anthropomorphic thought and what is perceived to be an articulation of God's metaphysical attributes consistent with the classical view. If one assumes Cassian presents an historically accurate record of Photinus' reply, and if Photinus is correct in asserting that "all the leaders" of the Eastern churches understand Genesis 1:26 "spiritually", then it seems the Egyptian anthropomorphites in the deserts of Scete their monasteries and the Audiani in Sycythia were local ascetic communities that held beliefs differing from the Western and most of the Eastern Catholic churches regarding God's nature and knowledge.<sup>53</sup> Further, it is apparent that not all churches in the Egyptian desert adopted an anthropomorphic God. This is evident in Cassian's earlier account of Paphnutius' permission, as presbyter, to allow Photinus to expound on the opposing non-corporeal viewpoint in his church. Moreover, it is not easy to forget the festal letter sent by Theophilus, which was read against the wishes of presbyters in neighboring anchorite communities, in this very church. The generosity of Paphnutius to yield his pulpit seems to exceed standard courtesy or customary oriental hospitality, instead, demonstrates an apologetic attempt to change particular theological viewpoints. This is supported by Cassian's record of the noble, but failing, efforts of Paphnutius to convince a well-respected and extremely pious old abbot named Sarapion of the anthropomorphic error.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Photinus' litany of six divine attributes (infinite, incomprehensible, invisible,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> In A.D. 397 near the height of the anthropomorphic controversy, when writing against the Manicheans, Augustine describes the accepted belief of the "men of the Catholic faith" when he says the "divine substance and nature has no material extension, and has no shape bounded by lines, but the carnal and weak of our faith, who, when they hear the members of the body used figuratively, as, when God's eyes or ears are spoken of, are accustomed, in the license of fancy, to picture God to themselves in human form" (*Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental*, XXIII)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Though Cassian says Sarapion spent fifty years in the Egyptian desert faithfully in good conscience, there is no mention of any other "earlier" or "later" belief distinct from the view held by this man or others of his group. However, Cassian says that Sarapion rejected Paphnutius' arguments for non-corporeality because it "seemed to him [i.e., Sarapion] a novelty and one that was not ever known to or handed down by his predecessors..." (*Conferences*, X.3). We do know that Cassian's interview with Abbot Piamun in the late fourth-century shows that the Coenbite and Anchorite systems were already beginning to deteriorate (*Conferences*, XVIII.7).

incorporeal, uncompounded and simple) is unmistakably orthodox. Therefore, his explanation may have presented the reader with a glimpse of not only what the Eastern churches, for the most part, *did not* hold as sacred theology, but at what they did indeed value concerning the nature of God, which is consistent with the classical concept of God's exhaustive foreknowledge and immutability. The words of Photinus do not seem isolated, rather they appear consistent with the earlier Nicene and Constantinople councils, and doctrinal traditions of the vast majority of apostolic and early fathers from the East, West, and North Africa. What is more, Cassian enlists the council of a learned abbot and champion of prayer, Isaac, to help him make sense of a puzzling question regarding the "grievous error" of the anthropomorphites. How did Sarapion come to believe that God is corporeal? Isaac's response is instructive in several areas:

We need not be surprised that a really simple man [like Sarapion] who had never received any instruction on the substance and nature of the Godhead could still be entangled and deceived by an error of simplicity and the habit of longstanding mistake, and (to speak more truly) continue in the original error which is not brought as you suppose by a new illusion of the demons, but by the ignorance of the ancient heathen world...with custom of that erroneous notion, by which they used to worship devils formed in the figure of men, they even now think the incomprehensible and ineffable glory of the true deity should be worshipped under the limitations of some figure, as they believe that they can grasp and hold nothing if they have not some image set before them....Anthropomorphites, which maintains with obstinate perverseness that the infinite and simple substance of the Godhead is fashioned in our lineaments and human configuration.<sup>55</sup>

Immediately noticeable is a reinforcement of Photinus' earlier descriptions of the classical attributes, lending support to the widespread belief in the traditional concept of God, even among Egyptian leadership. Further, since Isaac is an Egyptian Abbot, it too lends strength to the notion that anthropomorphite doctrine is not a monolithic movement; rather, it appears anomalous to the Egyptian ascetic churches.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Isaac's idea of a "heathen" hangover from idolatry is provocative at least and possible at best,<sup>57</sup> especially

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., X.5, 403.

<sup>56</sup> According to Edgar Gibson in his *Prolegomena to John Cassian's Conferences*, the Egyptian ascetic movement was not widespread. Rufinus visited the territory in 372 and spoke of fifty monasteries in his *Histories*; Sozomen gives the same number in his *Ecclesiastical History*, VI.31, and adds that there were various orders "who live together in society" and others who "adopted a solitary mode existence" giving support to the notion that unique and varied belief systems existed among the coenbite, anchorite, and Sarabaites traditions; after spending time in the desert at the end of the fourth-century, Palladius in his "The Monks of Nitria" (*Lausaic History*, VII.1-6) records the number of monks in monasteries around Alexandria to be two thousand and "the total number of monks and ascetics at five thousand" with "the Anchorites of the desert, 600 in all".

<sup>57</sup> Cassian's record of an interview with Egyptian anchorite, Abbot Piamun, suggests there were groups such as the Sarabaites and imposter Anchorites (*Conferences*, XVIII.7-8) which found it either

since little evidence exists for early *groups* of intellectually sophisticated<sup>58</sup> anthropomorphites who were associated with the Christian tradition. Therefore, based on the information regarding the Audians and given the preceding passages concerning the Egyptian ascetic monks, one may conclude that anthropomorphite theology was not only unorthodox when compared to the Catholic church at large; it was limited to individuals and groups in various geographical locations.<sup>59</sup> However, the groups appear to be small in number, with good evidence to suggest dissenting voices<sup>60</sup> within the group itself and/or in the local geographical area.<sup>61</sup>

*Calcidius.* Calcidius was a fourth or fifth-century Platonist philosopher who partially translated Plato's *Timaeus* from the Greek language into the Latin and provided a partial corresponding commentary of the same.<sup>62</sup> He is often cited by openness advocates

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difficult or undesirable to give up old habits. Moreover, since the emphasis of ascetic training is found in the unquestioning following of another's pious example by experience and empirical observation, many monks may have had a difficult time understanding or even desiring an incorporeal God (*Conferences*, X.3, see the example of Sarapion who after learning of God's invisible nature said "Alas! Wretched man that I am, they have taken away my God from me, and I have now none to lay hold of; and whom to worship and address I know not").

<sup>58</sup> Isaac's use of terms and phrases like "simple", "simplicity", "ignorance", "ignorance and simplicity being its authors", seems not be speaking of the simplicity of life in piety or practical sense, but rather implies a lack of intellectual doctrinal training.

<sup>59</sup> In his *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII.11, Sozomen suggests that the anthropomorphite issue was unique to some of the monks in Egypt when he writes, "A question was at this period agitated in Egypt, which had been propounded a short time previously, namely, whether it is right to believe that God is anthropomorphic. Because they laid hold of the sacred words with simplicity and without any questioning, *most of the monks of that part of the world were of this opinion*; and supposed God possessed eyes, a face, and hands and other members of the bodily organization. *But those who search into the hidden meaning of the terms of Scripture held the opposite*; and they maintained that those who denied the incorporeality of God were guilty of blasphemy". Italicized portion not in the original.

<sup>60</sup> There are some who critically question the assertion that sees anthropomorphite doctrine as widespread among the Egyptian monks since our sources (Sozomen, Socrates, Cassian) are of the Origenist tradition and the surviving texts from Egyptian monasticism show little or nothing in the way of an "anthropomorphite controversy". In fact, one of the most well-known individuals among Egyptian monasticism was Evagrius Ponticus, who himself wrote extensively, and especially in his *On Prayer* 66-68 advocated prayer without any conceptualization of material or finite form (*morphe*). For an evaluation of early Egyptian monastic documents, see Graham Gould in "Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth Century Monasticism", in *Origeniana Quinta*, and Georges Florovsky, "The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert", in his *Collected Works*, volume 4. For a contrasting history, see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII.11.

