

HELLENISTIC OR HEBREW? OPEN THEISM AND REFORMED THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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The goal of this paper is to contrast Reformed theological method with that of open theism, in an effort to demonstrate that it is here, at the beginning, where the two theologies diverge. We will attempt this by briefly analyzing the assumption that classical theology is “Hellenistic” rather than biblical, marking out the key features of Reformed method, and comparing and contrasting this method with open theism. We will limit our scope to John Sanders’s *The God Who Risks* and Clark Pinnock’s *Most Moved Mover*.¹

I. HELLENISTIC OR HEBREW?

The late nineteenth-century historical theologian Adolf von Harnack advanced his thesis that nearly everything we regard as Christian “orthodoxy”—“the Catholic element”—is in fact the result of “the acute Hellenization of the church.”² Harnack could apparently relativize every period but his own, as the earliest and therefore most authentic elements of Christianity were curiously well-suited to the dynamic, Hegelian worldview of *fin-de-siècle* intellectual life in Germany.

But long before Harnack, the Socinians, according to Genevan theologian Francis Turretin, reproached classical theism on the same basis,

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¹ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). Cf. Clark Pinnock, “Theological Method,” in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard J. Erickson* (ed. David S. Dockery; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998) 197–208.

² Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, translated from the third German edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1902) 48–60. A similar tack may be discerned in the Arian attack on the doctrines of the Trinity and deity of Christ. On the basis of a literalistic reading of Prov 8:22–23 (Wisdom personified speaking: “The Lord created me” and “before the ages established me”), Arius denied the Trinity of God and the deity of Christ. But, as Pelikan notes, it was exegesis “in the light of a particular set of theological a prioris which produced the Arian doctrine of Christ as creature” (*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* [100–600] [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971] 194). Among those presuppositions was the mathematical oneness of God. Although this was itself a presupposition of his neo-Platonism, many modern historical theologians have made Arianism into “a final, mighty upheaval’ of an angel Christology that had come down from late Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism and was making its last stand ‘against the new, hellenized christology,’” although Pelikan rightly judges that this characterization is unsupported (*ibid.* 198).

namely, that “the whole doctrine is metaphysical” rather than biblical.³ In response, Turretin writes, “The necessity of the immutability we ascribe to God does not infer Stoic fate,” since it neither imposes an internal necessity upon God nor interferes “with the liberty and contingency of things.”⁴ With Hegel’s ghost looking over his shoulder, Harnack argued that traditional theism represented a static Stoic worldview, while the apocalyptic religion of the early Jewish and Christian believers reflected values strikingly familiar in modern society: individualism, enthusiasm, and a direct, unmediated experience with God.⁵

This thesis has underwritten a century of modern theology, not only in neo-Protestantism, but in neo-orthodoxy and in the version of the “biblical theology” movement identified especially with G. E. Wright. According to Wright, the God of systematic theology was the deity of static order, while the God of biblical theology was always on the move.⁶ But the twentieth century, especially through the work of Barth and Brunner, also witnessed the rehabilitation of the Reformers in this respect, shifting the blame for “Hellenistic” theology to their systematizing successors instead.⁷

More recently, however, this thesis has been unraveling. On the biblical-theological side, James Barr led the way to its demise,⁸ and subsequent re-

³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1 (trans. George M. Giger; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992) 191.

⁴ *Ibid.* 205–6.

⁵ “The attempts at deducing the genesis of the Church’s doctrinal system from the theology of Paul” or the analogy of Scripture, Harnack was convinced, “will always miscarry; for they fail to note that to the most important premises of the Catholic doctrine of faith belongs an element which we cannot recognise as dominant in the New Testament, viz., the Hellenic spirit” (*History of Dogma* 48). In the beginning, the church possessed a “sure consciousness of an immediate possession of the Divine Spirit, and the hope of the future conquering the present; individual piety conscious of itself and sovereign, living in the future world, recognizing no external authority and no external barriers” (*ibid.* 49).

⁶ G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM, 1952). He speaks of “propositional dogmatics, the systematic presentation of abstract propositions or beliefs about God, man and salvation. The churches retain and encourage this conception in their liturgy and creeds. For example, every elder, deacon, commissioned church worker and minister in the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. is required to affirm when he or she is ordained that the confession of faith of that church contains ‘the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.’ But does the Bible contain a *system* of doctrine?” (p. 35). Therefore, “Biblical theology cannot be analyzed after the manner of propositional dogmatics because it rests on a living, changing, ever expanding and contracting attitude toward historical events” (p. 81). It is preferred to “the rubrics of systematic theology in the customary static and abstract form: i.e., the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of redemption, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Church, etc.” (p. 111).

⁷ This was the working assumption of neo-orthodoxy (particularly evident in Brunner and Barth), in its attempt to rescue the Reformers while eschewing the systems of their successors. On the Reformed side, it is the controlling presupposition of T. F. Torrance, James B. Torrance, Michael Jinkins, Jack Rogers, B. A. Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, and others. It has proved so effective rhetorically that even many conservatives have assumed it in their work.

⁸ James Barr, “The Old Testament and the New Crisis of Biblical Authority,” *Interpretation* 25 (1971) 24–40; cf. *idem*, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) and *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM, 1962).

search has raised serious questions about its viability: in relation to Jesus (Hebrew) vs. Paul (Greek)⁹ and the Reformers vs. the Protestant scholastics.¹⁰

In his chapter, "Overcoming a Pagan Influence," Clark Pinnock takes this well-traveled road, but with the entire classical tradition from the Church fathers to current orthodoxy dismissed in one stroke as hopelessly trapped in ancient paganism.¹¹ This does not keep Pinnock, any more than Harnack, from reading Scripture through the lens of modern thought, especially Hegel, in addition to Teilhard and Whitehead, a debt that Pinnock readily identifies. But in this case the philosophical debt is evidently justified, since "modern culture . . . is closer to the biblical view than classical theism."¹² Pinnock gives the impression in this book and elsewhere that the detection of unintended philosophical influence from the quarter of ancient philosophy disqualifies a theological model, while his own explicit dependence on modern philosophical trends is greeted practically as *praeparatio evangelica*. But Pinnock, Sanders, and their colleagues have yet to produce new evidence that might reopen this now widely discredited thesis.

II. SPEAKING OF GOD: REFORMED THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Heinrich Heppé started the rumor that predestination was the central thesis of Calvin and Calvinism.¹³ However, this has been refuted by close

⁹ Against the application of the Harnack thesis to the so-called "Jesus vs. Paul" antithesis, see the recent collection, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

¹⁰ For the criticism of the Luther/Calvin vs. Lutheranism/Calvinism version, see particularly Richard Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995) 345–75 and 31 (1996) 125–60; cf. Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (2 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1970–72). Articles and monographs by Willem van Assalt, David Steinmetz, Susan Schreiner, Irena Backus, Robert Kolb, among others, have contributed significantly to this field.

¹¹ First, Pinnock does not seem to grant that in the Hellenistic world are many mansions: not only Parmenidean *stasis*, but Heraclitean *flux*. To reduce Hellenism to the Stoics and Plato is to ignore the fact that even Hegel *et al.* appealed to important streams of Greek thought (especially Aristotle, oddly enough). As we will see in this paper, reductionism is a glaring weakness of many aspects of the open theism proposal. Second, the early Reformed tradition has usually related to the classical theological tradition in a sympathetically critical manner, suspicious of the Stoicism of Justin Martyr and Origen, the neo-Platonism of Augustine, the Aristotelianism (alleged and real) of Aquinas, late medieval nominalism, and the rise of rationalism evident in Socinianism. This suspicion has been just beneath the surface throughout the movement's career, as is evident in the works not only of the scholastics but of their British and Continental heirs. C. Van Til, for example, in *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969) 118–19, is sharply critical of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine. He is able to show that, while Augustine was "in some measure subject to the principles of Platonism and particularly neo-Platonism," his writings display an irreducibly biblical interest. So Van Til can critique Augustine's "rationalist-irrationalist" dialectic (dependent on neo-Platonism) while affirming the major thrust of his work as a distinctively Christian project.

¹² Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in Clark Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 24.

¹³ Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics* (trans. G. T. Thompson; rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

attention to the primary sources, both Calvin and the Reformed scholastics.¹⁴ From the beginning, with Melancthon and Bullinger leading the way, covenant theology emerged as the very warp and woof of Reformed theology.¹⁵ As we will see below, Calvin warned against speculating concerning eternal predestination, and the Reformed tradition reflects this caution, emphasizing the dynamic relationship and even partnership that obtains in the history of redemption through God's covenantal dealings. Unlike Barth's overemphasis on divine transcendence, Reformed orthodoxy understood the Creator-creature relationship in covenantal terms even at the ontological level, which implied similarity as well as dissimilarity.¹⁶ As a result, it advocated its own version of the doctrine of analogy. But before we describe that position, let us briefly explain the biblical assumptions upon which it rests.

