

DEI FIDE: A RELATIONAL THEOLOGY OF THE FAITH OF GOD

by

WILLIAM CURTIS HOLTZEN

Submitted in accordance with the requirement  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

in the subject of

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF E VAN NIEKERK

November 2007

Copyright © 2007 by Wm. Curtis Holtzen

All rights reserved.

Student Number: 3376-325-9

I declare that **DEI FIDE: A RELATIONAL THEOLOGY OF THE FAITH OF GOD** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

NOVEMBER 30, 2007

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Curtis Holtzen". The signature is written in a cursive style with some flourishes.

.....  
WILLIAM CURTIS HOLTZEN

Abstract of the thesis

DEI FIDE: A RELATIONAL THEOLOGY OF THE FAITH OF GOD

by

William Curtis Holtzen

University of South Africa: 2007

Relational theology became a major voice in the theological conversations of the twentieth century and now in the twenty-first century it is poised to become the major influence in doctrine of God discussions. Relational theology argues for a model of God that emphasizes a dynamic interaction between God and the cosmos. Reformulating the divine nature contra Classical theism, Relational theology instead includes images of God as sympathetic, mutable, limited in power and knowledge, creative, and as a risk-taker. The assertion is that such images or metaphors for the divine are necessary rightly to understand and discuss God's relationality with the world. This thesis argues that given the relational nature of God the metaphor of faith should be added to the list of God's attributes.

The thesis begins by discussing issues of methodology then reviewing Relational theology in the forms of process and open theism as contrasted with Classical theism. This is followed by explorations of various depictions of faith as found in the Old Testament and New Testament. Faith is also examined theologically and philosophically as including the elements of belief, trust, hope, and risk. It is then argued that faith has a decidedly relational nature in that faith most properly takes place between persons.

The crux of the thesis is the development of a theology of divine faith. Because humans are free, God is limited, and creation has a purpose, the argument is made that God relates to the world through faith. A case for God's faith is developed exegetically and logically through explorations of the concepts of divine belief, trust, hope, risk, and doubt, concluding that faith is a necessary inclusion for Relational theology.

Finally, two primary Church doctrines, creation and christology, are explored through a theology of divine faith. God demonstrates divine faith in bestowing an evolving creation with both freedom and a purpose. God has faith in the creation to produce persons who can freely share faith and love with God. The fully kenotic

coming of Jesus Christ demonstrates the Father's faith in the Son, the second person of the triune God. The coming and death of Christ also reveals God's faith that the cross will be efficacious in reconciling those who have abused their God-given freedoms.

#### Key Words

God, Relational Theology, Faith, Belief, Trust, Hope, Risk, Doubt, Process Theology, Open Theism, Creation, Kenosis, Incarnation, Trinity, Social Trinity, Metaphor, Faith of Jesus, Faith of God, Anthropomorphic, Anthropopathic.

*In memory of Doug,  
who sparked a fire of theology within my being.*

Acknowledgements:

Great appreciation and thanks to my promoter Professor van Niekerk whose unending encouragement and enthusiasm over the last several years made this task not only possible but enjoyable. I believe it was your tireless faith in me which inspired the topic of the Faith of God. Adoration to my wife Wende and our daughter Roman for your tremendous love and patience. I am most blessed to have each of you to share with me in this achievement. Gratitude to three colleagues for their friendship and willingness to spend countless hours reading, evaluating, and discussing with me the concepts and ideas of this work. David Matson who, for nearly three years, has listened to me work out ideas and concepts for this thesis. Your thoughts and critiques challenge me to do better work. Jim Woest for your careful readings and comments. I can't imagine ever writing a paper without you proof-reading it. Joe Grana, not only for your willingness to read and review my work but most importantly your praise. Appreciation to Paul Rogers, Adrian Coxhead, Hal Shrader, and Chuck Boatman for your friendship and moral support. Thanks to John Sanders for the meeting and many emails of encouragement, insights, and recommended readings. Recognition to Chandra Jenkins, Nicole McDermott, and Craig Canfield for their help in the editing and researching of this thesis.

## CONTENTS

Abstract .....	iv
Key Words .....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Problem.....	1
History.....	3
The Task.....	4
The Method.....	4
God-Talk.....	5
The Linguistic Turn .....	7
Metaphor.....	11
Models.....	15
Anthropopathic Metaphor .....	17
Interpretive Context .....	23
Criteria .....	25
CHAPTER 2: ARELATIONAL THEISM .....	29
A Working Definition.....	29
Classical Theism .....	30
Examples of Relational Theology.....	39
Process Theism .....	39
Whiteheadian Metaphysics .....	39
Process Depictions of God.....	45
Open Theism.....	54
Other Key Figures.....	62
Conclusion .....	63
CHAPTER 3: FAITH .....	65
Biblical Depictions of Faith.....	66

Old Testament.....	66
Conclusion .....	73
New Testament .....	73
Background .....	74
Synoptic Gospels and Acts .....	75
Pauline Literature.....	77
Johannine Literature.....	80
Epistle to the Hebrews .....	83
The Epistle of James .....	85
Conclusion .....	86
Elements of Faith .....	86
Faith and Belief.....	87
Faith and Trust.....	97
Faith and Hope.....	105
Faith and Risk .....	107
Faith and Relationship .....	111
Conclusion .....	114
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE SUBJECTIVE FAITH OF GOD .....</b>	<b>116</b>
Conditions for Divine Faith .....	116
Human Free Will.....	116
Limited Foreknowledge .....	119
Purpose in Creation.....	120
God Believes.....	123
Divine Belief and Omniscience .....	123
Situations of Divine Belief.....	130
Changes in the Divine Mind .....	131
God Changes What God Believed to be True.....	132



God Believes Abraham is True.....	135
Conclusion .....	141
God Trusts.....	141
Partnership and Trust .....	142
Divine Trust and Omnipotence.....	149
The Call to Trustworthiness.....	152
God’s Trust in Job.....	156
Conclusion .....	160
God Hopes .....	161
Hope for the Future.....	162
“Perhaps” .....	163
God is Patient.....	168
Conclusion .....	172
God Risks.....	173
A Passionate Risk .....	174
Relationship and Risk.....	178
Conclusion .....	183
God Doubts .....	184
God Laments.....	186
Doubting Narratives.....	190
Conclusion .....	192
Conclusion .....	193
CHAPTER 5: CREATIO EX FIDE.....	195
Creatio Ex Nihilo .....	197
Kenosis and Creation .....	203
Creation and Other.....	205
Freedom Verses Security .....	208

Creatio Continua .....	215
Faith in an Evolving Creation .....	217
Faith in Chance .....	222
Ongoing Creation means Ongoing Faith .....	224
Creatio Imago Dei.....	226
Genesis One .....	229
Divine Representation: Stewardship.....	230
Relationality with the Divine: Fellowship .....	232
Genesis Two & Three .....	234
Trust in the Human Couple.....	234
Mistrust by the Human Couple .....	238
Conclusion .....	242
CHAPTER 6: DIVINE FAITH AND THE ADVENT OF CHRIST .....	245
Trinity .....	245
Essence over Persons: Psychological Analogy.....	247
Persons over Essence: Social Analogy .....	251
The Triune Faith of God .....	253
Conclusion .....	258
Faith and the Incarnation .....	259
Incarnation .....	260
Kenotic Christology .....	262
The Son's Faith in the Father: Faith in the Life of Jesus .....	274
The Father's Faith in the Son: Cross and the Mission of Christ.....	281
God's Faith in the Efficacy of the Cross.....	284
Atonement.....	287
Reconciliation: A Two-Party Affair. ....	288
God's Faith in Humanity's Response .....	292

Conclusion .....	295
CONCLUSION.....	298
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	305



## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

“[M]an’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.”<sup>1</sup> The startling truth reflected in these words has most likely been the impetus for the last several decades of disruption in an otherwise relatively static history concerning the doctrine of God. Even a casual study of the twentieth century reveals that thinking about God has ranged from the most rigid of literalistic and fundamentalist theologies, to radical “Christian atheists” proclaiming the death of God, from those who speak of God as so completely “Other” that God should not even be spoken of as a “being,” to postmodern theologies that in a strange way are returning theology to questions asked a millennium ago. The twentieth century was an exciting time in theology, and the twenty-first seems to be a continuation of that excitement.

One of the theological questions that developed in the latter half of the twentieth century is still going strong today. The question concerns itself with God’s relationship to the world, to God’s creatures, and even to God’s own being. While these seem like three very different questions they are certainly inter-related by one fundamental question: what does it mean for God to relate?

### **The Problem**

There is an essential interconnectivity between humanity, nature, and the divine. No amount of reductionistic theorizing can eliminate questions of relationality and interconnectivity. With interconnectivity in mind, how can we understand biblical language and imagery, our human experiences, and, perhaps, the very structure of the universe itself as essentially relational without commenting on and seeking a means of linking this imagery and experiences to God’s relationality? The very phrase “God’s relationality” is in itself a question of transcendence and immanence. Traditionally, God has been spoken of as a being that is completely and utterly distinct from this world (transcendent), and yet God is seemingly a being who

---

<sup>1</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1.

can authentically relate to the world (immanent). As transcendent, “God is self-sufficient apart from the world. God is above the universe and comes to the world from beyond.”<sup>2</sup> However, “God also relates to the world as the Immanent One...present at every moment of creation. The divine is active within the universe, involved with the processes of the world and of human history.”<sup>3</sup> If God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow<sup>4</sup> but the world is in constant flux, transition, and evolution how can any sort of genuine relationship take place? The last few decades have produced theologies providing approaches to this and other consequential questions. The answers have come in the shape of “relational theologies.”<sup>5</sup> Relational theologies, in the forms of process theism, open theism, and a host of other less classifiable works, have sought to show that there is a genuine relationship between God and the creation. The divine-human relationship is one that has authentic give and take; God not only influences but also is influenced by humanity and nature. These theologies have sought, in quite different ways at times, to maintain, as they understand it, God’s transcendence as well as God’s immanence.

These relational theologies, however, have failed to address a significant, if not central, aspect of relationship: faith. How is it that we can speak of God being influenced by the world without exploring the notion of God’s faith in creation as a source of influence? How can we speak of God creating an evolving world of autonomous beings in which God has chosen to partner with and yet fail to suggest that God has faith in these beings? Love is often seen as the foundational attribute of God and it is primarily, if not exclusively, out of love that God relates. But any discussion of God relating and loving is incomplete if it does not include a careful exploration of God’s faith as well as faithfulness. Yet, those theologies addressing God’s love have been curiously silent in terms of God’s faith. They have carefully explored how God relates to the world in loving care but what about God’s trust, beliefs, and hopes? This work is not seeking to establish the grounds for a theology of God’s love or even God’s relationality; rather, it seeks to address God’s faith in light of the theological model of relationship and relational theology.

---

<sup>2</sup>Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 11. Grenz and Olson present in this text a noteworthy guide to twentieth century theology under the rubric of transcendence and immanence.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>4</sup>This statement is derived from Hebrews 13:8 which is part of the benediction of the book and actually says “*Jesus Christ* is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

<sup>5</sup>A fuller description of “Relational Theology” is found in chapter 2.

It seems counter-intuitive, though, to speak of God having faith. To trust or to have faith is an act of dependency; it is the putting of one's well being, at least partially, in the hands of another. However, how can we understand and speak of God being in authentic relationship with the world (humanity and nature), without exploring the notion that God is not simply the object but is also the subject of faith? Likewise, if relationship is essential to God, as relational theologians have claimed, then consideration must be given to divine faith and trust within the person of God.

In short, this work, within the framework of relational theology, addresses the problem of God's faith. In addition, it addresses the problem of overlooking this key theological insight. By the end of this work I hope to show that it makes sense, biblically, theologically, and experientially to speak of God as a being and subject of faith.

### History

There is no real historical development of the concept of God's faith. Authors and scholars over the last century have used phrases such as "God believes," "God hopes," "God trusts," and even "God's faith," but no author, to my knowledge, has developed the idea that God is a being of genuine faith and the implications of such a theology.

In 1998 John Sanders produced *The God Who Risks*. In this text Sanders proposed a model of God as a risk taker.<sup>6</sup> Sanders' suggestion that God is a risk-taker means, in some respects, that God is conditioned by creation and that God enters into real give-and-take relationships.<sup>7</sup> Divine risk-taking means that God's desire for relationship can be thwarted and that God is changed in some manner by this event. Sanders speaks of God as confident,<sup>8</sup> hoping,<sup>9</sup> dependent,<sup>10</sup> sharing power,<sup>11</sup> and even mistrusting<sup>12</sup> and yet never speaks about God's faith. The closest Sanders comes to expressing God as having faith is when he says:

---

<sup>6</sup>In a personal conversation with John Sanders (Philadelphia, November 2005), when asked why he never spoke of "God's faith," stated that it had never occurred to him to use such language.

<sup>7</sup>John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 10-11.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 105.

Finally, it hardly needs saying that it has not been customary to think of God as “believing” or “hoping” in anything. But if we begin with the understanding of God as bringing into being creatures with whom he desires to enter into genuine personal and loving relationships, then it is quite permissible to speak of God’s believing and hoping things will go a certain way.<sup>13</sup>

In this statement it is clear that Sanders has some kind of understanding of God having faith, but it is left undeveloped.

### **The Task**

This work seeks to offer a new metaphor in contemplating, communicating, and conceptualizing God. It suggests that the God of Christian theism should be understood as one who acts in relationship (with humanity, nature, and triune self,) not solely on knowledge (infinite and complete) but also on beliefs (limited and contingent) and trust. It is in this relationship that faith arises, or to be more precise, this relationship is faith. The task is to show that God is not a being *above* faith, but that God is a being *of* faith; a being who genuinely believes, hopes, trusts, and even doubts for these are conditions necessary for relationship in its fullest; conditions necessary to foster communion or mutual fellowship between God, creation, and creature.

This idea, the faith of God, is a new metaphor, a conceptual innovation, working within the model of a relational theology. It is believed that this work, by establishing this metaphoric conceptual innovation, will demonstrate that: 1) relational theology operates, consciously or subconsciously, under the presupposition of God as a being of faith; 2) a metaphor of God’s faith is faithful to the biblical narratives; and 3) speaking of God as a being of faith is a coherent means of understanding God’s relationship to God’s self, humanity, and the world.

### **The Method**

Modern theologies have been preoccupied with reductionism. They have sought to reduce every event, theology, and even God, to one core, basic, or foundational idea. To reduce a theology to a single idea, however, is problematic for it makes the theology flat and unstable. Reductionistic theologies, in hopes of making God knowable, make God more elusive than ever. The “hammering out” of all of the characteristics and nuances in the concept of God may leave a clean and smooth surface, but in the end it may reflect a theological construct more than it reveals God’s

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 181.

truest nature; that is, it may reflect the author of the theology more than the subject. Reductionistic theologies are also unstable because balancing theology atop one lone foundational concept leads to problems when that foundational concept is reconsidered in light of new understandings and experiences. This can be seen in the various theologies of the last century that have sought to strictly define God as either fully transcendent or completely immanent. This work is not suggesting that God's sole or central attribute is faith, for this would simply be replacing one faulty foundation with another (which has been the consequence of reducing God to any one idea whether love, power, holiness, etc.) but is instead seeking a balance of attributes in order to make God's story coherent. The purpose is to recognize a metaphor that has been neglected.<sup>14</sup> One of the strengths of framing theology within the model or rubric of "relationship" is that relationship itself is multifaceted and is by nature non-reducible. By adding the metaphor of faith, relational theology will be able to speak about God's relationality in even more dynamic and inclusive ways.

### **God-Talk**

Any study that seeks to explore the nature of God must deal with issues of language. While at one time it may have been acceptable simply to use the word "God" and expect the author and audience to have a shared understanding, this luxury is no longer available today.<sup>15</sup> The twenty-first century student of theology must first ask, of what kind of God is the author<sup>16</sup> speaking?<sup>17</sup> When one uses the word "God," the reader must ask what the author assumes by this title. These questions go beyond the simple designation "God," and extend to secondary titles that presuppose all that is believed about "God." Titles such as Lord, King, Father, Rock, Wind, etc., when applied to God, bring with them primary and secondary assumptions. These are not only assumptions that go with the title of "Father" but also assumptions built into the word "God." Exploring one's own, as well as the author's, assumptions is what makes the task of theology so difficult and yet most necessary. It could also be said that understanding the meaning of the words used is the very nature of theology itself.

---

<sup>14</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 13. Fretheim develops this idea further in chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup>It is not being suggested that in the centuries preceding the twentieth all Christians had a shared understanding of the notion of "God." Even a casual survey of the church's great theologians would reveal significant differences in the theologies of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin.

<sup>16</sup>"Author" is being used generically to include all forms of communication.

<sup>17</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 1.



As Gordon Kaufman states, “all doctrines and dogmas are attempts to express and interpret what we mean by ‘God,’ and they have their significance in the degree to which they are successful in doing that.”<sup>18</sup> Theology then is actually, at its root, theology or “God-words.”

It is not enough, though, simply to ask what an author means by God; the reader, too, must be willing to ask how it is that he or she uses the word and what assumptions go into the forming and the shaping of its meaning.<sup>19</sup> If, while reading this work, one presupposes the notion of “God” to mean an impersonal being existing in a Platonist state of static perfection, then one will not be able to conceive of ways in which the word “God” might be used in conjunction with thoughts of a personal being who hopes and trusts. It is necessary that the reader be willing to explore his or her presuppositions before and during any theological investigation. This work is no exception. I, however, am not interested in developing a meaning for the word “God” as a class of being. The focus of this work is to say something about the God to whom Christians have been referring for centuries. It is quite appropriate to speak about being “human” as a class, or in Aristotelian terms “essence,” and to speak of a particular human. It is not possible, however, to speak of God as *a* god, that is, as a classification of a type of being and then as a *particular* God, for each of these are

---

<sup>18</sup>Kaufman, Gordon D., “Theology as Imaginative Construction,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 1 (March 1982): 74. Kaufman does not explain what it might look like to be successful in explaining or interpreting the word “God.” Likewise John Macquarrie states that “We are being forcibly reminded that the question of meaning is prior to the question of truth. Before one can discuss whether a statement is true or false, one must have at least some idea of what the statement means.” John Macquarrie, *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 17.

<sup>19</sup> This task of explaining what “God,” and a host of other signifiers, mean prior to evaluating doctrinal significance, presents two practical problems. First is the danger that one can become so swept up in the issues and problems of language that he or she never says anything significant. One becomes trapped in a Sisyphean mission of scrutinizing all the words used before one uses them only to have to examine them again. Eventually conclusions need to be formed, no matter how tenuous, for it is disingenuous to study the meaning of words, sentences, or ideas, and then say nothing with them, constructive or critical. It is self-defeating when theories of language conclude and *convey* that after careful analysis nothing can be said because words are meaningless or their meaning is beyond us. A second and related danger one faces in a study of this nature is to become so preoccupied with method, regardless of its empowering significance, that the method championed is never employed. After one spends page after page probing for the meaning of words and how they have been, could be, and should be used, the work can move into lengthy treatments of history, criteria, truth, and more. After all this there is little, if any, space left for the actual construct of the method. The reader is then lost in the issues of method instead of the actual subject. The goal is to heed Jeffrey Stout’s warning, “Preoccupation with method is like clearing your throat: it can go on for only so long before you lose your audience.” Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 163; quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 12. The assumption being made is that something meaningful, whether accurate, inaccurate, true, partially true, or entirely false, can be said. But it is also true that some issues of methodology and language must be explored in order to set the stage.

subsumed in the other. In other words, I cannot definitely describe what a God is in essence, kind, or class and then seek ways to explain how *this* God fits or differs from that classification. Any conclusion drawn about God in particular is a conclusion about “God” in general. I am not meaning to suggest that God does not have characteristics common to other beings. It might be suggested that God is a particular person and thus any discussion of persons would necessarily include God. But if God is personal then this is only one part of the definition of “God” for God may very well be a person, but personhood is not a necessary element in the meaning of “God.” Only God defines “God.” Whatever is ultimately known or discovered about God is what is necessary to the essence of “God-ness.” This work then is not about suggesting that “faith” is a necessary facet of “God-ness” but is suggesting that God, as attested to in scripture and understood in relational theology, is best conceived of as a being of faith.

### The Linguistic Turn

It is quite fashionable to speak of the twentieth century bringing about a “linguistic turn.”<sup>20</sup> This linguistic turn, initiated by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,<sup>21</sup> is a presuppositional move away from, or beyond, the primacy of epistemology in modernity towards “prefoundational” issues concerning the meaning and use of language. This turn is significant because questions concerning language have gone well beyond the halls of philosophy and have become central in the human sciences, the philosophy of science, and religion. In fact, to speak of this movement as a “turn” is a glaring understatement; it has become an obsession.

Not only has language evolved over the centuries, but the philosophy of language has evolved as well. The premodern era held a “common sense” approach to language in which it was assumed that words represent reality. Philosophical attitudes concerning language in this era were either those of neglect or contempt, according to philosopher Dan Stiver. Stiver states that, “Issues of language had long been relegated to rhetoric or poetics, in other words to less ‘scientific’ areas, which

---

<sup>20</sup>For more on the meaning of the “linguistic turn” see Gustav Bergmann, “Logical Positivism, Language, and the Reconstruction of Metaphysics,” in *The Linguistic Turn*, ed. Richard Rorty (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 63-71.

<sup>21</sup>Gustav Bergmann, “Logical Positivism, Language, and the Reconstruction of Metaphysics,” in *The Linguistic Turn*, 63. Bergmann’s was the work is cited as that which initiated the “linguistic turn.”

from the philosophical perspective did not concern themselves with accurately understanding reality.’<sup>22</sup> The modern era saw an investigation into language and a new concern for how, or if, words represent reality in an attempt to ground language in a concrete epistemology. No longer could one assume that the words being used actually referenced the objective world; one needed to prove or demonstrate that the words used were meaningful and true. Theories of verification or the meaning of “meaning” became chief concerns. This problem, and the particular means of solving it, was championed by a group who has become symbols of modernistic empiricist approaches to language: the Logical Positivists. Logical Positivism,<sup>23</sup> building upon Hume’s analytic/synthetic criterion, held that the meaning of a statement is conditional upon its means of verification, implying that any sentence or statement, which purports to say something about a real state of affairs, must be verifiable. That is, the truth or meaning of the sentence or statement requires an experiential or empirical verification.<sup>24</sup> This concept works quite well with everyday statements such as, “the bread is in the cupboard” but is quite problematic for metaphysical statements such as, “reality is composed of matter,” for theological statements such as, “God is omnipresent,” or for ethical declarations such as “the rights of the innocent must be protected.” This approach eventually came under fire when philosophers saw that there were many meaningful statements that could not meet the verification standards of Positivism, including Positivism’s own theoretical statements.<sup>25</sup> Even though Positivism has been succeeded by more open approaches to language it nonetheless

---

<sup>22</sup>Dan R. Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol & Story* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 5. Stiver notes that it was metaphysics and not language that was the primary concern of western philosophers for over two millennia.

