

Theology Matters

A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

Vol 7 No 3 • May/Jun 2001

A Map for the Maze: Finding Your Way Through Contemporary Theology (A Guide for PNC's)

by Randall Otto

As anyone who has ever been lost can attest, it is a great help and relief from frustration to find someone who knows the territory and can help get the weary traveler back on the right road. A good map or set of directions is the best antidote for someone who has wasted too much time trying unsuccessfully to find his way. Christianity was originally known as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4, 14; 24:22), based on Jesus' assertion that he is "the way and the truth and the life," that "no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Way, in modern theological reflection, is anything but clear, however. Theology is in a state of crisis and confusion.

The question, What is God doing in our midst? becomes a highly charged theological question where there is little consensus whether *God* as referent is real, a linguistic symbol, or a necessary idea; whether supernatural, natural, or humanly constructed; whether transcendent being, immanent being-itself, or product of nature. Christian theology is in crisis insofar as the diverse theologies that still take upon themselves the name *Christian* increasingly appear on the surface to share nothing in common; conservative theologies can

appear to hold to untenable premodern beliefs; progressive theologies can appear to care nothing for traditional beliefs.¹

This article is intended to allay confusion and give direction to clergy and laity alike in the Church by serving as a kind of map through the maze of contemporary theologies.

Contemporary theology is manifested and classified in various ways. A helpful approach contrasts them with regard to the transcendence and immanence of God in relation to the world. In his transcendence, God is eternally existent, self-sufficient and stands beyond creation in the fullness of triune bliss and holiness without need of anything or anyone. In his immanence, God graciously creates and upholds a world with which to share his goodness and love and acts in that world to reveal himself and call a people unto himself, supremely in the incarnation of his only Son. As Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson observe in their utilization of this schema, Christian theology must always seek the proper balance between these two poles or it will go astray.

A balanced affirmation of both truths facilitates a proper relation between theology and reason or culture. Where such balance is lacking, serious theological problems readily emerge. Hence an overemphasis on transcendence can lead to a theology that is irrelevant to

Randall Otto, Ph.D. is pastor of West Grove Presbyterian Church, West Grove, PA. His Ph.D. is in historical and theological studies (modern theology emphasis) from Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA.

the cultural context in which it seeks to speak, whereas an overemphasis on immanence can produce a theology held captive to a specific culture.²

Contemporary theology has shown a lack of such balance, often giving greater weight to Enlightenment *hubris*, personal experience, or social concerns than to the authoritative Word of God. As a result, contemporary theology and those led by it appear to have lost their way, to be “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (Eph. 4:14). The Church can only help others find their way as it walks in the Way and according to the teaching of him who said, “I am the way” (John 14:6).

The Revolt against Immanence: *Neo-Orthodoxy*

In his commentary on Romans, first published in 1919, Karl Barth laid siege to the Enlightenment assumptions that had rendered the liberal religion of his theological mentors so innocuous. Humanity, having made God into a mere Idea and an empty abstraction, sought autonomy. This desire to be as gods resulted in the prominence given to scientific knowledge, personal experience, and historical thinking. Barth viewed “religion” as centered on futile human efforts to achieve salvation and thus more a culprit than a cure for human alienation from God. As “the supreme possibility of all human possibilities,” religion stands in opposition to divine grace, which is “man’s divine possibility, and, as such, lies beyond all human possibility.”³

Over against the immanence of God revealed in history and therefore subject to the variations and uncertainty of historical analysis, Barth emphasized the transcendence of God, “the ‘Wholly Other’” who comes from beyond history in Jesus Christ and “intersects vertically, from above,” the plane of human history, “as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it,” in the moment of KRISIS, the existential encounter with God’s judgment in revelation which elicits the need for a personal decision. The best efforts of humanity to please God or to trace God in history are but the dead corpse of “religion”; only God can save humanity through the new man, Jesus Christ, who comes from beyond history and renders judgment upon history in “the ‘non-historical’ happening” of the resurrection.

This is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The judgment to which Jesus surrenders Himself is righteousness; the death He suffers is life; the ‘No’ which He proclaims is ‘Yes’; in Him is reconciliation....This reversal or transformation is not a ‘historical event’ which may be placed side by side with other events. Rather it is the ‘non-historical’ happening, by which all other events are bounded.⁴

Because Barth laid such emphasis upon the “infinite qualitative distinction” (derived from the Danish existentialist Søren Kierkegaard) between time and eternity, his theology became known as the “theology of crisis,” KRISIS being the “‘Moment’ of revelation” in which the Word becomes revelation and the individual, having encountered God in

Jesus Christ, must make an existential decision to believe or not. Barth’s theology was also called “dialectical theology” because of the way he was able to preserve antitheses, like “Yes” and “No,” while at the same time resolving them in a higher unity wherein the “Yes” is “No” and vice versa. Finally, Barth’s work was called a “theology of the Word,” because of its Christocentrism, seeing Christ as the beginning and end of all things, from creation to consummation. Because Barth gave serious attention to elements of orthodoxy that liberals considered “relics of the past,” such as “the earthly life of Jesus,” “Christ the Son of God,” and “redemption by the blood of Christ,” Barth’s theology was called “neo-orthodoxy,” even “biblist.”⁵ However, for all his emphasis on “exegesis,” Barth often directly contradicted the plain meaning of the text.

The christocentrism of Barth’s theology became an all-inclusive force within Barth’s theology, leading him to some very idiosyncratic interpretations. Most notable is his doctrine of election, strictly focused on Jesus Christ. As God, Jesus Christ elects humanity, and as a human being, Jesus Christ is the elect. If Christ is not the electing God, one would need to look outside of him to an absolute decree of God to determine the divine decision. This Barth’s christocentrism will not allow. Double predestination thus concerns only Christ—he is the representative of all people and all are united in him with God; only Christ is reprobate. God gives humanity salvation in him, while taking on condemnation in him. God elects not punishment but rather the forfeited life of the creature. The divine Yes is unconditional in its certainty, outlasting the self-determination of the creature. The Yes is definitive and eternal.⁶

Although Barth demurred on the question “apokatastasis,” the universal salvation of all people, his insistence that the divine decision in Christ cannot be undone by any human decision and that what Christ did on the cross “affects all” and is a “reality for all” regardless of their belief has led many to say there is “no alternative to concluding that Barth’s refusal to accept apokatastasis cannot be harmonized with his doctrine of election.”⁷

Barth’s view clearly does involve an objective, universal election in Christ. He emphasizes this so strongly that he urges the Church not to take unbelief seriously. In this way he minimizes the Scriptural warning against apostasy as well as the call to repentance and faith.... Hence the urgency of preaching is gone, and the biblical significance of the call to repentance and faith loses its relevance.⁸

If unbelief is ultimately impossible and faith is inevitable, even unnecessary, for all, no real decision for Christ is required. Proclamation is needless, save as to inform people of an already existing state of affairs, i.e., they are already reconciled to God. Because Christ acted in place of the human race and made an end of human beings as sinners, humanity is already liberated. Faith is really only necessary for the acknowledgment of this liberation; faith is not

necessary to lay hold of the divine verdict, for Christ's death was the death of all, regardless of their response.⁹

Barth's view of revelation remained existential, based on the idea of personal encounter. Derived from the German idealist philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel and rooted in the neo-Kantianism of Barth's pietistic liberal mentor Wilhelm Herrmann, Barth insisted that the Word validates itself apart from history. With Herrmann, Barth also insisted that there is no natural theology, no verbal inspiration of Scripture, and no propositional revelation. The Bible becomes God's Word to human beings when it becomes revelation to them. Barth contended that the biblical witness claims no authority for itself and the Bible was in fact dishonored by being identified with revelation, as the doctrine of inspiration holds. Rather, Barth said, verbal inspiration is an idea of the Renaissance which seeks to control the Bible. "Revelation is nothing but the freedom of God's grace" in the event wherein "from time to time it must become God's Word."¹⁰ Scripture only becomes the Word in faith; to say the Bible is the Word of God is a violation of the freedom and sovereignty of God. Yet the church cannot evade Scripture, but must listen to the voices of the human word of God's witnesses to revelation. "The incarnation of the Word of God and the outpouring of the Spirit has happened, is happening and will happen for the Church (and through the Church for the world) in every age, because in face of the uniqueness of revelation the Church is ready to receive its authentic witness and to accept and transmit it as authentic."¹¹

Barth acknowledges that Paul in saying *Scripture* is *theopneustos* ("God-breathed," 2 Tim. 3:16) believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, that every word comes from God. Though this was also the view of the Church Fathers and Reformers, Barth abandoned their doctrine as a violation of God's freedom and sovereignty which had made the Bible an object for human control, "a paper Pope."¹² Barth took a dynamic view of inspiration, wherein the words of the Bible, a fallible witness of human beings, became God's Word in the moment of encounter by the working, or inspiration, of the Holy Spirit. The Reformers' distinction between the one-time inspiration of the biblical authors and the continuing enlightenment, or illumination, of the Spirit in the hearts of those who hear and read the Bible, is thereby done away with.