<sup>61</sup> For parallels with Manichaeism regarding spiritual warfare and theodicy see the polemic work by John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Heleseth eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 66-69.

<sup>62</sup> John Dillon, "Calcidius", in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 119.

as the first Christian to promote the open view of omniscience.<sup>63</sup> Though very little is known of Calcidius' personal and religious background, and with the date, place and sources of his commentary uncertain, it appears he is addressing the thought of the Middle Platonist period between 50 B.C. to A.D. 200.<sup>64</sup> According to Boyd and Sanders, his contribution to the topic of foreknowledge is found in two areas: (1) His departure from the traditional view of omniscience<sup>65</sup> and (2) his unique view of dynamic foreknowledge<sup>66</sup>, which corresponds to the modern open perspective. Of particular importance in Calcidius' work is his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* where he attempts to answer Stoic views of fatalism and determinism. The Stoic agreement to God's complete foreknowledge of the future had led them to see past, present and future events as unchangeable, and therefore, fatalistically determined. Calcidius describes the Stoic position:

So, if God knows all things from the beginning, before they happen, and not only the phenomena of heaven, which are bound by a fortunate necessity of unbroken blessedness as by a kind of fate, but also those thoughts and desires of ours; if he also knows that, which is contingent by nature, and controls past, present and future and that from the beginning, and if God cannot be mistaken, the conclusion must be that all things are arranged and determined from the beginning, things said to be within our power as well as fortuitous and chance events.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of God's infallible knowledge of the future in all areas of reality, including medicine, art, laws, praise, and blame, resignation to unchangeable events and the absence of genuine freedom are to characterize the proper mode of Stoic life.<sup>68</sup> At this point, Calcidius can either deny human freedom or explain divine foreknowledge that permits it. In many respects, his thoughtful response illustrates a new contribution to the area of omniscience, which was previously obscure in the Christian tradition, or at least in its

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<sup>63</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 114-115; See John Sanders' reply to the question "Who has held the dynamic omniscience view in history?" at [www.opentheism.info/pages/questions/traq/tradition\\_02.php](http://www.opentheism.info/pages/questions/traq/tradition_02.php) accessed April 14, 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Dillon, "Calcidius," *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 119; See John R. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 401-408, and J. Den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate: His Doctrines and Sources* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 127-137, for contrasting opinions on the sources and dating of Calcidius' commentary.

<sup>65</sup> Traditional foreknowledge refers to God's knowledge as being complete, exhaustive, and possessed all at once of everything that exists or could have existed in the past, everything that exist or could have existed in the present, and everything that *will* (including actualities and potentialities) exist in the future. Also known as the classical view of omniscience.

<sup>66</sup> According to Pinnock, this view of omniscience holds that God knows everything that has existed, everything that now exists, and everything that *could* (possibilities) exist in the future (*Most Moved Mover*, 99-100). The emphasis here is on God learning in incremental stages as actualities unfold.

<sup>67</sup> Boeft, *Calcidius On Fate*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

detailed articulation. The instructive aspect of Calcidius' view is seen in his distinguishing between those objects of knowledge that are necessary and those that are *contingent*. He writes:

What are we to answer against these doctrines laid down so contentiously and with even greater violence than fate itself possesses? Our answer is: That it is true that God knows all things, but that He knows everything according to its own nature: that which is subject to necessity as submissive to necessity, the contingent, however, as provided with such a nature that deliberation opens a way for it. For God does not know the nature of what is contingent in such a way as that which is certain and bound by necessity (for in that case He will be deceived and fail to know), but in such a way that he really knows the contingent according to its nature. So what do we say? That God knows all things and His knowledge is of all time, and further that the things He knows are partly divine and immortal, partly perishable and temporal; that the substance of immortal things is immutable and immovable, that of mortal things changeable and contingent, and that now it has this condition, now another, because of its inconstant nature. Thus also God's knowledge of divine things, which have a sure happiness protected by continuous necessity, is sure and necessary, both because of the certain grasp of the knowledge itself and on account of the substance of the things He knows; on the other hand His knowledge of uncertain things is indeed necessary, viz., His knowledge that these things are uncertain and their course contingent-for they cannot be different from their nature-, yet they are themselves possible in both directions rather than subject to necessity.<sup>69</sup>

For open theologians, Calcidius presents several original ideas in an attempt to preserve man's freedom without dismissing God's foreknowledge altogether. First, unlike his predecessors who emphasized God's nature in the knowing process, he focuses on the particular kind of *nature* the *object* of knowledge possesses. That is to say, those things that have a certain and unchangeable nature, known as "necessary" things, God knows as "immovable and immutable". Boyd concurs when he writes, "the issue is not about God's knowledge at all. Everyone agrees he knows reality perfectly. The issue is the *content* of the reality God perfectly knows—how many things and what kind of things there are on the 'plot of land' we call the future".<sup>70</sup> For open theism, future contingent objects of knowledge resulting from human decisions are known by God as possibilities and do not yet exist to be known, thus leaving the future open and unsettled. Sanders agrees when he writes "Though God's knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all that can be known, the future free actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and so there is nothing to be known".<sup>71</sup> Second, Calcidius retains an aspect of God's knowledge as necessary, thus aligning himself with the traditional view to a certain extent, though he falls short of proclaiming that the contingent objects of knowledge *will necessarily* come to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>70</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 125.

<sup>71</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 198-199.

pass. By his silence on the guaranteed future fulfillment of contingent things, some have drawn the conclusion by implication that it appears Calcidius would agree with the notion that the future is a *tabula rasa*, especially in light of his phrase that “deliberation opens a way” for the fulfillment of contingencies. His view of knowledge seems to foreshadow the open perspective that asserts God can only know what is real and in accord with the object’s nature, but since the future has not been actualized, there are no objects of knowledge to be known, except potentialities. Boyd agrees when he says,

If God does not foreknow the future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*....One is not ascribing ignorance to God by insisting that he doesn’t foreknow future free actions if indeed free actions do not exist to be known until free agents create them.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, the future only exists to God as far as it is populated with possibilities with regard to contingent things, while the past and present are unchangeable actualities.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, at first glance the similarity of the open view with Calcidius becomes clearer as Pinnock says God “knows everything that has existed, everything that now exists, and everything that *could* [possibilities/potentialities] exist”.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Boyd asserts that “the God who knows all of reality just as it is and not otherwise must know it as such. He is not only the God of what will certainly be, he is also the God of possibility”.<sup>75</sup>

Since there seems to be an *implicit* concurrence between knower (God) and the thing known (object), it is important to realize that Calcidius does not *explicitly* conclude that the contingent objects of knowledge are *contingent for God*,<sup>76</sup> rather they are most definitely contingent in themselves. Though he says God knows things the way they actually are, it is equally important to highlight what he does *not* say, namely, that God does not know the future. This idea may flow better in light of the context of Calcidius’ commentary, which seeks to demonstrate the deficiency of the Stoic understanding of fate, especially in their denial of freedom. Calcidius does not seem to be focusing so much, if at all, on the nature of the future, whether it will have only potentialities, but rather God can know things that *must* contingently *come to pass*. In other words, a proper understanding of the objects of knowledge along with how God knows will reveal a life with freedom

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>73</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 47-48, 99-102.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 99-100. Brackets and italics added.

<sup>75</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 120.