<sup>23</sup>Logical Positivism was a movement born out of the “Vienna Circle” and existed during the 1920s and 30s. Among the members of the Circle were Moritz Schlick (whom the Circle formed around when he was called to Vienna University), Gustav Bergmann, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Philipp Frank, Kurt Gödel, Hans Hahn, Victor Kraft, Karl Menger, Marcel Natkin, Otto Neurath, Olga Hahn-Neurath, Theodor Radakovic, and Friedrich Waismann. Even though Positivism’s influence weakened in the second half of the twentieth century there are still a number of philosophers, primarily in the sciences, committed to its ideals. For more information see: Alfred Jules Ayer, *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959); Friedman, Michael. *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ronald N. Giere and Alan W. Richardson, *Origins of Logical Empiricism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Paolo Parrini, Wesley C. Salmon, and Merrilee H. Salmon, eds., *Logical Empiricism - Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup>John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 123-124.

<sup>25</sup>The problem in saying that “a sentence or statement is only meaningful if it can be verified empirically” is that one cannot empirically verify that statement! Thus Logical Positivism became a self-defeating philosophy.

was a powerful idea which shifted theological speculation towards the “problem of language.”

The more “open” approaches to language have come in the form of poststructuralism or postmodernism. Philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his second period), Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty have been instrumental in reshaping philosophical approaches to language in the latter half of the twentieth century. While these thinkers can be lumped together under the title “postmodern,”<sup>26</sup> they are not unanimous in their approaches to the subject. However, they do share a common assumption that the “real” and language about the “real” cannot be easily distinguished. “It is not that we have objects on the one hand and thoughts or meaning on the other; it is rather, that we have signs everywhere.”<sup>27</sup> Postmodern philosophers dealing with language have demonstrated that there is no “first philosophy” which one can turn to in a presuppositionally free manner in order to ground one’s language. Language is the first philosophy. The words we use do not reflect or stand in for our beliefs, they shape our beliefs. Wittgenstein’s highly influential concept of “language games” suggested that meaning and truth are “discovered” only within the context of the word’s use. Just as there are many games and the rules can be quite different, words and their meanings come from the rules of the particular game in which the words are being used. This means there is no “ideal” use of language but only ordinary uses of actual language.<sup>28</sup> This idea was amplified by Derrida with his suggestion that because meaning is not found in the word itself it must always be “deferred.”<sup>29</sup> Language in this postmodern approach may not only be a means of conveying ideas and truth but the very building blocks of meaning—blocks, however, that are very fluid and illusive.

Given that the twentieth century has produced both Positivism and postmodernism, it is not surprising that some have been quite critical of the “linguistic

---

<sup>26</sup>I am using the term “postmodern” as a catchall. It is understood that Wittgenstein was a precursor to postmodern thought, that Foucault and Derrida were poststructuralists, and that Rorty is an analytic pragmatist. Lyotard may be the only one who regularly used the term “postmodern.”

<sup>27</sup>These are the thoughts of C.S. Peirce stressed over a century ago. Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 25; quoted in Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 61.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 181. As Stiver notes, Derrida is playing off the ambiguity of the French verb *différer* which means “to differ” and “to defer” suggesting that meaning can never be captured.

turn” in philosophy.<sup>30</sup> It has been suggested that this kind of emphasis on language is at best wasteful, clouding the real concerns of philosophy and theology, and at worst nihilistic. According to Richard Rorty, however, the “linguistic turn” is practical as well as theoretical and the “linguistic turn may, for all we know now, lead us back to rationalism and to idealism.”<sup>31</sup> The purpose of the “linguistic turn” is not to undermine epistemology, metaphysics, or theology. Its purpose is to aid the author and audience in exploring the meaning(s) of ideas, words, and ultimately, if possible, reality itself.

While a philosophical linguistic turn has prompted theologians to examine the ways language is used in matters of faith in unparalleled ways, it would be a mistake to assume that this concern first arose in the last century.<sup>32</sup> Stiver writes, “Religion has always had a concern for language that has outstripped that of the philosophical tradition, due in large part to the common conviction that the primary subject of religious language is a mystery that is expressed only with difficulty.”<sup>33</sup> This should not be surprising, for the Bible itself is quite occupied with the notion of language. The book of Genesis opens with God ordering the creation by divine word; ever since this act, word and being have been linked together.<sup>34</sup> From the earliest of days, Christian philosophers and theologians have concerned themselves with the problem of language and the ability to adequately or meaningfully speak of God. The twentieth century merely fueled the fire of language and found ways for it to burn hotter than ever before.

---

<sup>30</sup>See Carl F. H. Henry, *Frontiers in Modern Theology: A Critique of Current Theological Trends* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 146-148; James W. Sire, “On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody: Logocentricity and Postmodernity” in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup>Richard Rorty, “Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Language,” in *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, ed. Richard Rorty (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 9.

<sup>32</sup>It would equally be mistaken to assume that language concerns did not arise in philosophy until the twentieth century. The issues and problems concerning language go as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the battles between Socrates and the Sophists. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Plato explored questions concerning language. In his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato questions the nature of language and whether names were a matter of convention. Aristotle also dealt with issue of metaphor and the superiority of univocal language. For more information see Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 8-11.

<sup>33</sup>Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 1. Gordon Kaufman would not wholly disagree with Stiver’s thoughts, stating that the question “What do we mean by ‘God’?” is as old as theology itself, but he does believe that this question and others related to it “were more or less ignored or overlooked during the neo-orthodox period.” For more on Kaufman’s thoughts see Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Problem of God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 4.

<sup>34</sup>Fred P. Thomson Jr., “The Word of God,” in *Christian Doctrine: The Faith Once Delivered*, ed. William J. Richardson (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Publishing Company, 1983), 40-41.

## Metaphor

“Philosophers like language to be literal...Philosophers tend to think that literal speech is the default and metaphorical utterances are occasional aberrations, made mainly by poets and poets manqué.”<sup>35</sup> These words written by famed philosopher of language, William Lycan, not only sum up the sentiments of many philosophers but theologians and most likely the majority of church attendees.<sup>36</sup> The average person assumes that language is merely a representation of reality, the verbal equivalent of pointing, and has rarely, if ever, considered Lycan’s claim that “virtually every sentence produced by any human being contains importantly metaphorical or other figurative elements.”<sup>37</sup> It is for this reason that a careful treatment of metaphor is necessary.

It could be said that the reason language is so filled with metaphors is because life itself is metaphoric.<sup>38</sup> Metaphors are essentially comparisons, ways we seek to understand one thing by its relationship to another. They are attempts to help make that which is alien or strange more familiar by use of comparison. Vincent Brümmer contends that we always identify objects as belonging to a “kind” (for example people, animals, buildings, trees, etc.) and therefore all things have common recognizable characteristics. Without comparison, we would not be able to classify, or in fact distinguish various objects, and thus without comparison “we would not be

---

<sup>35</sup>William G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209. Lycan refers to the issue of metaphor as the “dark side” of the philosophy of language.

<sup>36</sup>Theologian Jaap Durand notes that his personal theological pilgrimage began in such a fashion in which he and others sought to extract “eternal truths” from the biblical message, often with little regard for historical context, in hopes of producing a systematized biblical principle. Durand goes on to explain how this method of theology can be (mis)used to justify all sorts of policies, including apartheid. See Jaap Durand, “When Theology Became Metaphor,” *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, no. 111 (November 2001): 12.

<sup>37</sup>Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, 209. Not only does virtually every sentence produced contain metaphor, but also it seems that virtually every theological work contains a treatment of metaphor. Dan Stiver notes that twenty-five years ago Mark Johnson, in his collection of essays on the philosophy of language, humorously reported that if books on metaphor increase at their current rate we will have more books about metaphor than people to read them. The sentiment of this statement could not be more accurate. Not only are there dozens of books about metaphor there are hundreds of books discussing metaphor as a subcategory. But if what Lycan says is accurate there is still much more needing to be said. For more information see Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 5. See also Mark Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), ix.

<sup>38</sup>I am not making a hard distinction between metaphor, analogy, symbol, and trope. It is understood that each of these has their own nuances. For more on the distinctions see Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, especially chapter 6; Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), especially chapter 4.

able to experience anything at all.”<sup>39</sup> If it is true that the “essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another,”<sup>40</sup> then it is also true that we exist in a constant process of metaphor, for we compare one thing, idea, or event against another every time we act or think. Our whole conceptual system, assumptions and presuppositions (worldview) are metaphoric for they are constructed out of language. In fact, the statement just made is itself a metaphor, that “language is constructed.” In this concept/statement language is being compared to a structure which is erected part-by-part. We could also speak of “breaking down language” in order to better understand it, but this too is a metaphorical concept for language does not “break” nor can we literally deconstruct an idea or statement. Metaphor is not simply a manner of speaking but of seeing one thing in terms of another. It is not simply objects we see and compare but ideas and events as well.<sup>41</sup> Metaphor is more than ornamentation or rhetorical color used to revitalize flat language.<sup>42</sup> Also, metaphors should not be thought of as merely useful bits of language, but, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson contend, metaphors are what we live by.<sup>43</sup>

As stated above, metaphor is an act of comparison but in language this comparison is made in order to convey what could otherwise not be said. The metaphor is not an unusual word but a word used in an unusual or uncommon way. Thus the metaphor of this work, “faith” is not a new word but a word being used in a new manner; it is a new comparison. This work is suggesting that God can be compared to humans in the sense that, just as humans act and operate on faith, God

---

<sup>39</sup>Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5. In the pages which follow, Brümmer gives a rather Kantian set of three points which are important for understanding classification. First, “the similarities and differences between things are given to us in experience.” That is, we do not produce these similarities and differences they “exist” objectively. Second, “which characteristics are to serve as a basis for the classification is a matter of choice on the part of the classifier.” This then is the subjective aspect of classification and is dependent upon various subjective matters pertaining to the person such as interests and concerns. Finally, “we are only able to divide things into classes if we have developed the skill to recognize the similarities and differences on which our classification is based.” Classification is a “skill” learned through life experience.

<sup>40</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

<sup>41</sup>Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 15.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>In the afterword, Lakoff and Johnson give one final statement on the pervasiveness of metaphor: “It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious.” Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 239.

too can be imagined and understood as operating in similar ways. The metaphor of faith, then, finds similarity amongst all the dissimilarity; God is similar to humans in this manner of faith even if there is not similarity in others. Metaphor is not solely about similarity though. Similarity only gives half the story. As Sallie McFague affirms, “metaphorical statements...always contain the whisper, ‘it is *and it is not*.’”<sup>44</sup> This whisper is a warning against what McFague refers to as the idolatry and irrelevance of religious language. Her warning is to protect the living metaphor against it slipping into the category of “dead metaphor.” Dead metaphors are believed but not seen, and the point of metaphor is “to see in light of it.”<sup>45</sup> Dead metaphors emit no light. Missing the fact that a metaphor has both elements of what is and what is not results from our becoming too comfortable with the metaphor. It is no longer arresting to our sensibilities and simply becomes a matter of convention. This event is fine in day-to-day living. It is not a problem if I forget that when I speak of the “table leg” or the “war of words” that I am speaking metaphorically. However, issues of theology are another matter. To speak of God as “father” and forget that God is something other than father is to step into the world of idolatry, for God is and is not each metaphor.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, as this work develops the notion of God’s faith it will be remembered that God is and is not like us in our relationships and that God’s faith is and is not like our own (even though I will not always point out the whisper of “and is not” in each use of the metaphor).

The use of metaphor is not to become vaguer but to seek accuracy. “[T]o take metaphorical thinking seriously is a demand for precision and clarity, though not of the logical sort.”<sup>47</sup> We might even use metaphors to speak of what we believe to be more basic or true regarding God. Not in an un-nuanced or literal sense but in that we see some uses of language as less picturesque and more “real.” We use the metaphor of “rock” to suggest that God is reliable, the metaphor of “king” to denote God’s authority, and in more recent times the metaphor of “mother” to convey God’s tender

---

<sup>44</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13.

<sup>45</sup>Marcus J Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 41. Borg presents a very interesting treatment of the Bible as history and metaphor.

<sup>46</sup>For more on McFague’s approach to models, metaphor, and idolatry see Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) and McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, chapter 5.

<sup>47</sup>Sallie McFague TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 39.



love. But are these metaphors of metaphors?<sup>48</sup> Theologians are more comfortable speaking of God's boundless love in univocal terms, but this too suggests that metaphors are not absent from truth but convey truth in living ways, experiential ways. By experiential, it is meant that the word and the meaning of "caring," for example, can be understood better by relating the word to personal experiences which summon memories, images, and feelings and not by simple conventional definitions. Along with the experiential is the emotional value that the metaphor brings. Metaphors bring with them feelings and attitudes,<sup>49</sup> but this experiential, emotive, and thus subjective aspect to metaphor does not mean that metaphors are above truth. The fact is that metaphors reveal truth in ways univocal language cannot. The metaphor of God's faith, then, is an attempt at reality depiction. Not in univocal terms, but in truth nonetheless. In fact, just as we speak of God's love in metaphoric terms, we still believe that God's love is more "real" than human love in that it is fuller, more complete love. Thus it is not a problem to speak of the truth of God's faith from a metaphoric stance if we can suggest that God's love, while being spoken of metaphorically, is authentic.<sup>50</sup>

According to McFague, "good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary."<sup>51</sup> One of the most shocking biblical metaphors is found in Hosea where God's relationship with Israel is depicted in metaphors of intercourse, love, passion, anger, disillusionment, and other anthropopathic imagery.<sup>52</sup> It is unknown whether the metaphor proposed in this work will upset and shock conventions—that is up to the reader. It is believed, however, that this new metaphor will spark new conversations about the relationship between God and humanity, God and the natural world, and even within God's triune self. If taken seriously, this work will at least open up old metaphors to new investigation. Metaphors of love and power will need to be reevaluated in light of the metaphor of divine faith. However, it is believed that the metaphor of God's faith will more seamlessly fit into the larger model of God as a

---

<sup>48</sup>Lakoff and Johnson would suggest there are metaphors of metaphors for they state, "metaphors are not merely things to be seen beyond. In fact, one can see beyond them only by using other metaphors." Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 239.

<sup>49</sup>Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, 14.

<sup>50</sup>For more discussion regarding the truth of metaphor, see below in the section "Criteria."

<sup>51</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 17.

<sup>52</sup>For an outstanding treatment of Hosea as anthropopathy of God see Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: I & II* (New York: Prince Press, 1962), 39-60, vol. 1.

relational being.

### Models

The metaphor of God's faith does not operate in isolation, but it is part of a larger framework of understanding and interpretation. Metaphor presupposes other and perhaps more dominant metaphors, or better, models. McFague writes that, "The simplest way to define a model is as a dominant metaphor; a metaphor with staying power."<sup>53</sup> While this may be the simplest way to define a model, models are not this simple. When a metaphor has staying power it becomes an interpretive lens by which we begin to focus and shape our understanding of the world. Metaphors with staying power become less known for their metaphorical qualities and fade into the background, but, as they do, they become structural, a framework so to speak.

There are many kinds of models which can be used by science or religion.<sup>54</sup> However, since the subject of theo-logy is beyond the physical senses, the theologian primarily uses conceptual or imaginary models. Brümmer rightly suggests that the purpose and value of theological or religious models lie in their ability to give meaning and faith to life whereas scientific models are primarily explanatory models of the physical world.<sup>55</sup> However, this should not imply that theo-logy has no explanatory power, for the religious model seeks to give meaning to the physical world but also to help us know or understand God. The value of a model is not only personal and subjective but reality-discovering as well. All models, according to McFague, "*re-describe* reality; the reference is not to reality as ordinarily or conventionally understood...something *new* is being said about reality which the user of the model believes describes it better, more appropriately, than the accepted views."<sup>56</sup> The scientist and the theologian each use their model to describe the reality and to shape it, to structure it in understandable ways. If the model is examined and reexamined, the model will be reshaped and reality re-described from time to time.

One widely held model of Christian theology is the model of God as relational. This is the "metaphor of metaphors" or the "root metaphor" to use the term

---

<sup>53</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 23.

<sup>54</sup>As Soskice notes, models are not limited to metaphor or idea. We can build model trains or we can use persons as living models. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 55.

<sup>55</sup>Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 13-14.

<sup>56</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 133-134.

coined by Stephen Pepper.<sup>57</sup> The metaphor that God relates to the world is deeply and widely accepted in the Christian tradition. Christian theologies universally agree that, in God's relationship with the world, God knows the needs and desires of humanity. It is commonly held that God knows being or existence other than God's self. God is not so transcendent that God's days are spent in some kind of Aristotelian self-pondering. In addition, God is not so immanent and one with the world that God's knowledge of the creation and humanity is ultimately, again, self-pondering. Thus the root metaphor of Christianity is that God is other and relational. This may be where the model's universal quality ends however. Opinions diverge greatly on how that relationship should be understood or modeled. Some models posit a God who is unaffected by God's relationship with the world and humanity. They hold that God is immutable and impassible. Others maintain that God is deeply conditioned by the world and that God is changed in significant ways by such a dynamic relationship. This work will build upon the model of relational theism which is "any model of the divine-human relationship that includes genuine give-and-take relations between God and humans such that there is receptivity and a degree of contingency in God."<sup>58</sup> This model will be surveyed and it will be suggested that a necessary metaphor for this model is that God is a being of faith. While the model of relational theism is not the chief purpose of this work, it will be explored prior to a case being made for God's faith for this model opens doors for God's faith better than any other model available.

In order for relational theism, as a model built upon the root metaphor of God as relational, to be viable, it needs to continue to offer better concepts and means of understanding the relationship between God and the world than its competitors. It needs to be comprehensive and include ways of conceptualizing God's relationship to humanity, nature, and God's self as well as how we are to understand our relationship to each of these. The images and concepts of the relationship, however, need to be relevant while at the same time non-idolatrous. This leads to a warning regarding models and metaphors.

McFague writes, "When a model becomes an idol, the hypothetical character of the model is forgotten and what ought to be seen as *one* way to understand our relationship with God has become identified as *the* way. In fact, it happens when a

---

<sup>57</sup>Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1942), 84-114, noted in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>58</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 12.

model becomes an idol, the distance between image and reality collapses.”<sup>59</sup> It could also be said that a model becomes an idol after reflection upon the model has become idle. If the model is closed off too tightly and not challenged or wrestled with, it sits idle, petrifies, and becomes set in stone as an idol. The model becomes an idol when its fecundity goes unquestioned and reaches the status of necessity. This is not only true of older models but current ones as well. Some theological models may only be a few years old and yet they have become unquestioned and therefore idolized. The model of God in relational theism is not above question and reform. This is not to suggest that all models become stale and useless, it is to suggest that any model will become stale and useless if it is not questioned, critiqued, and reassessed from time to time.

### Anthropopathic Metaphor

Anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expression is the most common type of metaphor used to speak of God. If the purpose of metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson assert, is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another, then the human metaphor for God is most appropriate given the various theological and philosophical statements concerning God and humans. Anthropomorphism is a term, which can be used broadly in the sense that it can refer to all language, used to speak about God and thus “all speech about God is anthropomorphic.”<sup>60</sup> In another sense anthropomorphism is limited to God being described or expressed in the form of a human or human attributes. The latter meaning is by far the most common, but it too can be narrowed even further using anthropomorphism to speak simply of physical human characteristics or human “forms” such as God’s eyes (Heb. 4:13), feet (Matt. 5:35), or in reference to God walking in the cool of the garden (Gen. 3.) More precise, and more appropriate to this study, are anthropopathic utterances. Anthropopathic refers to human emotions or *pathos* when applied to God (or any other nonhuman things). Thus, in a wide use “Anthropomorphism refers to descriptions of God’s being, actions and emotions...in human terms”<sup>61</sup> while anthropopathism is limited to descriptions of God’s emotions or thought processes.

---

<sup>59</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 9.

<sup>60</sup>Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 9. Ferré uses anthropomorphism in this broadest sense. See Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), especially chapter 6.

<sup>61</sup>T. Longmon III, “Anthropomorphism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: A Concise and Authoritative Resource*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 30.

While anthropomorphic language is unavoidable some treat it almost as a necessary evil. They maintain that the human metaphor is an obstacle that one needs to get around in order to speak of God univocally. Resistance to anthropomorphic language first appeared in the late sixth and fifth centuries BCE with the philosophical criticism of Xenophanes. “God is one, supreme among gods and men, and not like mortals in body or mind.”<sup>62</sup> Hellenistic Judaism continued in this vein. Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE—50 CE) argued, “God cannot have human form, for if He had, it would follow that He has human needs and desires.”<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic rendering of anti-anthropomorphism is the Septuagint’s attempted reconstruction or elimination of all such language. Adrio König notes for example, in the Hebrew Genesis 6:5-7, states, “The LORD *was sorry* that he made man on earth, and it *grieved* him to his heart.” However, the Septuagint changes this to read, “And the LORD *took to heart* the fact that he had made man on earth and he *reflected* on this.”<sup>64</sup> This attitude continued through the Church Fathers,<sup>65</sup> the Reformation,<sup>66</sup> and

---

<sup>62</sup>Edwin M Yamauchi, “Anthropomorphism in Hellenism and in Judaism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127, no. 507 (July-Sept. 1970): 213. It is not surprising given the immoral actions of the Greek gods that philosophers would eventually react so strongly to such linguistic conventions.

<sup>63</sup>Yamauchi, “Anthropomorphism,” 216. From this it is clear that Philo wished to avoid speaking of the Hebrew God in ways that might liken God to the Greek myths. Philo was the exception however. Yamauchi notes examples of rabbis in the Middle Ages who suggested God had a body (about 5,500 meters tall!) as well as rabbis in the early common era who held that God did such things as moan audibly, address prayer to God’s self and even spend part of each day studying the Torah.

<sup>64</sup>Adrio König, *Here Am I: A Believer’s Reflection on God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 65.

<sup>65</sup>Clement of Alexandria, for example, denies any sort of mental variations including joy, grief, or pity for these are rooted in the physical. Anthropomorphism is an accommodation made by God because of the weakness in human understanding. G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), 8. What is more interesting, however, is that Origen saw no value in anthropomorphisms related to physical characteristics but believed that those which had bearing on the human spirit had great value. König, *Here Am I*, 63.

<sup>66</sup>John Calvin writes, “The Anthropomorphites also, who imagined a corporeal God, from the fact that Scripture often ascribes to him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are easily refuted. For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.” John Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion, 2 Volumes--Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.13.1. The obvious problem with Calvin’s statement is that he, unlike the biblical authors, is above such “lispings” and understands God in God’s “loftiness.”