1. *The Creator-creature relationship.* Contrary to popular caricature, Reformed scholasticism championed an anti-speculative and anti-rationalistic theological method based on the Creator-creature distinction. Turretin, for example, speaks for the whole tradition when he states,

But when God is set forth as the object of theology, he is not to be regarded simply as God in himself . . . , but as revealed . . . Nor is he to be considered exclusively under the relation of deity (according to the opinion of Thomas Aquinas and many Scholastics after him, for in this manner the knowledge of him could not be saving but deadly to sinners), but as he is our God (i.e., covenanted in Christ as he has revealed himself to us in his word) . . .¹⁷

Even *sola scriptura* is not some abstract notion of authority imposed on theology from without, but is the recognition that, as the Reformers so clearly warned, the knowledge of God in his blinding majesty is deadly, while the knowledge of God in his condescending self-revelation is saving. Turretin elaborates on the contrasting approaches:

¹⁴ Both the notion of a "central dogma" (predestination) and the widely influential thesis of Perry Miller have been ably refuted by Richard Muller, in the article cited above ("Calvin and the 'Calvinists'") and also in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) and *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

¹⁵ See, for instance, Heinrich Bullinger, *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (1534); cf. Philip Melancthon, *Loci communes* (1543), where the covenant concept repeatedly appears as a unifying factor.

¹⁶ Analogy and therefore similarity as well as dissimilarity are written into the very fabric of creaturehood. See, for instance, Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), especially 9–14, although it is a theme running throughout this work and Van Til's thought generally. "Man is created in God's image. He is therefore like God in everything in which a creature can be like God. He is like God in that he too is a personality." On the other hand, "Man can never in any sense outgrow his creaturehood . . . He is like God, to be sure, but always on a creaturely scale. He can never be like God in God's aseity, immutability, infinity and unity." Created as a prophet "to interpret this world" and to both dedicate the world to God (priest) and rule over it for him (king), the fall was at least in part the result of "a false ideal of knowledge." "Man made for himself the ideal of absolute comprehension in knowledge . . . Man confused finitude with sin. Thus he commingled the metaphysical and the ethical aspects of reality" (pp. 13–15).

¹⁷ Turretin, *Institutes* 16.

Thus although theology treats of the same things with metaphysics, physics and ethics, yet the mode of considering them is far different. It treats of God not like metaphysics as a being or as he can be known from the light of nature, but as the Creator and Redeemer made known by revelation . . . For theology treats of God and his infinite perfections, not as knowing them in an infinite but in a finite manner; nor absolutely as much as they can be known in themselves, but as much as he has been pleased to reveal them.¹⁸

In fact, Turretin offers a typical Reformed complaint concerning those such “as Justin Martyr, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and the Scholastics, whose system is philosophical rather than theological since it depends more upon the reasonings of Aristotle and the other philosophers than upon the testimonies of the prophets and apostles . . . The Socinians of this day strike against the same rock, placing philosophy in the citadel as the foundation of faith and interpreter of Scripture.”¹⁹

If Scripture’s primacy is an implication of the Creator-creature distinction, what does Scripture say of this relationship? First, it is a relationship of communion as well as difference.²⁰ This is why covenant and not predestination is the organizing principle. As B. B. Warfield describes it, “The architectonic principle of the Westminster Confession is supplied by the schematization of Federal [covenant] theology, which had obtained by this time in Britain, as on the Continent, a dominant position as the most commodious mode of presenting the corpus of Reformed doctrine.”²¹ We reach the doctrine of analogy from the Creator-creature relationship by way of four other sub-categories.

The first such category is that of “transcendence and immanence.” Eschewing an abstract and static notion of these categories, which always ends up affirming some version of hyper-transcendence or hyper-immanence, Reformed theology insists that these can only be understood as analogies for non-metaphysical notions.²²

The second corollary is the “hidden-revealed” distinction. “Truly you are a God who hides yourself . . .” (Isa 45:15). We are reminded in Deuteronomy, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may

¹⁸ Ibid. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid. 44.

²⁰ Open theists sometimes appeal to Karl Barth’s hyper-transcendence (*viz.*, God as “wholly other”), as if the central dogma of Christianity is “the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man.” But Barth’s controversial account is hardly representative of the Reformed tradition—not only on the conservative side, but illustrated in the well-known debate with Emil Brunner over natural or general revelation.

²¹ B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931) 56. Thus it is odd to claim, as Pinnock does (*Most Moved Mover* 75–77), that when Reformed theologians turn to such notions as covenant to express the dynamic relationship, they are simply jumping on the open theist’s bandwagon.

²² God is clearly not spatially separated from us, since he is omnipresent. The context of Eccl 5:2—“For God is in heaven, and you are on earth”—indicates that we are not dealing here with univocal description as to God’s whereabouts, but to a reminder that God is not a creature. “Far” and “near” in Scripture always refer either to the Creator-creature distinction, underscoring God’s independence, or to the ethical distance between Yahweh’s righteousness and the sinfulness of his fallen creatures.

do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). God has his own independent intratrinitarian life apart from the creation, and this life is hidden from view and unknowable to creatures. Yet God has condescended not only to create and enter into a personal relationship with creatures, but to reveal his character in so far as it pleases him and benefits us. It does not benefit us to know the secret essence of God or probe the hiddenness of his Trinitarian life, but it does benefit us to know that God the Creator is also our Redeemer in Jesus Christ.

The third corollary is the distinction between the eternal decree and its temporal (redemptive-historical) execution.²³ This is why Calvin, like other Reformers, insisted we were not to look for our election in the "naked God" (i.e. his hidden decree), but in Christ (i.e. the revealed promise of the gospel in the covenant of grace embraced by faith). Probing God's secret predestination is like entering a "labyrinth" from which we will never escape.²⁴ Those who seek God out in his hidden decree will eventually come to believe in a god of arbitrary freedom (the *potentia Dei absoluta*), rather than the God in whom they can trust because they have his revealed promise conferred and sealed in his ordinary ministry (the *potentia Dei ordinata*). Calvin attacked the "absolute power of God" asserted by late medieval accounts of predestination precisely because they substituted speculation for concentration on God's ordained power (i.e. the covenantal promise revealed). This emphasis on the absolute freedom of God, Calvin warned, would make us little more than balls that God juggles in the air.²⁵ "Omnicausality" is explicitly rejected by Calvin.²⁶ The truth of God's eternal decree (both in providence and election) is clearly revealed in Scripture and is comforting to believers in their trials. "Yet his wonderful method of governing the universe is rightly called an abyss, because while it is hidden from us, we ought reverently to adore it."²⁷ "Meanwhile, nevertheless, a godly man will not overlook the secondary causes."²⁸

As a result of these distinctions, covenant theology therefore focuses on the dynamic outworking of God's redemptive plan in concrete history, taking very seriously the twists and turns in the road—including God's responses to human beings. But it does so without denying the clear biblical witness to the fact that God transcends these historical relationships. Tran-

²³ See Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree*. This pattern is Muller's chief concern in this volume.

²⁴ In the *Institutes* Calvin observes that the hiddenness of God's decree to us makes it not entirely wrong to think of certain events as "fortuitous" even though they are not beyond God's foreknowledge (1.16.9).

²⁵ *Institutes* 1.17.2, see especially footnote 7: "Cf. Calvin, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione*, where he assails the 'Sorbonist dogma that ascribes to God absolute power' dissociated from justice . . . Similarly, in *Sermons on Job lxxxviii*, on Job 23:1-7: 'What the Sorbonne doctors say, that God has an absolute power, is a diabolical blasphemy which has been invented in hell' (CR XXXIV. 339f.)." Although open theism appears at times to separate God's love from his justice, Calvin will not allow that either God's love or sovereignty is unhinged from his justice.

²⁶ *Institutes* 1.17.1.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1.17.2.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 1.17.9.

scendence and immanence are not antithetical categories for us, compelling us to choose one over the other. Neither Plato nor Aristotle, Kant nor Hegel, Kierkegaard nor Cobb gives us a biblical model for either transcendence or immanence.

The final corollary we will consider is the “archetypal-ectypal” distinction, the *epistemological* corollary of the *ontological* Creator-creature distinction. Although it had been a category in medieval system, Protestant dogmatics gave particular attention to this distinction and made it essential to their method. Just as God is not merely greater in degree (“*supreme being*”), but in a class by himself (“*life in himself*,” John 5:26), his knowledge of himself and everything else is not just quantitatively but qualitatively different from that of creatures. Theologians as diverse as Carl Henry and Langdon Gilkey have had trouble accepting this, claiming that it leads to irrationalism to say that God’s knowledge of an object and our knowledge of an object are never identical at any point.²⁹ And yet affirmation of this distinction is essential if we are to maintain with Scripture that no one has ever known the mind of the Lord (Rom 11:34, where the context is predestination), that his thoughts are far above our thoughts (Isa 55:8), and that he is “above” and we are “below” (Eccl 5:2)—if, in other words, we are to truly affirm the Creator-creature distinction.