Barth's assertion that the orthodox doctrine of inspiration freezes up revelation and places God under the control of humans is, however, unjustified. The freedom of God is in no way hindered by the identification of revelation with the Bible. The sovereignty of the Spirit does not permit imprisonment. The Spirit moves (*present tense*) where he pleases to bring new birth (cf. John 3:3-7), but he also moved (*past tense*) the human writers of Scripture to speak authoritatively from God (2 Pet. 1:21). The Spirit is "He who in His living, divine dynamics once made the human witness the living Word of God and in His unbounded grace continues to preserve it as such. But exactly for this very reason this human witness *is* the Word of God. And for the very same reason it can be said *without any reservation* of

this apostolic witness, now as well as in the days when it was written down: It *is* the revelation of the revealing God."¹³

Because revelation remained for Barth an existential encounter, several important concerns follow:

- 1) Barth could concede the value of historical criticism while at the same time shielding redemptive events from investigation or verification, since he had postulated *Geschichte* as the metahistory wherein the key elements of the Christian message could not be assailed. As Van Harvey famously put it, Barth "claims all the advantages of history but will assume none of its risks."¹⁴
- 2) The canon of the Bible is not closed or finally authoritative, but remains open as God in his freedom speaks through other means.
- 3) "Barth arrives at his doctrines by following the scriptural narrative, by treating the Bible, in Kelsey's term, as 'a vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel'....To use Scripture like this gives priority to imagination as opposed, say, to using the texts to reconstruct as accurately as possible what people in the ancient past may have thought."¹⁵ It is not the author's intent, but imagination that is primary in this view of Scripture.
- 4) Given his denial of the Bible as the objective Word of God and his persistent emphasis on the dynamic nature of revelation in personal encounter, i.e., human subjectivity, it is increasingly evident to Barth's followers and critics alike that he remained in fundamental agreement with his liberal theological shadow, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who had reacted against the Kantian critique by relegating knowledge of God to a sense of personal dependence.¹⁶ "For all their blistering rhetoric against Schleiermacher's children, all the major proponents of theological neoorthodoxy remained importantly rooted in the tradition of nineteenth-century theological liberalism."¹⁷

Although it drank deeply of historical theology and opened up new insights into theology, neo-orthodoxy may be seen as a "brand of liberal modernist theology."¹⁸ Although few identify themselves as "Barthians" any longer, Barth's influence remains in most mainline seminaries as the closest approximation to orthodox theology. Elements of that influence are evident in the Confession of 1967, as well as the Theological Declaration of Barmen, both found in our *Book of Confessions*.

Questions to ask of someone who alludes to Neo-orthodoxy

1. Is the Bible *God's Word*? Neo-orthodoxy says the Bible "contains" the Word of God, whereas Reformed orthodoxy confesses, "the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God" (2nd Helvetic Confession, *Book of Confessions*

[henceforth BC] 5.001).

2. How do you understand *inspiration*? Is the Bible authoritative for all people today, the only rule for faith and practice? Neo-orthodoxy says inspiration is an individual existential encounter in which the word of man becomes the word of God, whereas orthodoxy says inspiration is the means by which Scripture was given to be the only rule of faith and life (Westminster Confession, [BC 6.002]). Should additional revelation be expected or is the canon of authoritative Scripture closed? Neo-orthodoxy would allow for additional revelation, whereas orthodoxy says “nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (Westminster Confession [BC 6.006]).

3. Is Christian faith *historical or only existentially verifiable*? Does it matter, for instance, if there was an empty tomb on Easter morning? Should people be encouraged to found their faith on the facts of history as recorded in the Bible or in a personal, subjective encounter with God’s Word apart from its historical moorings? Neo-orthodoxy says faith is largely a personal, subjective encounter without regard for the contingencies of historical occurrence, whereas orthodoxy insists on the factuality of the events of redemption, that Christ’s resurrection was “confirmed by the testimony of his enemies” and “by the testimony of his angels, and by the senses and judgment of his apostles and of others, who had conversation, and did eat and drink with him after his resurrection” (Scots Confession [BC 3.10]).

4. What did Jesus Christ accomplish in his death and resurrection? Are all people redeemed and just don’t know it, or do they remain under divine condemnation unless and until they place personal trust in Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for their sins? Neo-orthodoxy seems to say all are redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection, regardless of whether they have repented of sin and believed the gospel, whereas orthodoxy says, “our Lord reconciled all the faithful to the heavenly Father, made expiation for sins, disarmed death, overcame damnation and hell, and by his resurrection from the dead brought again and restored life and immortality”; on the other hand, orthodoxy condemns “those who thought that the devil and all the ungodly would at some time be saved, and that there would be an end to punishments,” for “however many seek salvation in any other than in Christ alone, have fallen from the grace of God and have rendered Christ null and void for themselves” (2nd Helvetic Confession [BC 5.075-77]).

The Transcendence of the Future: *the Theology of Hope and Political Theology*

Although Barth had insisted that revelation could not be a predicate of history, there arose in the late ‘50s a group devoted to that very thesis, that revelation should be seen as history.¹⁹ Reacting to the Kantian double-bookkeeping in Barth’s *Geschichte-Historie* distinction, they maintained that any theological method that sets up a “suprahistorical kernel

of history...over against ordinary history (*Historie*)...necessarily depreciates real history.”²⁰ Building upon Hegel’s philosophy of history as revised by the Marxist atheist Ernst Bloch, this “hope group,” whose most prominent members were Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, emphasized the “openness” of the future as the transcendence of God. Both of these theologians stress that God lies *ahead* of the unfolding of history as the one who gives possibilities. Since history is thus unfolding and “not yet” complete, there can be no final knowledge of the God who reveals himself in history until the end, which gives this theology its eschatological orientation. While Pannenberg is surely the more conservative of the two and the one most interested in a serious appraisal of the historical nature of God’s revelation, his statements about God are admittedly tentative and anticipatory, “conjectural reconstructions” which “will have to be more that of anticipations than that of concept in the sense of classical metaphysics.”²¹ Since “the future that will reveal the truth about the present remains open and ahead of us,” “anticipation is therefore always ambiguous; its true significance depends upon the future course of experience” and thus concepts inevitably have “more the form of an intuitive seeing or feeling,”²² not dissimilar to Schleiermacher’s feeling of absolute dependence. The lack of certainty inherent in such anticipation becomes most acute when speaking about the person of Jesus Christ.

The future of Jesus Christ decides what he is, simply man or truly God. Because Jewish apocalyptic expected the resurrection of the dead at the end of the world, the gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection stand as the *end of history* in the *midst of history*, a *proleptic* end. In his resurrection is the beginning of the end, the confirmation and exaltation of Jesus by God, and the ultimate demonstration of the divinity of Israel’s God as the one God of all people. “The question about the fulfillment of man’s destiny remains open beyond the death of the individual. The wholeness of his life in unity with himself, the world, his fellowmen, and God, can only come in the resurrection from the dead, which is hoped for....Therefore, God’s revelation means the salvation of men, fulfillment of their destiny, of their essence.”²³

Still, this resurrection must be proven by rigorous historical research. In stark contrast to Barth, Pannenberg asserts, “There is no justification for affirming Jesus’ resurrection as an event that really happened, if it is not to be affirmed as a historical event as such. Whether or not a particular event happened two thousand years ago is not made certain by faith but only by historical research, to the extent that certainty can be attained at all about questions of this kind.”²⁴ It is to Pannenberg’s credit that he is able to demonstrate the probability of the resurrection accounts through the use of historico-critical methodology. Yet the historical method and view of history as revelation curtails any knowledge of who Jesus was apart from the resurrection. That is to say, there can be no warranted knowledge of him as pre-existent or divine prior to the resurrection, since Scripture only serves as a historical witness, not as the inspired Word.

The historicity of the resurrection thus plays a crucial role in deciding the very essence of Jesus. “Only the future decides what something is.”²⁵ In the Easter event, “Jesus is recognized as the one who he was previously. He was not only unrecognizable before Easter, but he would not have been who he was without the Easter event.”²⁶ The resurrection thus appears to be constitutive for Jesus’ essential oneness with the Father; in the “arrow of time,” this would seem to mean that Jesus *became one* with the Father in the resurrection, but this is not what Pannenberg means. Rather, he maintains *against the normal view of time* that the resurrection has a *retroactive effect* on the essential nature of Jesus; not only is Jesus thereby *recognized* to be divine, but in reality and essence, he *becomes divine retroactively*.