Historically, the Anthropomorphites were a sect of Christians who arose in 4<sup>th</sup> century Syria and, following the teachings of Audius, maintained that God, literally, had a physical form or body. The sect, and its variations, eventually died out by the 10<sup>th</sup> century. For more information see James J. Fox, “Anthropomorphism, Anthropomorphites,” *New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01558c.htm> (accessed October 2, 2007).

eventually became a target for modern critics of theism such as David Hume<sup>67</sup> and Ludwig Feuerbach.<sup>68</sup> Certainly one should not approach all anthropomorphic language univocally for this would strip God of any transcendence. But to use all anthropomorphic language equivocally, to see it as something which must be “cleansed” or “purified,” leaves God hidden and stripped of any immanence.<sup>69</sup> It is true that all language is human language and thus falls short of adequately describing God but to treat all language as anthropomorphism may render all theo-logy as apophatic. If anthropomorphic language is to be purified, then what can be said of God’s love, wisdom, or goodness? Can it even be said that God is a *living* God or that God has *being*?<sup>70</sup> Paul Tillich, while famous for seeking to reduce God to *being itself*, understood the value of human and symbolic language in reference to God. In dealing with the metaphor of “living God” Tillich writes, “We must speak of God as living in symbolic terms. Yet every true symbol participates in the reality that it symbolizes...Anthropomorphic symbols are adequate for speaking of God religiously. Only in this way can he be the living God for man.”<sup>71</sup>

Anthropomorphic language has received a new hearing of late. Theologians and philosophers who are embracing metaphorical theology are also valuing anthropomorphic language, viewing it not as something to be avoided (or idolized!) but as a signpost pointing to God in memorable and even shocking ways. At least three arguments can be made for the use of anthropomorphic metaphor. First is the fact that the biblical witness is replete with anthropomorphisms.<sup>72</sup> While no theologian would deny the ample use of anthropomorphic language in the Bible, it has been commonplace to see its use as “primitive” and something which was avoided by more sophisticated biblical writers especially postexilic. But this is not quite accurate

---

<sup>67</sup>David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, the Posthumous Essays, Of the Immortality of the Soul, and Of Suicide, from An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding of Miracles* ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1998).

<sup>68</sup>See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989).

<sup>69</sup>Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 68-69. Ferré does a nice job of setting up the problem of extremes in these two approaches.

<sup>70</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). Marion gives a provocative treatment of God. Marion eschews typical approaches to God that set out to describe God’s being and then God’s acts. Marion sees this as idolatry and suggests that God loves prior to God being. Marion states on page 138, “Only love does not have to be. And God loves without being.” This however, does not solve the problem of human language in reference to love when understood to be of God.

<sup>71</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 1.242.

<sup>72</sup>For a good treatment of this, see König, *Here Am I*, chapter 2.

as Mark Smith notes:

The avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery was by no means a general feature of Israelite religion after the Exile. While the tendency away from anthropomorphism marks priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions belonging to either through the fifth centuries, later works belonging to the priestly traditions continued to transmit anthropomorphic imagery. Postexilic priestly texts, such as Zechariah 3, attest to the divine council. Zechariah 3:7 includes the high priest in the ranks of the celestial courts (cf Zech. 12:8.) Postexilic apocalyptic circles also continued anthropomorphic renderings of Yahweh and the divine council (Daniel 7; cf Zech. 14:4, 1 Enoch 14.) These and other biblical passages (such as Isa. 27:1) reflect the continuation of old mythic material in postexilic Israelite tradition.<sup>73</sup>

Smith goes on to cite several non-biblical Jewish offerings which also make heavy use of anthropomorphic language. What we fail to see, however, is an evolution beginning with human forms and moving to spiritual as is commonly assumed. A careful evaluation of the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrates, in fact, that it is “not the spiritual nature of God which is foundational of Old Testament faith. It is personhood—a personhood which is fully alive, and a life which is fully personal, and which is involuntarily thought of in terms of human personality.”<sup>74</sup> It was anthropomorphic language which allowed these authors to depict God in personal ways. God was not like the gods of the surrounding cultures which were often depicted as animals or other natural phenomena but as a being with whom one could be in relationship.<sup>75</sup>

The New Testament is also filled with anthropomorphic language. Despite Hellenistic influence, the first century biblical authors did not avoid speaking of God in human terms. For example we read of God’s ears (James 5:4), hand (John 10:29), and face (Matt. 18:10). God’s feelings and action are also found throughout including God taking pleasure (Luke 2:14), loving (John 3:16), working (John 5:17), and speaking (Mark 9:7).<sup>76</sup> König even notes Paul’s statements about the “foolishness of God” and the “weakness of God” (1 Cor. 1:25).<sup>77</sup> The whole of scripture makes

---

<sup>73</sup>Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 145.

<sup>74</sup>Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume 1*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1961), 211. Eichrodt goes on to say that a “doctrine of God as spirit in the philosophical sense” cannot be found in the Hebrew Scriptures and not until John 4:24 is it possible to declare “God is a spirit.” See page 212.

<sup>75</sup>The Hebrew Scriptures certainly speak of God in zoomorphic terms including eagle (Deut. 28:49), dove (Mark 1:10), and lamb (Rev. 5:6).

<sup>76</sup>König, *Here Am I*, 61.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

heavy and constant use of anthropomorphism, and while the New Testament integrates the category of spirit with God's being it hardly shies away from human language for God. This brings us to the second point.

Not only does the New Testament not shy away from anthropomorphism, it takes it to its pinnacle in the doctrine of the incarnation.<sup>78</sup> Jesus Christ is understood to be *the* anthropomorph of God. Jesus became the personification of God, in whom God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:15-20). The incarnation proclaims that God related to the world most concretely in the person, flesh, blood, and psyche of Jesus Christ. Sanders writes:

If the incarnation is true and the divine Son experienced fully human life, then God in this way relates to the world in precisely the same way we do. Jesus is the consummate revelation of God in human form. The divine self-disclosure in Jesus puts an end to the claim that being in the form of a human is contrary to the divine nature. To overturn this, we would need a priori knowledge that the divine nature is completely unlike human nature, which would render an incarnation impossible.<sup>79</sup>

Sanders is correct that if there is absolutely no likeness between the divine and the human then the incarnation is impossible for it would be the equivalent of God denying God's own nature. And so if one does wish to remove all anthropomorphic utterances then what is left is not an incarnation as traditionally understood but a Gnostic apparition.

Lastly, anthropomorphic language is appropriate because it makes sense. To speak of God as person requires us to speak, think, and experience God in human forms, human forms which are both transcendent and immanent. Robert King states that "Conceptually there must be some overlap between the way in which we speak of God and the way in which we speak of ourselves."<sup>80</sup> He notes that the word "I" and the word "God" have significant similarities, a similar logic because "God and self are analogous concepts with analogous roles to play in our language. It should not be unusual then if the one should serve as the model for the other, if in order to get clear about the concept of God we should look to the concept of the self."<sup>81</sup> King is not

---

<sup>78</sup>It is not being suggested that the New Testament offers a single or unified treatment of incarnation. It is quite clear that the christologies of Mark and John differ significantly. However, even if one takes a Hickean approach that Jesus never claimed divinity but that this was an invention of the early church, it still demonstrates that many of the earliest followers of Jesus were not afraid to speak of God in anthropomorphic language.

<sup>79</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 26.

<sup>80</sup>Robert H. King, *The Meaning of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 42.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-22.



suggesting that God and the self are synonymous but that they are similar.

To suggest that God is like humans, and not merely that humans are like God, is only possible by way of the *imago Dei*. Humans, as the image and likeness of God, become models for understanding, conceptualizing, and speaking about God. From the *imago Dei* one could logically ask, is language about God anthropomorphic or is language about humans theopomorphic? The answer is yes, to both, especially in light of the discussion above concerning incarnation. From a Christian perspective, one cannot discuss anthropology without discussing theology, and likewise, one cannot discuss theology without discussing anthropology. However, it is important to note the “varying degrees of correspondence” in anthropomorphic utterances.<sup>82</sup> Not everything said about humans or the self applies to the divine and vice versa, and so it might be helpful to discuss what kind of anthropomorphic language is appropriate for this kind of study.

Few authors make much of a distinction between anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language, but the difference is important. All anthropomorphic utterances are not of the same value and some anthropomorphic utterances are more fitting than others. While it is obvious that God has no feet, is it equally obvious to say that God has no anger or no love? While no anthropomorphic metaphor is literally true, it can be said, as noted by Paul Tillich, that true symbols (or metaphors) participate in the reality which they symbolize.<sup>83</sup> It is for this reason that it is more helpful to speak of anthropopathic utterances than anthropomorphic in the framework of relational theology and the metaphor of God’s faith. Jewish scholar Abraham J. Heschel is thought to be the first to give a positive rendering of anthropopathic language and even called the preaching of the prophets a “theology of pathos.”<sup>84</sup> The preaching of the prophets was not that of an apathetic or impassive God but of a God filled with emotion.<sup>85</sup> It is the emotions, thoughts, feelings, and actions of God which are most important to a relational theology and not God’s *form*. Here again, it is asked, “Is speaking about God’s *pathos* merely anthropomorphic or is there something theopomorphic in our own *pathos*?” Throughout the history of the Christian tradition, doctrines of the immutability and impassibility of God have held

---

<sup>82</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>83</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1.240.

<sup>84</sup>König, *Here Am I*, 91.

<sup>85</sup>See Heschel, *The Prophets*.

sway. But if one is to speak of God loving, living, and even being, one must give thought to loving, living, and being without pathos. This however brings us right back to the problem of God-talk if there is no truth in the metaphor.

This work seeks to make ample use of anthropopathic language, not as an obstacle to get past or as a veil to get behind, but as a signpost to point forward.<sup>86</sup> It is best to remember McFague when she reminds us that “metaphorical statements...always contain the whisper, ‘it is *and it is not*.’”<sup>87</sup> It is a careful path we walk between transcendence and immanence, between conception and mystery. With this in mind, it is as problematic to speak of God as wholly other as it is to speak of God as wholly same.

### **Interpretive Context**

Concepts are always formed within *a* community and for *a* community and this work is no exception. It is a conception developed within the community of Christian faith and is an offering to that community. It is an offering contextualized by particular presuppositions and sense making abilities born out of and developed within a particular historical and cultural setting. Context is a very important concept in contemporary theology for there is no longer the idea that theology can be done in a vacuum. All theological ideas will reflect the communities in which they were born. The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” was born out of John Wesley’s desire to note the sources of theology which included scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. What must be remembered is that even these four sources themselves are contextually developed and will always be understood and applied within a communal context. The Quadrilateral is not for the purposes of getting beyond context for the influence of each of the sources will be contextually driven. The theologian’s community and context shapes how he or she understands and uses these sources.<sup>88</sup> Context can also

---

<sup>86</sup>Or as Marion might say, not as an *idol* upon which we fix our eyes, but as an *icon* which surpasses itself. For more on the idol icon diction see *God Without Being*, 7-24.

<sup>87</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13.

<sup>88</sup>For a helpful reworking of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral see David Lertis Matson and Warren S. Brown, “Tuning the Faith: The Cornelius Story in Resonance Perspective,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33, no. 4 (winter 2006). Matson and Brown first of all suggest that the sources or domain of “Rationality” should be split to include “Science” which would be based on information that is observable and repeatable while “Rationality” would be the use or application of mathematics, logical, and philosophical arguments. The primary focus of the article is to discuss a better way of understanding how the domains of the five sources relate. Matson and Brown put forth a “resonance model” which analogously speaks of each source as a radio giving off an auditory signal. “All five auditory signals...have some implication for understanding truth. Thus, information from a single source is not alone synonymous with truth. Truth, such as it can be known, is found in the interdomain resonant field” (452). Matson and Brown use the “quadrilateral” contextually by applying it to the

be conceived of as an authority for the theologian. Colin Gunton writes, “We must acknowledge the fact that all theologies belong to a particular context, and so are, to a degree, limited by the constraints of that context. To that extent, the context is one of the authorities to which the theologian must listen.”<sup>89</sup> John Franke, while noting that there are obviously dangers involved in accommodating theology to culture, writes “the quest to construct a theology free from the influence of culture is misguided. We simply cannot escape from our particular setting and gain access to an objective, transcultural vantage point. All views emerge from a particular location.”<sup>90</sup>

Stanley Grenz and John Franke speak of this approach as “pilgrim theology.”<sup>91</sup> Pilgrim theology is theology that is:

formulated in the context of the community of faith and seeks to describe the nature of faith, the God to whom faith is directed, and the implications of Christian faith commitment within the specific historical and cultural context in which it is lived. Although the essential commitment of the believing community to the God revealed in Jesus does not change, the context in which this confession and its implications are lived out is in constant flux.<sup>92</sup>

As a Christian, male, white, American, westerner who treats biblical literature as a normative resource, my theology is going to reflect this context. This is not inherently problematic, however, for there is not a context-free manner in which to conduct theological studies and offer innovations. Problems arise when an author forgets that his or her context is but one of many and offers a theology that is intended to be above context. Also, while my intention is to be as objective as possible, it should be stated that I have genuine sympathies for relational theology. Many of the relational theologians mentioned in this work have shaped much of my theological thinking.

---

Cornelius story and the Jerusalem church exploring how different domains resonated in the decision to admit Gentiles into the faith community.

<sup>89</sup>Colin Gunton, “Using and Being Used: Scripture and Systematic Theology,” *Theology Today* 47, no. 3 (October 1990): 253; quoted in John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 85.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 90. For Franke’s fuller approach to contextual theology see chapter 3.

<sup>91</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16. Grenz and Franke offer a working definition of Christian theology as “an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life, and practices of the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ’s followers in the vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.”

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

## Criteria

If metaphors are comparisons in which we say that an object, event or person “is and it is not” like another, does this not presuppose that we have some sort of knowledge of the two things being compared? And yet, if we can obtain this kind of knowledge would the purpose of a metaphor simply be to lead us to literal or univocal language? Again, is the point to get beyond the metaphor? This is Carl Henry’s judgment when he suggests that the middle road of predication between univocal and equivocal (such as analogy or metaphor) is futile if we cannot come to univocal knowledge. “Unless we have some literal truth about God, no similarity between man and God can in fact be predicated...The alternative to univocal knowledge of God is equivocation and skepticism.”<sup>93</sup> While Henry seems to suggest that metaphor masks literal language and truth, others, such as John Hick, have suggested that metaphors are simply useful myths, or more precisely, fictions.<sup>94</sup> While Henry’s approach leads to latent idolatry and implies limits on God’s ability to break into our situation and radically alter our metaphors, the Hickean mythic, relativistic, or pure paradoxical approaches undermine a Christian conviction and hope that the language we use is not simply metaphors of metaphors of metaphors but a meaningful way to compare something real which exists beyond the individual or community. As Brümmer states, “It would be incoherent to live my life as a life in the presence of God if I were to deny that there really is a God in whose presence I live.”<sup>95</sup> While God is known by metaphor God is more than metaphor. In response to such critique, this proposal is offered. First, it needs to be remembered that theology does not get a reprieve from the truth question. To simply state that theology is beyond any truth test is problematic. The Christian life is one lived in the hope of living virtuously and faithfully. Without a standard (what is virtue...faithful to what?) this talk is gibberish. Secondly, as theologians and philosophers of science have demonstrated theological truth and scientific truth cannot be held to the same criteria.<sup>96</sup> We cannot

---

<sup>93</sup>Carl F. H., Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 3 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1979), 364; quoted in Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, 21.

<sup>94</sup>John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977; *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 101-103.

<sup>95</sup>Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>96</sup>For more on evaluating truth claims in science and religion see Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

empirically verify the scientific truthfulness of a metaphor. Where does this leave us?

A new metaphor or “conceptual innovation” in theology needs to meet at least two basic criteria: coherentism and pragmatism.<sup>97</sup> Grenz and Franke write that “At the heart of coherentism is the suggestion that the justification for a belief lies in its ‘fit’ with other held beliefs.”<sup>98</sup> Coherence suggests, “we are justified in believing a claim just so long as it fits in (or coheres) with the rest of what we believe.”<sup>99</sup> The idea is that given that all beliefs are understood and formulated within a context it is prudent then to examine other beliefs within one’s belief system. Since a person can never step outside his or her belief system and evaluate a metaphor (or innovation to a belief) against a truth known independently of that system (correspondence theory<sup>100</sup>) it is necessary then to evaluate a metaphor by the system. The question that needs to be asked is if the innovation contradicts other core beliefs and metaphors. Or more positively, does the innovation fit into the system?<sup>101</sup> The innovation presented needs to be intelligible, at the very least to those in the Christian community at large,<sup>102</sup> but perhaps more importantly to the community in which the author is offering the conceptual innovation. Since I am writing, primarily, but not exclusively, to and for relational theists it is important that this innovation fit within relational theology just as it is necessary that relational theism fit within the larger Christian communities.

Coherence begins linguistically for the language and symbols used need to

---

<sup>97</sup>Philosopher Vincent Brümmer proposes four criteria in these questions: 1) Is this innovation proposal internally *coherent*? And is it coherent with other conceptual forms that I am unable to set aside with integrity? 2) Is this innovation proposal *adequate* to the demands of life as I experience these in my cultural and historical situation? 3) Is this innovation *intelligible* to me, in the sense of being sufficiently consonant to the cultural tradition that constitutes my horizon of understanding for me to “know what to make of it”? 4) Can I accept this innovation with *integrity*? Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25. Terence Fretheim offers three criteria: 1) adequacy to common human experience; 2) intelligibility and coherence; 3) faithfulness to the biblical witness and the tradition in which a given image stands. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 16. In the belief that simpler is better I will condense this to simply two criteria.

<sup>98</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38.

<sup>99</sup>W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>100</sup>The correspondence theory of truth says quite simply that a proposition is true in the case that it corresponds to reality. The proposition must be compared to reality and if it “matches up” it is factual. For fuller explanations and defenses of the correspondence theory of truth and its use in theology see David K. Clark and John S. Feinberg, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, Foundations of Evangelical theology (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003) and J. P. Moreland, “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 2005).

<sup>101</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 39.

<sup>102</sup>Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How To Think Theologically*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 36.

make sense to the reading community. This is not always straightforward given the paradoxical nature of faith, but the more intelligible the language used the stronger the possibility for the innovation's acceptance. The goal in this respect may be a "plausible coherence" that is "a degree of cohesiveness in the multifaceted meaning of Christian faith and the avoidance of contradictory messages."<sup>103</sup> Brümmer notes that this person-relative or communal approach is not limited to ethics or theology but is meant to "apply to all our thinking in all contexts," adding that, "Even something as intersubjective as a valid deductive argument succeeds in proving its conclusion only to those who can accept the truth of its premises with integrity."<sup>104</sup> The conception of God's faith can only be accepted if the language and symbols make sense within the Christian relational theological community. The innovation must appeal and make sense to the presuppositions of the hearing community before it can be accepted as true.<sup>105</sup>

Just as it is necessary to have theoretical coherence, it is necessary to find the pragmatic in the innovative metaphor. By asking if the innovation is pragmatic, I am not necessarily evoking the philosophy of pragmatism. Rather, I am asking the somewhat simplistic question of whether embracing this new metaphor will be fruitful to the believing community. A new metaphor or conceptual innovation can be pragmatic in a variety of ways including ethically, emotionally, or communally. While I believe this innovation might be productive in these ways I am concerned with this innovation being intellectually or systematically pragmatic. That is, just as this metaphor is developed, understood, and offered up contextually and is evaluated by whether it fits within the intended community's belief system, it must also be evaluated by whether it aids the belief system in its own endeavors for coherence. Because this metaphor is innovative it must benefit the community, systematically or coherently, for if there is nothing gained by its use, it is simply unnecessary baggage. The innovation needs to be more than valid; it needs to be advantageous to the belief system as a whole.

---

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God*, 26.

<sup>105</sup>It should be noted that the categories of "true" and "false" as typically understood, must also be understood within the context of the community. For example, it has been argued that truth cannot be split into objective/subjective categories for this assumes truth is "out there" independent of the community. Truth, like all symbols, functions within the context of the community. For more on truth and the objective/subjective dichotomy see Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chapters 23-28. Philip D. Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

It is the contribution of this study to suggest that theology can and should find room for the notion that God is a person of faith. This theological metaphor rests on a model of relational theology. This conceptual innovation, like all theological innovations, needs to be subject to careful critical evaluation. However, the criteria used needs to fit the subject at hand. All models and metaphors cannot be evaluated in the same manner. For example, science offers models that include empirical data and observation for the understanding of the universe. Models, no matter how successful, imaginative, or fruitful, are not static or timeless and need to be challenged and, perhaps, eventually toppled by new and better models.<sup>106</sup> This is true for scientific as well as theological models. And since the “God of faith” is a metaphor within a larger model of relational theology, it needs to be asked if this metaphor offers meaning, value, and integrity, not simply in the larger model of relational theology, but within our most basic experiences as persons of faith in our current historical situation.

---

<sup>106</sup>Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, chapter 6.



## CHAPTER 2 RELATIONAL THEISM

### **A Working Definition**

The term “relational theology” has an elusive history. Many theologians today speak of relational theology but are unsure of the history or development of the expression. The terms “process philosophy” and “process theology” originated with Bernard Loomer, in the 1950’s at the University of Chicago.<sup>1</sup> By the 1970’s the term “process-relational theology” was being used. However, most felt that the title was a bit “clumsy” and resolved to simply call it “process theology.”<sup>2</sup> The term “relational theology” is hardly limited to process thought for it is being used by evangelicals, feminist theologians, and even scientists.

However, in its broad use “relational theology” has yet to be defined in any normative manner. The following is a selection of some of the various ways the title has been defined. John Sanders states that:

thinking of God as a risk taker only makes sense within a particular theological model: a personal God who enters into genuine give-and-take relations with his creatures...By this I mean any model of the divine-human relationship that includes genuine give-and-take relations between God and humans such that there is receptivity and a degree of contingency in God. In give-and-take relationships God receives and does not merely give.<sup>3</sup>

Terrence Fretheim writes, “Most basically, God is present and active in the world, enters into a relationship of integrity with the world, and both world and God are affected by that interaction. In this relationship, God has chosen not to stay aloof but to get caught up with the creatures in moving toward the divine purposes for creation, and in such a way that God is deeply affected by such engagement.”<sup>4</sup> Denis Edwards offers, “Relational theology involves a real, two-sided, but differentiated relationship

---

<sup>1</sup>Donald Viney, “Process Theism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/> (accessed March 24, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>John Cobb, email message to author, February 15, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, 12.