²⁹ Duns Scotus argued this point against Thomas Aquinas’s doctrine of analogy, and in the modern era it is challenged on essentially the same basis (alleged irrationality/skepticism) by Gordon Clark, Carl F. H. Henry, Ronald Nash, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders. Henry, for example, summarizes the Clark-Van Til debate over whether human and divine knowledge of the same object is quantitatively or qualitatively different, respectively. Against the doctrine of analogy, which he suggests leads to agnosticism, Henry cites Clark: “If no proposition means to man what it means to God, so that God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge do not coincide at any single point, it follows by rigorous necessity that man can have no truth at all” (cited in *God, Revelation and Authority* [Waco: Word, 1976] 2.53–54. Aquinas’s analogical method “seems therefore finally to channel into theological agnosticism. Protestant Christians are more at home with a natural theology less dependent upon Aristotelian concepts and not encumbered by the notion of analogical predication” (ibid. 115). Yet all the major dogmatic systems of Protestant orthodoxy were in fact explicit in their use of the analogical as opposed to univocal method. But Henry also misunderstands the classical doctrine of analogy: “To Thomas Aquinas, Christendom specially owes the emphasis that religious language does not state what is literally true of God but involves only analogical predication” (ibid. 3.336). Henry appears to confuse “literal” with “univocal,” while those who appeal to analogy hold that predications of certain attributes in God are literal but analogical. This approach, says Henry, is “a futile attempt to explore a middle road between univocity and equivocity.” However, “only univocal assertions protect us from equivocacy; only univocal knowledge is, therefore, genuine and authentic knowledge” (ibid. 364). Not only does an analogical approach lead to skepticism, but (according to Henry) it is basically the same thing as a symbolic theology. This would make Aquinas a precursor of Protestant liberalism. Henry appears to be encumbered by a positivist view of language and propositional assertions. Theology, for instance, “consists essentially in the repetition, combination, and systematization of the truth of revelation in its propositionally given biblical form” (ibid. 1.238). Interestingly, both a liberal theologian such as Langdon Gilkey (“Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *JR* 41 [1961] 200) and a conservative such as Carl Henry (*God, Revelation and Authority* [Waco: Word, 1976] 1.237–38) erroneously link univocity to premodern and analogy or equivocacy as modern (liberal) moves. This is to miss a rather dominant strain of theological phenomena running from the patristics to Aquinas to the Reformers and their successors.

2. *Analogy.* All of this leads us, finally, to the doctrine of analogy. When we assert certain predicates of God, based on God's own self-revelation, we use them in one of three senses: univocally, analogically or equivocally. If we say that the predicate "gracious" means exactly the same thing, whether in God or in a creature, we are using "gracious" univocally. At the other end of the spectrum, if we say that by using that predicate we are ascribing something to God whose appropriateness is unknown to us, we are using it equivocally. If, however, God is said to be "gracious" in a way that is both similar and dissimilar to creatures, we say it is analogical. For instance, when we acknowledge that God is a "person," do we really mean to say that he is a person in *exactly* the same sense as we are? When we follow Scripture in using male pronouns to refer to God, do we really believe that he is male? Unless we are willing to ascribe to God (in a univocal sense) all attributes of human personhood, predications must be analogical.

Human language cannot transcend its finitude, so when God reveals himself in human language, he draws on human analogies to lead us by the hand to himself. It is correct description, but not univocal description. As we will argue below, the univocal approach to such language almost always tends toward rationalism and the suspicion of the mystery inherent in the Creator-creature distinction. And equivocal approaches, such as those adopted in some forms of mysticism and in the wake of Kant, denying any certainty about the truth of our predications, tend toward skepticism under the guise of God's mysterious incomprehensibility.³⁰

Thus, Calvin and the Reformed do not use analogy as a fall-back strategy when they find something that does not fit their system. Rather, it is the warp and woof of their covenantal approach, a necessary implication of the Creator-creature relationship as they understand it. *All* of God's self-revelation is analogical, not just some of it. This is why Calvin speaks, for instance, of God's "lispering" or speaking "baby-talk" in his condescending mercy. Just as God comes down to us in the incarnation in order to save us who could not ascend to him, he meets us in Scripture by descending to our weakness. Thus, not only is God's transcendence affirmed, but his radical immanence as well. Transcendence and immanence become inextricably bound up with the divine drama of redemption. Revelation no less than redemption is an act of condescension and grace.³¹

³⁰ In spite of significant differences, Gordon Kaufman and Wolfhart Pannenberg illustrate the post-Kantian difficulty with accepting biblical analogies as divinely authoritative. Both appeal to divine incomprehensibility to affirm an essentially equivocal stance, although Pannenberg argues that our frankly equivocal ascriptions of praise to God for specific attributes is justified by the proleptic anticipation of revelation at the end of history. See his chapter "Analogy" in *Basic Questions in Theology* (trans. George H. Kehm; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 1.211–38. It should also be pointed out that Calvin was hardly the inventor of this idea or, for that matter, the notion of accommodation, which we find replete in the writings of the Church fathers: Chrysostom and Athanasius as well as Augustine and Ambrose. It was abundant in apophatic theology and persisted through the middle ages, despite attempts to transgress the boundary of mystery in pursuit of the *Visio Dei*. According to the Fourth Lateran Council, in all analogies between God and the creature there is always more dissimilarity than similarity.

³¹ For a brilliant treatment of this relationship, see Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Redemption* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

Those who are uncomfortable with this analogical approach frequently betray an autonomous view of knowledge.³² How can we know if the analogies fit? The assumption seems to be that unless one can stand outside of the analogy and its referent, one cannot compare the analogy for its success. Many conclude that if the predicate “good” applied to both God and Sally does not mean exactly the same thing, then we are left in skepticism (equivocity). Either rationalism or irrationalism: that is the choice that an autonomous epistemology requires. But a Reformed analogical approach insists that, because Scripture is God’s own speech in human language, the analogies that *God* selects are appropriate whether *we* know the exact fit or not. We do not need that which we cannot possibly have—namely, archetypal knowledge.³³ Because creaturely knowledge is inherently ectypal, it is essentially analogical. Univocal knowledge is reserved for the Creator and his archetypal theology. But if God authorizes the analogies, they must be accurate descriptions even though they do not provide univocal access to God’s being. Scripture is sufficient for the purposes God intended—to reconcile us to himself, not to satisfy our curiosity.

Once more, it was the Socinian and Remonstrant (Arminian) schools that strongly opposed this approach, raising reason and speculative deductions above clear scriptural statements and insisting upon univocal access to God’s being. This is further evidence that Reformed theology is far from being a rationalistic system claiming to be a reproduction of the mind of God.³⁴ In fact, although the term “pilgrim theology” (*theologia viatorum*) was employed by Hilary, it became the favorite phrase for Reformed and Lutheran systems.

To cap off this trajectory, it is necessary to add the analogy of Scripture. If all language about God, including that which we find in Scripture, is analogical, we can never rest on one analogy and “translate” it into a univocal predicate. This translation error may be done by Calvinists as well as open theists, as whenever God’s simplicity is denied in favor of either his sovereignty or his love. When this occurs, the object of theology is no longer a personal God but an abstract attribute that is now said to be God’s essence. An analogical approach, therefore, in order to work properly, must

³² Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Analogy.”

³³ Following Herman Bavinck, C. Van Til says that all revelation is not only analogical but anthropomorphic. “It is an adaptation by God to the limitations of the human creature. Man’s systematic interpretation of the revelation of God is never more than an approximation of the system of truth revealed in Scripture, and this system of truth as revealed in Scripture is itself anthropomorphic. But being anthropomorphic does not make it untrue. The Confessions of the Church pretend to be nothing more than frankly approximated statements of the inherently anthropomorphic revelation of God” (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969] 41).

³⁴ Herman Bavinck displays this anti-speculative character, asserting that “God’s being in the abstract is nowhere discussed” in Scripture. “The Hebrew word *tushiah* from the root *yashah*, to exist, to be, . . .” indicate an enduring character (Job 5:12; 6:13; 12:16; 26:3; Prov 2:7; 3:21; 8:14; Isa 28:29; Mic 6:9); ‘but in none of these passages does it signify the being of God.’ These passages give us something of God’s ‘excellencies or virtues,’ but not access to his nature. ‘Scripture nowhere discusses God’s being apart from his attributes’” (*The Doctrine of God* [trans. and ed. William Hendriksen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977] 114).

listen to the symphony of biblical analogies, knowing that none of the analogies by itself can be reduced to the whole (univocal) score.

III. OPEN THEISM: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

John Sanders offers a refreshingly fair summary of the methodological approach we have considered:

God is not knowable unless God makes himself known, and even then we do not possess a complete understanding of God. Barth goes on to say that this hiddenness is not due to the inadequacy of human language . . . and not because of any metaphysical distinction between the abstract and the sensual. Instead, the incomprehensibility of God is based on the Creator-creature distinction that comes to us from divine revelation.³⁵

As we shall see, however, open theism and classical Reformed theology differ considerably on this question, at least in practice if not always in theory. We will follow the same outline as above in our comparison and contrast.