<sup>76</sup> Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate*, 55-56.

involved. Therefore, it may be entirely possible to interpret Calcidius as describing God's necessary knowledge of contingencies that *must necessarily come to pass as contingencies*. That is, he may not be describing the limitation of God's foreknowledge as to the future ends of foreknown events *per se*.<sup>77</sup> Instead, he may be saying God's foreknowledge does not preclude free means by which to bring about future events that God knows will inevitably take place. In order to overcome the mistaken notion of the Stoics that all events are of *one* species, namely, determined by necessity, Calcidius must convince them of two issues: (1) The kind of objects God infallibly knows will come to pass are of *two* species, necessary and contingent. According to him, the necessary is the possible of which its contrary is impossible.<sup>78</sup> This appears to be the way the Stoics viewed the world, namely, seeing God's knowledge as the primary cause of all that comes to pass; (2) the outcome of contingencies is achieved through free means. Calcidius describes the contingent as the possible of which the contrary is also possible.<sup>79</sup> Though not explicitly developed, Calcidius may be offering the seeds, at least to our eyes, of what was brought to maturity in Aquinas eight hundred years later, namely, understanding the certainty of things known to God by viewing God's infallible foreknowledge of those objects from two distinct perspectives. One perspective from the relationship of God's knowledge to itself, in which case the end is sure, and the other perspective viewed from the relationship of human free choice in the sense of possessing the power to do otherwise.<sup>80</sup> This seems to be consistent with Calcidius' view that appears to run contrary to an open, and even some classical interpretations of his work. Calcidius says, "God knows all things and His knowledge is of all time".<sup>81</sup> If he means God's knowledge of "all things" includes contingencies and their future actualization, and "knowledge of all time" refers to what it has traditionally meant as past, present and future, there is no reason to see his view as distinct from the classical perspective on this issue. This leaves the question as to why Calcidius is silent as to the certainty of future contingencies in God's knowledge. If one interprets his silence as *affirming* a lack in God's knowledge of how contingents will

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<sup>77</sup> The words "events" and "objects" are here used interchangeably.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.14.13; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book One: God*, translated by Anton C. Pegis (University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), I.67.1-11.

<sup>81</sup> Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate.*, 52.

finally end, the danger of arguing from silence becomes a reality. The answer may be twofold: (1) The Stoics already believed that the content of the future was known by God and was certain to unfold and (2) Calcidius focused on the central problem, which was distinguishing two kinds of objects necessarily known to God and the *means* by which each would be fulfilled. Neither of these necessitated a dialogue on certain fulfillment. This would appear to ease the Stoic dilemma of fatalism and simultaneously preserve moral responsibility with praise and blame without departing from a traditional view of God's omniscience. However, in the final analysis there does not appear to be sufficient evidence in Calcidius' work to dogmatically conclude either the open or the classical view of God's knowledge, since the minimal requirements are present and consistent with both positions. If this were the case, Calcidius' contribution to establishing a precedent for the open position is tenuous at best.

*Socinians.* The Socinians are a sixteenth and seventeenth-century heterodox Unitarian movement in Switzerland, France, England, Basel, Netherlands, and more importantly in Poland. They derived their name from a pair of Italian reformers Lelio Francesco Maria Sozini (1525-1562), and his nephew Fausto Paolo Sozzini (1539-1604).<sup>82</sup> The elder was born into an upper class family of jurists in Siena, Italy. However, in lieu of pursuing a career in law Lelio sought to cultivate his theological inclinations, many of which were highly skeptical of both protestant orthodoxy and Catholic creedal formulations.<sup>83</sup> This focus led him on a journey through several European countries from 1548 to 1554, which brought him into contact with John Calvin, Melancthon and other reformers who sought safety from the newly instituted inquisition and freedom to voice alternative viewpoints pertaining to Christian doctrine. Undoubtedly, Lelio's views were considered at least unorthodox, if not altogether heretical,<sup>84</sup> being critical of the orthodox doctrines of the personality of the Holy Spirit, Christ's blood atonement, sacraments, the Trinity, and predestination and free will.<sup>85</sup> By the end of his life in 1562, the elder Sozini

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<sup>82</sup> "Socinus," in Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1512-1513. The younger spelled his name with two z's, and the last name is more commonly known as the Latinized "Socinus," which came to describe the movement known as "Socinianism".

<sup>83</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: The Swiss Reformation 1519-1605*, volume 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 634.

<sup>84</sup> See Thomas M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation* (New York: Scribner's, 1938), 2:470-471.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 635-636; see also Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present* volume 2, (Peabody, MS: Prince Press, 1953, 1975 [revised edition]), 792-796.

had cultivated the key theological questions. He had left sufficient notes along with his *Confession of Faith* (1555) and thoughts on the sacraments known as *De Sacramentis Dissertatio* (1560)<sup>86</sup> to provide the core ideological basis on which his nephew (Fausto) would form the Socinian view of God's foreknowledge. Generally, the younger agreed with the elder's opinions and by 1579 spent time with the existing Minor Reformed Church<sup>87</sup> in Cracow, Poland. Eventually, it was in Rakow where the Socinians settled and enjoyed religious tolerance, freedom of the press and Unitarian education, largely due to recent free speech laws passed by the state.<sup>88</sup> This widespread freedom allowed George Schomann, Polish pastor of the Minor Church, to compose the first known statement of Anti-trinitarian doctrines in Poland, known as the *Cracovian Catechism* (1574), which was largely composed of scripture verses.<sup>89</sup> However, in an attempt to revise the catechism, Socinus died and the work remained unfinished until Valentin Schmalz, Johann Volkel and Hieronymus (Jerome) Moskorzowski completed what is known as *The Racovian Catechism* (1605).<sup>90</sup> Though the catechism<sup>91</sup> offers many Socinian scriptural positions on various theological issues, it is foundational to the development of the movement. The later multivolume *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* (BFP), edited by Andreas Wiszowaty (Irenopoli, 1656-1668), and in particular, the first volume of *Fausti Socini Senensis Opera Omnia*,<sup>92</sup> describes the philosophical and theological details of God's foreknowledge and its relationship to man's freewill.

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<sup>86</sup> "Socinus," in Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1513.

<sup>87</sup> This body of churches was composed of members from the Reformed Church who found the newly formed doctrines of Socinus believable. The number of students attending their university in Racow at its height was approximately one thousand (John Marshall, (1998), "Socinianism," in E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. Retrieved April 14, 2006, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DA069SECT1>.

<sup>88</sup> E.M. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1947), 358-360. The tolerance was officially ended when the decision was made to banish the Socinians in 1658 at the Diet of Warsaw.

<sup>89</sup> "Catechism," in McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 2.182.

<sup>90</sup> The completed catechism was based on Socinus' notes and published in the Polish language. Two other editions were composed in German (1608) and Latin (1609), one was given to the city of Wittenberg, and the other to King James I who condemned it.

<sup>91</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, translated by Thomas Rees (Lexington, KY: The American Theological Library, 1962).

<sup>92</sup> All citations of this work will be from Faustus Socinus. *Fausti Socini Senensis Opera Omnia in Duos Tomos Distincta*. Volume 1. Edited by Giuseppe Ciaccheri (Siena, Italy: 2004 [Irenopoli, 1656]). All English translation of the Latin text used in this research were completed by professional translator, Luciano Nardone.