<sup>4</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 108-109.



between God and creatures, a relationship in which God becomes vulnerable.”<sup>5</sup> And Jacques Haers writes, “Relational theology, a theology that uses as its root metaphors connectedness, encounter and conversation.”<sup>6</sup>

While it would be inaccurate to suggest that there is an official “school of relational theology” in the same sense that there is a definite and detailed “process theology” or “classical theology” (even though there are real variations in each of these), I would agree with John Cobb when he says, “In general I would not treat most uses of ‘relational’ theology as designating a specific, distinct position. It is used as an adjective highlighting an emphasis on relationality.”<sup>7</sup>

### Classical Theism

Before presenting an overview of relational theology, it would be helpful to note the school of thought to which relational theology is, in many ways, exists in reaction. Classical theism is by and large the primary way in which western Christians have conceptualized God. It is classical in that its formation dates back to some of the earliest Christian writings. Classical theism can be summarized, for our purposes, by six key beliefs or features relating to God: 1) pure actuality, 2) immutability/impassibility, 3) timelessness, 4) simplicity, 5) necessity, and 6) omnipotence/omniscience.<sup>8</sup> These beliefs, while not exhaustive, hit upon the basic

---

<sup>5</sup>Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 40.

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Haers, “Defensor Vinculi et Conversationis: Connectedness and Conversation as a Challenge to Theology,” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. J. Haers and P. De May (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2003), 15. It seems that Haers’ theology is about relationships between humans. Nonetheless this definition is applicable to relational theism as well.

<sup>7</sup>John Cobb Jr., e-mail message to author, February 15, 2006.

<sup>8</sup>Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 54-55. Kärkkäinen actually develops his list from the classical theism critic David Ray Griffin, whose book *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976; New York: University Press of America, 1991) actually contains eight categories treating Kärkkäinen’s immutability/impassibility and omnipotence/omniscience separately. This list in this form is also found in Ronald Nash’s “Process Theology and Classical Theism,” in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987), 8-13. Nash’s defense of classical or Thomistic theism in his book *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983) also lists Griffin’s eight categories but his own list treats impassibility as a subsection of immutability, and basically omits pure actuality only mentioning it without a formal treatment. Norman Geisler’s *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New “Open” View of God--Neotheism’s Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997) has a less systematic treatment of classical theism that lists, with some explanation, God’s aseity, simplicity, necessity, immutability, impassibility, eternity, and unity but which also includes longer treatments on God’s unchanging relationship with the world, infinite unchangeable knowledge, and God’s unchangeable will (see pages 25-43).

foundation or “the essential core”<sup>9</sup> of classical thought in the doctrine of God. Classical theists do disagree regarding the exact understanding of these attributes, whether each one equally applies to God, as well as how soundly biblical support can be demonstrated.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this review is not to advocate or critique any or all of these attributes but simply to outline.

Pure actuality<sup>11</sup> is the concept, built upon Aristotelian thought, that every *thing* which exists is a combination of form and matter<sup>12</sup> with each thing possessing both actuality and potentiality. Potential is what is yet to come. It is a future state, or what might have been, a different reality. Pure actuality finds two expressions in classical theism. The first is that God is perfect and perfection is complete, therefore there can be no potentiality in God. God, being completely perfect, cannot become more perfect, and is therefore pure actuality. God is absolute, pure actuality, pure form with no potential. This notion has several logical implications such as immutability, necessity, omniscience, and timelessness, but the main point under this heading is that nothing happens *to* God but only *by* God. Sovereign activities on God’s part, whether freely chosen creative acts or freely chosen eternal stasis, will not add to God’s being or diminish it in any way. Nothing in God can be taken away and nothing can be added. It might be said that God is all that God has ever been and ever will be and God will never be what God is not.

Immutability/impassibility naturally proceeds from God’s pure actuality. If God is absolute perfection in pure actuality, there can be no change or mutability for this would imply that God, already being perfect (or a perfect Being), could only change into imperfection. Philo was the first to write concerning the immutability of God, arguing that God was fully other than the unstable creation and even suggesting that the greatest “wickedness” would be to think that the unchangeable God could in

---

<sup>9</sup>Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 72.

<sup>10</sup>John Cooper, for example, sees room for modifications to classical theism in the area of simplicity: “The strong version affirms that the divine nature in itself is absolutely without distinction. In God, everything is logically identical.” This approach which leads Cooper to state, “I cannot defend it” (page 326). For a complete treatment of classical theism see John W. Cooper *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 319-346. Ronald Nash, while defending classical theism, believes there is room to question the categories such as timelessness and even eliminate simplicity. See Nash, *The Concept of God* chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup>Also known as aseity or self-sufficiency.

<sup>12</sup>According to Aristotle all substances (things or beings) are a combination of both form and matter. A thing’s “whatness” is its form. It is what makes a thing a tree, chair, or human. Matter is what gives a thing its “thisness” and makes it a particular thing and not a general concept. The matter is unique to a particular object while the form is shared among many objects. Matter and form thus make what Aristotle called substance. For more information see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol. I Greece and Rome* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1962), 287-319.

fact change.<sup>13</sup> Immutability/impassibility was also firmly in place early in Christian thought. For example Clement of Alexandria denied any mental variations, including the emotions of joy, pity, or grief, in the person of God.<sup>14</sup>

Immutability can take two forms theologically; weaker and stronger. Weaker immutability is the understanding that God's character and general will are unchanging. God is not capricious in nature nor is God morally dilute. Weaker versions allow for God to have "new experiences" in either God's own free acts or possibly the free acts of humans. Weaker immutability means that God can either create or not create, as stated above, but this would not constitute a change in God because God's character as well as God's will remain unchanged.<sup>15</sup> Strong versions suggest that God cannot change at all. If God is timeless, wholly actual, and simple, then God cannot change. Being perfect and purely actual, God cannot change for the better for that would assume that God lacked something good, so any change that would take place would be a change for the worse.

Impassibility proceeds from immutability for if God cannot change, then God cannot be moved emotionally. Some classical theologians suggest a strong and a weak reading of impassibility. Strong impassibility suggests that God has no emotion and any scriptural references to God rejoicing or grieving are merely metaphors. Those who favor a weak reading of God's impassibility suggest that God can genuinely emote but any and all emotion in God is of a free choice. In other words, there is nothing creation can do to cause God to grieve. All apparent change in God's emotions is grounded in God's sovereign and free will. There is nothing humanity or any other aspect of creation can do to *cause* God to change. Norman Geisler understands impassibility to mean that God has no unfulfilled desires, stating, "God is without passion. For passion implies desires for what one does not have. He lacks nothing." Geisler concludes with a weaker rendering when he states, "However, to say that God is impassible in the sense that he has no passions or cravings for

---

<sup>13</sup>Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 75-76. Philo argued for several attributes of God that would become key concepts in classical theism including God's omniscience of all future events, creation of time, and necessary existence.

<sup>14</sup>G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), 8.

<sup>15</sup>John Cooper offers a weak version of immutability when he writes, "God's freedom to create also entails a distinction between his essence/nature and existence. If God had chosen not to create the world or not to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, then the full actuality of God's existence, including the life of the Trinity, would be different than it is. Thus classical Christian theism must affirm an element of contingency in God's life quite apart from the issue of his involvement in temporal change. But it does so consistently with a strong notion of immutability of God's nature and his unchanging will." See *Panentheism*, 327.

fulfillment is not to say that he has no feeling. God feels anger at sin and rejoices in righteousness.”<sup>16</sup>

Immutability and impassibility are apophatic terms which do not explain the nature of God but simply remind the theologian of what God is not. Biblical passages that speak of God emoting or repenting are most often read as simply metaphorical by the classical theist, which suggests that such anthropomorphic language, while revealing something about God, does not reveal a passionate God.<sup>17</sup>

Timelessness is the concept that God stands in a unique relationship to time.<sup>18</sup> God is “outside” of time for time is a creation of God. Time has not always existed and may one day cease to exist. Timelessness can also be understood as eternity, which is, “the enduring, simultaneous presence of the infinite divine life without any succession.”<sup>19</sup> God’s relation to time is certainly a complex concept and is understood by various classical theists in a variety of ways, but what is always agreed upon is that time is in no way a limitation for God.<sup>20</sup> Advocates of divine

---

<sup>16</sup>Norman L Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New “Open” View of God--Neotheism’s Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), 29.

<sup>17</sup>For a lengthy defense of God’s impassibility see Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*

<sup>18</sup>Issues regarding God and time rest on two discussions: the nature of time and God’s relation to time. The nature of time is important for if time is metaphysically real, then God either exists and acts in time or must exist outside of time. If time is not a reality but a way of speaking about relations of events, then God is neither in nor out of time. These two issues fortify arguments regarding the nature of eternity as either “everlasting” or “atemporal.” Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions on the nature of time have taken two approaches known as the “a-series” and “b-series” of time, based upon the works of J. M. E. McTaggart. Those who support the a-series maintain that there is “now” which exists independently of our experience while the b-series supporters maintain that the “now” is simply a feature of experience. The b-series approach suggests that events can only be located in relation to other events, something can only happen before, after, or simultaneously with another event. A-series supporters believe this approach denies the “now” which eliminates a real past or real future. For the a-series the “now” is real independent of mind, while b-series makes the “now” dependent on knowing minds. For more on time see Gregory E. Ganssle, “Introduction: Thinking about God and Time,” in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 13-16; J. J. C. Smart, “Time,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Volumes 7 and 8*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 126-134.

<sup>19</sup>Cooper, *Panentheism*, 330.

<sup>20</sup>For treatments on the possible approaches to God and time see *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001). In this volume, three views express either the classical or a modified classical theistic approach to God and timelessness. Paul Helm argues for the most traditional approach suggesting that God exists in pure and absolute timelessness. Alan Padgett’s offering argues that God should be understood as “relative timelessness” which holds that God created time and transcends time but is also temporal in God’s relationship with the world. William Lane Craig represents a middle-knowledge approach that he titles “Timelessness and Omnitemporality.” In Craig’s treatment, God has both timeless and temporal existence, and it could be argued that his approach is such a radical modification to the classical view that it should not be included. Nonetheless Craig’s view is significantly different from the relational approaches that posit a radically open future. Finally, Nicholas Wolterstorff advocates divine temporality suggesting that God has a real history, and, while God is not damaged by time, God exists wholly in time. The four views overlap in many ways and even the authors note significant agreements between them.

timelessness have included Augustine and Aquinas, but Boethius, the sixth century Christian philosopher, may be the best representative of the view. Boethius held that God is eternal, but this should not be understood to mean that God has a past and a future or that God has existed and will always exist. This would imply that God is somehow within the stream of time. For Boethius, God's eternity is "the complete and perfect possession at once of an endless life."<sup>21</sup>

The doctrine of timelessness must be understood, from our limited human perspective, as paradoxical, not incoherent, according to its advocates. The paradox suggests that God's "actions are timeless, although they have their effects in time. His thoughts and reactions are timeless, although they may be thoughts about or reactions to things in time, His knowledge is timeless, although it includes knowledge of things in time."<sup>22</sup> Given that the concept of timelessness developed at the end of the Patristic period and thus relatively late in the formative years of classical theism, it is most likely that timelessness developed as a safeguard to early concepts such as immutability and pure actuality. For example Geisler relates timelessness to immutability suggesting that:

total immutability necessarily implies eternity. For whatever changes substantially is in time and can be computed according to a before and an after. Whatever does not change cannot be in time, since it has no different states by which before and after can be computed; all are the same. It never changes. Therefore, whatever does not change is not temporal. Hence, God is eternal.<sup>23</sup>

As will be shown timelessness also gives necessary grounding to divine omniscience.

Simplicity is the doctrine that God is not composed of parts like everything else in the universe. God is one and thus simple. However, God's simplicity or oneness is not the concept of God having only one "part," but that God is essential "pure form" without any material or elements.<sup>24</sup> Simplicity also means that nothing can be added to, or taken away from, God, including knowledge or desires. The doctrine of simplicity also entails that God's properties are not what God is composed of or, again, parts of God, but that God is identical with God's nature. Simplicity

---

<sup>21</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 224.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>23</sup>Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, 30. Geisler even seems to imply that God cannot enter or act in time being that God is purely actual when he writes "God cannot be temporal in any way, since all time involves change" (32).

<sup>24</sup>Keith Ward, *Concepts of God: Images of the Divine in Five Religious Traditions*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 137.

though, speaks against what has been done up to this point, speaking about God's attributes as differing qualities. If God is simple, all talk of God's attributes is nonsense. Classical theist Francis Pieper addresses this problem stating that "since finite human reason cannot comprehend the infinite and absolute simplex, God condescends to our weakness and in His Word divides Himself, as it were into a number of attributes which our faith can grasp and to which it can cling."<sup>25</sup> As Ronald Nash notes, these attributes then are not objective, in that they do not exist in any real distinction within the being of God, but are subjective, in that they are human conceptions.<sup>26</sup> In like fashion Keith Ward states, "We may speak of God having various properties—of wisdom, goodness, power and so forth. But 'the diversity this implies is not to be attributed to God himself, but to the way in which we conceive him.'"<sup>27</sup> Simplicity then is a significant doctrine for the grounding of many, if not all, the other attributes. If God is not simple, then God could gain new knowledge, which would imply that God is mutable.

Necessity has been treated differently by philosophers and theologians. Philosophers speak of God's necessity meaning that it is impossible for God not to exist given the fact that the world is filled with contingent beings. Necessity has been treated in weaker and stronger versions with the stronger, known as logical necessity, relating the idea that God's nonexistence is impossible. Logical necessity maintains that God's existence is as necessary as is a triangle having three sides. Just as three-sidedness is logically necessary for the concept of triangles, existence is logically necessary for the concept of God. To put it another way, "God is not only identical with his essence. He is also to be identified with his existence...if you say he always is, that means that God's actual existence is part of, or is identical with, his nature. That nature carries its existence with it."<sup>28</sup> The weaker form, known as factual necessity, suggests that because God is eternal and uncaused, unlike everything else, God is necessary for the factualness of all other things. God is necessary, factually but not logically, for it would still make sense to utter "God does not exist" while it

---

<sup>25</sup>Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 1:428; quoted in Nash, *The Concept of God*, 85.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>27</sup>Ward, *Concepts of God*, 137. Ward uses quotation marks but does not reference the quote. It is assumed that given his subject being Aquinas this statement should be attributed to him.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

would be nonsense to say “I have a five-sided triangle.” This discussion of God’s logical versus factual necessity continues today among theologians.<sup>29</sup>

God’s necessity is not only about God’s existence but every attribute God has. It is no accident that God is immutable, simple, or omniscient because anything other would not be God. As Griffin, tying simplicity with necessity, states, “the doctrine of simplicity entails that *everything* about God is necessary. Since the divine essence is necessary, and there is nothing “in” God other than this essence, then God as a concrete whole is necessary.”<sup>30</sup> Again, the interdependence of each attribute is in necessity as well.

Finally, omnipotence/omniscience could be seen as the logical conclusion of what has been said above or possibly as the necessary foundation for the doctrines so far expressed. Both approaches recognize the necessity of omnipotence and omniscience for a tightly knit classical expression of God’s being.

Omnipotence is a difficult concept to define and explain. Nash explains that some argue that any limitations placed upon God’s power seriously undermine the classical rendering of God and thus define omnipotence as God’s ability to do anything. However, Nash says that this was never the approach taken by medieval theologians.<sup>31</sup> Most theologians have understood omnipotence as God’s ability to do anything that is logically possible; power that does not violate the law of noncontradiction.<sup>32</sup> Thus it is not a problem that God cannot do certain things such as cease to exist. The debate in recent years has been over the notion of “logically possible.” However, for the classical theist the list of logically impossible acts is very small. While God does not act in anyway contrary to the logic of God’s nature, God is free to will whatever God chooses. Omnipotence is directly tied to the sovereign will of God. God must be able to get whatever God wills, for if God were to will something and was unable to bring it into actuality, then this would be a serious limitation on God’s being.

God’s omnipotence and will must be understood in light of apparent creaturely freedom. One approach is to argue that God’s creatures are not actually free but also

---

<sup>29</sup>For more on the philosophical nature of necessity see Nash, *The Concept of God*, 107-112.

<sup>30</sup>Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 75.

<sup>31</sup>Nash, *The Concept of God*, 37. For example, it was not seen as a limitation that God could not sin or could not do what was only possible if God was corporeal.

<sup>32</sup>René Descartes is one of a small number of philosophers who maintain that God is even above the laws of logic for these laws are dependent upon God and not the other way around. For more information see Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 16-22.

fully determined by God's will. This would most certainly be the traditional Calvinistic approach in which God's will is never frustrated because God has sovereignly decreed all that takes place, including all human actions and ends. Calvin supports such an approach when he writes:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.<sup>33</sup>

While the very strong view of omnipotence maintains God's mysterious will is the cause of every event in the universe, other classical theists have sought to understand human free will acting in concert with God's omnipotence. Gordon Lewis appears to be taking this approach when he writes, "Although God determines some things to come to pass unconditionally, most events in history are planned conditionally, through the obedience of people or their permitted disobedience to divine precepts. In any case, God's eternal purposes for history are not frustrated, but fulfilled in the way he chose to accomplish them."<sup>34</sup>

Omniscience is an important doctrine which allows these theologians to suggest that God is not the cause of all events but is in control of all events, for God infallibly knows the future free choices of every person and thus is in control of the entire future. By omniscience, God is able to know every future free act, either actual or potential, and use them to accomplish God's will. While omnipotence has been qualified by arguments suggesting that God can do what is logically possible, omniscience claims are typically left unqualified.<sup>35</sup> Omniscience is generally stated as "God knows all things,"<sup>36</sup> or in a more nuanced statement, "the range of his [God's] knowledge is total: He knows all true propositions."<sup>37</sup> The idea of omniscience is often tied to timelessness for if God is outside of time then God can see or know all events simultaneously. Timelessness would allow God to know all

---

<sup>33</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.5.

<sup>34</sup>G. R. Lewis, "Attributes of God," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), 458. It is Lewis' notion of "planned conditionality" that will raise questions concerning the coherence of such a view.

<sup>35</sup>For example, many relational theists will suggest that God knows all that can be known. If God does not know something it is logically impossible to be known by any being regardless of that being's abilities or knowledge.

<sup>36</sup>Lewis, "Attributes of God," 454.

<sup>37</sup>Nash, *The Concept of God*, 51.



future free acts of individuals without necessarily being the cause. In this sense God actively and sovereignly preordains all events *because* of God's infallible and total knowledge of the future.<sup>38</sup> Other classical theists do not worry about maintaining human free will or wrestling with the questions of how God knows an indetermined future, and they suggest that God knows all things simply because God is the author of all things. God knows every event because God has foreordained every event.<sup>39</sup> Knowledge for God is as simple as God knowing his own acts and being. As Geisler argues, "God's knowledge is identical with his essence. For if God's acts of knowledge were distinct from his essence, then they would be related as actuality to potentiality. But there can be no potentiality in God; he is pure actuality."<sup>40</sup>

This last quote by Geisler nicely demonstrates how each of these attributes, as understood in classical theism, depends upon each other to be coherent. These are not the only key beliefs of classical theism. I could have included the belief that God is triune and that this is understood in Tertullian's dictum "three persons, one substance." In addition the belief that God is good and omnibenevolent is also key to classical theism. However, these are lesser points of contention between classical and relational theists. It is the six key attributes above which, according to relational theism, hamper a lucid and consistent understanding of God's dynamic relationship to creation.

One final note: Some have suggested that this depiction of classical theism is a caricature and is not an accurate picture of the theologies of the shapers of classical theism. Langdon Gilkey challenges the accuracy of such depictions of classical theism by process theologians calling them "a strange hodgepodge that bears little

---

<sup>38</sup>This approach is espoused by Norman Geisler in "God Knows All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986). Geisler does offer a necessary, although problematic, qualification. Geisler is arguing for genuine human free will but also that God predestines all things upon God's knowledge of these free events. However, Geisler understands God to be timeless and thus God cannot know before God predestines for that would necessitate a sequence and thus time. Geisler then suggests that God foreknows and predestines in a timeless unified sense. Geisler writes, "Whatever he foreknows cannot be *based on* what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based on what he *forechose*. Both must be simultaneous and coordinate acts of God. Thus God knowingly determined and determinately knew from all eternity everything that would come to pass, including free acts. Hence, there are truly free actions, and God determined they would be such. God then is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs, and yet humans are completely free and responsible for what they choose" (71).

<sup>39</sup>This view is articulated by John Feinberg, in his article, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986). Feinberg takes a compatibilist approach to determinism and freedom, yet his emphasis is squarely on God's sovereign preordination of all events.

<sup>40</sup>Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, 34.

historical scrutiny.” Gilkey also states that the notion that “there has been a *dominant* conception of God in Christendom characterized by Thomist attributes” is a dubious argument.<sup>41</sup> William Placher suggests that this portrait is more a development of the modern era than an actual representation of thinkers like Aquinas, Luther, or even Calvin.<sup>42</sup> While the depiction of classical theism above is accurate concerning those who today bear the label “classical theist,” it might be less accurate concerning those who originally fashioned these ideas.

## **Examples of Relational Theology**

### Process Theism

Process thought is an elaborate metaphysical system developed in the early part of the twentieth century under the influence of Darwinian science, Einsteinian physics, German Romantic philosophy, Buddhist doctrines, and Classical Christian thought.<sup>43</sup> Developed primarily out of the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne,<sup>44</sup> process thought has been influential in a variety of disciplines spawning various ecological, philosophical, political, scientific, and theological subcategories.<sup>45</sup> For this study, the focus shall be limited to a brief treatment of process theology or more specifically, process theism.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Whiteheadian Metaphysics***

Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* is the backbone of process philosophy. It offers an imaginative metaphysical theory which posits that reality is

---

<sup>41</sup>Langdon Gilkey, “A Theology in Process: Schubert Ogden’s Developing Theology,” *Interpretations* 21 (1967): 449.

<sup>42</sup>William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 7.

<sup>43</sup>James C. Livingston and Francis S. Fiorenza, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 309-312. While these have been influences for process thought, they have not escaped critique from various process thinkers.

<sup>44</sup>It should be noted that other philosophers/theologians exerted influence upon contemporary process thought including Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Henri Bergson, but none have given shape to the school’s thinking like Whitehead’s metaphysics and Hartshorne’s writing on God. There have been others who have helped shape process thought and theology into its current form including John Cobb, Schubert Ogden, Daniel D. Williams, Norman Pittenger, David Ray Griffin, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki.

<sup>45</sup>These categories can also be broken down into three primary categories of “process philosophy,” “process theology,” and “process interdisciplinary thought.” For more information see The Center for Process Studies, “What is Process Thought?,” <http://www.ctr4process.org/about/process/> (accessed March 25, 2007).

<sup>46</sup>Process theology would include subjects such as anthropology, christology, ecclesiology, practical theology, soteriology, and more. By process theism, I mean to limit this survey to primarily the topic of God.

not static bits of matter but is at its essence dynamic, occasional, and always in process. Without Whitehead's metaphysics there would most likely not be a process theology. The process depiction of God is thoroughly dependent upon Whitehead's thoughts, so it is necessary to briefly explore his system.