First, open theism claims to be biblical. But where Reformed theology recognizes Scripture alone as the source of theology, while experience, reason, and tradition are treated as significant influences, open theists adopt the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, with Scripture as the first but not sole normative source.³⁶ In a previous work Pinnock reasoned, "Just as Augustine came to terms with ancient Greek thinking, so we are making peace with the culture of modernity."³⁷ Yet one would be hard-pressed to find Augustine sharing Pinnock's assessment of such direct dependence.³⁸ Pinnock writes, "As an open theist, I am interested in such authors as Hegel, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Whitehead because they make room in their thinking for ideas like change, incarnation and divine suffering. . . ."³⁹

³⁵ Sanders, *God Who Risks* 21.

³⁶ "My approach to theological method is bi-polar," Pinnock announces, which is to say, faithful to the Christian message and the contemporary world. "As Paul Tillich put it, theology ought to satisfy two basic needs: to state the truth of the Christian message and to interpret the truth for every generation." This dialectical movement ". . . is not easy to balance. . ." (*Most Moved Mover* 19). "To be more precise," Pinnock adds, "I adhere to the rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic . . . I hold the Bible to be the primary norm for theology in the midst of the other sources" (*ibid.*).

³⁷ Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in Pinnock, *Grace of God and Will of Man* 27.

³⁸ It is one thing to suggest that Augustine was influenced by Greek thought; quite another to conclude that he was taking a posture of capitulation. Whether Pinnock concedes this in his case with respect to the culture of modernity, it is certain that Augustine would not have recognized himself as treating culture as a source of theology.

³⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 142. So it is really not the case that Pinnock substitutes a frankly biblical approach for an ostensibly pagan philosophical one, but that he more explicitly draws upon secular thinking as a subordinate source. Pinnock even refers to Whitehead as a Christian, although this would have been questioned as much by Whitehead, at most a Unitarian, as by anyone. These writers treated the incarnation as an idea—an abstract, general concept. This is far, it seems to me, from the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, which is hardly an instance of a general type. It cannot be made into a general philosophical concept, whether of a Parmenidean-Kierkegaardian or Heraclitean-Hegelian form. Hegel, Teilhard, and Whitehead were as indebted to Greek thought (the Heraclitean type) as their Stoic friends were devoted to

1. *The Creator-creature distinction.* It is no secret that there are strong similarities between process thought and open theism: both process and open theists have repeatedly acknowledged these. However, they have also acknowledged important differences even in these two works that we are citing.⁴⁰ Among these differences, for instance, is the essential Creator-creature distinction.⁴¹

Yet, despite calls to trade abstract for concrete description of God, Pinnock does end up speaking of transcendence and immanence in quite abstract, static, and general terms. They appear to be timeless ideas, drawn from the familiar antitheses of ancient and modern dualism (and dualistic monism), and this often leads to false dilemmas. Either we worship a God who does not want to “control everything, but to give the creature room to exist and freedom to love,” or “. . . an all-controlling despot who can tolerate no resistance (Calvin),” giving the false impression that Calvin actually held this position attributed to him.⁴² Further, we must choose between a God who is “immobile” (a “solitary monad”) and the “Living God” who is dependent on the creation for his happiness.⁴³ But who really believes the former? That is important, since the very title of Pinnock’s book suggests that the position he is criticizing is little more than a religious gloss on Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover.” He calls it “the immobility package”.⁴⁴ But if there is no such thing, it would seem that the options are not as extreme as some would have us believe. Since Pinnock repeats this charge, a brief response will illustrate my larger point.

Clark Pinnock and his colleagues conflate immutability and immobility. But this misses a crucial step; namely, that of determining whether the tradition did in fact adopt Aristotle’s doctrine. As Richard Muller points out, “The scholastic notion of God as immobile does not translate into English as ‘immobile’—as one of the many cases of cognates not being fully convertible—but as ‘unmoved.’”⁴⁵ However much in this respect the Christian doctrine sounds similar to Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover,” the differences are greater. Since Old Princeton is often targeted as the bastion of classical theism, let us listen to its most illustrious systematician, Charles Hodge. Christians maintain that God is immutable:

Parmenides. In fact, elsewhere Pinnock draws on Justin Martyr’s formulation of the *logos* concept in his search for a universal natural theology, even though the Stoic influence is well known.

⁴⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 142–50; Sanders, *God Who Risks* 161, 190, 207, 113. See also the new collaborative volume, edited by Pinnock and John Cobb, Jr., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁴¹ Pinnock insists, “God has no need of an external world to supply experiences of relationality because God experiences it within himself apart from any world.” Creation “. . . is not something God needs but something he wants” (p. 29). There is no panentheism in his remark, “God enjoys the world; it means something to him as an expression, but it is not an essential element of his self” (p. 30).

⁴² *Ibid.* 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 78.

⁴⁵ Richard Muller, “Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism,” *WTJ* 45 (1983) 27.

[B]ut nevertheless that He is not a stagnant ocean, but an ever living, ever thinking, ever acting, and *ever suiting his action to the exigencies of his creatures, and to the accomplishment of his infinitely wise designs*. Whether we can harmonize these facts or not, is a matter of minor importance. We are constantly called upon to believe that things are, without being able to tell how they are, or even how they can be. Theologians, in their attempts to state, in philosophical language, the doctrine of the Bible on the unchangeableness of God, are apt to confound immutability with immobility. In denying that God can change, they seem to deny that He can act.⁴⁶

Immutability must not be confused with immobility, and there is unanimity here among the various Reformed dogmatics.⁴⁷

In a similar vein, Cornelius Van Til writes,

Surely in the case of Aristotle the immutability of the divine being was due to its emptiness and internal immobility. *No greater contrast is thinkable than that between the unmoved noesis noēseōs of Aristotle and the Christian God*. This appears particularly from the fact that the Bible does not hesitate to attribute all manner of activity to God. . . . Herein lies the glory of the Christian doctrine of God, that the unchangeable one is the one in control of the change of the universe.⁴⁸

Yahweh is therefore not a solitary monad preoccupied with himself, a Buddha-like figure who closes his eyes to the world in order to contemplate his own bliss. But he is also not a creature contained in and circumscribed by the reality that he has created apart from himself. Not surprisingly, the classical prohibition of univocal access to God's being is motivated by the Creator-creature distinction, while open theists have serious difficulties with this *epistemological* boundary, even though they affirm the *ontological* distinction.⁴⁹

2. *Analogy*. Analogy is ideally suited to the biblical understanding of the God-world relationship. While equivocity is a mark of hyper-transcendence

⁴⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946) 1.390–91 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Ibid. 392. Here Hodge criticizes in particular some statements of Augustine to that effect, charging that he speculated beyond the limits of exegesis. But modern theology is far more indebted to philosophical assumptions, he charges. "We must abide by the teachings of Scripture, and refuse to subordinate their authority and the intuitive convictions of our moral and religious nature to the arbitrary definitions of any philosophical system." Bavinck concurs: "The fact that God is immutable does not mean that he is inactive: immutability should not be confused with immobility" (*The Doctrine of God* [trans. William Hendriksen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951; Baker, 1977] 151).

⁴⁸ Cited by Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability and the Case for Classical Theism" 30 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Of course, the Creator-creature distinction is affirmed, but what makes it difficult right up front is that we have not yet agreed on definitions for the debate. Pinnock asserts, "All of us hold to the fundamentals of orthodox theism, e.g., the immanent Trinity, the God-world distinction, God's actions in history, the goodness, unchangeableness, omnipotence, and omniscience of God, and the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (*Most Moved Mover* 11). Yet in the same book Pinnock admits that his proposal is an alternative to "orthodox theism"; the status of the immanent/economic Trinity distinction is ambiguous, and "unchangeableness, omnipotence, and omniscience" are affirmed by Pinnock only at the cost of redefining these terms.

and its concomitant skepticism, univocity is a mark of hyper-immanence and its concomitant rationalism. An equivocal approach to religious language champions difference at the expense of similarity, while a univocal approach offers a reverse sacrifice. But analogies assume both difference and similarity. It is therefore less reductive than either univocal rationalism or equivocal irrationalism. It is not just that some Scriptures (that represent God as repenting) are treated as analogical or anthropomorphic, while others (that represent God as never-changing) are treated as univocal. All of this language is analogical, the result of God's self-condescension and accommodation. Human beings, "when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth," Calvin warned.⁵⁰ Far safer, then, to let God descend to us.⁵¹

In an ironic move for those who accuse Calvin and the tradition generally of being held hostage to reason, Pinnock and Sanders complain that such strong affirmations of divine incomprehensibility and mystery can only lead to skepticism. Scripture declares, "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike?" (Isa 46:5; 55:8–9; Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Hos 11:9). But such texts, Sanders says, "are often understood as biblical warrant for the disparagement of anthropomorphism."⁵² But does that really meet its mark? How is one *disparaging* anthropomorphism simply by treating it *as* anthropomorphic? Is it not those who demand that anthropomorphism and analogy be translated into univocal predicates who are scandalized by the former? From our perspective, Scripture is no less analogical when it says that God does not repent than when it represents him as doing just that.