Socinus rejected divine foreknowledge in the *Opera* under his discussions known as “Praelectiones Theologicae” (PT). He maintained that it is “certainly true that the Holy Scriptures clearly teaches against God’s predestination, i.e., against the idea that from all eternity God has decreed some to election and some to perdition”.<sup>93</sup> Predestination was denied since one must assume God possesses complete divine foreknowledge, which “implies that no freedom is left to men to make personal decisions in any area of their lives regarding good and evil”.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, in no uncertain terms Socinus rejected the view of the Roman Church, which advocated the compatibility of predestination with man’s free will.<sup>95</sup> It appears that the Socinian rejection of classical foreknowledge was an apologetic response to both the Roman Catholic doctrine of *compatibilism* (i.e., man’s free will *is* compatible with God’s absolute foreknowledge) and the Calvinist notion of *incompatibilism* (i.e., man’s free will *not* compatible with God’s absolute foreknowledge). For Socinus, any doctrine based on God’s complete foreknowledge would necessarily eliminate the very foundation of religion and impugn the integrity of God. He says:

If predestination were true, then the very foundation of religion would be undermined. The second reason is that if predestination were actually the case, then God would be by necessity the author of evil....If predestination is accepted as a valid concept, then the entire idea of religion becomes ludicrous, because it clearly implies that men would perform their good deeds out of necessity and not as free agents....Moreover, if predestination were true, then God would be guilty of four of the most horrifying things that any human soul abhors: *injustice, simulation with deception, ignorance, and depravity*.<sup>96</sup>

Socinus further argues that God’s absolute foreknowledge would be a liability since God would clearly know his attempt to accomplish a goal (i.e., salvation for all humankind, 2 Pet. 3:9) is impossible to attain, thus revealing his own “awkwardness” and “ignorance”.<sup>97</sup> At this point, Socinus moves beyond describing his rationale for rejecting predestination and begins specifically answering his opponent’s mistaken theological belief that the “*Divine nature immanently contains the notion of an unerring foreknowledge*”.<sup>98</sup> He correctly understands his adversaries’ view to be that:

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<sup>93</sup> Socinus, “Praelectiones Theologicae,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 542. Hereafter known as “PT”.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

God, by his infallible foreknowledge, knows all things before they come into existence.... Therefore, we can infer with certainty that all things happen under the sun are bound to happen by necessity.<sup>99</sup>

He continues:

Everything existing is present to God because He himself is beyond time. God exists in eternity, where nothing is earlier, nothing is later, nothing is past, and nothing is future, but everything is present.<sup>100</sup>

Socinus responds with clarity and depth revealing the core of his view of God's knowledge with striking similarity to the modern open position. First, Socinus agrees that "all things are *present* to God,<sup>101</sup> but immediately adds:

Only what actually exists and has the attributes of existence can be present to God. On the other hand, everything lacking the qualities of existence, i.e., things that never had, never have, and will never have existence – cannot be known by God.<sup>102</sup>

It is clear that Socinus places all *future* decisions of humankind in this latter category since they have no real qualities of existence, and since at the present moment they are remaining only in a "potential" state.<sup>103</sup> The introduction of his notion of the "future" directly confronts us with the question of the relationship of God's knowledge to time. Here Socinus offers an answer that is crucial to anyone seeking to understand and appreciate his unique contribution to studies of divine knowledge. It appears that his notion of divine knowledge emanates from his understanding of the nature of time, something to which Boyd in *God of the Possible* agrees as being the foundational issue in the foreknowledge debate.<sup>104</sup> Socinus describes his view of time and how it relates to God's knowledge when he avers:

Indeed, time is eternal and it cannot be denied, because the definition of time, whatever theologians say, comprises in itself the notion of past, present, and future. Time in fact did not begin with the creation of the world; only the measure of time began with creation. The days, the nights, the sun, and all the other stars of the universe are only means for measuring time and making us aware of its existence.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> In *God of the Possible*, 15, Boyd says, "The careful reader may have already discerned a subtle but very important point regarding this debate about God's foreknowledge – namely, it is not really about God's knowledge at all. It is rather a debate about the nature of the future".

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

For Socinus, it would be a simple logical deduction issuing from the belief that time had always consisted of past, present and future, to conclude that God's knowledge must also be confined to these temporal parameters. However, it appears this would be true only if the very nature (essence) of God was also temporal and not somehow immune from the restrictions of time. Otherwise, it would seem to leave the possibility of his view of time to be compatible with the classical view of absolute foreknowledge since it is one thing to assert that time is eternal and another to claim that God's nature is *ontologically* a part of eternal time. From his description of the nature of time alone, it is unclear as to whether he believed that God's essence, including his knowledge, was ontologically confined to past, present and future. For the answer to this question, the *Racovian Catechism* is helpful, since its discussion on the "Nature of God", clearly states that God "is one only" and "he is eternal".<sup>106</sup> The Socinian concept of God's eternity is defined as being "without either beginning or end; that he has always been, and always will be; in so much that he cannot but be and exist perpetually. Hence it is that in the Scriptures he is styled INCORRUPTIBLE and IMMORTAL"<sup>107</sup> and "that the essence of God is one, not in kind but in number".<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, "that his essence is spiritual and invisible".<sup>109</sup> From these statements, it is difficult to conclusively discover the answer to the ontology question. It appears that God is eternal in the temporal sense of *continual duration* and *perpetuity* without beginning or end rather than an *ontological* eternity in the classical sense, which does not allow for a succession of moments. Further, God being "one in number" and not in "kind" seems to imply a stress on single-*person* Unitarianism and the exclusion of classical notions of divine *simplicity* if "kind" is to be understood as referring to nature or essence. Socinus lends support to the temporal view of God's ontological duration in the *Opera* when he says, "Even for God, past, present and future do indeed exist".<sup>110</sup> As a consequence springing from his particular belief in the nature of the eternity of time and the ontological temporality of God he summarizes his view of the limitations placed on God's knowledge in the following manner:

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<sup>106</sup> *Racovian Catechism*, III.1, 26

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>110</sup> Socinus, "PT," in *Opera*, volume 1, 545.

Consequently, God knows things as past, present, and future, *as such*. God knows any past actions *as they can be known one moment in time*, and He knows any future actions as they can be known at the present time, i.e. only in potential. Thus things can be known only as they are, or as they really exist at one particular moment in time. The knowledge of things are conditioned by the laws of time. Therefore, any human actions depending on man's free will, exist only in potential, not in actuality, and therefore they cannot be foreseen by anyone, not even by God.<sup>111</sup>

It appears that Socinus held several characteristics that depart from the traditional view of God's knowledge and that are consistent with the advocates of the open view (e.g., Boyd and Pinnock). First, the extent and quality of God's knowledge is limited to what is "actual" in the present moment or to that which has already been actualized in the past. Second, God cannot know with certainty, or infallibly foresee, all future free contingent decisions since the object of knowledge is a "potential". Third, the nature of God's knowledge is conditioned by the laws of time. Socinus would argue that these "limitations" in no way detract or impugn the character or nature of God since God can only exhaustively know that which is possible to know. Future contingents are not real, having no actual existence and, therefore, cannot possibly be known by God.<sup>112</sup> To assert otherwise would be tantamount to holding the contradictory proposition that "God can know the unknowable". Socinus sums up the matter succinctly when he writes:

God indeed knows everything that can be known. Yet just as He does everything that can be done, i.e., only those things that by their nature are capable of being done, so does He know only those things that can be known, i.e., that is only those things that by their nature are capable of being known....God's omnipotence is not known by what is logically incoherent with His nature; thus His inability to perform a devilish action detracts nothing from His omnipotence....By their own nature, all those things that are not yet born into the realm of existence are not yet born into the realm of knowledge.<sup>113</sup>

When summarizing his conclusions on the matter of foreknowledge, he leaves little room to question where he stood claiming, "we are bound to conclude that there is no prescience of God" and that the evidence from logical reasoning and the Scriptures suggest, "God's foreknowledge of all future events is to be totally denied".<sup>114</sup> Like the Calvinists, Socinus viewed divine foreknowledge and human freedom as mutually exclusive categories. As such, he rejected the Calvinist notion of unerring foreknowledge, which he viewed as

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 549.

necessarily eliminating human freedom, and ultimately made God a passive spectator of world events, thus removing God’s relational care for his people. Francis Turretin offers a post reformation description of the Socinian view of foreknowledge and freedom:

Another question of greater importance refers to future contingent things, the knowledge of which the Socinians endeavor to wrest from God in order to establish more easily the indifference of free will (its freedom from all necessity, even from that which is usually placed upon the foreknowledge of God).<sup>115</sup>

Philip Schaff concurs with Turretin when he writes:

The Socinians admitted that Calvinism is the only logical system on the basis of universal depravity and absolute foreknowledge and foreordination; but they denied these premises, and taught moral ability, free-will, and, strange to say, a limitation of divine foreknowledge. God foreknows and foreordains only the necessary future, but not the contingent future, which depends on the free-will of man. The two systems are therefore directly opposed in their theology and anthropology.<sup>116</sup>

What is more, Socinus finally dismissed the Catholic position of absolute foreknowledge that allows for the simultaneous co-existence of human freedom. Much more attractive to him was the position of limited foreknowledge, which allowed God to maintain relationships with humankind and his immediate day-to-day direction of the world.