Whitehead's metaphysical system was a radical departure from the metaphysics of being as found in Plato and the dualism of Descartes. Each of these had a relatively firm hold on philosophical thought. In order to break free from much of Platonic and Cartesian thought, Whitehead had to develop new terms and drastically alter the meaning of ordinary words. It is for this and other reasons that Whitehead's system can be difficult, even frustrating, and has spawned many interpreters.<sup>47</sup> While I strive to be accurate here my treatment must be deficient. Space only allows for a brief overview.

While much of the history of philosophy has emphasized a reality composed of substance, Whitehead was convinced that reality is a series of events, not things, which are always in a process of becoming and perishing. Even though things appear to be permanent, they are actually in process, or better, in process of becoming actual.<sup>48</sup> There is a primacy of time in Whitehead's thought. Reality is not fixed, waiting to be acted upon but is constantly moving and changing. Although Whitehead rejects the atomistic view of static substance that never actually changes but is merely rearranged into new forms,<sup>49</sup> he did adopt a kind of atomism in that all reality is composed of "tiny" bits of reality called "actual entities" or "actual occasions." Every actual entity is a unit of process, "a drop of experience that comes into existence through the creative process of concrescence."<sup>50</sup> All of reality is composed of these actual entities or occasions, even God. As Whitehead writes, "God

---

<sup>47</sup>While there are perhaps hundreds of writings on Whitehead's system, I am indebted to a few rather brief treatments: Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New Revised; New York: Crossroad, 1989), "Appendix;" John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 13-29; William F. Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy: The Contemporary Voyage 1900-*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2002), 487-498; Cooper, *Panentheism*, 166-172.

<sup>48</sup>Cobb and Griffin note that, even though process is fundamental to reality, not everything is in process for that would be self-defeating. Change itself would be subject to change and that is self-contradictory. There are unchanging principles and abstract forms. For more information see Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 14.

<sup>49</sup>Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (A Revised and Expanded Edition of *Religion in an Age of Science*; New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 285.

<sup>50</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 257. According to Suchocki, actual occasions and actual entities are almost synonymous except that actual occasions only apply to "finite entities, not to God." Actual occasions have a spatio-temporal locus while God is nontemporal in God's primordial nature.

is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space.”<sup>51</sup>

Materialists have debated ways in which to understand mentality in light of a purely physical world, Whitehead, however, proposed a different kind of monism. Whitehead’s “panpsychism” attempts to give a unified theory of reality, allowing for both the mental and physical to be genuine while avoiding problems caused by both materialistic monism and Cartesian dualism. Panpsychism is the theory that all things have varying degrees of mentality and will. It is in this sense that each occasion or entity is an “experience” and not mind or matter. All entities have genuine experiences even though consciousness will vary greatly. As Whitehead said, “The principle that I am adopting is that consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, “All actualities experience, but only a few experiences rise to the level of consciousness.”<sup>53</sup> Whitehead speaks of these experiences as “prehensions,” for each entity willprehend, or capture, its environment and experience the world even if it is not conscious of the relationship.

Prehensions are a part of an entity’s or occasion’s creative burst into actuality and can be positive and negative (these are not value statements). Prehension is an entity’s essential relatedness to the rest of the world, or, more accurately, its “multiplicity of relations.”<sup>54</sup> As an occasion becomes actualized it willprehend or “feel” all previous occasions. It is a “complex unification of the many influences in its past.”<sup>55</sup> This does not mean it exists prior to being related to its influences. Relation is primary, and the actual occasion is the relatedness of past (and the future). A positive prehension or feeling is the activity of an occasion, including the datum of its past within itself. A prehension will also be negative if it is to be distinct from its past. Negative prehension is the activity of an occasion, excluding data as it creatively actualizes.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps it could be said that a positive prehension *possesses*

---

<sup>51</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lectures, 1927-1928 (New York: Macmillan, 1929); ed. David Griffin and Donald Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York, Free Press, 1978), 18. All page numbers correspond to the corrected edition.

<sup>52</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 53.

<sup>53</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 17.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>55</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 238.

<sup>56</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 491. Lawhead gives this analogy: “a block of marble is creatively transformed into a statue by chipping away some of the pieces (corresponding to negative prehensions) so as to reveal a new form within the marble that is preserved (corresponding to positive prehensions).”

much of its past while a negative prehension *negates* parts of its past. The relationship between the actual occasion and its past is not simply causal, however. Each occasion has a self-determining element.

In a similar fashion to prehending, each actual occasion is dipolar with a physical and a mental pole. These poles do not constitute a breach between mind and matter for, in Whitehead, there is no distinction between the two. All reality has each of these poles: the physical (not material) conforming to the occasion's past; and the mental relating to its future. The physical is passive and causally determined while the mental is creative and self-determining.<sup>57</sup> While every reality has both poles, each one's importance will differ in actual occasions.<sup>58</sup> In the world of artifacts, it is the physical pole which dominates while the mental pole's influence is minor. For example, the influence of the mental pole in a nonliving object is "resisting the intrusion of novelty by continuing the patterns of the past...or allowing them to fade away...but it does not introduce anything new."<sup>59</sup> The negligibility of the mental pole and dominance of the physical pole is what accounts for the relative stability in artifacts. In more complex organisms, the mental pole dominates, allowing for subjective self-creativity and freedom. The difference between artifacts and living organisms, according to Whitehead, is a matter of degree, "but it is a matter of degree which makes all the difference."<sup>60</sup>

Creativity may be the most important aspect of Whitehead's metaphysics. Each new occasion is not simply formed by a history which causally acts upon it. Each occasion incorporates those previous events creatively forming them into a novel bit of reality. The occasion or entity comes into existence in relation to the realities of its past but also in relationship to the realities of its future possibilities. This coming into actuality for Whitehead is called "concrecence" which basically means "growing together" or "becoming concrete."<sup>61</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki defines concrecence as "the activity of becoming: it is the unification of many feelings into the single actual entity or occasion...The activity of concrecence is the

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 493.

<sup>58</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 239.

<sup>59</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 493.

<sup>60</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 179. Whitehead states it is a difference not simply of degree but quality.

<sup>61</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 492

self-production of the subject.”<sup>62</sup> William Lawhead notes that the process of becoming concrete (concrecence) has four phases.<sup>63</sup> First, as a new actual occasion actualizes it prehends its immediate past. The occasion is a result of past causes but this immediate history has not determined the event. Second, as the occasion actualizes from its past, there is a process of self-creation as well. The actual occasion will take the data of its past and unify it in novel ways creating a new synthesis. Third, when the self-creative act has brought about an actual occasion, it is said to have achieved “satisfaction.” The actual occasion is related to its past but has also brought about novelty. And in the very instant of its reaching satisfaction it perishes, giving itself and its datum to the next actual occasion. Finally, the occasion is no longer actual (but still real) but achieves “objective immortality” for it has influenced the universe, and the universe will never be the same because of that influence.

This process of actual occasions being caused or drawn to self-create, reaching satisfaction and then instantaneously fading away as they become the cause in the next self-creative actual occasion is the rhythm of the universe. It is what allows for novelty and connectedness. From this picture, process thought concludes that, “Nothing exists except by participation.”<sup>64</sup> But if nothing exists how do we account for “things” that seem to last beyond a moment? How are these subatomic, instantaneous, actual occasions related to rocks, coffee cups, computers, cells, animals, and humans? These objects all seem to have a relative bit of stasis; they seem to have being even though all reality is becoming. For Whitehead, “thingness” is explained in “societies of actual occasions” and “eternal objects.” First, actual occasions do not exist independently from one another. Just as they are related to their past and future, they are related to one another in societies which make up “objects.” All material objects, living or artifact, are composed of smaller objects such as neutrons, atoms, molecules, and each of these is made up of a seemingly endless number of actual occasions. Analogies range from pixels in a photograph<sup>65</sup> to television screens which are made up of billions electrical impulses.<sup>66</sup> And yet, while

---

<sup>62</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 257.

<sup>63</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 492. While I will follow his lead, I will take some liberties in explaining what takes place in each phase.

<sup>64</sup>Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 285.

<sup>65</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 237-238.

<sup>66</sup>Cooper, *Panentheism*, 167.

these societies of actual occasions creatively reach concrescence and fade away, we still have enduring objects. Whitehead explained the fact of characteristics and enduring forms by suggesting there must be “eternal objects” and “forms of definiteness.” These “objects” are not things but “potentialities for becoming... [and their] locus is the primordial nature of God.”<sup>67</sup> These “objects” and “forms” are quite platonic in that they are universals such as shape, color, and number which can be conceptually intuited.<sup>68</sup> Lawhead writes, “The process of becoming actual involves the selection and exclusion of forms from among this domain of possibilities. Hence, some forms become part of an event and others not.”<sup>69</sup> These forms or eternal objects are what the actual occasions or entities might reflect or “ingress” as theyprehend their past. Things such as rocks, trees, and persons are no more real than the societies of actual occasions of which they are composed. It is simply that these actual occasions are abstracted from eternal objects which reveal patterns, structure, and value in the experiential world.<sup>70</sup> Lawhead sums this up nicely: “From the temporal perspective, an object that endures through a span of time is really a series of actual occasions who come into being and perish while maintaining a stream of continuity by passing on their characteristics to the next emerging occasion.”<sup>71</sup>

These societies of actual occasions and entities are grounded by God who makes the process of becoming possible and orderly. God provides each entity its initial aim and God is related to every occasion. Because of God-given aim, freedom and novelty are possible, for, without God, the world would lapse into repetition and entropy.<sup>72</sup> Whitehead states, “The order of the world is no accident...the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but...this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God.”<sup>73</sup> Whitehead’s

---

<sup>67</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 258.

<sup>68</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 492-493.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 493.

<sup>70</sup>Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 314.

<sup>71</sup>Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 493. The difference between organic and inorganic objects may be explained in how the societies of actual occasions are related. Inorganic objects are roughly a single collection of societies while organic objects have independent societies of actual occasions that make up cells and these cells make up the organic objects. For humans “it is an intimately related society of cells organized and directed by a dominant actual entity (the mind) that imparts its subjective aims throughout the smaller entities composing the organism” (493).

<sup>72</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 29.

<sup>73</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (The Macmillam Company, 1926; New York: Meridian Books, 1954), 115.

metaphysics are important in the study of process theology for God does not merely relate to a world in process; God is also in process. As Whitehead suggests, “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.”<sup>74</sup> It is with this that I move into a process doctrine of God.

Process philosophy is the grounding for process-relational theology. Process philosophy suggests more than a relationship between God and the world but a metaphysical principle of relationality which permeates all reality, including God, at its very core. The process understanding of reality is not that all real things relate but that reality is relationality. Relationship is not how reality acts and interacts but interrelation is reality and, as Whitehead held, God is no exception.

### ***Process Depictions of God***

Process theologies of God have sought ways of integrating Whiteheadian philosophy of relational metaphysics with progressive biblical theologies in order to develop a more holistic picture of God and the world. These integrations have evolved since Whitehead’s publications, but the relational character of God and world has remained unchanged. In this section, I seek to give an overview of process theism without necessarily developing its evolution from Whitehead<sup>75</sup> to Hartshorne to Cobb and others.

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead offers several images of God in relation to the world, but it is the image of poet which may best represent the Whiteheadian process notion of God. Whitehead states that God “does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”<sup>76</sup> The image of poet with its artistic creativity is in stark contrast to medieval and modern notions of God as the Ultimate or Absolute. God the poet is an artist whose work is God’s very being. John Cobb

---

<sup>74</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

<sup>75</sup>It is typically understood that Whitehead’s thoughts on God evolved throughout his writings and that his thoughts reached their fullest development in *Process and Reality*. For more information on this subject see Forrest Wood Jr., *Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for a Philosophy of Religion* [book on-line] (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986, accessed 2 April 2007), chapter 4; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2736&C=2476>; Internet; John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* [book on-line] (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965, accessed 2 April 2007), Chapter 4: Whitehead’s Doctrine of God; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1085&C=1118>; Internet.

<sup>76</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346. Griffin and Sherburne note on page 413 that in the original copy of the book Whitehead had crossed out the word “leading” and wrote both “persuading” and “swaying.”



and David Ray Griffin<sup>77</sup> understand process theology as a critique of classical theism's notions of God as: "Cosmic Moralist,"<sup>78</sup> "Unchanging and Passionless Absolute,"<sup>79</sup> "Controlling Power,"<sup>80</sup> "Sanctioner of the Status Quo,"<sup>81</sup> and "Male."<sup>82</sup> The process vision of God has love as its primary metaphor for God. "God is love" expresses the reality of God but what love means is the question. Love, according to Cobb and Griffin, is not "active goodwill," as typically denoted by classical theologians, but is responsiveness to the other. It is not simply God doing what is good for the other<sup>83</sup> but God feeling what the other feels, sympathizing in an absolute relationality. "God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands."<sup>84</sup> This kind of love is what they refer to as "creative-responsive love."<sup>85</sup> This creative-responsive love is supported by Whitehead's notion of prehension. God does not simply act on the world but the world acts on God, and thus, God "feels" what the world feels. As Cobb suggests, "everything creatures do or say or think or feel makes a difference to God. All that they are is, for good or ill, a gift to God. This is true not only of human beings, but of, for example, sparrows as well. That means that what human beings do to other human beings -- and to sparrows -- they do also to God."<sup>86</sup> God and world are necessarily related, and this process notion is typically discussed as God's "dipolar" nature or as a larger theological notion known as panentheism.

---

<sup>77</sup>This five-fold list by Cobb and Griffin is most likely developed from Whitehead's "three notions of God that have been dominant in the Christian tradition," which include "the ruling monarch, in the likeness of Caesar; the ruthless moralist of the Hebrew prophets; and the unmoved mover of Aristotle." Ewert H. Cousins, "Process Models in Culture, Philosophy, and Theology," in *Process Theology: Basic Writings by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 13.

<sup>78</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 8. The "Cosmic Moralist" is one who proclaims arbitrary laws, keeps records of wrongs done, and punishes offenders.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-9. The "Unchanging and Passionless Absolute" is a being who is unaffected by anything external to God based on Greek notions of immutability and perfection.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 9. The "Controlling Power" is a being who is all-determining.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.* This notion is supported by the previous three and sees God as primarily interested in cosmic order and not creative love.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10. This being is known primarily through male imagery denoting dominance and inflexibility at the expense of feminist ideals.

<sup>83</sup>Cobb suggests that the God depicted by classical theism fails to meet even this lesser notion of love. *Ibid.*, 44-46.

<sup>84</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

<sup>85</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 41-61.

<sup>86</sup>John Cobb Jr., "Process Theology," Religion-Online, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1489> (accessed April 2, 2007).

God's nature and relation to the world was understood somewhat differently by Whitehead and Hartshorne. According to Whitehead, God is the "unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality. In this aspect, he is not *before* all creation; but *with* all creation."<sup>87</sup> God is that which gives creation its aim and potential concreteness amongst the absolute reality of creativity.<sup>88</sup> In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead discusses God as the "ground of concrete actuality."<sup>89</sup> God limits the infinite realm of possibilities which allows for actualization. God may also be understood as the "principle of limitation"<sup>90</sup> which gives value to the world.<sup>91</sup> God, Whitehead stresses, is not the foundation of the metaphysical situation we find ourselves in for if God is the author of this situation, as the medieval and modern philosophers have thought, "there can be no alternative except to discern in Him the origin of all evil as well as of all good."<sup>92</sup> However, God cannot be the origin of evil for God's very nature is "to divide the Good from the Evil."<sup>93</sup> God is a player in the metaphysical reality of creativity and process, or as Whitehead calls it, "philosophy of organism." God is not above change and evolution but is not subject to change and

---

<sup>87</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

<sup>88</sup>Whitehead's interpreters differ regarding what metaphysical role creativity plays. Whitehead speaks of God as subjective to creativity when he writes, "every actual entity, including God, is a creature transcended by the creativity which it qualifies" (*Process and Reality*, 88). This understanding of God and creativity seems to suggest that creativity is logically prior to God. However, Whitehead also speaks of God and creativity as juxtaposed to one another: "God can be termed the creator of each temporal actual entity. But the phrase is apt to be misleading by its suggestion that the ultimate creativity of the universe is to be ascribed to God's volition. The true metaphysical position is that God is the aboriginal instance of this creativity, and is therefore the aboriginal condition that qualifies its action. It is the function of actuality to characterize the creativity, and God is the eternal primordial character. But, of course, there is no meaning to 'creativity' apart from its 'creatures,' and no meaning to 'God' apart from the 'creativity' and the 'temporal creatures,' and no meaning to the 'temporal creatures' apart from 'creativity' and 'God.'" (*Process and Reality*, 225). For a helpful exploration of "creativity" in Whiteheadian thought, see Paul R. Sponheim, *Faith and Process: The Significance of Process Thought for Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1979), 77-90.

<sup>89</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Lowell Lectures (The Macmillan Company, 1925; New York: The Free Press, 1967), 178.

<sup>90</sup>Forrest Wood notes that Whitehead's thought on God as the "principle of limitation" develops. "When we move from the chapter on God in *Science and the Modern World* to *Religion in the Making*, we encounter a major change. God, the principle of limitation, has now become God, 'the actual but non-temporal entity whereby the indetermination of mere creativity is transmuted into a determinate freedom. This nontemporal actual entity is what men call God — the supreme God of rationalized religion.'" (*Religion in the Making*, 88). So Whitehead now conceives of God as an actual entity who performs the function of limitation. And we must note that he calls God a non-temporal actual entity. Wood, *Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for a Philosophy of Religion*, chapter 4.

<sup>91</sup>Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 178. Whitehead states that no reason can be given for the nature of God for God is the ground of rationality. "God is the ultimate limitation, and his existence is the ultimate irrationality."

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

temporality in the same sense that humans and the rest of the universe are.<sup>94</sup> God, like all actual entities, prehends future possibilities while prehending past actualities. In this sense, God is dipolar<sup>95</sup> with a primordial and a consequent nature.<sup>96</sup> God's "primordial nature includes all ideal possibilities and is therefore 'free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious.' His consequent nature prehends the entire universe of actual occasions and their entire past. Thus it is 'determined, incomplete, consequent, 'everlasting,' fully actual, and conscious.'"<sup>97</sup> In a most basic rendering, God's primordial nature is the source of infinite possibility while the consequent nature is that which has been actualized in the universe and thus into God. It is more than knowledge of the world that God actualizes into God's self but the experience itself.<sup>98</sup> In this, then, God is essentially relational to all that is within and without God.

Hartshorne's dipolar vision is very similar to Whitehead's but Hartshorne adds a new term to express God's essential relatedness: panentheism.<sup>99</sup> While Whitehead explained God as a single actual entity, Hartshorne spoke of God as an enduring society, a person in fact, who rules the universe as a member of the society, but not as an outside tyrant as classical theism would envision.<sup>100</sup> Depicting God as a person allowed Hartshorne to speak of God having both a mind and a body which causally

---

<sup>94</sup>Cooper suggests that Whitehead's philosophy could substitute Creativity for Spinoza's "Absolute God" and that Whitehead's God is the "primordial accident" or supreme instance of Creativity." Cooper, *Panentheism*, 174.

<sup>95</sup>While Whitehead's thoughts on God are typically understood as God having a two-part or dipolar nature, Keith Ward speaks of Whitehead's God of threefold character that includes God's primordial, consequential, and superjective. "The primordial nature sets out all possibilities, but is 'deficiently actual.' The consequential nature is the perfected actuality of consciousness. The superjective nature is that in which the perfected actuality flows back into the temporal world as an influence on the future." See Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 172.

<sup>96</sup>It is important to note that "nature" in this sense denotes how God relates. Since Whitehead conceived of all reality as relational, God's very nature is relational as well. God does not have two natures per se but two ways of relating.

<sup>97</sup>Cooper, *Panentheism*, 174. Cooper quotes Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343, 345.

<sup>98</sup>C. Robert Mesle gives the example that God not only shares the pain of the person with a skinned knee, God experiences the damaged cells themselves. See *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>99</sup>The term panentheism was coined by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) to distinguish his theology from those of pantheism and traditional theism. While the word has a relatively brief history, and its popularity did not rise until Hartshorne, the idea may be found philosophically as early as Plato and in a Christian sense as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century author Pseudo-Dionysius. John Cooper identifies five distinctions of panentheism: explicit/implicit, personal/nonpersonal, part-whole/relational, voluntary and/or natural, and classical/modern (27). For more information on the philosophical and theological history of the concept see Cooper, *Panentheism*.

<sup>100</sup>Cooper, *Panentheism*, 178.

interact. Panentheism, for Hartshorne, is a middle ground between pantheism and theism. Panentheism agrees with pantheism in that “God cannot in his full actuality be less or other than literally all-inclusive” while it agrees with traditional theism “on the important point that the divine individuality, that without which God would not be God, must be logically independent, that is, must not involve any particular world.”<sup>101</sup> For Hartshorne, “‘panentheism’ is an appropriate term for the view that deity is in some real aspect distinguishable from and independent of any and all relative items, and yet, taken as an actual whole, includes all relative items.”<sup>102</sup> This approach suggests that God is not wholly independent or wholly interdependent but uniquely both. “[N]o other being, in *any* aspect, could be either wholly relative or wholly nonrelative. Thus, while all beings have some measure of ‘absoluteness’ or independence of relationships and some measure of ‘relativity,’ God, and only God, is in one aspect of his being strictly or maximally relative.”<sup>103</sup> In this sense, then, “God is both absolute and relative, being and becoming, potential and actual, abstract and concrete, necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, immutable and changing, cause and effect, and maximally excellent yet always improving.”<sup>104</sup> For Whitehead and Hartshorne, God cannot exist independent of relationship, and yet the fact that God is essentially relational does not mean God’s essence is ever-changing. God is absolute and relative.<sup>105</sup>

The process panentheistic approach also reveals a dramatic difference between process thought and classical Christianity. Process philosophic mode of thought for the study of God, as Bernard Loomer writes, “is process-relational and the method is rational-empirical. The emphasis is naturalistic.”<sup>106</sup> Because God can be identified with the world, the method of process philosophic theology is experiential. While it is true that “Process theists are deeply concerned to think in a way that is continuous with the Bible” it must also be emphasized that “process theists suppose that theology can be convincing today only if it makes contact with contemporary scientific and

---

<sup>101</sup>Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948), 90.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>104</sup>Cooper, *Panentheism*, 181.

<sup>105</sup>For a lengthy exploration of this subject, see Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, chapter 2 “God as Absolute, Yet Related to All.”

