

THE OPENNESS HERESY

THE THEORY THAT CLAIMS THAT GOD IS INADEQUATE AND IGNORANT

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: THEOLOGICAL FREEDOM IN ADVENTIST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES —————

It is said, by many church historians and theologians, that a number of the ancient heresies in the Christian church came from Origen (A.D. 186-255). Heavily influenced by Platonism and speculative in the extreme, Origen's writings were a font from whence many later innovators derived ideas on which they expanded. The complete list of Origen's speculations is immense, and most students of church history thought that all the new heresies were just variants of those fought over for centuries in the Dark Ages.

Yet it was not until the 20th century that the "Openness" heresy was devised. *Incredibly, it was invented by a Seventh-day Adventist college teacher!*

Richard Rice was a Bible teacher at La Sierra College in the late 1970s when he came up with the idea. He began sharing his ideas with fellow liberal thinkers in the La Sierra/Loma Linda area. Most either liked the idea or thought it did not matter much what one believed about such things.

So when Rice began teaching the new heresy to his students, he encountered the same reaction. Many accepted the novelty of the idea, a few rejected it, while others considered it less important than the latest sports events.

Rice even came up with a name for his theory. After a lot of thought, he called it "the openness of God."

What is this "Openness" theory?

It is the erroneous position that God does not know the future! According to Rice and his disciples, God does not even know what will happen next week!

Can you believe it? An Adventist Bible teacher

This is one of a three-part set:

The Openness Heresy [WM-1056]. The error, originated at La Sierra University by Richard Rice, that God is inadequate and does not know very much.

The Infinite Wisdom of God [WM-1057]. Bible and Spirit of Prophecy statements.

God Knows the Future [WM-1058]. Spirit of Prophecy statements.

originating such a heresy, one which I am not able to locate at any earlier time in church theological history? *And, instead of being discharged, he has continued, as a salaried worker, to teach his heresy to thousands of Adventist students in southern California for nearly twenty years!*

Here is an introductory quotation that will help define the usual belief on the matter:

"Omniscience. The English word *omniscience* comes from the Latin words *omnis*, meaning 'all,' and *scientia*, meaning 'knowledge'; thus it means that God has all knowledge. A more comprehensive definition will state that God knows all things actual and possible, past, present, and future, in one eternal act. A number of things should be noted about God's omniscience.

"(1) God knows all things that exist in actuality (Ps 139:1-6; 147:4; Matt 6:8; 10:28-30). The psalmist recognized the omniscience of God in that God knew his actions, his thoughts, his words before he even spoke them, and his entire life (Ps 139:1-4).

"(2) God knows all the variables concerning things that have not occurred. Jesus knew what Tyre and Sidon would have done had the gospel been preached to them (Matt 11:21).

"(3) God knows all future events, because God is eternal and knows all things in one eternal act. Events that are future to man are an 'eternal now' to God. He knew the nations that would dominate Israel (Dan 2:36-43; 7:4-8), and He knows the events that will yet transpire upon the earth (Matt 24-25; Rev 6-19).

"(4) God's knowledge is intuitive. It is immediate, not coming through the senses; it is simultaneous, not acquired through observation or reason; it is actual, complete, and according to reality."—*Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 194.*

For an interesting Sabbath afternoon, read through the four Gospels and find the various instances in which Jesus seemed to know events at a distance, in the past, or in the future. You will find an astonishing number of them. Some of the events were occurring elsewhere; some would occur soon; some would not occur for decades or even centuries. Jesus also knew about events long ages in the past.

We stand in awe at the ability of Jesus to walk on water. Yet a careful reading of the passage in *De-*

sire of Ages, reveals, in addition, that, as He stood on the shore, Jesus knew all the thoughts of the disciples as they shoved off from land in their boat and even as they were far out on the lake. Christ did not come to their rescue amid the violent storm until He knew that, in their thinking, they wanted His help. He continually saw their boat, even though they were far away in a wild storm. Add to this that, after standing on the shore watching them, He is next walking on the water not far from them. To do that, He had to be transported through the air.

The sheer infinity of capability, on all levels, of the Godhead is beyond comprehension. Yet it is amazingly true. If you have any doubt, look about you at the things of nature.

As mentioned earlier, in the late 1970s, Richard Rice invented the new heresy and, then, wrote a book. He did that in the hope that Adventists everywhere would accept it! Equally incredible, the *Review and Herald* willingly printed it! The simpleton attitude of some church leaders toward the rising tide of errant standards and doctrines in our denomination is simply astounding.

We have here a genuine “heresy,” in the true church history sense of the term; for a basic quality of God and the plan of salvation is involved.

Please understand that, when Rice uses the word, “God,” he means the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In his view, all three have the supposed defect in ability. Apparently he is willing to let them have infinite capacity in omnipotence and omnipresence, but only very limited capability in knowledge.