Jesus’ essence is established retroactively from the perspective of the end of his life, from his resurrection, not only for our knowledge but in its being. Had Jesus not been raised from the dead, it would have been decided that he also had not been one with God previously. But through his resurrection it is decided, not only so far as our knowledge is concerned, but with respect to reality, that Jesus is one with God and retroactively that he was also already with God previously.²⁷

This inversion of time categories and ontological priorities will strike many as unacceptable, for it is generally believed that the future may change the *meaning* of something, but not its essential nature. Even Pannenberg trips over his reconstruction of being and time when later, maintaining that Jesus “was also the Son of God in the whole of his life and not only after a particular point in time,” he says, “this was decided only by Jesus’ resurrection, just as in general only the future event decides the *meaning* [not the essential nature] of earthly events.”²⁸

Pannenberg is to be commended for attempting to counter the anti-historical thrust of Barth’s theology, but he neglects the authority of the special revelation of inspired Scripture which, in Calvin’s analogy, serves as “spectacles” to clarify the otherwise confused knowledge of God we have in the general revelation of creation, including ourselves, owing to sin.²⁹ Historical research, important as it is in validating and confirming the reality and authenticity of God’s redemptive work among humanity, cannot suffice to lead people to the truth of God. God’s ways stand above human thought, which is the reason why God has spoken through his inspired agents, the prophets and apostles, and consummately in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of hope is much more radical than Pannenberg’s work. Although they both draw heavily from the Hegelian roots of the Marxist philosopher Bloch and his ontology of the “not-yet,” i.e., the incompleteness of all things, Moltmann’s work is much more interested in the liberating effects of theology and the sociological reinterpretation of Christian imagery. His Left-Hegelian stance, in which praxis becomes the criterion of truth, utilizes

socio-political reinterpretations of theological concepts to enhance human freedom. Moltmann is thus considerably less interested than Pannenberg in rigorous historical and exegetical study; instead, his focus is on how theological concepts can be reformulated to achieve a more liberating effect.

Moltmann began his *Theology of Hope* by accenting the eschatological orientation of history in Jewish thought. Only by returning to its Israelite origins could theology arrive at a conception of God unburdened with the anti-historical Greek philosophical thinking that both he and Pannenberg insist has prevailed in the history of Christian thought. Moltmann argued that Israel experienced history according to the promises of the God who was ahead of history, breaking in from the future to open up new possibilities. This God, with “future as his condition of being” stood in contrast to the gods of Israel’s neighbors. The history of Israel, with its linear direction, evinces a God very different from the epiphany religions of Israel’s neighbors who, with their cyclical view of time, conceptualized deity as eternal presence. The ‘I am’ who eternally ‘is’ provides epiphany religion with a means of escape from the chaos and nothingness of this world, but such a god of eternal presence can have no concern for history, future, or the world, for it is the negation of all that is earthly. Such a god of presence, removed from all pain and suffering, cannot love and is an idol to be dispelled.

Moltmann repudiates eternal presence for metaphysical and cosmological reasons, but also for political and ethical reasons. The monotheism of eternal presence is but a heuristic device to justify the domination of rulers throughout history who have considered themselves God’s representatives on earth, lording it over their subjects as masters over slaves. Moltmann contends that the revolutionary impetus of Israel’s God is lost in the bourgeois domestication of monotheism, which, instead of standing in contradiction to given reality, provides justification for lordly rule.

Moltmann espouses Israel’s God of promise, “no intra-worldly or extra-worldly God, but the ‘God of hope’ (Rom. 15.13), a God with ‘future as his essential nature’ (as E. Bloch puts it),” not “in us or over us but always only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future.”³⁰ This God of hope is not above or beyond history, but *ahead of it*, coming to humanity in the promises of his presence and leading humanity in divine faithfulness towards the lands of promise in unrepeatable events of promise. “In the Old Testament Yahweh was experienced, not as heavenly substance but as a divinely historical person, and the promise of his presence was believed in his name: ‘I am who I am’— ‘I will be who I will be’— ‘I will be there’ (Ex. 3.14).”³¹

The nature of God’s presence in Moltmann’s promissory history is nonetheless suspect, since “promise” is a “language event” announcing a reality that has not yet arrived. In announcing this not-yet reality, the future

becomes a “word-presence.” Word-presence, however, is anticipatory, distinct from actual presence.³² God is not *actually* present in the promise, which is proleptic. God lies ahead. Nonetheless, “the *word* of the promise itself already creates something new.”³³ God is thus personally absent and present only in word. His universal presence is the goal of history. Moltmann’s God is ‘not-yet’, but only ‘possible’ (*Gott-möglich*).³⁴

Since monotheism is the cornerstone of Judaism, Moltmann’s insistence on dispensing with monotheism and yet maintaining the Jewish roots of Christianity is contradictory. Particularly troubling, however, is the willingness many conservative theologians have exhibited in following Moltmann’s contrast of monotheism with trinitarianism.³⁵ “It is in the threeness of God that the unity consists, a point made from the earliest times by Christian theologians. Trinity and monotheism are or should be one.”³⁶ Although Moltmann maintains that definitions of God as omnipotent, self-sufficient, and immutable, for instance, derive from natural theology, and philosophy, Barth could speak of trinitarianism as “Christian monotheism”. He did this while refusing the possibility of natural theology: “what is in question is the revealed knowledge of the revealed unity of the revealed God-revealed according to the testimony of the OT and NT.”³⁷

According to Moltmann, “A God who is conceived of in his omnipotence, perfection, and infinity at man’s expense cannot be the God who is love in the cross of Jesus, who makes a human encounter in order to restore their lost humanity.”³⁸ The liberated believer must therefore dispense with the inhuman God, the God apart from Jesus, for the sake of the cross. “There is no being of God for us other than his being-for-us in Christ.”³⁹ Moltmann’s trinitarian reformulation has nothing to do with a substance or subject beyond humanity. “‘God’ is not another nature or a heavenly person or a moral authority, but in fact an ‘event’.”⁴⁰ God is the event of the cross. “The Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ.”⁴¹

For Moltmann, Jesus was, historically speaking, a man with a vision of the future community of free and loving humanity who engaged in a mission of liberating and suffering fellowship with those who have no rights. Jesus was wholly devoted to eschatological community. Endowed with the Spirit of empowering love at his baptism, Jesus was “the provisional representative of the still absent God,”⁴² working for human community in revolutionary activity and sympathetic suffering. His zeal for the kingdom of true humanity was squelched, however, by the political and religious authorities of his day and he was hanged on a cross as a blasphemer and insurrectionary, abandoned and forsaken. When his life ended, so did his hope for the kingdom. This was the death of God for him. Because “the question ‘what is God?’ . . . is the question concerning the kingdom,”⁴³ the apparent negation of the kingdom hope entailed the very death of God. God is, therefore, no cold heavenly power; rather, he is known as the human God in the

crucified. “There is no other God than the incarnate, human God who is one with men and women in suffering and love.”⁴⁴ “Jesus’ death cannot be understood as ‘the death of God’, but only as death *in God*.”⁴⁵ Moltmann rejects any idea of essence in God. “The word ‘God’ cannot mean a metaphysical form or a moral instance, but the history which unfolds between Father and Son, the *happening* of the love of the Son and the pain of the Father.”⁴⁶

If the cross is the archetypal event of suffering love for human community, what is the resurrection? The resurrection for Moltmann is an apocalyptic expression for the eschatological and historic (*geschichtlich*) opening of closed concepts of being (*Historie*). It is a symbol of the eschaton, the end of the history of unrighteousness, and has nothing to do with revivification or immortality. “‘Resurrection of the dead’ first of all excludes any idea of a revivification of the dead Jesus which might have reversed the process of his death” as well as “any idea of ‘a life after death’,” for “resurrection life is not a further life after death,” but rather “the annihilation of death in the victory of the new, eternal life.”⁴⁷ “The resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God does not speak the ‘language of facts’, but only the language of faith and hope, that is, the ‘language of promise’.”⁴⁸ For Moltmann, “the resurrection” is a *symbol* of what occurs in the course of human history as God identifies with the poor and they revolt against oppression. World history is symbolized by the cross and resurrection. “The resurrection was not for Jesus an exit from our brutal world into heavenly bliss above. . . . The body of the risen Jesus can be identified by us in the bruised and bleeding body of mankind.”⁴⁹ “‘The world of the cross’....still awaits the resurrection.”⁵⁰

“Jesus’ resurrection can be understood as the protest of life against death,” “the humanization of the human condition as a whole.”⁵¹ The historical person of Jesus thus provides the model of liberating suffering that each is called to emulate in history until, at last, in some non-historical eschaton beyond space and time, new being is achieved and the provisional eschatological titles (e.g., “Christ,” “Lord”) become ontological realities which all share in community.