Despite his incomprehensibility, God wills to enter into a relationship with his creatures. The covenant is the context in which that becomes possible. Let us turn for a moment to examples of this covenantal (analogical) discourse, particularly as touching on this debate. We will treat classes or types rather than offering exegesis of specific passages.

The obvious examples have to do with God relenting and repenting. Both, open theists contend, demonstrate that God is *not* immutable, independent or omniscient—at least as these terms have been historically understood. We know the passages, but what do we do in such instances? Occurring as they do in the dramatic narrative of God's covenant dealings with his people, we know that we are not in the realm of God's hiddenness,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ In the *Institutes*, for instance, the Genevan reformer appeals to analogy to challenge the anti-trinitarianism of some of his critics. Note the anti-speculative intent of this appeal:

Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture, we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun's body, though men's eyes daily gaze upon it? Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself (*Institutes* 1.13.21).

⁵² Sanders, *God Who Risks* 20.

“God-in-Himself,” the eternal decree of the immanent Trinity. Rather, we are in the realm of God’s revelation, “God-for-Us,” the historical outworking of that eternal plan. On one hand, we are to take seriously the dynamic relationship of covenant partners (1 Sam 15:11), yet without translating them into univocal descriptions that lead us to conclude that God does in fact change his mind (v. 29). The same is true in Mal 3:6: “For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” Neither God’s nature nor his secret plan changes, and this is why believers can be confident that “if we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13). So what changes if not his secret plans? It is his revealed plans that change: the judgment that he has warned that he will bring upon the people is averted—precisely as God had predestined before the ages. The dynamic give-and-take so obvious in the history of the covenant must be distinguished from the eternal decree that Scripture also declares as hidden in God’s unchanging and inaccessible counsel (Eph 1:4–11).

These are not two contradictory lines of proof-texts, one line pro-openness, the other pro-classical theism. Rather, there are two lines of analogy acting as guardrails to keep us on the right path. There is real change, dynamic interaction, and partnership in this covenant (*Deus revelatus pro nos*). At the same time, God is not like the human partner in that he does not repent the way the latter repents: God transcends the narrative (*Deus absconditus in se*). With Scripture, we speak on one hand of our existence after the fall in terms of not being as God intended things and yet recognize that even this is part of God’s eternal plan to display his glory. We are not denying the analogy or failing to take it seriously, but we are refusing to take it univocally. Theologians and preachers in the Reformed tradition have not had difficulty with the “repentance” passages the way open theists seem, by their troubling silence, to be burdened by the “non-repentance” passages. That may be due in part to the fact that the tradition does not reduce everything to either the eternal decree of the hidden God or the historical covenant of the revealed God.⁵³

One of the marks of a strong theory is that it is able to make sense of the greatest amount of appropriate data. Open theism has still not provided a serious exegetical account of the passages that clearly indicate that God does not change, does not repent, does not depend on the world for his happiness, and passages that do affirm God’s knowledge of and sovereignty over all contingencies of history to the last detail. On the other hand, an analogical account provides a paradigm in which both may be seriously affirmed without resolving the mystery in a false dilemma.

⁵³ Pinnock and his colleagues may not approve the Reformed account of double agency, but their repeated misrepresentation of this tradition as “omnicausality” and the elimination of human partnership in the covenant is a perennial weakness of their rhetoric. This notion of double agency is not the incursion of philosophy, but is a good and necessary inference from such numerous passages. In the familiar Joseph narrative, the same event—Joseph’s cruel treatment by his brothers—has two authors with two distinct intentions: “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good” (Gen 50:19–20). Peter offers precisely the same rationale for the crucifixion: “You with you wicked hands . . . But he was delivered up according to God’s foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23–24).

This point comes into sharper focus in open theism's treatment of the classical doctrine of divine impassibility, which it incorrectly defines as the inability to experience or feel emotion. (By the way, *passio*, in Latin, means "suffering," not "feeling" or "experiencing.") If God were exactly identical to every representation we come across in Scripture, could we not justly conclude that he is, for instance, capricious: "Kiss the Son, lest he become angry and you perish in the way, *for his wrath can flare up in an instant*" (Ps 2:12, emphasis added)? In this Psalm, God is depicted as mocking his enemies with sardonic laughter. But do we really want to ascribe this univocally to God's being rather than recognizing it as a sober comparison of a great king undisturbed by the pretenses of human power? We have yet to discover among open theists an argument in favor for God's rage being understood in the same univocal terms as his repentance.⁵⁴

Surely this dialectic play of analogies is comparable to the narrative representation of God as repenting and yet affirming, "I am not a man that I should repent" (1 Sam 15:29). Jealousy is praised in God (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24), while it is condemned in creatures (1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:20), so clearly "jealousy" cannot mean exactly the same thing in God and creatures. God is described as uprooting the Israelites "in furious anger and great wrath" (Deut 29:28), and yet "his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime" (Ps 30:5). All of these diverse analogies must be taken seriously within their specific redemptive-historical context and then interpreted in the light of the rest of Scripture. The anger that God condemns in us (Prov 29:11, 22; 22:24; 1 Cor 13:5) is different from the anger that fills him with holy wrath, whatever similarities there may be.⁵⁵ Sanders judges,

⁵⁴ Further, there is enough similarity to what we experience as love to say "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but love is obviously different in the case of the one who loves in absolute freedom than for creatures whose experience of love is always related to some form of dependence and reciprocity. This very point seems implied in the same chapter: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins . . . We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:10, 19). In other words, here God's love is the ultimate reality and human loves analogies. We will never know exactly how God's loving and creaturely loving compare, but we have seen God's love in the face of Christ, and that is sufficient for eternity. Think of the numerous passages narrating God's impatience with Israel's unfaithfulness in the wilderness, threatening to destroy them. Although God is frequently represented in narrative texts as impatient (Gen 18:22–33; Exod 32:9–14), he also passed before Moses proclaiming his name: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, *slow to anger* . . ." (Exod 34:6). "Slow to anger" is as analogical as the impatience discerned in the narrative.

⁵⁵ So are open theists consistent in their denial of impassibility? Is "impatience" in God the same as our impatience? It would appear that there are only two options. On one hand, one can say that God can just as easily be overwhelmed with impatience or vengeance as he can be with love. In this case, we can be confident that for the time being at least God has not rejected us, but we cannot be absolutely certain about tomorrow. Univocal interpretations of divine suffering cut both ways. The other interpretive strategy is to recognize that, while God is not affected or changed by creatures, expressing his interaction with creatures in redemptive history cannot help but rely on analogies that, by definition, break down. Because God is essentially good, loving, just, righteous, and merciful, and not essentially impatient and vengeful (or repentant and sorrowful), he is unlike the idolatrous projections of the human imagination. Our God is reliable. This, in fact, is the very logic of Mal 3:6: "For I am the LORD, I do not change; *therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob*" (emphasis added).

The desire not to speak about God anthropomorphically simply seems correct. After all, just about everyone takes the biblical references to the “eyes,” “arms” and “mouth” (anthropomorphisms proper) of God as metaphors for divine actions, not assertions that God has literal body parts. But some go further, claiming that the anthropopathisms (in which God is said to have emotions, plans or changes of mind) are not actually to be attributed to God.⁵⁶

First, as we have insisted, “the desire not to speak about God anthropomorphically” is far from our contention. But further, why would we make an arbitrary distinction between analogies of being and analogies of feeling? If all predicates applied to God and creatures must be regarded as analogical, that would include references to God’s sardonic laughter at his enemies in Psalm 2 or his grief at the disobedience of covenant partners. Perhaps, to attain consistency, an open theist would want to agree with Moltmann that God somehow does actually cry real tears.⁵⁷ Pinnock does in fact take this next logical step, speculating concerning God’s embodiment beyond the incarnation.⁵⁸ This is a good example of how distinctions collapse in open theism. Even Jesus’ assertion that “God is spirit” could conceivably be surrendered as one more incursion of Greek philosophy. He cites Mormon theologian D. Paulsen, among others, for support and appeals to Mormon criticisms of divine incorporeality as well as other classical attributes.⁵⁹ Is it not open theism, then, that disparages anthropomorphism and cannot live with analogies *as* analogies?

But short of making this move to affirm divine corporeality, there seems to be no theoretical reason to separate attributions of particular emotions from attributions of particular limbs and organs.⁶⁰ We do not have the space here to pursue this important point further.⁶¹ Nevertheless, renewed atten-

⁵⁶ Sanders, *God Who Risks* 20.

⁵⁷ Some advocates of divine suffering verge on caricaturing their own position when they criticize the traditional view, as Moltmann does, as holding that “[God] cannot weep, for he has no tears” (*The Crucified God* [New York: Harper & Row, 1974] 222). Does Moltmann believe that God possesses tear ducts? Or is he being as anthropomorphic as the texts he cites for his position? Is this the next step to deny God’s spirituality as yet another relic of Platonic dualism that will have to give way in the light of so many biblical representations of God in physical terms? It would seem that panentheism of some sort is the necessary consequence of open theism’s critique. And any divine transcendence, including omnipresence or divine spirituality, would appear just as threatened as the other incommunicable attributes we have considered.