It is interesting, if not remarkable, that openness proponents have been silent regarding the Socinian view of foreknowledge especially since it clearly has greater similarities with the open viewpoint than with any ancient or modern tradition. The following comparison chart of statements will identify the most similar points within both the open and Socinian systems as they depart from the classical position of God’s nature and knowledge

	<b>Socinian Theology</b>	<b>Open Theism</b>
<b>God’s Knowledge is Temporal</b>	“God knows any past actions <i>as they can be known at one moment in time</i> ; He knows any present actions <i>as they can be known at this moment in time</i> , and He knows any future actions <i>as they can be known at the present time, i.e. only in potential</i> ”. <sup>117</sup>	“Instead of perceiving the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know events as they take place”. <sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, volume 1, (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1992), 208.

<sup>116</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume 8, 631-632.

<sup>117</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 545.

<sup>118</sup> Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 16.

<b>God is Ontologically Temporal</b>	“Therefore, even for God, past, present, and future do indeed exist”. <sup>119</sup>	“I affirm that God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present, and future are real to God....The God of the Bible is not timeless”. <sup>120</sup>  “After God acts, the universe is different. The concept of divine action thus involves divine temporality. Time is real for God”. <sup>121</sup>
<b>God Endures in Everlasting Time</b>	“What is it to know that God is eternal? That he is without either beginning or end; that he always has been, and always will be; in so much that he cannot but be and exist perpetually. Hence it is that in the Scriptures he is styled INCORRUPTIBLE and IMMORTAL”. <sup>122</sup>	“The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time when God does not exist. Timelessness limits God”. <sup>123</sup>  “Scripture presents God as temporally everlasting and not timelessly eternal”. <sup>124</sup>
<b>Everlasting Nature of Time</b>	“Indeed, time is eternal and it cannot be denied....Time in fact did not begin with the creation of the world; only the measure of time began with creation”. <sup>125</sup>	“‘Time’ in the sense of measurement between objects was indeed created. ‘Time’ in the sense of consciousness, duration and relations between persons is uncreated, since the Trinity is everlasting”. <sup>126</sup>
<b>No Exhaustive Foreknowledge</b>	“Now, because we have found no plausible reasons and no sacred Scripture which clearly proves that God knows all things before they are, we are bound to conclude that there is no prescience of God....God’s foreknowledge of all future events is to be totally denied”. <sup>127</sup>	“The idea that God knows every detail of the future is not taught in Scripture and is philosophically questionable”. <sup>128</sup>  “What does the Bible say about God’s knowledge? Many believe that the Bible says that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, but it does not”. <sup>129</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 545.

<sup>120</sup> Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 120-121.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 36. Also see William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 171-185.

<sup>122</sup> “On the Nature of God,” in *Racovian Catechism*, III, 27-28.

<sup>123</sup> Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 121.

<sup>124</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 96.

<sup>125</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 544.

<sup>126</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 319, footnote 78.

<sup>127</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 549.

<sup>128</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 100.

<sup>129</sup> Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 121.

<p><b>Classical Foreknowledge and Human Freedom are Mutually Exclusive</b></p>	<p>“If we admit that God has a complete foreknowledge of what men are going to do, it follows that all their decisions would be made before any act of choosing. But logic requires that there should be elements of uncertainty in the process of choosing, which implies freedom from constraint of the will”.<sup>130</sup></p>	<p>“But if God <i>foreknows</i> what we will freely do—if God has always known what our choices will be—then we cannot, it has been argued for a millennia, choose differently from the way we do; thus we are not free”.<sup>131</sup></p>
<p><b>Future Contingents are Unknown by God</b></p>	<p>“The knowledge of things are conditioned by the laws of time....To this reason we answer that God indeed knows everything that can be known....By the same token, to say that God can foreknow the unforeknowable, would only arouse derision. By their own nature, all those things that are not yet born into the realm of existence are also not yet born into the realm of knowledge. Therefore, just as there is no imperfection in God if He is unable to do anything other than what is good, there is definitely no imperfection in God if He is unable to know anything other than what is knowable”.<sup>132</sup></p> <p>“They [future contingencies] have neither <i>negative</i> nor <i>positive</i> existence. In fact, according to an old saying – future contingencies should be neither true nor false, neither stated nor implied before they happen. The norm is that future events should be accepted or denied only after the fact, not before the fact”.<sup>133</sup></p> <p>“Yet, only what actually exists and has the attributes of existence can be present to God. On the other hand, everything lacking the qualities of existence, i.e., things that never had, never have, and will never have existence – cannot be known by God. In this latter category we place all actions that men could potentially choose to perform, but have not performed yet”.<sup>134</sup></p>	<p>“Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known—but God’s foreknowledge does not include the undecided”.<sup>135</sup></p> <p>“The belief that God does not know the content of future decisions compromises the perfection of His knowledge only if we regard these decisions as there to be known before they are actually made. But this is precisely what the open view of God denies. Future free decisions do not exist in any sense before they are made”.<sup>136</sup></p> <p>...though God’s knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all that can be known, the future free actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and so there is nothing to be known.<sup>137</sup></p>

<sup>130</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 549.

<sup>131</sup> Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 42.

<sup>132</sup> Socinus, “PT,” in *Opera*, volume 1, 545.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 123.

<sup>136</sup> Rice, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*, 53.

<sup>137</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 198.

Despite the striking similarity, John Sanders does not mention Socinus in his “Historical Considerations” section of their seminal work *The Openness of God*, nor in his “Divine Relationality in the Christian Tradition” in *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*.<sup>138</sup> Boyd omits Socinus altogether in the *God of the Possible* when answering questions on historical precedence in church history.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, Pinnock has not published an academic study on the view nor included any mention of Socinus in his historical survey “From Augustine to Arminius” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*.<sup>140</sup> One need not infer a nefarious connotation from these omissions, though it may indicate the quality of their historical scholarship or the hesitancy to include heretical groups within a section that addresses the *Christian* tradition. Perhaps the absence of an in-depth study on the issue is due to the lack of Socinus’ works translated into English from the Latin or from the relative paucity of available primary source materials or even the undesirability of being associated with unorthodox individuals or movements. With the exception of the Socinians, there does not appear to be any significant group or individual that contributed to the foreknowledge debate during the reformation period. The traditional Arminian movement does indeed have similarities with open theism. However, it does not appear in the area of divine foreknowledge and attributes, but primarily with the nature of free will, election and stress on divine-human relationships. This is primarily because traditional Arminians (e.g., Arminius, Episcopius, Wesley, Fletcher, Watson) held that God possessed complete foreknowledge<sup>141</sup> and that election is *grounded* in it. Although, Sanders would argue that James Arminius introduced a “decisive break concerning the nature of God” by introducing the notion that God’s election is a *response* emanating from his knowledge of what man will freely decide concerning salvation.<sup>142</sup> Open and classical theologians are in agreement that the traditional Arminian movement holds to complete foreknowledge. However, Sanders rightly observes that Arminius inaugurated some sort of *conditionality* and *responsiveness*

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<sup>138</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 140-166.