Any interpretation of Moltmann which sees ontological reality in God apart from the non-historical eschatological end is misguided. Moltmann’s God is not-yet, but only a “possible God” (*Gott-möglich*), evinced in the archetypal and symbolic events of the cross and resurrection, sociologically reinterpreted in terms of suffering (cross [negation]) and liberation (resurrection [positive]). Moltmann’s God is the Nothing, the ideal of human community projected for the non-historical end.⁵² In Hegelian fashion, the eschatological Nothing takes up into itself the nothingness of sin and chaos in suffering love, bringing forth the positive of liberation and true community. This Hegelian dialectic impels all events of liberation throughout history until the hoped-for God of human community is realized, which, in actuality, it can never be, since there can be no end to an open process.

Moltmann's book *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) received the Grawemeyer Award from the faculty of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, indicating Moltmann's appeal there.

Questions to ask of those alluding to the theology of hope or political theology:

1. Do you believe in an actually existing God? Do humans and historical occurrences contribute to what God is or becomes? Is God present in and sovereign over history? The theology of hope says God is coming from the future, has no actual existence or presence yet, and is dependent on humans and historical occurrences for his actualization; God is also not sovereign over history. Orthodoxy says, "there is [present and eternally existing] but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty; most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory"; "God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them" (Westminster Confession [BC 6.011-12]).

2. Who is Jesus Christ for you? Is he the eternally existing Son, equal with the Father in the triune God, who became incarnate and was very God and very man from the moment of his conception? What was the essential purpose of Jesus' coming into this world? The theology of hope seems to say either that Christ became the Son of God at his resurrection or that he will become the Son of God in the eschaton when the world is made right by human action, whereas orthodoxy says, "the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature" in the womb of Mary, apart from sin (Westminster Confession [BC 6.044]). He came "to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, fully revealing to us the secret purpose and will of God concerning our redemption; to be our only High Priest, having redeemed us by the one sacrifice of his body and ever interceding for us with the Father; and to be our eternal King, governing us by his Word and Spirit, and defending and sustaining us in the redemption he has won for us" (Heidelberg Catechism [4.031]).

3. What happened at Jesus' resurrection? Did he become something he had not been? Was the resurrection an actual event in which Jesus was raised from the dead in testimony to his victory over sin and death or is it simply a symbol for the need of humanity to overcome obstacles to human liberation? (Cf. BC 6.048.) The theology of hope in Pannenberg affirms the resurrection, while in Moltmann it is a symbol, but for both it is somehow constitutive for the divinity of Christ, whereas orthodoxy teaches that Christ was "very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father," who in his resurrection arose in victory over sin and

death according to "the testimony" given by his enemies, the angels, and his followers (Scots Confession [BC 3.10]).

4. What is the fundamental freedom to which human beings are called (cf. Rom. 6:18-22)? Does God exist for humanity or does humanity exist for God? The theology of hope (in Moltmann) emphasizes human freedom from oppression and a general Marxist world view, with God's existence contingent upon humanity's openness to those possibilities, whereas orthodoxy says God is self-sufficient and sovereign over all things, working in them for his glory and that the chief freedom to which humans are called is the enjoyment and glorification of God (Shorter Catechism [BC 7.001]), which certainly includes work for justice and peace (Confession of 1967 [BC 9.17, 25]).

Transcendence within the Story: Narrative Theology

Narrative theology draws from the neo-orthodox refusal to see the Bible as inspired revelation conveying actual history and propositional revelation. Instead, it emphasizes the interpretation of Barth's view of Scripture as a "non-fictional novel" which gives rise to imagination. William J. Bausch sees other factors in the development of narrative theology, including the shift from a high christology (stressing the divinity of Christ) to a low christology (stressing the humanity of Christ), the impact of modern science, and the impact of feminism and women's imagination. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur sees the imagination as the one genuine means by which often contradictory elements can be held in tension at many levels.⁵³

Ricoeur has exerted extraordinary influence on hermeneutics (the interpretation of biblical texts), even among highly-esteemed evangelicals like Kevin Vanhoozer. As a philosopher of hope, "Ricoeur proposes that it is poetic or creative language which best expresses the surplus, the 'more than actuality,' of human being."⁵⁴ Because humanity is "not-yet," the "surplus of meaning" in the possibilities suggested by the language of hope drives man on to a realization of authentic existence. As in all phenomenological philosophy, possibility here stands prior to actuality, with imagination as the power of the possible and meaning or "essence" being the imagined ensemble of possibilities.

For Ricoeur, narrative is the product of the *creative* imagination (what *might* be), not the *reproductive* imagination (what *is*). Narrative is a poetic strategy for transforming natural time into meaningful human time. Fictions are not *less* real than the things they represent but rather *more* real, since they focus on what is essential, the world of the reader. By projecting worlds in which the reader is invited to dwell, fictions "remake" reality. The truth of fiction is not "reference," or correspondence to actuality, but "refiguration," or correspondence to possibility. Utopia is the poetic vision that, like metaphor, shatters the present order of actuality through an eschatological order of

possibility. While Vanhoozer rightly wonders how one can “discern illusory possibilities from ones that are capable of being actualized,”⁵⁵ he nonetheless believes Ricoeur is a philosopher who hearkens to the Christian word. “I wager that Ricoeur’s narrative theory provides new resources for theology’s task of combining a particular historical fate (Jesus’ passion) with a universal rational framework (the possibility of freedom). Similarly, Ricoeur’s mediation of history and fiction transforms the troublesome dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.”⁵⁶

Ricoeur sees demythologization as similar to the interpretation of metaphor: “the absurd literal sense must be abolished in order to unleash the redescriptive power of the metaphor.”⁵⁷ While Ricoeur “demythologizes” Rudolf Bultmann in asserting the need for *meaning* prior to *decision*, his “fundamentally existential” hermeneutical foundation still ends in subjectivity. Vanhoozer rightly asks concerning that which is beyond the individual human consciousness:

What is ultimately at stake when I read Scripture is *me* and my subjectivity. What becomes of ‘objectivity’ and the ‘realism of the event of history’? Is it swallowed up in the quest for self-understanding? Ricoeur claims that he is moving decisively beyond any kind of Romanticism or subjectivist hermeneutics. The reader does not project his own understanding onto the text; indeed, reading may call for the reader to abandon his previous self-understanding. Ricoeur tries to escape the charge of subjectivity by making the text the objective mediation of possible worlds....To call the ‘world’ of the text ‘objective’ is somewhat misleading, however, for there are as many worlds as there are interpretations. Moreover, the ‘world’ of the text itself refers to a mode of subjectivity, a way of being-in-the-world.⁵⁸

The application of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic to the gospels “would seem to lead us to a variation of Schleiermacher’s thesis: the life of Jesus manifests a being-towards-God that is marked by an elevated God-consciousness.”⁵⁹

Vanhoozer curiously hails Ricoeur as a modern John the Baptist, who “serves the Gospel by baptizing our imaginations, philosophically preparing the way for the Word.”⁶⁰ Ricoeur has ostensibly made space once more for biblical exegesis despite the fact that “the ‘truth’ of the text may be had apart from the events it narrates actually having happened.”⁶¹ This provokes the reader to ask Vanhoozer the same question he had asked of Ricoeur (and never really answered): “What power to effect human liberation do the Gospels have that works of fiction such as *Huckleberry Finn* lack?”⁶² Summarily, if the Bible is permitted to be construed simply as any other classic novel, it would seem that Ricoeur has *lessened* the interest in and the impact of biblical exegesis. Why not rather study Dostoevsky?

If Vanhoozer can say, “our suspicion [is] that Christianity is for Ricoeur only an illustration of philosophical truth,” then how is it possible that “Ricoeur is perhaps best viewed as an apologist for the intelligibility of the Christian kerygma.”⁶³ If

Ricoeur’s “goal as a philosopher is nothing less than making room for the Transcendent in the modern world,” it is a transcendence founded in secular and social subjectivity, paving the way for the revisionist Marxist kingdom of man rather than the kingdom of the God who acts in redemptive history for the salvation of his people through the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁶⁴

However, holding that sinful man’s vision is blurred and in need of the spectacles of Scripture and the authentic divine interpretation of reality revealed therein, Reformed theology cannot concur with an indemonstrable “hope” that “Ricoeur’s philosophy prepares the way for the reader of the biblical text to be called again, to attain not exactly hermeneutical innocence (after all, Kant expelled us from our interpretive Edens) but a second, chastened, naiveté.”⁶⁵ On the contrary, Calvinistic philosophy declares that all thought not founded in Scripture is autonomous and guilty of a presumed innocence and neutrality in willful antagonism to the divinely-stated ethico-epistemological effects of sin upon man’s view of reality.

Questions for those alluding to narrative theology:

See questions under “neo-orthodoxy” and “theology of hope.”