<sup>106</sup>Bernard M. Loomer, “The Size of God,” in *The Size of God: The Theology of Bernard Loomer in Context*, ed. William Dean and Larry E. Axel (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 20.

historical knowledge.”<sup>107</sup> If it is true that “divine influence in the world is a fully natural part of the normal causal processes of the world, never supernatural interruption thereof” and panentheism the most adequate understanding of God’s and the world’s relationship, then a naturalistic and empirical methodology is most logical and rational in acquiring knowledge of God.<sup>108</sup>

While much can be said about the process theological understanding of God, I will focus the remainder of this section on expounding upon the process emphasis on God as relational in its critique of classical theism. Process theologians take the concept of “God is love” very seriously, understanding God ontologically as love. Love is greater than, and logically prior to, sovereignty. God as love is more than sentimental good will but is an active concern beckoning the world to greater and deeper acts of goodness and justice. To do that which is good is to be in harmony with God. In fact, love can be understood as God acting through those who do good.<sup>109</sup> Any attributes of God must be understood via this dynamic element of God.

The ontologically sovereign God of classical theism is held to be a leftover from Greek thought. According to Whitehead, the early church gave God attributes “which belonged exclusively to Caesar.”<sup>110</sup> However, according to process thought, God cannot act by coercion or unilateral acts of power. Coercion and power are not the nature of God’s internal relatedness nor are they the nature of love. God partners with creation in a creative-responsive love which can only lure the world into all goodness but cannot cause it to be good or keep it from doing evil. “God’s power is persuasive, not controlling.”<sup>111</sup> God’s inability to control or coerce is the main element of process theodicy.<sup>112</sup> Since God does not have a monopoly on power but instead must share power with other self-determining free agents, God does not, because God cannot, unilaterally determine any occasion.<sup>113</sup> God does not stop evil

---

<sup>107</sup>Clark H. Pinnock and John B. Cobb Jr., “Introduction,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), xiii. John Cobb is the actual author of these words.

<sup>108</sup>David Ray Griffin, “Process Theology and the Christian Good News: A Response to Classical Free Will Theism,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock and John B. Cobb Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 5-6.

<sup>109</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 48-49.

<sup>110</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

<sup>111</sup>Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 276.

<sup>112</sup>Whitehead said that, “All simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked upon the rock of the problem of evil.” See Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 74.

<sup>113</sup>Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 277-278.

because God cannot stop evil. In this way process thought seeks to preserve God's goodness and love at the expense of God's power.<sup>114</sup> But, because of God's essential relatedness, God is not above or outside of the evil and suffering of the world. As Griffin states:

Worldly events of pain and sorrow are received into God just as they are. God suffers with our sufferings, as well as enjoying our enjoyments. Since the world always contains a mixture of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, the divine beauty is always tragic beauty. Accordingly, the risks which God asks the creation to take are also risks for God. Stimulating the world toward greater intensity means the risk that God too will experience more intense suffering.<sup>115</sup>

God is ontologically empathetic in relationality. God's risk is the world's risk and vice versa.

Whiteheadian metaphysics and liberal Christian theology lead to a denial or a reconfiguration of the classical understanding of God's attributes in process theism. These reconfigurations emphasize a God who is deeply relational, responsive, and involved in the development of the world. In his book, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, Hartshorne lays out "six common mistakes about God," four of which deal with God's attributes.<sup>116</sup> The first mistake, according to Hartshorne, is the conclusion that God must be changeless since God is absolutely perfect. Hartshorne believes that the classical Christian doctrine of immutability is born out of a misunderstanding of perfection. Hartshorne says that static perfection is Platonic philosophy and not a biblically informed notion. The Bible does not imply that perfection excludes change in all respects.<sup>117</sup> As already noted, process theology suggests God is ever-changing and in process, while still maintaining God's changeless love and character.

The classical rendering of omnipotence is the second mistake. Hartshorne suggests that if God is understood as changeless perfection, including power, "whatever happens is divinely made to happen."<sup>118</sup> Process theology rejects the classical notion that God can do "anything" and instead suggests that "God has the

---

<sup>114</sup>Classical theism typically safeguards God's power while seeking ways to interpret God's love and compassion or to reinterpret evil itself.

<sup>115</sup>Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 309.

<sup>116</sup>Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 1-49. Mistake number five is "Immortality as a Career after Death" and the sixth mistake is "Revelation as Infallible."

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

highest conceivable form of power and that this power extends to all things.”<sup>119</sup> However, God’s power must be understood in light of the fact that God has also created “self-creating creatures,” beings with their own power of self-determination and the ability to create.<sup>120</sup> Process conceives of God as influence, luring self-creating beings into all goodness. God’s power is not coercive because it cannot, by definition, coerce a self-creating creature. As Hartshorne notes, this inability is only a lack or limitation of power on God’s part if omnipotence is conceived in a “false or indeed absurd ideal.”<sup>121</sup> Ultimately for the process theologian God exerts all the power God can in dealing with the world. God’s power is actually limited, not simply restrained, in God’s dealings with the world.<sup>122</sup>

Omniscience is the third mistake for Hartshorne. The classical notion that God, in perfect immutability, knows all truth, including future events, is impossible to reconcile with the idea of genuinely free agents. While the classical theist would suggest that a God who did not know all future events would be ignorant, Hartshorne argues that knowable future free events is a misnomer and a misunderstanding of the metaphysical reality.<sup>123</sup> He notes, “since events in time do not form a totality fixed once and for all, but are an endlessly growing accumulation of additional actualities, to view all time in a changeless fashion would be an erroneous view and not at all the highest conceivable or divine form of knowledge.”<sup>124</sup> Therefore, since time is not something fixable, and future events, by definition, unknowable, God’s inability to know the unknowable is hardly a “failure.”<sup>125</sup> The process approach does not suggest

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>God’s necessary limitation of power is a very important doctrine in process thought for it is the ground of process theodicy. Griffin has offered and advocated the most complete process theodicy in his book *God, Power, and Evil*. Griffin and other process thinkers suggest that the only way to justify God’s goodness in a world of genuine evil is to argue that suffering and evil happen because God is unable to eradicate them. If God can unilaterally prevent needless suffering, but does not, then God cannot be understood as good in any meaningful way. But God’s goodness is retained because God does wish to bring evil to an end, and is active in that goal, but ultimately “God cannot unilaterally effect any state of affairs” (280). God is dependent on the partnership of humans in the possibility of bringing an end to evil.

<sup>123</sup>Hartshorne notes that the idea of an unchangeable omniscience, which perfectly knows all the world’s history, is not found in Greek philosophy (except Stoicism, which denies human freedom) and is also absent in Eastern philosophies as well.

<sup>124</sup>Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 38.

<sup>125</sup>Hartshorne writes elsewhere, “that God ‘fails’ to know them eternally or beforehand is not properly a failure, for success here is mere nonsense, and where success is nonsense ‘failure’ is inapplicable. Hence it is quibbling to call God ‘ignorant’ because He does not know things which are not there to be known.” See Charles Hartshorne, “The Development of Process Philosophy” in *Process*

that God is unable to know a real and existing future, but rather, suggests that all reality, including God, is becoming and that the future is wholly potential. Therefore there is nothing God can know absolutely about the future for the future does not yet exist.

Finally, Hartshorne suggests that classical theism has mistakenly developed a doctrine of “God’s unsympathetic goodness” typically known as impassibility. In opposition to a static depiction of God, process thought promotes a God of “creative-responsive love.” Creative-responsive love is a high doctrine for process theology for it most dramatically combines the Christian teaching that God is love with the Whiteheadian metaphysics of becoming. God is a relational being who is responsive to a world in change and who always seeks to lure the world into more love. God’s consequent nature, which is in constant change, receives the history of the world while God’s primordial nature creatively responds to bring about authentic good. Cobb and Griffin see this depiction of God embracing many of the feminine qualities often eschewed in classical thought. Cobb and Griffin write:

The traditional concept of God is in many respects stereotypically masculine. God was conceived to be active, unresponsive, impassible, inflexible, impatient, and moralistic. This being has none of the stereotypically feminine traits—it was not at all passive, responsive, emotional, flexible, patient, and it did not balance moral concern with an appreciation of beauty.<sup>126</sup>

God is not a steely and stoic being who is unaffected by the joys and pains of the world but rather a being who prehends all feelings. God is quite literally “sympathetic,” for God feels what the world feels. Not that God simply understands, but that every feeling felt in the world is felt in God. As responsive love, God creatively seeks new ways to love and bring good in light of past events. God is not unmoving in God’s ways and means but only in God’s loving purposes.

Process thought depicts a God of endless creativity in relationship to the world. God, not being above metaphysics, but their chief example, is ontologically relational. By God’s very nature God is related to the world and must always act and react in light of this fact. We will see in the next section that it is this ontological relatedness that distinguishes process thought from open theism.

---

*Theology: Basic Writings by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 51.

<sup>126</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 61.



## Open Theism

In 1994, a book was published that caused quite a stir in evangelicalism. The book was the combined work of five evangelical theologians who sought to challenge the modern classical depiction of God, not from a philosophical foundation as in process, but from a conservative reading of the Bible. In the book, *The Openness of God*,<sup>127</sup> Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger challenge notions of an immutable, timeless, and all-controlling God on biblical, theological, philosophical, and practical grounds. This book was followed up by David Basinger's *The Case for Freewill Theism*,<sup>128</sup> John Sanders' *The God Who Risks*, Greg Boyd's *God of the Possible*,<sup>129</sup> and several others with the same basic theology. The thesis of all these works is that the God of the Bible is not the God depicted in classical theology but is a God who is vulnerable, responsive, mutable, and self-limited for God desires "responsive relationship" with God's creatures.<sup>130</sup>

The name "open theism," sometimes called "free will theism," suggests that the future and, thus, God's means of acting are not closed or settled by either God's supposed sovereign predetermining acts (Calvinism) or infallible knowledge of the future free acts by humans (Arminianism) but is open to all kinds of possibilities. A truly open future means that God's control and knowledge are limited by the choices of significantly free agents. God can only *know* what is actual, and since future free actions cannot be knowable *and* free, God is significantly limited. But open theists also maintain that God can still be praised as all-knowing for God knows all that *can* be known. Because much of the future is sheer possibility and not actuality, it cannot be known as the past is known. This is not a fault or weakness on God's part but is a simple fact of the reality God chose to create. Thus, the future is open to many possibilities.

While there are many excellent works that offer explanations and apologies for the open position,<sup>131</sup> I will first follow the structure of the argument given by

---

<sup>127</sup>Clark Pinnock and et al, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>128</sup>David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>129</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>130</sup>Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, back cover.

<sup>131</sup>Along with those already mentioned see: William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*

Pinnock in his chapter “Systematic Theology”<sup>132</sup> from *The Openness of God* and will finish with a few additional openness perspectives.<sup>133</sup> It should be noted from the start that openness theologians seek first and foremost to have a thoroughly biblically grounded approach. While process thought begins with philosophy, openness looks to the Old and New Testaments. Pinnock writes, “To be sound, theology (the open view of God or any view) must be true to the biblical witness as primary source...Tradition, philosophy and experience are important sources but of greatest importance is Holy Scripture and whether a model is consonant with it.”<sup>134</sup> Openness theologians, in seeking to give the Bible primacy, believe that their approach is more biblical than classical theism.<sup>135</sup> Open theists claim that in the “classical tradition the prima facie meaning of the texts cited in favor of the openness of God is commonly overturned in favor of another interpretation” most likely because “Greek thought played an extensive role in the development of the traditional [classical] doctrine of God.”<sup>136</sup> From this it is clear that openness advocates do not wish to ignore philosophy but that they see the biblical witness as fundamental.<sup>137</sup>

Open theism builds upon two key themes: God’s relational nature and genuine human freedom, each of which open theists believe are sound biblical models.

Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it, agents who can respond positively to God or reject his

---

(Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

<sup>132</sup>Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 101-125. The other chapters of the book offer biblical, historical, philosophical and practical considerations for the reader.

<sup>133</sup>In following Pinnock’s lead, I am not suggesting that all open theists are in complete unanimity in all respects. There is debate and disagreement, yet, as in process, there is a basic agreement and it is my intent to highlight in this section those concepts most concrete in openness of God thinking.

<sup>134</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 25.

<sup>135</sup>It may be this claim that has brought the most criticism. Many of the openness advocates are evangelical and have standing in the Evangelical Theological Society which requires its members to annually affirm, in writing, to the following statement before their membership will be renewed: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.” Evangelical Theological Society, “ETS Constitution,” <http://www.etsjets.org/?q=about/constitution> (accessed May 5, 2007).

<sup>136</sup>John Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” in *The Openness of God*, 59. Pinnock adds that he wishes to “overcome any distortions caused by excessive Hellenization and allow biblical teaching to operate more normatively.” See “Systematic Theology,” 101.

<sup>137</sup>Pinnock’s statement that he wishes to “overcome any distortions caused by *excessive* Hellenization and allow biblical teaching to operate more normatively” demonstrates this thought. See “Systematic Theology,” 101.

plans for them. In line with the decision to make this kind of world, God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static...the bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us.<sup>138</sup>

This statement nicely sets the agenda for the open approach to God. Humans are free, as is God, yet God chooses to create and rule the world in such a manner as to allow for genuine relationship that will mean an open future.

Open theists maintain a firm and ontological transcendence that characterizes God as “other.” God is “self-sufficient, the Creator of the world...sovereign and eternal.”<sup>139</sup> God’s self-sufficient transcendence can be demonstrated in two of the key traditional doctrines of creation: *creatio ex nihilo* and the trinity. Pinnock seems to use these doctrines to distance open theism from process thought and yet maintain openness’ orthodoxy. The trinity, according to Pinnock, allows the church to speak of a God who “embodies a relational fullness and richness of being in himself.”<sup>140</sup> Relationship is the very essence of God and the trinitarian doctrine of God as a community of persons, not modes of being, gives ground to that idea. God does not exist in solitary isolation but in an eternal community of “mutuality and sharing.” Intratrinitarian relationality is how open theists maintain God’s self-sufficient transcendence that also preserves God’s relational ontology. “The Trinity lets us say simultaneously two very important things about God—that God is (on the one hand) self-sufficient in fullness and (on the other hand) open to the world in overflowing love.” Therefore, “The triune God (unlike God in process theism) does not need the world to make up for a love and mutuality lacking in his nature.”<sup>141</sup> The trinity allows God to be free and exercise choice in God’s dealings with the world. A social depiction of the trinity then, according to openness thinkers, safeguards openness thought from some of the necessary limitations of the process God.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>142</sup>A Trinitarian formula is not altogether absent in process thought. While thinkers like Hartshorne seemed to dismiss the trinity or triunity altogether (see *Omnipotence*, 82 and *The Divine Relativity*, 32-34), others have sought to either reinterpret the trinity through Whiteheadian metaphysics or a modified Whiteheadian metaphysic. For more information, see Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997). For an insightful look into Aquinas’ depiction of God’s triunity through Whiteheadian philosophy, see

God as a self-sufficient triune creator means, according to open theists, that God does not create out of necessity but out of overflowing love. God, being triune, could have created any world God pleased, but God desired a world of beings capable of authentic responsiveness. God's relationship with the world then is free. "Without having to do so metaphysically, God seeks fellowship with us, out of grace and overflowing love. Sovereign and free, God chooses to be involved with us."<sup>143</sup> While in classical theism the creation might be seen as an exercise of God's power and glory and in process it is a necessary event that God is seeking to lure into goodness, the open approach seeks a middle ground. Creation is out of relationality but freely chosen. Pinnock writes, "The aim was to create an echo in space and time of the communion that God experiences in eternity, a reflection on the creaturely level of the loving movement within God."<sup>144</sup>

God's transcendence is only half of the equation. God is also immanent meaning that "God is everywhere present in all that exists. The world and God are not radically separated realities—God is present within every created being."<sup>145</sup> While it is openness' doctrine of transcendence that separates it from process theology<sup>146</sup> its approach to immanence has caused great debate in evangelicalism.<sup>147</sup> Openness has sought to reinterpret many of classical theism's divine attributes in ways that make relationship coherent and, according to openness advocates, more faithful to the biblical witness.<sup>148</sup> Omnipotence is recast by open theism in a way that

---

Walter E. Stokes, "A Whiteheadian Reflection on God's Relation to the World," in *Process Theology*, 137-152.

<sup>143</sup>Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 110.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid. While Pinnock does not use the term panentheism, this seems to be the implication. While openness theologians have tended to avoid the term, Pinnock expressed, in a personal conversation, that there might be room for an "orthodox panentheism." Pinnock goes on in this chapter to suggest Paul's quote of the Greek poet saying, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) demonstrates an interconnection between God's Spirit and the whole of creation.

<sup>146</sup>Openness theologians and philosophers have a great affinity for process thought and do not wholly separate themselves from such thinking. As examples see Clark Pinnock, "Between Process and Classical Theism," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987), 309-327 and Gregory A. Boyd, "The Self-Sufficient Sociality of God: A Trinitarian Revision of Hartshorne's Metaphysics," in *Trinity in Process*, 73-94.

<sup>147</sup>For critiques of open theism from a classical approach see Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?*; Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?: A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006); Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000); John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (P & R Publishing, 2001).

<sup>148</sup>While all openness advocates make hefty use of the Bible, the most thorough incorporation is found in Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, chapters 3-4.

allows God to remain “unquestionably the superior power” with the authority to “control all things,” and yet “God does not monopolize the power.” Instead God deploys power “in more subtle ways.”<sup>149</sup> Because God has given humanity the ability to self-actualize, to determine much of their own existence, God’s power must be surrendered in order to partner with persons, and yet, as opposed to process theology, God’s power is *self-limited*.<sup>150</sup> This self-limitation, according to Pinnock, actually demonstrates God’s greater power, and in no way should this be understood as openness claiming God is “weak.” “[I]t requires more power to rule over an undetermined world than it would over a determined one.”<sup>151</sup>

God’s power, in the open approach, must always be understood in terms of relationship. God’s power is not raw or abstract, but a power in submission to love. As Pinnock writes, “When love says that power will not work in a situation, power is allowed to withdraw in favor of powerlessness. God does not overcome his enemies (for example) by forcing but by loving them. God works, not in order to subject our wills but to transform our hearts. Love and not sheer power overcomes evil—God does not go in for power tactics.”<sup>152</sup> When God lovingly gives power to creatures, God chooses to influence instead of coerce, risk instead of control.<sup>153</sup> God, in open theism, is seen as “omnicompetent” with the ability to deal with any situation that

---

<sup>149</sup>Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 113.

<sup>150</sup>Pinnock does seem to imply that God has necessary limitations but these limitations came about only by God’s free choice to create self-determining creatures. He writes, “By willing the existence of significant beings with independent status alongside of himself, God accepts limitations not imposed from without.” See Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 113.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>153</sup>It seems that the reason God does not force creatures to love God is because the metaphysics of love do not allow such an event. Pinnock writes, “Humankind had to be granted real freedom, i.e. a capacity to respond, if we were to be able voluntarily to enter loving personal relations with God. He values freedom...as an instrument to make possible what he really longs for, love.” However, it is unclear whether Pinnock believes it was necessary for God to give freedom and limit God’s own power for the sake of love, for Pinnock begins this section in contradiction to what is quoted above, when he states, “He could have pre-programmed creatures to love him, but instead created them with the liberty to choose to love him freely” (*Most Moved Mover*, 126). Pinnock also claims that God’s love does not command but instead “woos and transforms us,” and, yet, God still retains the power of coercion for the reason that “to reduce God’s power to persuasion would make God too passive—it would be an overreaction against almightiness” (“Systematic Theology,” 116). I would suggest Pinnock theologically “wants to have his cake and eat it too.” This approach raises the question of why God does not coerce creatures into loving God if that is in fact possible. If much of evil comes from the free actions of sinful creatures, and yet freedom is not necessary for love, then freedom seems to be an awful experiment with no good purpose.

arises. The will of God is not brought to fruition by unilaterally determining all events, past, present and future, but by partnering with free creatures.<sup>154</sup>

To suggest that God has authentically partnered with humanity to bring about God's will means that divine immutability must be rethought. For if humans act in ways counter to God's wishes, then God will logically become angry and seek alternative ways to bring about God's will. Biblical stories that depict God changing God's mind, such as the story of Jonah, are often used to suggest that God does change and adapt to situations because of human freedom. God is not capricious or fickle—changing plans without reason—but is faithful to relationship. In this sense, immutability stands for God's character, and God's overall will for the care and salvation of humanity does not change. As Pinnock states it, "God is unchanging in nature and essences but not in experience, knowledge and action."<sup>155</sup> This naturally leads to the doctrine of impassibility which open theists quickly dismiss for it is "the most dubious of the divine attributes discussed in classical theism."<sup>156</sup> God's passion and pathos are strong biblical themes, according to Pinnock, suggesting that God is not aloof but deeply affected by God's relationship with the world. Overcoming notions of God's impassibility is a driving theme of Sanders' *The God Who Risks*. In this book God is chiefly portrayed as a being who risks pain and suffering for the joy found in authentic relationship.<sup>157</sup> How God suffers is not altogether articulated by open theists since God is ultimately beyond many modes of suffering.<sup>158</sup> The point

---

<sup>154</sup>Some classical theists have suggested compatibilism: that God controls all events and yet creatures are genuinely free.

<sup>155</sup>Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 118. Pinnock qualifies the statement by saying that God's changeability is unique in that God is not subject to involuntary change for that would make God contingent. God, being self-sufficient, allowed the world to affect God while God retained transcendence over it. It is unclear whether Pinnock includes God's emotional change. Open theists, Pinnock included, maintain that the world exercises some power over God in its ability to pain God in the reality of broken relationships (118-119).

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>157</sup>Sanders actually frames the book as a "theology of providence" suggesting that God risks by being relational with humanity as opposed to divinely determining all events. It is a book about impassibility for what is it that God ultimately risks other than God's own welfare? And, therefore, God cannot be impassible for God gets hurt in broken relationships and is joyful in communion with creatures.

<sup>158</sup>Weinandy argues that God does experience grief and sorrow but not suffering if it is understood as coming from within. "To ascribe suffering to God does not then imply that God experiences inner emotional anguish or distress because he has experienced some injury or the loss of some good, nor that he has been adversely affected by some evil outside cause, but rather it accentuates the truth that God's perfectly actualized goodness is wholly adverse to all that is contrary to his goodness, and that in his perfectly actualized love he embraces those who suffer because of sin and evil" (169). God's grief or possible "suffering" is more akin to God perfectly knowing those who do suffer. For more information see *Does God Suffer?*, 168-170.

being made by open theists is that God is not a disinterested observer or an immutable being whose will is sovereignly followed. God is also not in the stasis of the “eternal now,” experiencing all reality in a perfect unitary moment, but rather, God is in a real time relationship with the world and experiences the pains of a suffering world.