⁵⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 33–34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 35 n. 31 and 68 n. 11.

⁶⁰ Marylin Adams has observed, in a written response as part of a seminar with Professors Nicholas Wolterstorff and Marylin Adams on divine impassibility at Yale University in 1997, “It seems to me that human suffering could be a reason for Divine compassion without being an efficient cause of it.” Adams captures what is really at stake here: “If something other than God causally affects God, however, God can’t be the first cause of every change, unless Divine passibility is just an indirect approach to Divine self-change . . . If God could be totally or even nearly overcome by grief within God’s Divine nature, God would not only fail to have an ideal Stoic character (which those of us who flirt with passibility can live with), God’s providential control might be jeopardized. Do crucifixion, earthquakes, and eclipses signal that God has ‘lost it’ in Divine rage and grief?”

⁶¹ See Paul Helm, “The Impossibility of Divine Passibility,” in *The Power and Weakness of God* (ed. Nigel Cameron; Edinburgh: Papers of the Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1990) 123, 126: “Aquinas, for example, does not object to some of what are affections in human beings being a part

tion to this particular formulation of divine impassibility would seem to be called for on both sides of this debate. B. B. Warfield's treatment of divine emotion contrasts sharply with the picture that one obtains from Pinnock's caricature.⁶²

At the end of the day, Sanders is worried that an analogical approach will leave us with agnosticism (equivocity), citing John Macquarrie's concern that without a "univocal core," theology "lapses into agnosticism."⁶³ Macquarrie and other liberal or existentialist theologians have reason to worry about agnosticism, however, only because they do not accept the authority of Scripture to deliver *trustworthy* analogies. But if God has authorized these analogies, why should we feel anxious?

Similar to Pannenberg's criticism of analogy above (see note 29), Sanders seems to assume a faulty (autonomous) standard for what counts as real knowledge. He must *see* the fit between language and reality in order to know with apodictic certainty that it is accurate: "If one suggests that there is an infinite difference between the analogates when speaking of God and humanity, then the doctrine of analogy fails to give us any knowledge of God."⁶⁴ We must see the fit ourselves in order to judge it (univocity) or else

of God's character [*Summa contra gentiles* I.90], he only objects to those affections which, if they are had by anything, require that individual to be passive and to be in time. So that if there are attributes which, though they in fact carry such implications when possessed by human beings, do not when possessed by God, then Aquinas is ready to recognize the possibility of such in God. And clearly there are such—love, joy, delight, care and grace, for example. God has each of these with the greatest possible intensity and power."

⁶² B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 570–71:

Men tell us that God is, by the very necessity of His nature, incapable of passion, incapable of being moved by inducements from without; that He dwells in holy calm and unchangeable blessedness, untouched by human sufferings or human sorrows for ever, haunting

The lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud, nor moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Now ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
His sacred, everlasting calm.

Let us bless our God that it is not true. God can feel; God does love. We have Scriptural warrant for believing that, like the hero of Zurich, God has reached out loving arms and gathered into His own bosom that forest of spears which otherwise had pierced ours. But is not this gross anthropomorphism? We are careless of names: it is the truth of God. And we decline to yield up the God of the Bible and the God of our hearts to any philosophical abstractions. . . . We may feel awe in the presence of the Absolute, as we feel awe in the presence of the storm or of the earthquake. . . . But we cannot love it; we cannot trust it. . . . Nevertheless, let us rejoice that our God has not left us by searching to find Him out. Let us rejoice that He has plainly revealed Himself to us in His Word as a God who loves us, and who, because He loves us, has sacrificed Himself for us.

I am grateful to Professor John Frame for pointing out this reference.

⁶³ Sanders, *God Who Risks* 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 286 n. 43. Sanders adds, "Furthermore, thinkers as diverse as John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, George Berkeley, William Alston, Richard Swinburne, Thomas Tracy, and Paul Helm all agree that there must be a 'hard literal core' or 'univocal core' to our talk about God. There must be some properties that are used of God in the same sense that they are used of things in the created order. *Otherwise we will be back in the cave of agnosticism.* Anthropomorphic language does not preclude literal predication to God" (*God Who Risks* 25, emphasis added).

know nothing concretely about God (equivocity) only if God has not spoken (analogy).⁶⁵

Here the analogy of Scripture becomes essential. We might even call it, somewhat awkwardly, the analogy of analogy. No single analogy, abstracted from the rest, adequately represents God's character. Only taken together as one multifaceted self-revelation do the analogies effectively render a sufficient knowledge of God. (The analogy of Scripture applied to theology proper, it should be noted, is the corollary of the doctrine of divine simplicity, which open theism also rejects, reducing the diverse divine attributes to one: love.)

To summarize thus far, open theism affirms the Creator-creature distinction at least in principle, distinguishing it from process thought. Furthermore, it tries to affirm the correlative distinctions between God's being-in-himself and his being-for-us, and affirms the role of analogies. But does it succeed in maintaining these in actual practice? This is where Pinnock and Sanders appear to be tentative at best.

Methodologically, theological proposals must do more than offer an alternative to a dominant position that nobody actually holds. For Pinnock, it is either "libertarian freedom" or despotic "omnicausality," not even recognizing that Reformed theology (like other traditions) affirms a fairly well-developed and well-known account of double agency. Calvinism, according to Pinnock, envisions God as "the sole performer who cannot make room for significant human agents."⁶⁶ It may be that Pinnock thinks that this is what Calvinism amounts to, but the official confessions and catechisms of the Reformed and Presbyterian family explicitly affirm double agency and stridently reject any suggestion of the sort alleged by Pinnock.⁶⁷ Perhaps he thinks that since his position is beyond Arminianism he must render his nemesis something beyond Calvinism.

Related to the biblical confession that "God is in heaven and we are on earth" (again, not a spatial announcement, but an analogical way of stating the Creator-creature distinction) is the insistence of historic Christian theology that we know God "not as he is in himself but by his works," a formula found as early as Chrysostom, among others.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ It is worth pondering whether the dominance of the "mirror" as a root metaphor for the relationship of language and reality is at bottom a rationalist presupposition, in contrast to the biblical emphasis on "hearing" the (analogical) word. This is a point I develop at length in *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). For a helpful description of the career and influence of the "mirror" epistemology, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁶⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 158.

⁶⁷ Although he sometimes cites the first part of the Westminster Confession 3.1 ("God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass"), he has not yet, by my reckoning, quoted the entire statement: "... yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established" (*The Book of Confessions*).

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on John," NPNF 14.7: "And if these instances are not sufficient fully to explain the whole matter, marvel not, for argument is God, whom it is impossible to de-

Contrary to the antitheses of modern theology, which led Nietzsche to reject the Creator in favor of the creation, it is striking that in the Mars Hill speech, for instance, Scripture does not present the false choice offered by secular notions of transcendence and immanence. God does not have to “make space” for others, as open theists repeatedly express it, by limiting his own freedom.⁶⁹ Paul’s speech simply does not assume the transcendence-immanence problem that has plagued ancient and modern metaphysics.

Among the ironic similarities between the methodological approach of open theism and hyper-Calvinism is the fact that both are apparently impatient in the face of mystery. Demanding univocal knowledge, both reflect a rationalistic streak that cannot live without the final resolution of the divine sovereignty-human freedom mystery into one or the other.⁷⁰ But analogies of transcendence and immanence must never become translated into univocity. Otherwise, the next move may be the denial of divine omnipresence. According to this attribute, God’s “filling all things” disallows any notion of his being wholly contained or circumscribed in one place.⁷¹

While open theism affirms the God-world distinction, the corollary distinctions we have considered fray to the point of threatening to unravel that commitment. John Sanders is aware of these classic distinctions that have played such an important role especially in Protestant systems, and he is

scribe, or to imagine worthily; hence this man nowhere assigns the name of His essence (for it is not possible to say what God is, as to essence), but everywhere he declares Him to us by His workings . . . In short, one name is not sufficient, nor two, nor three, nor more, to teach us what belongs to God. But we must be content to be able even by means of many to apprehend, though but obscurely, His attributes.”

⁶⁹ It is not in some reality above or beyond God, shared by the creature, that humans have freedom—an area of autonomous freedom. Rather, it is in God’s sovereign reign that creatures have creaturely freedom in the first place. Like transcendence and immanence, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but is at least for Christians defined by God as its source and therefore as the one who normatively defines it. Freedom is not autonomy, but faithful existence in God’s *ex nihilo* created space. Paul regards God’s sovereignty, independence, and freedom as the very environment in which freedom for others is possible. He moves effortlessly from the statement that God has “determined the times set for [human beings] and the exact places where they should live” to the announcement, “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 18:26–28). Here God’s sovereign freedom comprehends both his immanence and transcendence, not favoring one to the neglect of the other.