Immanence in the Experience of Oppression: Liberation, Black, and Feminist Theologies

Liberation theology originated in Latin America in the late ‘60s in conjunction with the radical reexamination of systems of oppression and socio-economic stratification posed by study of Marxist philosophy. “The socioanalytical tools, the historical horizon of interpretation, the insight into the dynamics of the social process and the revolutionary ethics and programme which Marxism has either received and appropriated or itself created are, however corrected or reinterpreted, indispensable for revolutionary change.”⁶⁶ Much of this influence was evident in Moltmann’s work, which could easily be characterized as a prominent example of liberation as well as political theology and indeed has been formative for both.⁶⁷ While the general themes of the cry against oppression, the emphasis on the liberating aspects of gospel, and the prophetic demands for justice are the same, the basis for these claims and their doctrinal formulations vary, from being fairly conservative applications of theology to a complete recasting or even renunciation of Christianity. In general, however, the criterion for liberation theology is not doctrinal faithfulness to Scripture, but rather praxis, i.e., the development of theology based on the personal experience of oppression and implications of who benefits from it. Unless it calls into question the values, interests, and goals of those who benefit from structures of injustice, theology cannot contribute to the liberation movement.

Black Theology

In 1969 a group of black church leaders formulated a concise description of black theology, evincing its contextual nature:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression.⁶⁸

Black theology arose out of the civil rights and Black Power movements of the '60s, a time of distrust between white and black religious leaders and featuring an exclusivistic militancy on the part of some blacks. Albert B. Cleage, Jr., pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, a United Church of Christ congregation in Detroit, insisted in 1968 that only a "resurrection of a Black Church with its own Black Messiah" could unify black people. Blacks were to shake off their slave identification by recognizing their election. The Bible, he maintained, had been written by black Jews but had been corrupted by Paul in order to make the original message of a black messiah more acceptable to Europeans. Shortly thereafter, Cleage and others issued a Black Manifesto demanding from white churches, synagogues, and "all other racist institutions" reparations for the past mistreatment of black people. Similar calls for reparations are again being debated.

Black theology begins with an analysis of the black condition in light of white oppression. "Black Theology is not prepared to accept any doctrine . . . which contradicted the black demand for freedom now."⁶⁹ Christ is black and the church must be black with him. "Revelation is a black event, i.e., what black people are doing about their liberation."⁷⁰ Prominent black theologian James Cone "elevated as the core tenet of Black theology the biblical God who is related to the Black struggle for liberation. This means that God is Black: God has joined in the oppressed condition and is known wherever people experience humiliation and suffering."⁷¹ Because God is black and is known only among the black experience, to be free as a human being means to be black.

Feminist Theology

Feminist theology emerged out of the women's movement of the 1970s, though its roots extend back one hundred years to the abolitionist movement preceding the Civil War when certain activists realized that the emancipation of slaves and the rights of women had the same biblical basis. Like other forms of liberation theology, feminist theology begins with critical reflection on praxis, the experience of truth in the oppressed freeing themselves from the oppressor, and understands doctrine from a socio-political perspective. Feminist theology differs from black theology in seeing the primary focus of oppression not in white racism, but in male domination, sexism, or patriarchy.

Feminist theology is itself divided into various subcategories of praxis. *Womanist* theology is a specifically black feminist

critique going beyond the "feminist preoccupation with gender inequalities" to "the interstructured nature of race, gender, and class oppression—and other forms of oppression as well."⁷² *Mujerista* theology "makes a preferential option for Latina women, for our struggle for liberation."⁷³

Feminist theology begins with criticism of the past, in which women see themselves as having been oppressed by a patriarchal culture that has viewed God as male and therefore the male sex as divine, resulting in women being perceived as not fully human and as the source of sin in the fall of humanity. As long as men believe their experiences and ideas represent all of human experience, the half is mistaken for the whole, resulting in inaccuracies regarding women's experience and view of God. Inasmuch as the Bible was written by men within a patriarchal society, it may be suspect in what it says about God and life; thus, feminist theologians seek support either from alternative readings of biblical texts, extra-biblical texts or the revelatory value of personal experience. "Mujerista theology helps Latinas discover and affirm the presence of God in the midst of our communities and the revelation of God in our daily lives. Latinas must come to understand the reality of structural sin and find ways of combating it because it effectively hides God's ongoing revelation from us and from society at large."⁷⁴ With its emphasis on personal lived experience and its "hermeneutics of suspicion" regarding the biblical texts as received, feminist theology is highly subjectivistic; whatever is perceived to be liberating may be considered revelatory and true. "We do recognize and hold liberation to be the criterion or principle by which we judge what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, what is salvific or condemnatory."⁷⁵ Although Isabel Rogers suggests "the majority of feminists want to take the Bible seriously" in wrestling with the texts, the focus on finding "the (sometimes hidden) strains in the Bible which affirm the dignity and humanity of women" and the "theological reinterpretation leading to that same end"⁷⁶ may well mold, distort, or obviate the meaning derived from those texts. While it is clear that women's insights into the study of the Bible have indeed elicited greater appreciation for the role of women in all aspects of life, particularly that of the church, "Christian feminist theology" has come to be used "almost exclusively for a movement that seeks sweeping revision in theological foundations and beliefs."⁷⁷ Evangelical groups emphasizing an egalitarian approach to women's roles in the church, such as *Christians for Biblical Equality* and the PCUSA's *Voices of Orthodox Women*, are thus to be distinguished from "feminist theology."

In the theology of Rosemary Ruether, the purported tendency of men to dualisms of nature/spirit, transcendence/immanence, soul/body, creation/redemption, male/female, good/evil only serve to subjugate and dehumanize women. Women are viewed by men as the "lower nature," the correlate of matter, body, creation, immanence, and evil, in contradistinction to the "higher nature" found in men. Seeking for a nondualistic reference for God, Ruether turns to Paul Tillich's view of God as the

“ground of being,”⁷⁸ which she refers to as the “primal Matrix” or “God/ess.” For her, God/ess is not a transcendent, personal being, but the matrix of being which underlies and supports the continual potential in humanity for new being. Because all is in unity with God/ess, all reality is equal, thus making “her account of God/ess” “only a hairsbreadth from the nature-personification Mother Goddess of the radical feminists who worship the earth and themselves.”⁷⁹ The 1993 Re-Imagining Conference in Minnesota was only a blatant example of the feminist urge to substitute pantheism, polytheism, and various forms of paganism for the God of biblical revelation.

Anything goes—except biblical monotheism, belief in one God. The broad umbrella of feminist spirituality covers all of the world’s pagan religions—and many of today’s popular distortions of Christianity. Most seekers simply pick and mix the “best parts” of several traditions. Someone might start with Buddhist meditation, then add Chinese medicine, Hindu yoga, and a Native American wilderness initiation called “Spirit Quest.”⁸⁰

“*Thealogy* (theology constructed from women’s experience) tends to speak of God in pantheistic or panentheistic terms, stresses archetypal language and the feminine divine and denies the uniqueness and deity of Jesus Christ.”⁸¹

The problem of how the incarnation of God in the man Jesus Christ can benefit women has been problematic for feminist theology, its “great ‘thorn in the flesh.’”⁸² This “problem” has led some radical feminists, such as Mary Daly, to abandon the church altogether. Other feminists have chosen to formulate clearly unorthodox christologies, “emphasizing the historical Jesus as a finite, charismatic Jewish male who gathered around him an egalitarian socio-spiritual movement; some feminist Christologies also stress the universality of the Christ-symbol as a cosmic eros or divine wisdom immanent in but transcendent of the historical Jesus, and thus capable of empowering women and other vulnerable flesh.”⁸³ The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God is thus denied and reduced to a symbol for the erotic (sexual and relational) power found in other religions or to the Sophia (wisdom) particularly found in female anatomy.⁸⁴ Letty Russell, cited by Isabel Rogers in her *Primer on Feminist Theology* (mailed to each Presbyterian [USA] church) as desiring to “wrestle with the text,” is criticized by leading evangelicals for seeing in Jesus “nothing more than God’s representative of true humanity,” her emphasis falling “not on Jesus’ uniqueness but on the ability of other humans to become representatives of true humanity like he was.”⁸⁵ Orthodox christology is thus replaced by the feminists’ divine power in all.