Here is how this strange, new heresy spread from Adventism out into the Protestant world, where it has now become a raging controversy:

The Openness of God was the name of Rice’s *Review* book. It was also the name he gave to his heresy. But even the name is a fraud. His theory is that God is (pardon the blasphemy) too ignorant to know much of what is going to happen. If you were Rice, what name would you give to the theory? It obviously should be called “The Ignorance of God.” But Rice did not dare name it correctly. Instead he used a camouflage phrase: “The Openness of God.” What is that supposed to mean? From the title, you have no way of knowing what Rice has in mind. Satan always uses sneaky ways to introduce error into unsuspecting minds.

In 1980, the *Review* published Rice’s book, *The Openness of God*. But, in response to objections to a number of faithful believers—some of them in high places,—the *Review* board voted to withdraw

the book the following July.

Immediately, the liberals went through channels and demanded that the book be kept in print. Rice apparently already had a sizeable number of supporters. So rather quickly after the decision was taken to withdraw the book, the board voted to let it continue being sold to unsuspecting church members until the print run was exhausted. A second print run was not made.

That seemed to settle that. By 1983, Rice’s influence had narrowed once again to the hundreds of students he was teaching year after year at La Sierra.

By late 1983, so many errors were being taught at Adventist colleges that a crisis loomed on the horizon. Church leaders recognized that, if they bore down on the college and university teachers who were teaching new theology errors, they might lose half their religion faculty. So they made an unfortunate decision. They called it “theological freedom.” (More on that on page four.)

In April 1984, Rice received a letter from Clark Pinnock, well-known Baptist theologian teaching at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Pinnock expressed his utter delight with the strange, new teaching. In the correspondence that followed, when Pinnock learned that the *Review* had stopped printing the book, he helpfully suggested that one of his contacts, Bethany House Publishers, might be willing to reissue it. With Pinnock’s help, the book was back in print in 1985 under a new title, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*.

Richard Rice found a good friend in Clark Pinnock; and, in the early 1990s, they co-authored a book with four other well-known theologians who had converted to the new faith. At Pinnock’s insistence, the new book, issued in 1994, retained the original name: *The Openness of God*.

By the mid-1990s, a growing number of Protestant theologians had jumped on the bandwagon. The theory, that God did not know much about what is about to happen, gained still more nice sounding titles: “free will theism,” “open theism,” and “openness theology.”

A central idea is that man’s free will cannot operate if God knows very much! —As if God is limited by the free agency of His creatures. Keep in mind that this would apply to all creatures, everywhere. The Deity does not even know what your dog is going to do in a few minutes. He can only guess at it.

Blasphemy in the extreme? Yes, very much so.

1 But I am reporting it, because this error is ac-
0 cepted by a growing number of liberal Adventists
5 and Protestants.

As a result of the above-named books, a sizeable number of angry articles appeared in various Protestant journals. But not one appeared in our own church paper, the *Review*. Yet, by the mid-1990s, two of our U.S. Adventist universities (La Sierra and Loma Linda) were teaching the heresy!

To date, Richard Rice has never been reproved for teaching heresy. Instead, the board of our largest university, down the highway a few miles at Loma Linda, voted to give Rice a call to come teach with them. They felt honored to have such an original thinker on their faculty, especially since his theory was gaining some acceptance throughout the Protestant world. So Rice's heresy got him promoted to the status of "Professor of Religion" at Loma Linda University. A percentage of the World Budget of the denomination goes to Loma Linda to help pay his salary.

According to Rice, free choices do not exist until they are made; therefore God has no way of knowing ahead of time what they will be. The Deity does not know what you will do five minutes from now!

Stop and think a minute. If that were true, there would be no way for God to predict any event that will to happen a year from now. Most everything in the books of Daniel and Revelation, as well as Matthew 24-25, etc. would be just talk, and nothing more. They will never be fulfilled. No antichrist would ever arise, there is no mark of the beast,—and no beast either. Toss out the time prophecies and eliminate the Sanctuary Message. The three angels' messages can be thrown on the scrap heap. If Rice's theory is correct, the key verses, Daniel 7:25, 8:14, and Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 are only idle chatter.

According to this 20th-century heresy, Jesus did not know what He was talking about when He predicted that Peter would deny Him just before the cock crowed the third time. Isaiah 46:9-10 is uninspired doggerel: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things not yet done."

Since the mid-1990s, still more books advocating the new heresy came off the press: Gregory A. Boyd's *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*; John Sander's *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*; Clark H. Pinnock's *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of the Divine Openness*.

Critics have also published books: Bruce A. Ware's *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*; R.K. McGregor Wright's *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*; Douglas Wilson's *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*.

The critics complain, and rightly so, that the "open view" (it should be called "The Ignorance View") diminishes God's sovereignty and denies God's omniscience. In one lecture last fall, Millard Erickson declared that "the God who risks" might just as well be called "the God who guesses."

In the March 5, 2001 issue of *Christianity Today*, appeared Royce Gruenler's article, "God at Risk," in which he stated: "Does He [God] have 20 percent and the advancing world has the other 80 percent [of knowledge]? Is it 30/70? If that's the case, why is He worth worshiping?"