God is eternal, not timeless, according to open theists, suggesting that God “transcends our experiences of time, [and] is immune from the ravages of time.” But just the same, “God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present and future are real to God.”<sup>159</sup> It is important to emphasize God’s actions in time, according to open theists, for God’s salvific and redemptive actions in history are the heart of the gospel message. Most important, from a relational stance, is that if God is atemporal, then God cannot authentically relate to this world. God must be able to experience a succession of events with humans. God remembers and anticipates in the present. While God has full knowledge of the past and present, the future is open to novelty and possibility that leads to the open notion of divine knowledge.

If the future is open to real novelty, then God’s knowledge of the future must be limited for if God knew the future as God knows the past, there could be no real openness.<sup>160</sup> Open theists suggest that God’s omniscience means that God knows everything there *is* to know, therefore God is omniscient. However, because the future is sheer potential and not actual, God cannot know the future for there is nothing to be known. It is this part of openness theology which is most crucial to its approach and the most controversial for classically minded Christians.<sup>161</sup> The most crucial assertion of relational theology is that if the future is fully known, then there is no relationship because relationality requires freedom for both parties.<sup>162</sup> God and humanity need to be able to respond to the actions of the other. God does not simply act, according to open theists, God also reacts, responds, and reconsiders.

---

<sup>159</sup>Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 120.

<sup>160</sup>Pinnock writes, “omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events. If that were its meaning, the future would be fixed and determined, much as is the past. Total knowledge of the future would imply a fixity of events. Nothing in the future would need to be decided.” “Systematic Theology,” 121.

<sup>161</sup>Critics claim this approach undermines scripture and its prominent role for prophecy as well as depicting God as ignorant (see Ware’s *God’s Lesser Glory*). However, open theists argue that biblical prophecy is not simply divine future predictions or announcements of what will occur but open-ended statements on God’s part. These are conditional prophecies filled with statements like “Perhaps they will understand” or “It may be that they will listen” (Pinnock, “Systematic Theology, 122). For a lengthy discussion of these kinds of passages see Boyd’s *God of the Possible*, chapter 2.

<sup>162</sup>For a discussion of God’s knowledge and human freedom, see Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, chapter 2.

God also learns and, as Pinnock adds, enjoys learning.<sup>163</sup> This should not imply that God is a student or needs to overcome ignorance, but that “God created a dynamic and changing world and enjoys getting to know it. It is a world of freedom, capable of genuine novelty, inexhaustible creativity and real surprises.”<sup>164</sup> Pinnock even refers to God as the “best learner of all” and suggests that humans “should try to learn as God learns.”<sup>165</sup> God can be genuinely surprised as well, both in joy and disappointment. A God who learns is what should be expected if real, loving relationality, born out of freedom, exists.

Open theists maintain that although the future is open, it is not a wide-open future. Unlike process theologians, openness maintains that the future is “partially open” for God can and does unilaterally act. God has made promises and declarations and nothing can thwart God’s promises. One example may be the death of Jesus. God, in this case, according to open theists, predestined the death of Jesus as well as God’s incarnation in Christ.<sup>166</sup> God also knows particular aspects of the future exactly based on inevitable consequences of present events. God’s absolute knowledge of the past and present, as well as God’s infinite wisdom, allow God to anticipate future actualities humans could never know. Thus, from God’s perspective, the future is open to real novelty and, yet, closed in some respects based on his knowledge and his divine pronouncements.

Finally, while some have understood the openness discussion regarding God’s knowledge of the future to be a statement about God, it is actually a statement about the nature of reality. Regarding divine foreknowledge, Boyd writes:

[There is] a subtle but very important point regarding this debate about God’s foreknowledge—namely, it is not really about God’s knowledge at all. It is rather a debate about the nature of the future...The issue is not whether God’s knowledge is perfect. It is. The issue is about the nature of the reality that God perfectly knows. More specifically, what is the content of the reality of the future? Whatever it is, we all agree that God perfectly knows it.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup>Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 123.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Boyd also notes that there are even places in which God announces a particular plan and yet God’s mind is still changed. Thus, even if God says the future is fixed, there may be occasions in which it can be altered. See *God of the Possible*, 44-45.

<sup>167</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 15-16.



God does not, therefore, know future free actions because there is nothing to know. God knows what is—be it the past, present, or God’s own self-determined future action.

The God of open theology therefore is quite different from the God of process. In open theology, there is an effort to maintain many traditional beliefs, such as God being the creator *ex nihilo* of the universe and that God is not limited by metaphysics for God is the creator of all natural laws. Also openness maintains that God’s limitations are self-limitations. In other words, God could have created a world in which all future events were fully known by God, and God could have created a world in which there was no freedom. However, God did not create such a world. Instead, this is a world in which God has to take risks, risks that affect God’s own being. God thus can be genuinely angry, sad, joyful, and even surprised. So, the open theologian disagrees with the process thinker who maintains that God cannot act unilaterally upon creation and believes that God is not necessarily limited but is voluntarily limited. The open theologian in many ways is a bridge between process thinking and classical theology.<sup>168</sup>

### Other Key Figures

Those who wear a particular theological title, whether process theologian or open theist, are not the only ones who depict God as deeply relational. Vincent Brümmer, a philosophical theologian, often speaks of a relational God who wishes to respond to this creation. Brümmer even argues that God, in one sense, needs humanity in order to be God, stating, “like our love, God’s love needs to be

---

<sup>168</sup>On a personal note, I believe a continued dialogue between process and openness theologians is needed. Process theologians would benefit by dialoguing with others concerning various ways of understanding God as transcendent that include God’s ability to act at times, in one way or another, unilaterally. While God’s inability to act unilaterally is the crux of any process theodicy, I think there may be ways for process to speak of God’s final triumph over evil. Process thinkers have made steps towards traditional Christianity in rethinking such notions as the trinity and conscious human afterlife, so continued dialogue in this area is not out of the question.

Open theology needs to move past a functional relationality and adopt a genuinely relational ontology. To suggest that God is relational but that God ultimately does not need the creation because God’s real relationship lies within the trinity hardly supports the biblical language of God as Father or the church as the bride of Christ. If God’s authentic relationship is found elsewhere than with the world, then creation is at best a “foster child” or a “concubine.” The trinity should not be seen as a way for God to be relational without creation any more than a husband and wife are a family independent of their child. While it could be said that God was wholly self-sufficient in God’s triune existence prior to the creation, that creation forever changed God’s being, functionally and ontologically much like a mother who gives birth. She is forever changed both in what she does but also in who she is.

If the emphasis is relationality there is room for each theology to continue to move towards the other and yet remain distinct. The openness emphasis on the Bible and the process dependence on Whiteheadian metaphysics will always give distinction to the two approaches, and, yet, there may be ways continue bridging the gaps.

reciprocated. God needs our love, because he is the loving God he has freely decided to be.”<sup>169</sup> Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim argues at great lengths that God is relational. In his book *The Suffering of God*, Fretheim sets out a case for a God who suffers with and for Israel as God seeks to mend broken relationships. In one statement Fretheim declares, “The world is not only dependent upon God; God is also dependent upon the world. The world is not only affected by God; God is affected by the world in both positive and negative ways.”<sup>170</sup> Other scholars and theologians who could also be included in this list are Jürgen Moltmann, Thomas Oord, Ted Peters, Dorothee Soelle, and Keith Ward.<sup>171</sup> Scientists such as John Polkinghorne and Arthur Peacocke have also written works in which God is depicted as relational.<sup>172</sup> The end result is that the leading thinkers in theology are challenging the classical understanding of God as fully actualized, atemporal, and immutable today. The question that needs to be answered is whether the theological approaches of these thinkers have room for the idea of God’s faith. However, before a theology of God’s faith can be laid down, the idea and elements of faith need to be explored.

### Conclusion

While there are a variety of relational theologies from which to choose, process and open theism are the two most prominent schools of thought in North America today. Process, openness, and all other relational theologies can be distinguished from more classical renderings by these characteristics. First, God is ontologically relational. Whether this is understood in God’s relation with all reality or within the triune Godhead alone, God is understood as *being* relational. Second, humans are significantly free, self-determining, and self-creating. God is working with fellow minds who create, will, plan, act, and react. Third, the future is genuinely open to novelty. While there are disagreements over the extent of the future’s openness, all parties agree that the future does not exist in order to be known. Lastly, God does not determine the world’s events but allows for creaturely freedom as each move anew into the future. God is not a micro-manager. God influences and calls,

---

<sup>169</sup>Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 237.

<sup>170</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 35. See also Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*.

<sup>171</sup>These authors’ various works, which display their relational approach to God, are cited in chapters 4-6 of this work.

<sup>172</sup>For a more comprehensive list of contemporary relational theists, see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 161-164.

but in the end, God partners with humanity and creation to fulfill God's desires for this world. God's act of partnering means that God must trust, have faith. It is necessary then to explore the concept of faith in order to determine where it is a concept that can be used in reference to God.



## CHAPTER 3 FAITH

Faith may be the most widely used word in Christian theologies. It is used as a verb when Christians are called to believe and trust; it is a noun when Christians are called to have faith, and it is used synonymously for Christianity itself when Christians speak of the Faith. In the triad of faith, hope, and love found in the NT, faith in its various forms out numbers hope and love together by over two hundred.<sup>1</sup> While sheer numbers do not equate to importance, it is nonetheless striking to see that faith is such a pervasive word and concept in the NT.

Christian writings beyond the Bible have also treated faith as one of the most significant theological concepts. Faith has been proclaimed a virtue, the expression inherent in the sacraments, and the means of salvation. Faith can be conceived of as a belief, action, doctrine, feeling, attitude, and work. Faith must be understood, explained, studied, embraced, felt, proclaimed, and defended. Faith is to Christianity what gravity is to the universe; it is that which holds it all together. To be a person or community of faith is what most expresses what it is to be Christian. Yet, with all the faith talk, there is no discussion of divine faith, that is, God's trust, beliefs, and hopes. Could this be because faith is inherently a human virtue? Should it be suggested that love is eternal and divine while hope and faith temporary and human? Tillich famously proclaimed faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned."<sup>2</sup> Are humans the only beings so ultimately concerned? Before these questions can be addressed, the meaning and nature of faith must be discussed.

The focus of this chapter is not to note every sense, aspect, or conception of faith, but to explore the various understandings of faith and its nature. The goal is to determine how faith has been conceived in order to determine whether these conceptions can be applied to a relational theology of God.

---

<sup>1</sup>Faith, in its various forms, is used 553 times while hope and love, in their various forms, are used 343 times. For a break down of the numbers see below.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 1.

## Biblical Depictions of Faith

“The Bible does not define faith any more than it defines God.”<sup>3</sup> A careful (or even casual) reading of the Bible reveals the accuracy of this statement. There is no monolithic or single definition, description, conception, or use of the word faith within its pages. Faith, therefore, should not be treated as a term that is simply translated from the text and used in a very tidy manner. The Hebrew and Greek words that are usually translated as “faith” typically emphasize a devotion to God, trust in the divine promises, or assent to statements about God’s character. While there is no single conception of faith, it is nonetheless always used in scripture in relational terms or in a context which reveals its relational character. It is revealed as a way in which humans relate to God. Faith is not belief in an ideology or an impersonal force, but trust in the person of God or Christ. It could even be argued that faith’s place in the Old Testament (OT), as one way in which Israel was to be in relationship with God, becomes the essential manner or understanding of relationship with God in the New Testament (NT).

### Old Testament

The OT describes the relationship between God and Israel, whether corporately or individually, in an assortment of ways using various terms such as love, hope, fear, and many others. The OT also uses narratives, both magnificent and ordinary, to depict the multifaceted conception of relationship with God. Faith is not an exception, for, in the OT, faith is but one of many ways in which persons are called to stand in relation to God. Some scholars, such as Gerhard von Rad, have suggested that faith, in an OT sense, “signifies man’s turning to God with the whole of his being.”<sup>4</sup> This approach to faith is certainly a full-bodied depiction. It might, however, be saying more than each OT author intended. It may be that faith, as the OT authors used the word, was one of several elements which were used to denote ways in which Israel in particular, and perhaps all humans in general, were to stand in relation to God. So while there is no single concept in the OT to adequately describe the human relationship to God, it may prove to be equally impossible to find a single,

---

<sup>3</sup>Leroy Garrett, “The Nature of Biblical Faith,” in *Christian Doctrine: The Faith Once Delivered*, ed. William J. Richardson (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, 1983), 102.

<sup>4</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: Volumes I & II*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions (Single Volume; Peabody, Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2005), 2:378. See also Dieter Lührmann, “Faith,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 2 D-G*, ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Frank Witt Hughes, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:744.

theoretical conception of faith in the OT.

The Hebrew word, *`aman*, is typically translated into English as “faith” or “believe” and is translated in the Septuagint as *pistis*. The actual word faith is used sparingly in OT translations. The New International Version only uses the word 15 times, 9 of which speak of “broken” faith, while it is found over 200 times in the NT. The New American Standard Version uses the word faith only 4 times in the OT and over 200 times in the NT. However, the near absence of the word faith in the OT exemplifies the “hazards of word studies,” for while the word itself is quite rare, the concept may be found in many of the narratives as well as infused in other ideas throughout the OT including covenant, obedience, hearing, and loving.<sup>5</sup> These related concepts all reflect and even presuppose the notion of faith. Even more than words and concepts, the OT narratives best demonstrate OT understandings and theologies of faith.

Even though *`aman* is typically translated as “faith” or “believe,” modern renderings of this ancient word (and its variants) can be rather clumsy. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* suggests that *`aman* means to “confirm,” “support,” or “uphold,” as well as “to be certain” or “to believe.”<sup>6</sup> *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* states that the verb form of the word means “to be true,” “solid,” or “firm,” while the noun adds also “faithfulness,” “truthfulness,” and “fidelity.”<sup>7</sup> *Vine’s* simply states that the verb means “to be certain, enduring; to trust, believe”<sup>8</sup> and *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* renders it as “be steady, firm and trustworthy.”<sup>9</sup> These notions of being firm or steady are derived from the root of the word *`aman* and can reference daughters being held firm to their mothers’ sides (Isa. 60:4) or to firm places (Isa. 22:23). A derivative of *`aman* is *`amen* which is translated as “true” or “verily.” The word is mostly used in response to declarations of curses (Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15ff; Jer. 11:5) and after prayers and praises (1 Chron. 16:36; Neh. 8:3; Ps. 41:13).<sup>10</sup> In

---

<sup>5</sup>D.C.T. Sheriffs, “Faith,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 281.

<sup>6</sup>*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Volume I*, ed. Harris, R. Laird, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:51.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Paul Donfried, “Faith,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 298.

<sup>8</sup>*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with Topical Index*, ed. W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1996), 76.

<sup>9</sup>*The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, ed. Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 373.

<sup>10</sup>*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:52.

these uses, the word seems to be an expression of agreement with the declarations and hope in the prayers. From the word *`aman* and its derivatives, we derive notions of firmness and unwavering commitment, a sense of confidence, trust, and steadfastness, i.e. faith. What is not clear is how closely these notions of trust and firmness contain elements of belief and certainty, those intellectual elements so commonly attributed to faith today.

While various authors use differing concepts to aid in a careful rendering of *`aman*, “trust” seems to be the most complete term. The word trust is included in nearly every one of the wordbooks and dictionaries. Walter Brueggemann, in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, speaks of “primal trust” as the “juxtaposition of obedience and discernment.”<sup>11</sup> The word faith is curiously absent in his text, but he does develop the concept of trust as the meaning of *`emeth*, a derivative of *`aman*. Trust, in the Hebrew mindset, according to Brueggemann, is a basic, primal trust like that a child has in its mother as an alternative to intense anxiety.<sup>12</sup> Trust is “full reliability in Yahweh in adverse circumstance” and faith is “to trust and have confidence in Yahweh and in Yahweh’s good governance of the world.”<sup>13</sup> This sense of trust and confidence, Brueggemann notes, is typified in Psalms such as 25:2-3: “O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.” And also 26:1-3: “Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.”<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann interestingly notes that trust, while focused on God, is not simply trust concerning God proper but also God’s works. “From personal and intimate focus, however, Israel is able to generalize, so that one may come to trust the world over which Yahweh presides as a safe and

---

<sup>11</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 466-470.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 466. Brueggemann develops this notion of trust in part from Erik Erikson’s notion of “basic trust.” For more on this see Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton, 1980), 57-67.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 467. Brueggemann develops this idea in light of von Rad’s work on “holy war.” Brueggemann notes that von Rad sees Israel’s trust in Yahweh situated in times of war and thus a sense of threat and helplessness. For more on von Rad’s understanding of Israel’s faith in the face of threat, see Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 101-114.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Brueggemann notes that, in this Psalm, verse one uses the word *bʾth* (covenant) while verse three uses *`emeth*.

reliable place to live.”<sup>15</sup> OT faith then, according to Brueggemann, can be understood as an active confidence, living life free from the anxiety that comes from having no one to trust and nothing to hope for. It is “trusting completely, without reservation, in the reliability of Yahweh and Yahweh’s world.”<sup>16</sup>

The suggestion that faith is a kind of trust moves faith from simply a kind of remembrance to a portrait of OT faith which is closely tied to expectation or hope. Hope gives the OT understanding of faith a rather future oriented stance. Faith is not the belief that God exists or simply the remembrance of what God has done. Rather, from an OT perspective, faith is the confident expectation that God will act in the future, and is thus the living of one’s life in the trust that God is fulfilling God’s promises.<sup>17</sup> Von Rad notes the futuristic orientation of OT faith several times in his classic work *Old Testament Theology*. In his treatment of the Abraham narratives, von Rad notes that, while the word “faith” is used only once, “it is the problem of faith which lies at the back of these stories.”<sup>18</sup> Abraham “made himself secure” in the promise of God, that God had a plan for the future and that he believed this to be real.<sup>19</sup> Von Rad also uses the book of Isaiah to make explicit the future orientation of faith noting that the object upon which the author’s contemporaries should base their faith did not yet exist, “it lay in the future.” “Isaiah demanded of his contemporaries that they should now make their existence rest on a future action of God. If they should succeed in taking refuge in Jahweh’s future act of deliverance, then they would be saved.”<sup>20</sup> Von Rad further argues that the phrase “looking to the action of Jahweh” is used synonymously for faith in Isaiah.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 468.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 470.

<sup>17</sup>This is in no way to suggest that remembrance or looking back was unimportant in the Hebrew understanding of relation with God. The OT itself and the observance of the many holy days testify to the importance of remembrance for the Hebrew. The point being made is that looking back at what God has done is not on par with the OT use and understanding of faith/trust.

<sup>18</sup>von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:171.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., I: 171. It is most likely not the case that von Rad understands “believe” in this sense to mean intellectual assent to the promises of God for he states “these stories are not only interested in the fact of divine promise and guidance as such, but they also bring within their view all the human experience of the recipient of the promise, in whose reactions and conflicts the promise is reflected.” Belief in this sense then is a lived out life experience and not simply or even primarily intellectual assent.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., II: 161. Von Rad, it should be noted, is not linking a future saving act of God to the coming of Christ but to future political or military events.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., II: 161. Von Rad also adds that this term is used synonymously in Ex. 14:13, 31 for the idea of faith.



While Christianity in general, and the NT in particular, is thoroughly infused with the centrality of faith, the concept of faith as Israel trusting God is not of central importance in the OT. In fact, the OT's primary concern is with God's relationship to Israel rather than Israel's trust in God. That is, faith as an OT concept is less about Israel's faith and more about God's faithfulness, not about human trust but about divine trustworthiness.<sup>22</sup> Israel is called to faith in God because this is a logical response to God's faithfulness; Israel is to trust God for God is exceedingly and utterly trustworthy. Faith, as a kind of trust, is but one note in OT theology, but when seen in concert with the others ways in which Israel is to relate to God, we see a dynamic, multifaceted understanding of this relationship. It is this idea of relationality that is significant in the OT and faith as trust is just one element of many. I will briefly review a few of the other elements which, when combined, reveal a dynamic understanding of Israel's relationship, both corporately and her representatives, to God.

Before a brief review of some complementary concepts that contribute to a robust relationship with God as informed by the OT, it is necessary to reiterate that I am not suggesting these are simply synonyms for faith. While it can be argued that any adequate rendering of faith from a contemporary theological standpoint should include each of these ideas, and that these ideas cannot be treated in isolation from one another, from an OT perspective, faith is principally understood as trust. The key to understanding Israel's place before God then, is not trust alone, but a wider, more dynamic type of relationship which includes a host of other elements. I will briefly review three elements of relationship with God as understood in the OT that are to be seen in concert with trust: Obedience, Fear, and Love.<sup>23</sup>

*Obedience*: this is a key teaching and concept in the OT and is often linked to trust. In Genesis 22, faith and obedience are linked when Abraham is blessed because of his obedience to God in the binding of Isaac. The OT is also filled with instructions to obey along with the promises and perils which come in response. These calls to obey are not simply commands born out of power but are calls for

---

<sup>22</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, "Πιστεύω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 1964-1974), 6:182.

<sup>23</sup>Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume 2*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1967), 268-315. Eichrodt, in chapter 21 of this second volume, explores "man's personal relationship with God" as seen in the OT. Here, he is breaking away from the corporate model and is denoting relationship in individualistic terms. Eichrodt, however, understands there to be three elements of this relationship which include fear, faith, and love while I am suggesting that obedience should also be given consideration.

Israel to trust God in its obedience. Isa. 50:10 links obedience and trust (faith) when it states; “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the LORD and relies upon his God?” Trust, however, is not the same as obedience. One need not trust in order to obey for obedience may be born out of fear. Deut. 8:20 calls Israel to obedience for fear of God destroying them as he has destroyed other nations.<sup>24</sup> Obedience is not simply a way of trusting but a response to God that may involve trust or simply a desire of reward or a fear of curse.<sup>25</sup>

*Fear*: “The fear of the Lord” is an expression that is sometimes used to summarize the principal element of an OT understanding of relationship with God. For example, Ps. 19:9 states, “the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” Likewise, Prov. 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” This idea of fearing God can certainly have a *prima facie* understanding as a sense of anxiety in regard to God’s actions or reactions to human sin or attitude, but OT expressions of this idea are much richer theologically. Eichrodt states that “religious fear is not simply a matter of a naked feeling of terror, putting one to flight, but an *oscillation between repulsion and attraction*, between *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*” thus “religious fear is bi-polar or ambivalent, and conceals with itself at the same time both anxiety and trust.”<sup>26</sup> Fear in this sense is existential, revealing a personal sense of, or mixture of, trust and doubt. “The fear of the Lord” is also a way of understanding one’s proper place in relationship to, or with, God. There is not an equality between the human and the divine. Humans (Israel) must know their place for there is a gap between the human and the divine that properly evokes a sense of anxiety and a fear of displeasing God. Fear, then, is also a way in which relationship to God is noted in the OT. It is not trust, but, when coupled with trust, forms an essential set of terms upon which relationship to God was understood in the OT.

---

<sup>24</sup>It is interesting to note that the primary way of understanding disobedience to God is by breaking relationship with God and following (entering into relationship with) other gods.