With the reformulation of christology as a celebration of female wholeness, sin is effectively denied, as is the need for a Savior. “For many womanists, especially Delores S. Williams, there is no saving event in Jesus’ suffering on the cross.”⁸⁶ The orthodox view of the suffering of Christ as “redemption by innocent suffering” is repudiated as another male attempt “to enforce an obediently suffering daughterhood.” Indeed, feminists say they “have

recognized in substitutionary and surrogacy constructions of atonement what [Rita Nakashima] Brock calls ‘cosmic child abuse’: the imputation to the Father of the need for the physical torture, humiliation, and sacrifice of the perfectly innocent child.”⁸⁷ The atonement is thus denied in view of the feminist “epistemology,” whereby “through the mask of the Second Person” “we know relationally; and this means erotically—with the fleshly, creative desire for connections to the others out of whose lives we come and whose future we transform,” since “as daughters of God we are siblings of all creatures, seeking for them the justice that will allow mutuality for all; in this way we also maintain the perichoresis of the First and Second Persons”; finally, the “bodily knowing” “of the incarnation thus infinitely overflows the single instance of Jesus; the Spirit was becoming flesh before and will be forever after him.” “These relations become christological—indeed ‘atoning’—only as they become the subject of mutual attention.”⁸⁸

“Feminist theology” is, by its own admission, a “polyglossia of women’s Christianities,”⁸⁹ i.e., a Babel of female reconstructions of how to understand the Creator, self and society. Berit Kjos rightly views it in terms of Rom. 1:18-32, showing how the feminist urge to “suppress the truth by their wickedness” and their failure to glorify God as he is “clearly seen,” has resulted in their thinking having become futile, their foolish hearts darkened, and professing to be wise they have become as fools, exchanging the glory of the immortal God for creaturely gods and the lusts of the flesh.⁹⁰ By substituting a panentheistic oneness of the Triune God as the focus of its worship, radical feminist spirituality denies every fundamental Christian doctrine. It distorts the identity of the one true God, and rejects the Incarnation and Atonement. It elevates women’s experience over revelation, casting aside the authority of Scripture and pulling from it only that which affirms women’s experience and mythic base. Finally, the Re-Imagining rituals denigrate the person and work of Jesus Christ by denying His deity and scoffing at the cross.⁹¹

Questions for those alluding to black or feminist theology:

1. Does God have characteristics and/or preferences for a particular race or gender? Black and feminist theology seem to think God favors them, because they have experienced oppression, whereas orthodoxy says God is “a most pure spirit, without body, parts, or passions” who “hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto” (Westminster Confession [BC 6.011, 18]).
2. How do you know God, through Scripture or personal experience? Black and feminist theology place strong emphasis on knowing God through praxis, personal experience of oppression, whereas orthodoxy says, “the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him” (Shorter Catechism [BC7.002]).
3. Is Jesus the only begotten Son of the Father, the unique

incarnation of God in human being for the purpose of revealing God to us? (Cf. BC 4.029-36.) Black and feminist theology discount Christ as the unique incarnation of God, whereas orthodoxy says, “Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah” and “we are not now to look for any other” (2nd Helvetic Confession [BC 5.077]).

4. What was the reason for Jesus’ death on the cross? Are humans alienated from God and one another apart from personal faith in Jesus’ once-for-all atoning work on the cross? Is there any other way to come unto God except through faith and obedience to Jesus? Black and feminist theology emphasize relief from oppression as salvation, accomplished through political and even revolutionary means, whereas orthodoxy says God’s righteous judgment stands over all for sin, that “no mere creature can bear the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin and redeem others from it,” and that only God incarnate in Christ can save sinners, so that as a man “he should make reparation for sin” and “so that by the power of his divinity he might bear as a man the burden of God’s wrath, and recover for us and restore to us righteousness and life” (Heidelberg Catechism [BC 4.012, 16-17]).

The Deepening of Immanence: Process Theology and Openness Theology

The previous allusions to panentheism, as well as many other facets found in feminist theology, derive from process theology. Process theology is a twentieth-century adaptation of the process philosophy formulated by Alfred North Whitehead in his *Process and Reality* (1929) and subsequently refined most notably by Charles Hartshorne. Whitehead’s chief aim was to reestablish the importance of metaphysics in conjunction with the prevailing scientific worldview, to develop a universal cosmology by which some of the main ideas of absolute idealism are transformed into an experiential realism. In the preface to *Process and Reality*, Whitehead states his main theme, “the becoming, the being, and the relatedness of ‘actual entities.’” There is, he goes on to say, a continuum in the becoming of these entities:

‘Actual entities’—also termed ‘actual occasions’—are the final things of which the world is made up. . . . They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.⁹²

Actual entities are not permanently enduring things, but “drops of experience.” Actual entities or occasions are not static things, but rather momentary events in a series in which each successive entity or occasion creatively determines itself as it responds, favorably or negatively, to a previous state in the lure of possibility and enjoyment. Each occasion is thus free to accept or reject the “initial aim,” the

optimum combination provided by God for its own enjoyment and the enhancement of others. Although the occasion becomes something else in process and hence perishes as its momentary self, it is not lost, for its own elementary significance has also added to God’s experience and hence has achieved “objective immortality” in contributing to God.

Everything is thus in process; to be actual is to be a process. Reality is not substantial (being), but rather flux (becoming). Thus, what is actual is temporal, in time, not eternal.

Like all actual entities, God is dipolar, consisting of a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The primordial nature is the atemporal aspect of God whereby he is “the absolute wealth of potentiality,” “not before all creation, but with all creation.” “So far is he from ‘eminent reality,’ that in this abstraction he is ‘deficiently actual,’” for “his feelings are only conceptual” and “devoid of consciousness.” This would seem to be a very limited state to serve as “the base of things,” since “the conceptual feelings, which compose his primordial nature” appear to have little urge or direction as “only conceptual” and “devoid of consciousness.” Notwithstanding, this nature, according to Whitehead, “is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire,” and “the principle of concretion” “whereby there is initiated a definite outcome from a situation otherwise riddled with ambiguity” as each actual occasion responds to the processive becoming of and in the world.⁹³

God’s consequent nature, on the other hand, is the conscious and temporal aspect of God which receives all that is actualized in the world and preserves it without loss in the immediacy of his own life. “Thus, by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God’s nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God.” As God “shares with every new creation its actual world” he also “saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life.” “The consequent nature of God is his judgment on the world,” “the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved.”⁹⁴ From this, Whitehead believes several antitheses between God and the world are resolved:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the World creates God.⁹⁵

Thus, all is in God (all [Greek, *pan*] + in [*en*] + God [*theos*] = panentheism), though all is not God (pantheism). “The

limitation of God is his goodness,” by which he overcomes evil through persuasive love, not dominating power.

He provides the ideal consequent, as a factor saving the world from the self-destruction of evil. The power by which God sustains the world is the power of himself as the ideal. He adds himself to the actual ground from which every creative act takes its rise. The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself.⁹⁶

By the sheer power of his persuasive love which runs through all things disclosing to them their own greatness, God is said to transform evil into good by the ideal vision of himself.

Whitehead’s vision had little interest in organized religion, specifically Christianity, save to repudiate the idea of God as distinct from the world, sovereign over it and sufficient in himself. Whitehead thought to find in Jesus an archetypal embodiment of God’s persuasive and transforming love, but not the unique incarnation of God. These basic ideas remain in those who have employed process philosophy in their reconstruction of Christianity.

Process theology insists that, if the world is dynamic and inter-related, God must be too. Here is evidenced a danger of natural theology, of surmising that God must be as the observed world. While traditional theology speaks of creation as the natural revelation of God, clearly revealing “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom. 1:20), this is not to say that God can be known by sinful humanity simply on the basis of that natural revelation. He needs the spectacles of Scripture, in Calvin’s analogy, to see clearly who God is and how to be reconciled to him. Rather than viewing God through the lens of Scripture, however, process theologians view him through the lens of a philosophy that is in numerous ways antithetical to biblical revelation.

Process theology rejects the notion of God’s control of the world, seeing instead an interdependence of God and the world. God did not create *ex nihilo*, as traditional theology affirms, since that would mean God is an absolute controller. Rather, process theology maintains God *creates* (present tense) out of the chaos of low-grade actual occasions. Evil is thus necessary since the unconstrained choice to receive or reject the divine aim among all things is necessary. Since, however, God is not completely in control, the divine love is not contradicted by the evil in the world. God is the source of order and novelty in the world and in his love launches out in risks, not knowing what may result. God’s omniscience is redefined as his knowledge of all that is knowable at a particular time. He influences the world but is also influenced by the world.