Six theologians advocating the new heresy replied in the April 23 issue (Richard Rice, Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger).

Those two issues stirred up so much controversy, that the cover of the May 21, 2001 issue of *Christianity Today* was headlined, "An Openness Debate," with this in slightly smaller print on the front cover: "Does God change His mind? Will God ever change His plans in response to our prayers? Does He know your next move? If God knows it all, are we truly free? Does God know the future? Was God taking a risk in making the human race? What does God know—and when does He know it?"

Theologians dearly love the annual meetings of the theological societies. Deep thoughts and big words are thrown about, and those in attendance feel so intelligent and important that they can listen to dozens of ponderous papers.

At the November 2001 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in Denver, the words "open" or "openness" will appear in the title of more than two dozen papers scheduled for presentation. The primary discussion will focus on whether the new view falls within the boundaries of Evangelical thought.

Lest some ETS members cancel their membership in advance of the meetings, the following statement appeared in a late 2000 issue of their *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*:

"The executive committee, in response to requests from a group of charter members, and others, to address the compatibility of the view commonly referred to as 'Open Theism' with Biblical inerrancy, wishes to state the following: We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate

and infallible knowledge of all past, present and future events, including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents. However, in order to insure fairness to members of the Society who differ with this view, we propose the issue of such incompatibility be taken up as part of our discus-

sion in next year's conference: 'Defining Evangelism's Boundaries.' "

Adventism is continually beset by new crises, and yet far too many of them seem to be of our own making. — vf

THEOLOGICAL FREEDOM IN ADVENTIST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

During and after the summer 1980 Glacier View meetings, our college Bible teachers were quite worried that they might lose their jobs. A large number of them were teaching views similar to those of Desmond Ford, who in 1980 was fired.

The situation was tight for several years. In late 1980, I had a copy of a typewritten letter from President N.C. Wilson to an unnamed college Bible teacher. The teacher had written Wilson asking whether he was going to be discharged since he had liberal views similar to those of Ford. Wilson's reply was intentionally circulated by the General Conference to our Bible teachers everywhere.

In it, Wilson said that, if the teacher was prudent and expressed continued loyalty to the church, he would not be fired for his beliefs. Yet he should not make a big issue of them.

But our college and university Bible teachers only became more tense with the passing of time. In the summer of 1981, most of them met in Atlanta and discussed their worries. One individual took notes and we were able to obtain a copy, with which we printed (*Atlanta Minutes [WM-36]*).

As for our church leadership, it well-knew that it had a pack of liberals in our college and university Bible departments. Most of the faculty of Pacific Union College and Andrews University had petitioned Wilson not to fire Ford!

Yet there were two major obstacles to firing any liberal Bible teachers: (1) By the early 1960s, we had started hiring Ph.D.s as Bible teachers. Of course, that was the reason why, by the 1980s, we had a bunch of liberals in our college and university religion departments! But it also meant that, if they were discharged, replacements—which we thought had to have Ph.D.s—would not easily be found. (2) The worldly accrediting associations would withdraw accreditation from our schools if we cleaned out those religion departments. That is because the secular academic world maintains that teachers have "academic freedom" to believe and teach whatever they want!

Finally, in 1984, our leaders relented. In October at the Annual Council, they passed a resolution, entitled "A Statement of Theological Freedom and Ac-

countability" (General Conference Policy File Number 127-84GN). Shortly afterward, I reprinted the action in a tract entitled, *Theological Freedom in Adventist Colleges and Universities [WM-110]*.

Here was the first paragraph:

"Recommended, to accept two documents: A. Statement on Theological Freedom and Accountability, and B. Academic Freedom in Seventh-day Adventist Institutions of Higher Learning."—1984 Annual Council Actions, p. 279.

In brief, Document A stated that salaried church workers are not permitted to discuss or teach non-Adventist doctrinal views. If they do, a "review hearing" will be held, from which appeals could be made. Sounds good.

But Document B was the dynamite. It said, in effect, that Adventist college and university religion teachers would be accorded a measure of freedom above that given to any other salaried workers in the church! This privileged class could study modernism, discuss modernism, teach modernism, and preach modernism—all under the name of "academic freedom!" They were granted three "freedoms": "Freedom of Speech," "Freedom of Research," and "Freedom to Teach."

"He is entitled to freedom in the classroom to discuss his subject honestly . . . [and to] pursue knowledge and truth in the area of the individual's specialty."—*Ibid*, p. 280.

No one would be disciplined or fired, unless too many complaints occurred. But first they would have to meet with a "committee." Yet nothing was said about who would be on that committee or what normative standards would apply. —That would entirely be left up to the employing college or university to decide! The hearing committee could be packed with fellow new theology teachers, plus an administrator or two.

So now you can see why Richard Rice could teach heresy for twenty years to thousands of students in our schools. With rare exception, every student enrolled at one of our colleges and universities is required to take religion courses,—and they are usually taught by liberals trained in Protestant, Catholic, and worldly errors in outside universities. — vf