⁷⁰ Pinnock sees Thomism and Calvinism as “threatening the reality of creaturely actions . . . It is the model in which the omnicausality of God is central and in which God is seemingly the solo performer” (*Most Moved Mover* 8). This may be a hunch, but if Pinnock had tested it, he would have found himself quite alone among historical theologians. “When the covenant between God and humankind is stressed, the element of partnership comes to the fore and works against determinism in the system” (p. 8). And yet, “I do not presume to judge what Calvin really meant . . .” (p. 9).

⁷¹ When we read that God is “near” his people—for instance, in the Cloud, the tabernacle and the temple, or even in Jesus Christ, this cannot be used to cancel his omnipresence. Instead of being cashed out in univocal spatial terms, we recognize that “nearness” has to do with his presence for us (*pro nos*). To be near his people is to be reconciled to them. Is open theism willing to treat as univocal those passages that represent God as changing locations, thereby surrendering also divine omnipresence and spirituality? As we have observed, this is a very real question. If not, however, the burden would seem to be on them to demonstrate how changing locations differs from changing attitudes and plans.

not ready to be wholly rid of them.⁷² But Sanders sees classical theology as privileging the hidden God over the revealed God. As a result of this fear, in actual practice at least, these distinctions play little or no role in the open theism proposal.⁷³

Reformed theology is chided by Sanders, like Pinnock, for “claiming that it [the relation of sovereignty and responsibility] is simply a ‘mystery beyond human understanding.’ The subject simply transcends human reason.”⁷⁴ He challenges Packer and the following quote from D. A. Carson: “For us mortals there are no rational, logical solutions to the sovereignty-responsibility tension.” On one hand, Reformed theology is berated for denying mystery in the headlong pursuit of a logical and rationalistic system; on the other, for affirming mystery too strongly. We have difficulty being satisfied with analogies just as the frail humanity that hid the blinding majesty of the God-Man may lead us to miss the paradox of God’s glory hidden under the cross. Ironically similar to a hyper-Calvinist, Pinnock rejects the notion of “mystery” in the relationship of divine sovereignty and human freedom. One of them simply has to go to resolve the tension: “All-controlling sovereignty is not taught in Scripture. There may be mysteries that go beyond human intelligence but this is not one of them.” Perhaps anticipating the likely objection, Pinnock simply asserts, “The Bible, not rationalism, leads to this solution,”⁷⁵ but this is more easily asserted than demonstrated.

⁷² See Sanders, *God Who Risks* 30: “Those scandalized by anthropomorphism align themselves with the tradition elevating the hidden God above the revealed God and attempt to discover the face of God behind the mask. This maneuver today elicits a strong reaction that God does not wear a mask. Rather, the God who reveals himself to us is the same God who remains hidden. Thus it is not surprising to find those who follow ‘Rahner’s rule’ that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa or that God *pro nobis* (for us) is the God *in se* (in himself) and vice versa. In my opinion, though the notion of the hidden God has been abused, it should not be completely rejected, for the reason that it is one way of affirming that God has being apart from the world and does not need the world in order to be fulfilled. . . . All that is possible for us to know is what God is like in relation to us.” Here we find a willingness at least to consider the abiding significance of these distinctions, and Sanders is certainly correct in his observation that this is less radical than the move that has been made not only by Rahner but by Moltmann, Pannenberg, and probably the broad consensus of leading theologians at present. As a less radical break, this constitutes a real point of potential agreement between our camps that deserves further conversation.

⁷³ In practice, it seems that the incarnation ends up being not only the climax of God’s self-revelation, but the only self-revelation. Instead of God the Son becoming flesh, we detect Hegelian hints of the incarnation serving as cipher for an abstract description of God’s being-in-himself. Although we cannot pursue the point in this paper, I have for some time wondered whether open theism shares with some abstract versions of classical theism an underdeveloped Christology that requires the concept of God-in-Himself to do all of the duty that God-for-Us, namely, the incarnate God-Man does in our understanding of the humanity of God. This is the perennial problem, as I see it, in Hegelian metaphysics leading through Teilhard de Chardin and Whitehead. The incarnation becomes the paradigm through which all divine existence and action is interpreted, as if the triune Godhead just *is* inherently kenotic. Again, does not such a “static” notion of “incarnation” subvert the “dynamic” incarnation of our Lord in first-century Palestine?

⁷⁴ Sanders, *God Who Risks* 35.

⁷⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 55.

Open theism, in practice if not always in intent, makes ectypal knowledge archetypal and analogical language univocal. God's being for us is his being in and for himself; the hidden decree is swallowed up in the history of redemption; and eternity is engulfed by time.⁷⁶ Pinnock counters what he describes as Calvinism with a dynamic emphasis on covenant:

History is a drama with profound risks and enormous dynamics. God goes in for partnerships where the junior partners make a real contribution. It is a covenantal-historical way of understanding based on mutual vows and obligations. It is not the situation of omnicausalism where even the input of the creature is already predetermined.⁷⁷

Pinnock nowhere (that I have located) allows that there is such a thing as Reformed covenant theology, in which double agency is a celebrated mystery, even though the likes of Pannenberg and Moltmann have self-consciously drawn on Reformed "federal" or covenant theology to emphasize the dynamic element.⁷⁸ Like some hyper-Calvinists, he only sees two options, open theism or "omnicausalism," but Reformed theology—with the "covenantal-historical way of understanding based on mutual vows and obligations" at its heart—provides an alternative to both that has yet to be considered by open theists.

"We must take seriously how God is depicted in these stories and resist reducing important metaphors to mere anthropomorphic or accommodated language," Pinnock insists, assuming that ("mere") accommodated language equals non-serious language. But he does not seem to have an alternative method, conceding, "God's revelation is anthropomorphic through and through. We could not grasp any other kind. We must take it all seriously,

⁷⁶ The result is that God's accommodated self-revelation is no longer treated as such, but is regarded in a literalistic manner as providing direct access to the being of God, as if God were standing naked, unveiled, before us. Colin Gunton has addressed the problem of immediacy in modern theology and, if I am not mistaken, this tendency that has plagued both fundamentalism and liberalism is all too apparent in the proposal of open theism: *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995). Whatever their material differences in this debate, Carl Henry and Clark Pinnock agree that univocity is the only way forward and that analogy necessarily degenerates into irrational skepticism.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 36.

⁷⁸ Johannes Cocceius (1603–69) was among the first to develop a concentrated focus on the dynamic history of redemption within the context of Reformed (covenant) theology (see especially his *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* 1648). This perspective has been reawakened in the Dutch/Dutch-American "biblical theology" movement, which includes Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Meredith Kline, and Richard Gaffin, Jr. The rise of federal theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has had a tremendous influence beyond its familiar borders and is often cited by contemporary theologians as a major resource for the recovery of eschatological reflection. Rather than seeing the Bible simply as a source book for timeless truths, it was regarded as a covenant between God and God's people, orienting it to history and dramatic events interpreted by the primary actor in those events. Jürgen Moltmann observes, "This new historic understanding of revelation had its ground in the rebirth of eschatological millenarianism in the post-reformation age. It was the start of a new, eschatological way of thinking, which called to life the feeling for history" (*Theology of Hope* 70). In fact, he specifically refers to Johannes Cocceius. Wolfhart Pannenberg has recently written, "Only in the federal theology of Johannes Cocceius does the kingdom of God come into view again as a dominant theme of salvation history and eschatology . . ." (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 3.530).

if not always literally.”⁷⁹ And he even recognizes the danger to which his criticism of “mere analogy” opens himself:

The open view of God proposes to take biblical metaphors more seriously and thereby recover the dynamic and relational God of the gospel, but in doing so it runs the risk of being too literal in its interpretation . . . It could give the impression that God fumbles the ball just like we do or that God is limited as to place and knowledge (cf. Gen 18:16–33, where God says he has to go over to Sodom to find out just how wicked these people are). We must avoid presumption in the matter of our speech about God whose reality transcends whatever we wish to say about him. Purely affirmative theology, without the check of negative theology, may make God the creature of our intellect as the Eastern traditions have reminded us.⁸⁰

But once he has conceded that God does not fumble the ball *just like we do* and is not limited *in the ways we are*, he has already thrown into question the univocal approach he has assumed in treating his favored passages.⁸¹ We hear the frustration in Pinnock’s challenge: “How often have we heard reasoning like this: the Bible may say that God repents but, being infinite, he doesn’t really . . . Why can’t we allow such passages to speak?”⁸² And of course he has a point. In cases where the accommodated, analogical, covenantal, “God-for-us” language is not allowed to have its say and is not taken seriously, only one type of analogy (*viz.*, “I do not change”) is allowed to dominate. But why do open theists not allow the “other passages” to speak, many interesting passages that he and other open theists have not attended to in their exegesis? Further, what does it mean to accuse critics of asserting that “the Bible may say that God repents but, being infinite, he doesn’t really,” when he has himself already conceded that God is not limited and does not “fumble the ball” exactly the way we do? Has he not conceded an analogical answer to that question?

We must let *all* of the passages speak, recognizing that they are all delivered in the analogical mode. This approach hardly stifles the Bible, as Pinnock suggests, but recognizes (as Pinnock claims to recognize at various points) the rich diversity of metaphors that God uses to accommodate to our condition.⁸³ In our account, analogical language, divinely revealed and

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 61.