<sup>139</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 113-118.

<sup>140</sup> See Clark Pinnock, gen. ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1989).

<sup>141</sup> Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 Volumes, translated J. Nichols and W.R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956 [1853 edition-reprint]), 2.4.1.31-32.

<sup>142</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 157. See Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991).

in God's election. Some later modern Arminian theologians, such as Lorenzo McCabe and Gordon Olson, would depart from this traditional perspective in favor of open theism's limited omniscience.

*Modern and Contemporary Theology.* An increasing number of individuals have discovered that free-will theism is an attractive option and have accepted all or some of its core tenets in order to preserve "dynamic", rather than "static", divine-human relationships. Sanders cites evangelicals such as "Clark Pinnock, Philip Yancey, Henry Knight III, Gilbert Bilezikian, Greg Boyd, John Boykin, Harry Boer and others who affirm a relational theism and makes room for genuine divine responsiveness".<sup>143</sup> Among nineteenth-century Methodists, Boyd lists former Ohio Wesleyan University Chancellor, Lorenzo McCabe and "popular circuit preacher Billy Hibbard".<sup>144</sup> Until the publishing of *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will* by Richard Rice in 1980, apparently, McCabe,<sup>145</sup> Gordon Olson,<sup>146</sup> J.R. Lucas,<sup>147</sup> Peter Geach<sup>148</sup> and Richard Swinburne,<sup>149</sup> are the only ones in the English-speaking world since G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) to advocate divine ignorance of the future in any substantial manner or published work.<sup>150</sup> McCabe, who appears orthodox in his theology, except omniscience, seems closely aligned with the open position pertaining to the limitations on God's knowledge in that he posits similar arguments in his denial of God's foreknowledge.<sup>151</sup> First, as he viewed it, man's free decisions become a *necessary effect* that is caused by God foreknowing something in an objective sense. Second, traditional foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom. Third, like Socinus, foreknowledge should be discarded since all human motivations to bring a certain event or condition about

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<sup>143</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 162-163.

<sup>144</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115. Though Hibbard's view of foreknowledge is similar to the open view, his obscurity and absence in accounts of the history of the church do not make his *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of B. Hibbard*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Piercy & Reed, 1843) an influential work.

<sup>145</sup> See Lorenzo McCabe, *Divine Nescience of Future Contingencies a Necessity* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1882); and *The Foreknowledge of God, and Cognate Themes in Theology and Philosophy* (Cincinnati, OH: Cranston & Stowe, 1887).

<sup>146</sup> Gordon Olson, *The Foreknowledge of God* (Arlington Heights: Bible Research Corporation, 1941).

<sup>147</sup> J.R. Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>148</sup> Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>149</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 1993 [revised edition]).

<sup>150</sup> Dennis W. Jowers, "Open Theism: Its Nature, History, and Limitations," in *Western Reformed Seminary Journal*, volume 12, number 1 (February 2005):1-9.

<sup>151</sup> McCabe, *The Foreknowledge of God*, 20-24.

would be in vain, including overcoming or resisting undesirable states. In addition to these, Boyd further identifies Psychophysicist G.T. Fechner (1801-1887),<sup>152</sup> Bible critic Otto Pfleiderer (1839-1908), philosopher Jules Lequier (1814-1862), Arminian Bible commentator Adam Clarke (1760-1832) and African-American commentator Major Jones<sup>153</sup> as advocating the open view of God's knowledge and nature. It is here that some would disagree to the title "noteworthy theologians" (with the exception of Clarke) Boyd attributes to these individuals<sup>154</sup> since they are either outside the domain of Christian orthodoxy, sufficiently obscure, lack proper credentials and/or lack significant research publications. Fechner has been largely unnoticed and lacks any substantial work as a theologian, philosopher or metaphysician. Additionally, he has only been cited 30 times over a twenty-year period in these categories.<sup>155</sup> Millard Erickson identifies him as a "panpsychist, since he believed that plants, planets, and stars had spirits"<sup>156</sup> among other aberrant views that would place him outside Christian orthodoxy and separate from any mainline theological tradition. Moreover, Otto Pfleiderer appears to have been trained in New Testament scholarship aligning himself with the idealism of the German higher critical school,<sup>157</sup> and according to Charles Hartshorne and William Reese, was greatly influenced by Hegel.<sup>158</sup> Hegel's influence emanates from his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which insists that whatever is real, including the Infinite, must manifest itself in the time-space world. This is in direct opposition to the notion that abstract ideas can somehow

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<sup>152</sup> G.T. Fechner, *Zendavesta, oder über die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits* (1851 [2nd edition by Lasswitz, 1901]).

<sup>153</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115; 172, footnote 2. See Major Jones, *The Color of God: The Concept of God in Afro-American Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 1987), 95. According to Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 128-129, though there appears to be a segment within the African-American community who share Jones' as well as the open view, the quote attributed to Jones by Boyd in *God of the Possible*, 172, footnote 3, is most likely referring to a less conservative evangelical segment described earlier in Jones' book than the quote and Boyd's editorial comments leads one to believe. Pinnock also quotes Jones (*Most Moved Mover*, 102) and does not elaborate on the extent to which black theology embraces his statement.

<sup>154</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115.

<sup>155</sup> Helmut E. Adler, "William James and Gustav Fechner: From Rejection to Elective Affinity," in Margaret E. Donnelly, ed., *Reinterpreting the Legacy of William James*, (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992), 259-260.

<sup>156</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, *On Life After Death* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1914 [3<sup>rd</sup> edition]), 16-17.

<sup>157</sup> Otto Pfleiderer, *Grundriss der Christlichen Glaubens und Sittlenlehre* (Berlin: Druck & Verlag von Georg Reiner, 1888), 71-72.

<sup>158</sup> Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, eds., *Philosophers Speak of God* (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 2000), 269.

reveal themselves in any meaningful way apart from a temporal concrete show. For Hegel, reality is a continuum that occupies both space and time, and within this continuum, ultimate reality (Absolute Spirit) is realizing itself in the historical process.<sup>159</sup> It is here that Hegel exerts great influence upon German idealism in particular, and European and American thinkers in the latter nineteenth century, especially as it generally relates to God's relationship to time, to his temporal creatures, and the mode of his knowledge. Among these neo-Hegelians were Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), J.M.E. McTaggart (1866-1925) and F.H. Bradley (1846-1924), all of whom were interested in the metaphysical implication of Hegel's idealism.<sup>160</sup> Regarding Pfeleiderer, in his review of Boyd's *God of the Possible*, Roger Nicole, who originally brought charges against Pinnock and Boyd at the Evangelical Theological Society, says:

Otto Pfeleiderer was an outstanding example of extreme Biblical criticism in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. His name is hardly calculated to inspire confidence to evangelicals. G.T. Fechner was a physicist and a philosopher, who was so far from being a theologian or even a Christian that his major work book was titled *Zen-Avesta!*<sup>161</sup>

Concerning Lequier, Hartshorne and Reese acknowledge that the unorthodox Socinian view of God's knowledge and the nature of time surfaced in the speculations of this unknown French mathematician.<sup>162</sup> As to his relative obscurity, Nicole writes:

As to Jules Lequier, his name is not even listed in the index volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (either the eleventh or fifteenth edition)...I finally discovered a brief notice of him in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards (IV: 438-39). And indeed his field was philosophy not religion, let alone Biblical interpretation.<sup>163</sup>

Moreover, regarding Clarke's support of open theism, Nicole asserts:

Boyd also claims the support of the commentator Adam Clarke (1760-1832). A brief examination of his comments on a number of relevant passages has failed to provide evidence of that claim. Adam Clarke was Arminian, but on Numbers 23:19 he states that Balaam said, 'God is not a man, that he should lie' 'to correct the fore-going supposition that God could change his mind.' On Jonah

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<sup>159</sup> Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 225, 234

<sup>160</sup> Robert B. Pippin, "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich," in Robert Audi, gen. ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 [1<sup>st</sup> edition]), 316.