God is thus essentially love, ceaselessly working toward the most widely-shared goal. He is not a cosmic moralist laying down laws that must be obeyed and he is not a controlling power with a predetermined plan who will have his way in the end. Instead, he is the “inescapable energy which moves through all things.” Thus, incarnation occurs in all, though supremely in Jesus. Process theologian Norman Pittenger is

bold to say, “Once we give up as incredible the Greek idea that a god came down to walk on earth,” there are two possibilities with regard to Jesus.⁹⁷ In Christ the energizing of God reaches its climactic stage; this possibility of course presupposes that there is in all the working of God, while in those who most respond there is a more intensive working until it was actually “clinched” in the man Jesus. Another possibility is that human nature is in essence moving toward the realization of the potential divinity inherent in it; this realization occurs when, in Jesus, there is the perfection of human nature which is by definition divine. Pittenger opts for the first option. Jesus in his full humanity responded to the “subjective aim” of God in such a way as to become a vehicle for the Word. His human life was so attuned to God’s will that in him the life of God was lived among humanity. According to Pittenger, any theology which widens the gulf between Jesus and other men is heretical and any ideas of the “finality” of Jesus would need careful re-statement to be acceptable to process theology.⁹⁸

Sin is redefined in terms of individualism, the failure to follow the “subjective aim” of society. Atonement is turning from self-will to God, a process which “takes time.” Jesus is merely a moral exemplar of the life attuned to God which is possible for all. Meanwhile, God suffers with humanity, urging it and luring it on in love toward a result he cannot know but only hopes to achieve with humanity’s aid.⁹⁹

Questions to ask of someone alluding to process theology:

1. In view of the Presbyterian Church’s “central affirmation of God’s sovereignty” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0500a.), how do you understand God and his relationship to the world? Is he sufficient in his triune self or dependent on the world for the realization of himself? Is God “the Almighty” (repeatedly from Gen. 17:1 to Rev. 21:22)? Can he change? Is he less than perfect? Is he simple or dipolar? Process theology says God and the world are interdependent, God is not almighty (except perhaps in love), that he is not perfect, and that he is not simple, but rather composed of two poles or parts (dipolar), whereas orthodoxy says, God is “in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty; knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Larger Catechism [BC 7.117]).

2. Reformed theology is historically noted for emphasizing God’s sovereign decree in predestination. Does God know the future, having planned “whatsoever comes to pass,” or is his plan contingent on what he has foreseen as future, or does God not know the future at all? Process theology says God does not know the future or control it in any way, whereas orthodoxy says that, “although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions”; rather, “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (Westminster Confession [BC 6.014-15]).

3. Is Jesus simply a model of the incarnation of God possible to all or the unique incarnation of God in humanity? Can anyone be saved apart from his cross? Process theology says the incarnation of God is possible to all and that salvation is based on following the love exemplified in Jesus, whereas orthodoxy says, “Christ alone is God’s own eternal Son, whereas we are accepted for his sake as children of God by grace”; he was called *Jesus* “because he saves us from our sins, and because salvation is to be sought or found in no other” (Heidelberg Catechism [BC 4.029, 33]).

The Openness of God

Evangelical theologians are presently debating a view that is in many ways similar to process theology, yet claims a more biblical basis. This “openness theology” (also called “free-will theism”) derives its name from the 1994 book *The Openness of God*, written by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, and William Hasker. In that book, the contributors “talk of God’s relation to the world in dynamic rather than static terms.”¹⁰⁰

The similarities between openness theology and process theology are widespread, leading former process theologian and now evangelical Royce Gruenler to say, “Openness talks the same lingo, though openness theologians try to work out of a more biblical base. They say God, of his own will, has given up his ability to see the future so that he might have genuine relations with us.”¹⁰¹ But therein is also a difference, for while process theologians say God is *not* sovereign and in control of the world (and thus did not create the world as an act of power out of nothing), openness theologians acknowledge “the triune God of love has, in almighty power, created all that is and is sovereign over all,” but in his freedom and desire to enter into relations of love with humanity has “decided to make some of his actions contingent upon our requests and actions” and “has chosen to exercise general rather than meticulous providence, allowing space for us to operate and for God to be creative and resourceful in working with us.”¹⁰² For openness theologians, then, God’s self-limitation is voluntary and based on his own decision, not inherent and part of his nature as in process theology. Contrary to process theology, openness theology affirms God is ontologically distinct from creation; “the problem in process theism seems to be the fact that it requires us to view the world as necessary to God, with its implication that God is not free in creation but necessarily tied to a world.”¹⁰³

Although openness thought confesses God’s ontological independence from the world, it also admits he is “dependent on the world in certain respects.”¹⁰⁴ Here it seems to verge perilously close to process thought. Pinnock denies the self-sufficiency of God, saying, “The Trinity points a relational ontology in which God is more like a dynamic event than a simple substance.” The idea that “God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of love and freedom,” he believes, is “the very antithesis of self-sufficiency.”¹⁰⁵ If, then, God is not sufficient in his triune self, he would seem to

require creation to be “sufficient,” as in process thought. Sanders’ questioning of God’s simplicity¹⁰⁶ also suggests a dipolarity in God. Although openness thinkers contend “God is unchanging in nature and essence but not in experience, knowledge and action,” this hardly seems to follow. How can it be said that God is “consistently reliable and loving and can be depended on completely”¹⁰⁷ when humanity has the power to thwart God’s will? How can it be said that “God’s moral perfection is an essential part of his nature,” so that “such a thing as being unfaithful to his promises is absolutely impossible for God,”¹⁰⁸ if what God “promises” is contingent on human consent? “Where human decision is presupposed,” Rice says, “God cannot achieve his purpose unilaterally. He requires our cooperation.”¹⁰⁹ This being so, God would not be able to “promise” anything to human beings (though it is indisputable that he does so in Scripture), for his moral perfection would be jeopardized.

In the openness reading of the Bible, God *is willing to jeopardize himself*. God is “One who takes risks and jeopardizes his own sovereignty in order to engage in historical interactions with created reality.”¹¹⁰ The dipolarity that these thinkers suggest between God’s *essence* and his *experience* appears suspect and must ultimately break down. How can God be changeless in his nature and character if his promises may be proven unreliable through human decision? God’s “moral perfection” (part of his essence) would be upset by changes in God’s experience. Furthermore, why would God “promise” anything if he cannot know the future or guarantee it by almighty power? God’s word in the end can be no authoritative than anyone else’s. If God “is flexible and does not insist on doing things his way,” why should anyone fear God or pay him heed?

According to openness thinkers, God knows only what he and his human partners have experienced together. God does not know the future *and cannot*. “God must know all things,” Pinnock says, for “ignorance would be a serious limitation.” “However, omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events,” for that would mean the future would be fixed.¹¹¹ Sanders makes a distinction between the future as partly definite (closed), such as an asteroid hitting the planet, and partly indefinite (open), those presumably involving human decision. Such a distinction breaks down rather easily, however, since all things may involve human contingency. Thus, for example, God could not predict or assure salvation through the cross, since Christ may not have been crucified at the hands of wicked men “by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23), doing “what your [God’s] power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:28). Indeed, according to openness contingency, even after Christ’s death, that plan of salvation conceivably might “not produce the anticipated results in the long run,” if, for example, God’s “moral perfection” were sufficiently jeopardized as to be rendered deficient by human influence.

Openness theology is a radicalized Arminianism, subject not only to the standard Calvinist responses found in Dort's famous TULIP, but also to most of the responses listed above for process theology.

Conclusion

In his 1990 book *Tracking the Maze*, Clark Pinnock characterized contemporary theology as “a labyrinthian maze that practically defies tracking.”

The crisis is one of identity, in which some theologians are no longer able to distinguish what is Christian truth from what is not. This creates a precarious uncertainty that exposes the Church to the danger of losing its centeredness [sic] and clear identity. The relativity is such that theology seems to be drowning in a sea of human opinions and modern trends, having lost touch with the substance and standards of the faith as historically confessed by the churches.¹¹²

Pinnock feared the very loss of the gospel at a time when the world needs it most. While changes in Pinnock’s own theology elicit serious concern, it is clearly his intention as an evangelical to maintain the historic gospel and “the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). That faith, formulated from Scripture alone, summarized in the ecumenical creeds and more specifically elucidated in the Reformed confessions, identifies the believer as truly Christian in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. That faith must “continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith” (*Book of Order G-2.0400*) and must be maintained by all who hold leadership in the church in accord with their ordination vows (G-14.0207b-d; G-14.0405b[2-4]). They are to “keep . . . the pattern of sound teaching” and “guard the good deposit that was entrusted” to them (2 Tim. 1:13-14), for it is only by watching both their doctrine and practice closely that they may hope to be saved and bring salvation to others (1 Tim. 4:16).