⁸¹ Richard Rice writes, “If human beings and God have nothing whatever in common, if we have utterly no mutual experience, then we have no way of talking and thinking about God and there is no possibility of a personal relationship with him” (“Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *The Openness of God* [ed. Clark Pinnock *et al.*; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994] 35). This assumes, however, that there is a general space or reality that is not created by God, an autonomous, neutral reality that comprehends both God and creatures. Fearful of irrationalism, open theism risks collapsing into a rationalism that denies the Creator-creature distinction in practice if not always in principle.

⁸² *Ibid.* 61.

⁸³ Part of the confusion may be due to regarding analogy and literal predication as mutually exclusive. Figures as diverse as Langdon Gilkey and Carl Henry have similarly misunderstood the doctrine of analogy in this direction. At least as formulated by the Reformed, to say that “God is Lord” is both an analogy and literally true. Modern (especially positivistic) views of language have tended to relegate analogy, metaphor, parable, and the like to the hinterlands of unreality. But our understanding of analogical revelation coheres perfectly with Sanders’s description of “literal”

sanctioned, provides just the sort of certainty that Sanders correctly insists upon, but without surrendering the kaleidoscopic analogies to a single univocal picture. The certainty comes from knowing that God has selected the appropriate reference-range, not from our own God's-eye view of the fit. To adapt a phrase from Rorty, "It's analogy all the way down."

However much Pinnock and Sanders might wish to accept the distinctions undergirding the Creator-creature distinction, it seems that whenever we meet in church history a strong affirmation of the mystery of God, Sanders detects the fingerprints of Hellenism.⁸⁴ As if there were no exegetical warrant, Sanders equates the suspicion of univocal knowledge of God with Philo of Alexandria: "The philosophical and theological attack on anthropomorphism assumes that we cannot know the essence of God."⁸⁵ Do we or do we not know God's essence, then? Sanders cannot seem to decide. Further withdrawing whatever allowance he has given to these distinctions, Sanders later adds,

If the qualitative difference between God and humanity is absolutely infinite, then there is no correspondence between God and the creation, and this will preclude any notions of creation or revelation . . . If 'the finite cannot comprehend the infinite,' then all revelation of God in history, any incarnation, the possibility of a personal relationship with God and all knowledge of God within our existence are ruled out. The concept of God becomes Teflon to which no predicates will stick.⁸⁶

But once more, such fears assume that analogical knowledge is not true or accurate knowledge; that the inability of creatures to comprehend (i.e. "fully contain") the infinite, necessarily entails no apprehension of God on his own terms (i.e. revelation).⁸⁷ This false choice offered by modernity should be resisted. It is neither the case that God is "wholly other" nor that he is "wholly like" anything in creation apart from the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. We do not believe that God is "*completely* ineffable," because he has revealed himself in Scripture and supremely in his Son.⁸⁸

when he writes, "What I mean by the word *literal* is that our language about God is reality depicting (truthful) such that there is a referent, an other, with whom we are in relationship and of whom we have genuine knowledge" (*God Who Risks* 25).

⁸⁴ Sanders, *God Who Risks* esp. 26–38.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 29.

⁸⁷ At the end of the day, the very distinctions Sanders has struggled to affirm fall under the weight of this false alarm: "Feuerbach's criticisms are devastating at this point. He says that what is completely ineffable lacks predicates and what has no predicates has no existence: 'The distinction between what God is in himself, and what he is for me destroys the peace of religion, and is . . . an untenable distinction. I cannot know whether God is something else in himself or for himself than he is for me'" (*ibid.* 30). But, I would submit, the very opposite is the case. Kant denied any constitutive knowledge of God—univocal or analogical. Rationalism, on the other hand, has maintained the possibility of a pure intellectual vision of eternal forms. The result was that analogies and anthropomorphisms were often ascribed univocally, which Feuerbach correctly took to be nothing more than a projection of human attributes onto a non-existent referent. Is this not precisely the tendency of open theism?

⁸⁸ Furthermore, we are created in God's image and even in our suppression of the truth in unrighteousness are witnesses to his invisible attributes in creation (Romans 1 and 2). We trust the

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Notwithstanding arguments to the contrary, in truth God remains a *mysterium tremendum*—truly given in, yet transcending, his own self-revelation. In Scripture we are introduced to a divine drama in which God is tacitly recognized as the playwright but is focally known as the central, though not sole, actor. Pinnock demands, “Why does it seem as if they are suppressing these dimensions of the text or, at best, making the story sound dynamic when it really isn’t?”⁸⁹

But once again I am left wondering who might be the target of his criticism. The discipline of biblical theology, which stresses the dynamic element of redemptive history and refuses to reduce the Bible to a mere collection of timeless truths, was pioneered by Reformed theology. Its recent interpreters, like Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Richard Gaffin, and Meredith Kline, have stressed this dynamic and interactive quality of the biblical drama.⁹⁰ And yet, all of these figures staunchly affirm at the same time God’s eternal decree and his unchangeable plan and will known only to him. It is never the “naked God,” but the “revealed God,” who clothes himself in our weakness and simplicity.

Pinnock and Sanders do not seem to think that they are standing before this mask or that they are being hidden in the cleft of the Rock while the backward parts of God pass by. In short, theirs is a univocal model. Pinnock defends his approach: “The model takes Scripture very seriously, especially the dynamic, personal metaphors, while our critics seem to consider it beneath them. Embarrassed by biblical anthropomorphisms, they are inclined to demythologize and/or deliteralize them.”⁹¹ But not only have we shown that the tradition has taken anthropomorphism and analogy *more* seriously, one detects in Pinnock a reticence to wholly embrace his own method:

apostolic testimony, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, that God has given the world his supreme self-revelation in Christ, whose Godhead remains incomprehensible even in the incarnation. See the Chalcedonian Creed in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 34–36. Also, it seems that Sanders is requiring nothing less than what Feuerbach demanded: If I cannot have univocal (autonomous) knowledge of the fit between predicates and reality; if I must rely on the God who is hidden in incomprehensible majesty to condescend to address me, I cannot have true knowledge. The significant difference between Sanders and Feuerbach is that the latter surrendered belief in God altogether, while the former surrenders the distinction between God’s archetypal knowledge (known intuitively) and our ectypal knowledge (mediated through scripture). Both views rest on the assumption that only if one possesses a God’s-eye perspective oneself is one entitled to claim epistemic certitude. This is the tragic legacy of the Enlightenment.

⁸⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 62.

⁹⁰ For instance, Ridderbos: “It is this great redemptive-historical framework within which the whole of Paul’s preaching must be understood and all of its subordinate parts receive their place and organically cohere” (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [trans. J. R. DeWitt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 39; cf. Richard Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978] 23–24): “Revelation never stands by itself, but is always concerned either explicitly or implicitly with redemptive accomplishment. God’s speech is invariably related to his actions . . . An unbiblical, quasi-gnostic notion of revelation inevitably results when it is considered by itself or as providing self-evident general truths . . . In a word, the concept of theology is redemptive-historically conditioned.”

⁹¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 62.

At the same time, there is a Scylla and Charybdis to be negotiated. On the one hand, there is the danger of missing the truth of the metaphors. What are the texts of divine repentance telling us? What is it that God's suffering implies? On the other hand, we do not have to be crassly literal. There is not always a one-for-one correspondence in texts that tell us important things. In any analogy there is something literal about reality that we don't want to miss and, at the same time, something different. We need to avoid both literalism and agnosticism. The way forward is to work with the diversity of metaphors and follow the grain of them. For example, God repents, but not as humans do; God suffers, but not exactly as we do; God works out his purposes in time, but not subjected to the ravages of time as we are.⁹²

Such reservations make it difficult to determine whether open theism is really convinced of its own methodological position.⁹³ It does not deny outright the Creator-creature distinction or its corollaries, but it appears suspicious of them (at least as traditionally employed) and seems uncomfortable with their regulative function in developing their proposal.

In this brief space we have attempted to exchange straw men for the actual arguments, presuppositions, and methods of Reformed system. We have demonstrated that we do not deny the knowability of God but the comprehensibility (that is, exact, archetypal knowledge) of God. In contrasting our theological methods, we have shown that, despite the serious misunderstandings of the tradition often assumed by open theism's advocates, classical Reformed theology has proposed a theological method that has yet to be refuted. While the classical theological tradition of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant communions may be influenced in its formulations by alien philosophical perspectives, the distinctions so central to its method are ultimately due to the biblical emphasis on the Creator-creature distinction and not to a capitulation to pagan thought. It is hoped that after serious conversation begins here, at the beginning, we may at least arrive at the place where our genuine differences may be fruitfully explored.

⁹² Ibid. 62.

⁹³ Everything stated in the paragraph above would be heartily affirmed by Reformed theology—although we would say that there is *never* a one-for-one correspondence (not just “not always”). But why does he seem to refuse to “work with the diversity of metaphors,” instead privileging a certain important but by no means exclusive type?