<sup>161</sup> Roger Nicole, "God of the possible?" in *Reformation & Revival Journal*, volume 10, number 1 (Winter 2001) accessed from [www.the-highway.com/possible\\_Nicole.html](http://www.the-highway.com/possible_Nicole.html) on March 8, 2006.

<sup>162</sup> Hartshorne and Reese, eds., *Philosophers Speak of God*, 227.

<sup>163</sup> Nicole, "God of the Possible?" in *Reformation & Revival Journal*, volume 10, number 1 (Winter 2001) accessed from [www.the-highway.com/possible\\_Nicole.html](http://www.the-highway.com/possible_Nicole.html) on March 8, 2006.

3:10 he says, 'the threatening was conditional.' On James 1:17 he writes, 'He [God] is never affected by the changes and chances to which mortal things are exposed.' On Jeremiah 18 and the illustration of the potter he writes, 'By this similitude God shows the absolute state of dependence on himself in which he has placed mankind....In considering this parable we must take heed that in running parallels we do not destroy the free agency of man, nor disgrace the goodness and supremacy of God.'<sup>164</sup>

Sanders appeals to various individuals within the mainline and Roman Catholic traditions such as Terence Fretheim,<sup>165</sup> Thomas Torrance and Thomas Oden as well as Catholic feminists Catherine LaCugna<sup>166</sup> and Elizabeth Johnson.<sup>167</sup> Some may question or be confused with Sander's reference to Oden as being either supportive, theologically consistent with, or in any way inclining toward the open view of God's nature and temporal relationship with humankind. He appears to say nothing that would distinguish him from the rest of classical Arminian theology which affirms all the orthodox attributes of God and his relationship to man. In addition, he affirms all the classical attributes of Christianity,<sup>168</sup> including the ontological timelessness of God,<sup>169</sup> God's simultaneous knowledge of past, present and future,<sup>170</sup> that absolute foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom,<sup>171</sup> and that God relates to temporal creatures according to his eternal nature without becoming temporal in any way.<sup>172</sup> Sanders identifies protestant theologians

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid. See Clarke's comments on other passages such as Genesis 6:7 and 1 Samuel 15:11, 29, which make similar statements, which are in striking, contrast to the open position, especially mutability.

<sup>165</sup> Terrence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>166</sup> C.M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>167</sup> Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 98; see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

<sup>168</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology*, volume 1 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987), 53-54.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 62-63, 66.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 69-71.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 71-74.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 66-69, 81-82. In his "Historical Considerations" in Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God*, 190, footnote 163, Sanders acknowledges Oden's classical position on "divine simplicity, timelessness and exhaustive foreknowledge" but views Oden as putting the "best 'spin' on the fathers" lacking an explanation of "how these cohere with his understanding of God's responsiveness". Logically, Sanders could conclude by deduction that according to Oden's descriptions of God, God can only *respond* according to his nature. Therefore, his response must be in accordance with his simplicity, eternity and omniscience, and not contingently, temporally, dependently or with any limitation of knowledge. Nevertheless, Oden does offer a general explanation of how God can relate to time, and by implication all temporal relations that are consistent with the classical attributes: "The decisive Christian analogy concerning time is that between the eternal indwelling in time and the incarnation. Brilliantly, the classical exegetes taught that the creation of time is analogous to the incarnation in this way: The Father inhabits time, just as the Son inhabits human

Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg as leaning in the open direction by seeing God's actions through the incarnation of Jesus, which is crucial for understanding the essence of God.<sup>173</sup> Even here, Sanders must be careful since both were heavily influenced by Hegel, leading Sanders to conclude that "certain passages suggest the open God whereas others seem to take it back, intimating that God is not genuinely involved in the temporal process, only in a dialectical (logical) process".<sup>174</sup>

*Process Theology.* The closest theological influence to the doctrines of open theism, besides Socinianism, is the modern form of process theology developed through the metaphysical speculation of mathematician, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Whitehead's unique contribution to logic, mathematics and philosophy have continued to influence modern treatments of these subjects, particularly the notion of God. Several landmark works encapsulate his thought on God such as *Religion in the Making* (1926), *Process and Reality* (1929) and *Adventures of Ideas* (1933). For Whitehead, the essence of reality is an inter-play between process and permanence and that all actual things are in process of becoming, including God. Therefore, God is viewed as bipolar (or dipolar), possessing an actual pole (also known as the consequent nature) which is the sum total of all actual entities and is always changing and becoming. This pole is identified as the universe, and therefore, is finite and limited. In addition, there is God's potential pole, which is also known as the primordial nature and is beyond the universe. This pole encapsulates the simple, eternal, infinite, unchanging and is the potential element of reality, which is often called the mental or conceptual state. Both poles are aspects of God's nature and are mutually dependent upon each other since the conceptual aspect of God is not actual like the universe is, and the universe is actual but needs value, creativity and order provided by the conceptual aspect of God. One aspect cannot function without the

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flesh (Hilary, *On Trin.* III, *NPNF* 2 IX, pp. 62 ff.; Nemesius, *On Nature of Man* III, *LCC*). As in creation, God is manifested in time, so in the incarnation God is manifested bodily in the flesh. Just as the Son does not cease to be God while becoming and being human—feeling, experiencing and acting as a human being—so does the Father not cease to be God while entering time-while feeling, experiencing, and acting as God in and through the conditions of time (Augustine, *On Trin.* XIV, *NPNF* 1 III, pp. 182-98; cf. *Letters* 143.7; Tho. Aq. *ST* I, Q10, I, pp. 40 ff.)". (Oden, *The Living God*, 63). Oden appears to be saying that just as the Son can be joined to material flesh in the incarnation and remain God without becoming material in the divine essence, so also can God the Father relate to time and remain ontologically eternal without becoming a temporal being. In other words, joining an eternal God to time no more makes him temporal, than joining the spiritual essence of the Son to a material body would make his spirit a material substance.

<sup>173</sup> Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 163.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 312, footnote 113.

other. Whitehead asserts, “There is no entity, not even God, ‘which requires nothing but itself in order to exist.’”<sup>175</sup> Norman Geisler explains the reason for this dependence when he writes:

That is, God is dependent on the world, and the world is dependent on God. Apart from God, there would be no actual world. Apart from the dynamic creativity of the actual world, there would be ‘no rational explanation of the ideal vision which constitutes God.’<sup>176</sup>

For Whitehead, God is the actual realization in the universe of the ideal world and is the ground of creativity and the measure of order. Without this primordial pole (God) as the ground of creativity and harmony, the actual world would not be formative and fail to become a completed, enriched, harmony of value. That is to say, without God in the world, all actual entities will fall into chaos. Conversely, without the actual world (universe) as a receptacle of God’s creativity, there is no way the primordial pole can actualize since potentials have no actuality by themselves. Whitehead claims:

God is that function in the world by reason of which our purposes are directed to ends which in our own consciousness are impartial as to our own interests. Further, God is the actual realization (in the world) of the ideal world.<sup>177</sup>

From these concepts comes the notion of God’s dependent relationship on the world and the world’s dependence on God for actualizing potential. In other words, God is deficient without both poles working in harmony. Whitehead avers:

Viewed as primordial, he is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality,...so far is he from ‘eminent reality,’ that in this abstraction he is ‘deficiently actual’- and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms.<sup>178</sup>

Critics have charged open theism with being negatively influenced by process theology to one degree or another. Pinnock has not altogether denied this charge. In fact, he describes his relation to process philosophy when he says, “Maybe modern influences, which create a distorting tilt in the direction of divine immanence, are present in my work”.<sup>179</sup> Several

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<sup>175</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Reprint, New York: Meridian, 1967), 71.