1. Roger Badham, “The Landscape of Twentieth-Century Theology,” in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives* (Badham, ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998) 3.
2. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th-Century Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 11-12.
3. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (transl’d from the 6th ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1933) 241-42.
4. In fairness to Barth, he does say, “the Resurrection is therefore an occurrence in history, which took place outside the gates of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30,” but then adds, “the Resurrection is not an event in history at all”; the difference apparently having to do with divine initiative, revelatory value, and historical non-verification (*ibid.*, 30).
5. *Ibid.*, 11-12. Perhaps the most telling indication of German disinterest in Reformation theology at that time is that, when Barth was made professor of theology at Göttingen in 1921, he “didn’t even have a copy of the Reformed confessions,” and “hadn’t read them” (Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994] 129).
6. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) II/2, 29-34.
7. G. C. Berkhouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956) 116.
8. Fred H. Klooster, *The Significance of Barth’s Theology: An Appraisal: With Special Reference to Election and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961) 70-71.
9. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 97-98, 295.
10. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 131-32.
11. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) I/2, 544.
12. *Ibid.*, 515-25.
13. Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962) 38.
14. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 158.
15. Timothy J. Gorringe, *Karl Barth Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 284.
16. *Ibid.*, 283; Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962).
17. Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000) 2.
18. *Ibid.*, 7.
19. Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).
20. Pannenberg, Redemptive Event and History,” *Basic Questions in Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 15.
21. Pannenberg, *Metaphysics & the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) 94.
22. *Ibid.*, 96, 104.
23. Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 193.
24. *Ibid.*, 99.
25. *Ibid.*, 136.
26. *Ibid.*, 137.
27. *Ibid.*, 136.
28. *Ibid.*, 364; emphasis and parenthetic remarks added.
29. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, vi, 1.
30. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 16.
31. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 122.
32. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 173.
33. Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 49.
34. Moltmann, “Die Kategorie *Novum* in der christlichen Theologie,” in Moltmann, *Perspektiven der Theologie* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1968) 186.
35. Cf. Randall E. Otto, “Moltmann and the Anti-Monotheism Movement,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, forthcoming.
36. John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 118-19.
37. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 406-7.
38. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 250
39. Ronald G. Smith, *Secular Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 192.
40. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 247.
41. *Ibid.*, 249.
42. *Ibid.*, 256.

43. Moltmann, "Antwort auf die Kritik der Theologie der Hoffnung," in Wolf-Dieter Marsch, ed., *Diskussion über die "Theologie der Hoffnung" von Jürgen Moltmann* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1967) 215.
44. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 119.
45. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 207.
46. Paul Ricoeur, "Der gekreuzigte Gott," in Michael Welker, ed., *Diskussion über Jürgen Moltmanns Buch "der gekreuzigte Gott"* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1979) 24.
47. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 170.
48. Ibid., 173.
49. Carl Braaten, *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamics of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 83.
50. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 44.
51. Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, 59.
52. For more on Moltmann, cf. Randall E. Otto, *The God of Hope: The Trinitarian Vision of Jürgen Moltmann* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).
53. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1984) 24.
54. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 8. Much of this section appeared in my review of Vanhoozer's book in *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992):202-204.
55. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, 107.
56. Ibid., 117.
57. Ibid., 132.
58. Ibid., 139.
59. Ibid., 208.
60. Ibid., 288.
61. Ibid., 263.
62. Ibid., 225.
63. Ibid., 284-85.
64. Ricoeur is not only a mentor of Moltmann, but also an ardent admirer: "For my part I have been very much taken with—I should say, won over by—the eschatological interpretation that Jürgen Moltmann gives to the Christian kerygma in his work *The Theology of Hope*" (Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* [ed. Lewis S. Mudge; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] 157).
65. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, 284.
66. José Miguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge of Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976) 8.
67. The distinctions between liberation and political theology are fuzzy. Thus, for example, the entries "liberation theology" and "political theology" in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) both allude to black and feminist theologies as forms of each type of theology, though the article on "liberation theology" does not mention "political theology," and vice versa. While both liberation and political theologies criticize structures of domination and injustice, it might be best to see liberation theology as the *subjective* application of this critical theology *to the oppressed* and to see political theology as the *objective* application of this critical theology *to the oppressors*.
68. "Statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen, June 13, 1969," in Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 101.
69. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury, 1969) 120.
70. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) 65.
71. Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 207.
72. Emilie M. Townes, "Womanist Theology," *Introduction to Christian Theology*, 214.
73. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Mujerista Theology: A Challenge to Traditional Theology," *Introduction to Christian Theology*, 237.
74. Ibid., 238.
75. Ibid., 243.
76. Rogers, *Toward a Liberating Faith: A Primer on Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Women's Ministry Program Area, 1999) 6.
77. Olson and Grenz, *20th Century Theology*, 226.
78. In my article "The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Paul Tillich," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990):303-323, I argue that Tillich's view of God, adapted from the idealist philosophy of F. W. J. von Schelling, is the non-existent idea of absolute freedom which is humanity's ultimate concern.
79. Olson and Grenz, *20th Century Theology*, 233.
80. Berit Kjos, "From Father God to Mother Earth: The Effect of Deconstructing Christian Faith on Sexuality," *Theology Matters* 3 (Sep/Oct, 1997):3.
81. Donna F. G. Hailson and Karenlynne Gerber, "Cooking Up Gotterdamerung: Radical Feminist Worship Substitutes Self for God," *Theology Matters* 4 (July/Aug 1998):3.
82. Keller, "Feminist Trinitarian Epistemology," *Introduction to Christian Theology*, 230.
83. Ibid., 231.
84. Although Keller states that in such a "christology of erotic power" "eros is "not in the genital but in the cosmic sense," so that "we know relationally," meaning "erotically," (ibid., 231), it is clear that there is strong emphasis in the radical feminist reconstruction of Christianity on the power latent in the female genitalia. Thus, in "Cooking Up Gotterdamerung," Hailson and Gerber describe how in the Re-Imagining liturgy the female Sophia as God is linked to the "milk of our breasts" and "the nectar between our thighs" (p. 7).
85. Olson and Grenz, *20th Century Theology*, 233.
86. Cone, "Black Theology in American Religion," *Introduction to Christian Theology*, 208.
87. Keller, "Feminist Trinitarian Epistemology," 231.
88. Ibid., 231. Keller's use of "perichoresis," the mutual being-in-the-other of the three persons of the Trinity, is another instance of the abuse of this important term in recent theology; see Randall E. Otto, "The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, forthcoming.
89. Keller, "Feminist Trinitarian Epistemology," 231.
90. Kjos, "From Father God to Mother Earth," 8.
91. Hailson and Gerber, "Cooking Up Gotterdamerung," 7.
92. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition* (ed. by David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne; New York: Free Press, 1978)
18. "Final" here the sense of "fundamental," not concluding.
93. Ibid., 343-45.
94. Ibid., 345-46.
95. Ibid., 348.
96. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1954) 147-49.
97. Pittenger, *God in Process* (London: SCM, 1967) 22-23.
98. Ibid., 33; *Process Thought and Christian Faith*, 73.
99. It should be noted that, while process theology strongly emphasizes the suffering of God with the world, the idea of God's ability to suffer is *not* tied to process theism. Alister McGrath notes that, "in the late twentieth century, it has become 'the new

- orthodoxy' to speak of a suffering God," though he alludes to Moltmann as the chief proponent (*Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997] 251). The implications of the suffering of God are not sufficiently recognized by those who advocate it. Cf. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), who explains that the impassibility of God is what makes both possible and coherent the incarnation of the Son in Jesus, so that God experiences and overcomes human suffering as a human being. He argues that a God who simply suffers along with humans is of dubious comfort, being in as much or more trouble than humans, and is of doubtful existence at all, since he is of the same order of being that humans are and not transcendent.
100. Rice, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) 15.
101. Wendy M. Zoba, "God at Risk: A former process theologian says a 30-percent God is not worth worshiping," *Christianity Today* 45 (Mar 5, 2001):57.
102. John Sanders, "Does God Know Your Next Move: Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders debate openness theology," *Christianity Today* 45 (May 21, 2001):40.
103. Pinnock, *Openness of God*, 108-9.
104. Rice, *Openness of God*, 16.
105. Pinnock, *Openness of God*, 108.
106. Cf. Sanders, *Openness of God*, 79.
107. Pinnock, *Openness of God*, 118.
108. Hasker, *Openness of God*, 135.
109. Rice, *Openness of God*, 56.
110. Pinnock, *Openness of God*, 123.
111. Ibid., 121.
112. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) ix.

**Theology Matters Needs Your Support
Consider making a donation today to:**

Theology Matters, P. O. Box 10249,
Blacksburg, VA 24062

Shedding Biblical Light on Presbyterian Women Bible Studies

For well over a decade, Dr. Paul Eckel has prepared Bible studies supporting and amplifying the annual Horizons material. This year's study is called *Esther's Feast*.

With sound scholarship, Dr. Eckel explores the Hebrew text of Esther, savoring in the process its literary charm, its irony and suspense, and even its considerable humor. He then with personal insight lifts out relevant themes raised by each chapter of Esther—themes to which the New Testament bears clear and unmistakable witness.

In this way the integrity of the Old Testament text is honored and retained. At the same time nurture is provided for the Christian community through the light born by the New Testament.

Forty years of pastoral service in the PCUSA coupled with passionate urgency for the faithful interpretation of the biblical text has made Dr. Eckel's annual studies sought after across the country. His resources on Esther are available on audio tape, as well as, printed transcript. A single complimentary audio tape of last year's lesson will be sent to you upon request along with a brochure describing this year's study.

Contact: Renewal Ministries Foundation
P. O. Box 2928, Sarasota FL 34230 (941) 351-5093,
fax (941) 351-3059, email pjeckel@aol.com