<sup>176</sup> Geisler, *Bakers Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 775.

<sup>177</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 148, 151

<sup>178</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 521.

<sup>179</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 141.

open theologians, with the exception of Pinnock and Rice, have described open theism's *dissimilarities* with process theology, but have not outlined the core *similarities*.<sup>180</sup> Sanders' "Historical Considerations" in *The Openness of God* and in his "Relational Theism in Contemporary Thought" appearing in *The God Who Risks* omits this valuable information. Pinnock describes where the views converge as follows:

Besides, there are things about process theism that I find attractive and convictions that we hold in common. We: make the love of God a priority; hold to libertarian human freedom; are both critical of conventional theism; seek a more dynamic model of God; contend that God has real, and not merely rational, relationships with the world; believe that God is affected by what happens in the world; say that God knows what can be known, which does not amount to exhaustive foreknowledge; appreciate the value of philosophy in helping shape theological convictions; connect positively to Wesleyan/Arminian traditions.<sup>181</sup>

As for the philosophical influence on, agreement with and appreciation of process theism, Pinnock writes:

The possibility that Whitehead might help us in the area of natural theology, and maybe even in theology, cannot be ruled out. Here is a theology that tries to work with modern science and has a dynamic metaphysics that doesn't equate God with everything superior and the world with everything inferior. I find the dialectic in its doctrine helpful, for example the idea that God is necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite. I think it is right about God affecting everything and being affected by everything. I agree with it [process theism] that God is temporally everlasting rather than timelessly eternal. I agree that God is passible not impassible and omniscient in the sense of exhaustively knowing all that can be known – that does not include knowledge of future free contingents. In fact I appreciate Whitehead and Hartshorne much the way that conventional theists appreciate Plato and Aristotle. We are both indebted to philosophers, in their case ancient and in my case modern....I believe that conventional theists are more influenced by Plato, who was a pagan, than I am by Whitehead, who was a Christian.<sup>182</sup>

Rice describes the similarity in their respective views of the doctrine of God when he says:

The openness concept of God shares the process view that God's relation to the temporal world consists in a succession of concrete experiences, rather than a single timeless perception. It too conceives God's experience of the world as ongoing, rather than a once-for-all affair. It also shares with process theism the twofold analysis of God or dipolar theism. It conceives God as both

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<sup>180</sup> Pinnock attempts to offer similarities in his *Most Moved Mover*, 142-143, however, the descriptions are largely superficial except for his acknowledgement of the bipolar aspect of God.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. It is questionable as to whether Whitehead was an orthodox "Christian" since it appears that he did not believe in any of the orthodox doctrines of Christianity such as the deity of Christ, virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, and did not hold to the supernatural, absolute truth, absolute values or heaven and hell. In addition, Pinnock's statement regarding the greater pagan influence of Plato on Christianity is challengeable since Christianity rejected the pagan elements of his philosophy. These include the rejection of reincarnation, pagan dualism, finite godism and the notion of a higher Ultimate (*Agathos*) than God (*Demiurgos*). See Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*; John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 13-40, 95-110; John B. Cobb Jr., *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions About Process Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003).

absolute and relative, eternal and temporal, changeless and changing. It assigns one element in each pair to the appropriate aspect of God's being – the essential divine character or the concrete divine experience.<sup>183</sup>

In addition to the above descriptions, by Pinnock's own admission, he shares substantial unorthodox beliefs in common with process theology such as: 1) Atheism is better than some forms of theism;<sup>184</sup> 2) the use of a dialogical method for determining truth that produces a synthesis of views;<sup>185</sup> 3) that an aspect of God may be in some sense embodied;<sup>186</sup> 4) that God is bipolar and learns and is in some sense dependent on the world;<sup>187</sup> 5) divine foreknowledge is impossible;<sup>188</sup> 6) God suffers;<sup>189</sup> 7) share important convictions;<sup>190</sup> 8) process philosophy should be used to interpret biblical faith and the Christian message;<sup>191</sup> 9) critical of classical substance metaphysics;<sup>192</sup> 10) reject God as an absolute being;<sup>193</sup> and 11) the future is open.<sup>194</sup> What is more, following Terence Fretheim's lead in *The Suffering of God*,<sup>195</sup> Pinnock agrees in some sense with process theism in regard to God having a corporeal body. Pinnock asks if "God is in some way embodied?" He dismisses the idea of God being primarily a disembodied Spirit or that embodiment passages should be interpreted metaphorically, instead opting to embrace the possibility of the corporeality of God as a doctrine not foreign to the scripture. He says:

Is there perhaps something in God that corresponds with embodiment? Having a body is certainly not a negative thing because it makes it possible for us to be agents. Perhaps God's agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal.... I do not feel obliged to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it.<sup>196</sup>

Certainly, by open theism's own admission, there are substantial similarities between process and open views of God and considerable philosophical influence. However, there are significant differences worthy of note that would disqualify the later from the "process" title. For example, God's primordial pole is believed to have an

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<sup>183</sup> Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 33.

<sup>184</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 2.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>189</sup> Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God*, x.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>195</sup> Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 79-106.

<sup>196</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 33-34.

unconscious aspect, particularly in feelings, whereas open theism rejects the unconsciousness of God altogether. As such, the open view should more accurately be described as a synthesis of process and classical theism, which is clearly seen when moving beyond theology proper into the whole of their respective paradigms.

*Conclusions.* To be sure, the historical survey of significant ideas that resembled the open view of God's knowledge and attributes has revealed that there is good reason to believe there is a precedent. However, not much is known of Calcidius, and he appears to be the sole individual within the ancient church who had a view of foreknowledge that could be similar to that of open theism. However, due to the paucity of material on Calcidius' view and his overall theology, even this similarity is not without debate. Further, Lorenzo McCabe, who appears to be orthodox in his theology, held a similar view, making him the most desirable candidate for an orthodox precedence. The overwhelming precedent, however, emanates from either pagan or heretical sources outside the orthodox church (Cicero, Marcion, Celsus, Socinus, Whitehead), or critical German idealism (Hegel, Pfleiderer, Moltmann, Pannenberg). In the contemporary era, open theism finds sympathy with unorthodox modern philosophers of religion and theologians who held similar tertiary doctrines regarding God's attributes (Swinburne, Wolterstorff, Stephen Davis).<sup>197</sup> Others who held similar views of limited divine knowledge and nature were so obscure, such as Hibbard and Lequier, as not to warrant attention by other major theologians of their time period. The Arminian movement in general has adopted the classical approach to God's knowledge and nature. However, even here, there are isolated pockets of those who sympathize, or in some cases, whole-heartedly adopt, some kind of divine contingency/temporality in God's nature and/or knowledge.<sup>198</sup> Based on these observations the open view of God's knowledge and related attributes could justifiably be

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<sup>197</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115.

<sup>198</sup> See Albert Truesdale, "The Eternal, Personal, Creative God," in Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic and Practical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 1.126; Leslie L. Lightner, "The Christian Understanding of God", in Fetters, Paul R., ed., *Theological Perspectives: Arminian-Wesleyan Reflections on Theology* (Huntington, IN: The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1992), 205. Other notable Evangelicals in this camp are J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig who reject divine simplicity in the classical sense and ascribe temporality and change to the divine nature. See their collaborative work *Philosophical Foundations for a Biblical Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 524-534.

characterized as a new theological perspective meriting an “aberrant” or “unorthodox” classification.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> I would not describe open theism as “heretical” since it affirms all the orthodox core doctrines of classical Christianity such as the deity of Christ, virgin birth, Trinity, incarnation, physical resurrection of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone, and the second coming of Christ. In this sense, open theism appears to be a true system as a whole with pockets of error, predominately in their theology proper (God). This is unlike a false system with pockets of truth, much like Socinian theology, which rejects most, if not all, the core doctrines of classical Christianity listed above.