<sup>25</sup>“Hearing” God is also a key concept linked to faith. Deuteronomy chapters 5 and 6 make healthy use of the notion of hearing. The Decalogue is introduced by Moses and a call to hear God’s statutes and ordinances (Deut. 5:1). Deut. 5:27 also links hearing, obedience and trust when Israel responds to Moses saying, “...speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you; and we will hear and do it.” To hear is to obey and to obey is to trust (have faith). The book of Jeremiah also strongly links hearing and obedience.

<sup>26</sup>Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:269.

*Love:* Love for God is revealed most significantly in Deut. 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Deuteronomy is an especially significant text in regard to the OT call to love God with the issue being mentioned 20 times in that book. This passage, known as the *shema*, is perhaps the most important command for a Jew today. From an OT perspective, love entails obedience and trust, but these ideas should not be seen as simply interchangeable. Love is a quality of those who keep the commandments, but love is more than simply obedience; it is also about one’s motivation. And, as we will see later, love and trust need to always be present together. Love may be the most relational term used thus far and it certainly gives the idea of relationship a special character, but it would be wrong to suggest relationship is summed up in the idea of love, and it would be equally as problematic to suggest love and faith are interchangeable.

Relationship with God is expressed in the OT in a number of ways, using several differing concepts as well as, sometimes radically, different narratives. The OT is thoroughly relational. Historically this relationship was primarily understood corporately, but eventually, humans were understood to relate with God in fear, faith, love, and obedience on an individual level.<sup>27</sup> Faith as an inward sense or expression of a human’s relationship to God did not take form until later in Israel’s history. As Rudolph Bultmann writes:

older OT religion was collective in structure, and it was difficult to give expression to the inner life of the community. Thus a wealth of usage begins to appear only when the individual breaks free from the collective bond, and on the basis of his own experience devotes special attention to the attitude of man to God. The prophets, by a deepening of content, gave a new creative impulse to the vocabulary and imagery of faith.<sup>28</sup>

While Bultmann’s existential bent can clearly be seen in these thoughts of the Israelite breaking free of the “collective bond,” he is certainly not alone in the suggestion that the latter period of Israel and the writings of some of the Psalms, the latter Prophets, and even Deuteronomy give a rendering of faith unseen in her earlier history. Faith, understood principally as trust, was one part of the relationality between God and human in the OT. It became the focal point in the NT. This did not happen however without the idea of faith growing into a more dynamic concept and at times, perhaps,

---

<sup>27</sup>See *Ibid.*, 2:231-530.

<sup>28</sup>Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 6:182-183.

an idea which was meant to encapsulate the whole notion of relationality itself. Though not identical to the NT, the latter renderings of faith seem to serve as a logical stepping stone in the evolution of this notion and to position us to see faith in the NT as a richer dynamic concept than trust alone.

While space does not allow a thorough investigation of faith in the life and history of Israel, it is important to note that while the word faith may be sparsely used the story of Israel's trust was an important element of her relationship with God. Faith, according to von Rad, "was expressed in a different way at different times and by different people, and quite often it was not spoken of in conceptual terms at all—people simply told a story."<sup>29</sup> And it is for this reason that faith can never be considered a single concept.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Though no final definition of faith is found, faith is clearly an underlying principle running under the surface of the OT texts. Relationship is only found when fear of God, obedience to God, and even love for God are mixed with faith in God. Actions of obedience and emotions of love and fear need not be mixed with trust just as trust need not contain elements of the former. But, to have authentic relationship, love and trust, faith and fear, confidence and obedience are thoroughly interwoven in the OT stories of relationship.

### **New Testament**

"There is nothing in the OT which exactly corresponds to the NT concept of Faith."<sup>31</sup> The truth of Alan Richardson's statement will be demonstrated in the next few pages. This should not be understood, though, as to suggest that there is a radical discontinuity between the OT and NT conceptions of faith. While OT depictions of faith hinge prominently on the concept of trust, it would be an overstatement to reduce NT notions of faith to simply "belief."<sup>32</sup> NT uses of "faith" have connotations of belief and trust, as well as hope, confidence, and other relational qualities. The various biblical authors each use the word "faith" with subtle nuances that reveal the

---

<sup>29</sup>von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:378.

<sup>30</sup>It is interesting to note Bultmann's sentiments that "the OT concept of faith, is richer, however, than the phenomenon denoted by πιστεύειν, and the Greek concept of faith." Bultmann, "Πιστεύω," VI: 197.

<sup>31</sup>Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 19.

<sup>32</sup>See Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

dynamic use and meaning of the term. The goal of this section is to overview the various ways in which *pistis* (and its variations) have been used in the NT texts.

The NT is saturated with the concept of faith. The words *pistis* (noun: faith) and *pisteuo* (verb: believe) can each be found 243 times while *pistos* (adjective: faithful) occurs 67 times. This is especially remarkable given the fact that *agape* (noun: love) is used 116 times and *agapao* (verb: love) 143 and *elpis* (noun: hope) is used 53 times and *elpizo* (verb: to hope) is used 31 times in comparison.<sup>33</sup> This is not to suggest that faith is more important than love or hope based on the numbers, but it does suggest that the biblical authors saw faith as the central element in the life of a follower of Christ. The concept of faith was so central to the biblical authors that it was understood to be more than how one rightly responded to the message of Christ and the Apostles. Faith was the message. Faith, then, was the proper response to *the faith*: the body of teachings, understood in the creeds, proclamations, revelation, doctrine, dogma, Gospel, and more, to which Christians confess and believe. In short, “the faith believed in.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Background**

Biblical studies of faith revolve around the meaning and uses of the Greek word *pistis*. The word was first used in Greek literature to denote trust in a weapon or skill in the weapon.<sup>35</sup> It could also be used in reference to honorable conduct concerning agreements or bonds.<sup>36</sup> Even though the Classical Greek period rarely uses the noun *pistis* in reference to religious faith, the word and word group eventually evolved into a religious term. In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a very early use of *pistis* in reference to the God is found. Dennis Lindsay argues that, in Sophocles, *pistis* is used in a “purely intellectual belief in God, but also an engaging commitment to God.”<sup>37</sup> As philosophical schools of skepticism and atheistic thinkers advanced, the use of *pistis* became more frequent but also came to be understood as

---

<sup>33</sup>Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>34</sup>“Faith,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, ed. E. A. Livingstone. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 595.

<sup>35</sup>Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 6:175.

<sup>36</sup>O. Michel, “Faith,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 594.

<sup>37</sup>Dennis R Lindsay, “The Roots and Development of the pist- Word Group as Faith Terminology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 49 (March 1993): 105. Lindsay notes that many Classical Greek authors have used *pistis* in a religious connotation including Aeschylus, Plato, Xenophon, and Thucydides.

theoretical conviction more than trust.<sup>38</sup>

The mystery religions of the time spoke of faith as “abandonment to the deity by following his instructions and teachings,” and it was in this way that salvation was to come.<sup>39</sup> O. Michel links the mystery religious’ understanding of faith with that of Judaism and Christianity in that “All had the same demand to hand: ‘Believe, if you would be saved, or begone.’”<sup>40</sup> Finally, in the Stoic tradition *pistis* takes on a very important character. It retained the theoretical quality that was prominent in the philosophical uses in that Stoics used it to express the principle that the world had a divine ordering, but along with that was the idea that “*pistis* reveals the essence of man” and that “fidelity to his moral destiny leads to fidelity towards others.”<sup>41</sup> *Pistis*, in the Stoic mind, was more than a belief but a way of life, a way of living in harmony to the divine and others.

### ***Synoptic Gospels and Acts***

In this section, I am concerned with the use of the word faith and the belief demonstrated by the chief characters of the stories. At this point, it is not necessary to do a historical reconstruction and compare it to the post-Easter church tradition found in the Gospels. The main point of this section is mainly to note general patterns in the synoptics.

Faith is quite often tied to miracle stories and the faith of the sick or needy as in Matt. 9:28: “When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’”<sup>42</sup> Faith in these stories might be understood as acts of trust in the power and mission of Jesus.<sup>43</sup> In the synoptic gospels, however, faith rarely has an object, there is simply a call for, or a recognition of, faith. God is seen as the object of faith explicitly in Mark 11:22: “Have faith in God” and implicitly in Matt. 6:30: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”<sup>44</sup> Matt. 18:6 has the lone synoptic statement of Jesus suggesting he is the (an) object of faith: “If any of you put a

---

<sup>38</sup>Michel, “Faith,” 595.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 595.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. Michel quote is from Origen, *Contra Celsus* 6, 11.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>See also Mark 2:5; 5:34, 36; Matt. 8:10; 9:22; Luke 8:48; 17:19.

<sup>43</sup>Michel, “Faith,” 599.

<sup>44</sup>See also Luke 12:28.

stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me...”<sup>45</sup> As stated above, the synoptic gospels often lack an explicit object of faith, but scholars, nonetheless, think God is the intended or primary object of faith.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus’ ministry is filled with calls to faith. This is an interesting contrast to John the Baptist’s preaching, which was concerned with repentance and baptism.<sup>47</sup> This distinction between John and Jesus is perhaps made most clear in Mark’s transition from John being arrested and Jesus coming and proclaiming the good news of God saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).<sup>48</sup> If John is to be understood as the last of the OT prophets, then the shift from repentance and obedience to faith is made clear in Mark and is implied in the Matthew and Luke passages. In light of this, faith as understood in the synoptics may be conceived in terms of a new means of relationship with God. While many details and nuances can be seen and formulated from the synoptics, there is no systematic understanding of faith, nor is there a specific pistology.

The Book of Acts, like the synoptics, reflects the thoughts from a post-Easter church. What is most striking about Acts when compared to the synoptics is the once implicit, now explicit, faith *in* Jesus Christ. Acts 3:16: “And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.”<sup>49</sup> The apostles now follow in the steps of Jesus: gathering a new community, performing miracles, and awakening faith in God and his mission. Acts also speaks of “the believer” as one who claims allegiance to Christ. This is certainly more than intellectual assent for the believer is also one who is joined to the community of

---

<sup>45</sup>This statement can also be found in Mark. 9:42 but the words *in me* are lacking in many ancient manuscripts. It might also be suggested that Matt. 10:32-33 also implies a faith in Jesus: “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.”

<sup>46</sup>See C. H. Pickar, “Faith: In the New Testament,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume V*, ed. Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America (New York: Hill, McGraw, 1967-79), 794; Michel, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 601; Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 11. Dulles also goes on to state that Jesus’ call for faith was implicitly a demand for faith in himself.

<sup>47</sup>It might be argued that Luke 3:18 presupposes John preaching faith when it states that “he proclaimed the good news to the people.”

<sup>48</sup>For an extensive study of faith as used in the Gospel of Mark, see Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, Monograph Series / Society for New Testament Studies, no. 64 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>49</sup>See also 20:21; 24:24; 26:18.

believers.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, then, faith is a kind of conversion,<sup>51</sup> but it might be said to be both the means and ends of conversion.

### ***Pauline Literature***

It is clear from both the sheer number of specific uses as well as the general content of Pauline literature that faith is a central concept. The use of *pistis* is found 142 times in Pauline literature, *pisteuo* another 54 times, and *pistos* 33 times more.<sup>52</sup> What is most important about Pauline literature is not the volume of faith language, but the way it is developed and theologized.

Faith is a dynamic concept in Pauline literature. In Second Corinthians, Paul speaks of excelling in faith (8:7) as well as increasing in faith (10:15). Second Thessalonians echoes this language by his being thankful for faith that is “growing abundantly” (1:3). Faith can also be weak (Rom. 14:1), vain (1Cor. 15:14), or futile (1Cor. 15:17).<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note the similarity between the dynamic notion of faith in Paul and Matthew’s language of faith being “little” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20) or “great” (Matt. 8:10; 15:28). This could be contrasted to Mark who seems to have an exclusivistic understanding in which one either has faith or does not.<sup>54</sup> Paul, however, does not see faith in all-or-nothing terms, for faith is living. Dynamic, living, growing faith is an important conception and quite necessary, for Paul speaks of faith quite often in relational terms and contexts.

Faith in Pauline texts is certainly more than intellectual assent; it is trust in the person of Christ (Rom. 1:5).<sup>55</sup> It is trust which leads to obedience, but even more than obedience, it is trust which leads to a new being which is characterized by walking with the Spirit or walking in faith. Avery Dulles writes that, “At the deepest level, faith is, for Paul, a new mode of existence. It is a new fellowship with Christ in the

---

<sup>50</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 12. For example see Acts 4:32; 11:21.

<sup>51</sup>Lührmann, “Faith,” 754.

<sup>52</sup>Leon Morris, “Faith,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 285. In this section, I will not make a distinction between disputed and undisputed letters. The point of this section is not to decipher the thoughts of the historical Paul but to note how faith is understood in Pauline literature. I will simply refer to “Paul” when addressing the author of the work. Morris’ treatment never raises the issue of Paul and deutero-Pauline works.

<sup>53</sup>Morris, “Faith,” 289.

<sup>54</sup>Mark 4:40 “no faith,” 5:36 “Do not fear, only believe,” 9:23 “All things can be done for the one who believes.” Mark 9:24 may be the one exception; “Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’” Mark in this case seems to be expressing a paradoxical nature of faith.

<sup>55</sup>It is unlikely that Paul is suggesting here “obedience to *the* faith” but more likely “obedience which is manifested in faith” or even a “faith which results in obedience.” For more information see Morris, “Faith,” 289-290.



Spirit...Faith makes it possible for a person to stand or walk in the Spirit...The Spirit effects an interpersonal union between the believer and Christ in the very act of faith itself.”<sup>56</sup> It is being suggested then that faith, for Paul, leads to union with Christ. Justification by faith, in this manner, is understood as relationship with God in Christ. Alan Richardson summarizes the relational nature of Paul’s understanding of faith when he writes:

[F]aith is for him, in the deepest of the many senses in which he used the word, the ‘yes’ of the whole personality to the fact of Christ. Faith in Christ achieves a right relationship with God, a relationship in which all hostility is done away; this relationship is expressed in terms of δικαίωσυνή (justification), since for Paul salvation means primarily the attainment of δικαιοσύνη (righteousness), which Christians possess through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3.22).<sup>57</sup>

Faith and obedience, or, perhaps, faithful obedience is to live justified in the presence of God. These are not metaphysical terms; they are relational and they depict the believer in relation with God in a new manner brought on by faith.

Paul never offers a formal definition of faith but instead gives the example of Abraham.<sup>58</sup> Paul uses Abraham as an example of faith in both Romans and Galatians. In both letters, Paul states that “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3 and Gal.3:6). In each case, Paul’s purpose in using Abraham is to argue that Gentiles need not become Jews before being acceptable to God for it was prior to Abraham’s circumcision that he was accepted by God (Gen. 15:6). Faith, in the example of Abraham, is strongly linked to trust, over and above any kind of “work.” It was also a faith that involved hope, according to Paul (Rom. 4:18), for his belief anticipated him becoming the father of many nations. Abraham’s faith, in Paul’s use, manifested hope in a future reality as well as “trust in the redemptive purpose of the righteous God.”<sup>59</sup> In this, Paul seems to be stressing that relation with God is not conditioned upon faithfulness to the conditions of the Law, but upon the faith, trusting commitment to the promises of

---

<sup>56</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 13.

<sup>57</sup>Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 24.

<sup>58</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 183. Furnish does give an informal definition in which he writes: “Here, broadly conceived yet compactly expressed, is Paul’s own definition of what faith and believing means. Believers are ‘those who receive’ (οἱ λαμβάνοντες) God’s grace and righteousness by virtue of their belonging to the one in whom grace and righteousness have been bestowed.”

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

God.<sup>60</sup> A trusting response will naturally lead to faithfulness and obedience, but they are not, for Paul, what makes one righteous.

While many themes and concepts could be addressed in the exploration of a Pauline understanding of faith, space permits one last idea and that is the relation of faith to hope and love. As noted above, Paul links faith and hope in the Abraham story, but these three, hope, faith, and love, are most dramatically linked in 1 Cor. 13:13 “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”<sup>61</sup> The question at hand is whether Paul is suggesting that these three will abide, that is last beyond this life or whether, as C. H. Pickar suggests, “Together with hope and charity, faith is one of the triad of virtues that have lasting value on earth and are the means whereby eternal happiness is attained... However, along with hope, it [faith] will give way to the direct vision of God in the future life, where charity alone endures forever.”<sup>62</sup> The words of eighteenth century commentator Matthew Henry nicely summarize the understanding of faith and hope coming to their end when he writes, “Hope fastens on future happiness, and waits for that; but in heaven, faith will be swallowed up in actual sight, and hope in enjoyment. There is no room to believe and hope, when we see and enjoy. But there, love will be made perfect.”<sup>63</sup>

But is it possible that Paul is suggesting that all three will remain into the eschaton? Certainly the fact that a singular verb links the three very closely, into a unified subject, gives reason for thinking that all three will remain.<sup>64</sup> Anthony Thiselton notes that some in the patristic tradition held that all three qualities abide. Irenaeus, for example, teaches that God will do away with everything except faith,

---

<sup>60</sup>Richard N. Longnecker, “The ‘Faith of Abraham’ Theme in Paul, James and Hebrews: A Study in the Circumstantial Nature of New Testament Teaching,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 3 (September 1977): 206.

<sup>61</sup>There are several instances where faith, hope, and love are understood as a trio, or at least seen in complementary ways. See Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 1:15-18; Col. 1:4-5. The greeting in 1 Thess. 1:3 also presents a strong association of faith, hope, and love when it states, “remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” However, there is no ranking or value statement in these as in 1 Cor. 13:13. There are also several passages in which love and faith are linked independently of hope and likewise faith and hope are linked in several passages independent of love.

<sup>62</sup>Pickar, “Faith: In the New Testament,” 795.

<sup>63</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Reference, 1997), 1112. For a modern scholar who reads Paul as saying that love alone will abide, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 649-652.

<sup>64</sup>Morris, “Faith,” 289.

hope, and love.<sup>65</sup> Some modern scholars have also argued for a reading that suggests Paul saw all three as remaining forever. David Garland argues that Paul contrasts hope, faith, and love, which are eternal, against the triad tongues, prophecy, and knowledge, which are transitory.<sup>66</sup> C. K. Barrett reads this passage to mean that faith and hope will also abide with love into the age to come. However, he suggests that the faith which will continue is not a “miracle-working faith” but a faith which is the “grateful and trustful acceptance of God as he is.” Barrett continues, “Faith, the thankful recognition of the gracious God, will be in place as long as God continues to be gracious; that is, faith is an eternal mark of the true relationship between man and God.”<sup>67</sup> While there are debates about the exact meaning of this passage regarding faith’s longevity, there are, nonetheless, scholars who support the reading that Paul is saying that love, faith, and hope will abide forever.

Pauline approaches to faith may be summarized as the characterizing element of the Christian life. It is by faith that humans are justified and can then enter into union with God and continue in union as long as the believer trust God with and for his very life. “Faith for Paul meant complete trust in God, like Abraham’s, total reliance on God’s enabling.”<sup>68</sup> Faith is a dynamic state of being which grows and is perfected as it manifests obedience in the model of God’s love.

### ***Johannine Literature***

In comparison to Pauline literature, Johannine writings, including Revelation,<sup>69</sup> reveal a prolific use of *pisteuein*. It occurs in Johannine literature 107 times whereas in Pauline it is only found 54 times. Yet, while Pauline writings use *pistis* 142 times Johannine uses it only a handful and never in the Gospel of John.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000),1071. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2:28:2. Thiselton also suggests that Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Calvin disagreed with Irenaeus’ view believing that faith would come to an end (1072).

<sup>66</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 626. Garland sees no reason to explain why love is the greatest of the three for “Paul feels not compulsion to explain why love is the greatest” (626).

<sup>67</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 308-309.

<sup>68</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 641.

<sup>69</sup>While most biblical scholars would not place Revelation in the category of Johannine literature, I will deal with this book under this heading for convenience.

<sup>70</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 14. Dulles notes the use of *pistis* in 1 John 5:4 but does not include Rev. 2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12. Dulles has a section entitled “Other New Testament Writers” in which he deals with writings other than the Synoptics, Acts, Pauline and Johannine

This seems to indicate that John,<sup>71</sup> in contrast to Paul, understands faith as an activity, a process rather than a state.<sup>72</sup> Yet each avoids any suggestion that faith is static in any sense.

Because of John's use of the *pisteuein*, English translations use the verb "believe" quite often in Johannine literature, but it would be a mistake to read these simply as intellectual assent. Johannine writings do emphasize a faith that arises out of testimony. John 1:7 indicates John the Baptist came to testify so that all might believe, and John 20:31 states, "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." These passages, as well as John's use of "signs" when speaking of miracles, indicate that faith comes indirectly for his readers. However, John denotes a faith that is closely tied to knowing. For example John 6:69, "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God," links faith and knowledge, or better, "believing and knowing." Bultmann notes that the relationship between πιστεύειν and γινώσκειν is a complicated one. For one reason, the object of each is identical, that is, "the fact that the Father has sent Jesus."<sup>73</sup> While the relationship between God and humans can be noted in terms of both faith and knowledge, Jesus' relationship to the Father is spoken of only in terms of knowing. This leads Bultmann to conclude, "the interconnection of faith and knowledge describes human faith, which must come to knowledge but which cannot attain to a definitive state of pure gnosis. Only when human existence ceases to be earthly and human will vision take the place of knowing faith or believing knowledge."<sup>74</sup> It is unclear what Bultmann means by "vision."<sup>75</sup> If "vision" means clarity in some sort of comprehension or understanding of God, this would seem to be counter to the relational or intimate quality of knowing found in John.

---

literature. This section not only includes Hebrews, James and the "catholic letters" but also the pastoral letters and Revelation.

<sup>71</sup>It is understood that the works that bear the name "John" were most likely not written by a single author but by a "school" which can be designated as the "Johannine School." For convenience, I will simply refer to the works' author(s) as "John."

<sup>72</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 14.

<sup>73</sup>Bultmann, "Πιστεύω," 6:227.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 6:227.

<sup>75</sup>It is possible Bultmann was referring to John's use of "seeing" (John 14:7-9; 1 John 3:6; 4:14-16) as the pinnacle of knowing and believing. This would not make much sense however, for in each case "seeing" is used synonymously with "knowledge."

Knowledge in Johannine literature is not simply cognitive it is relational.<sup>76</sup> “John evidently means not a merely theoretical grasp of an objective kind, but an intimate personal relationship such as the familiar union existing between Jesus and his Father.”<sup>77</sup> John 10:1-15 supports Dulles’ thoughts. For example, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.” In Johannine literature, believing leads to intimate knowledge, but it is also part of John’s theology that knowledge leads to believing.<sup>78</sup> Modernist distinctions of faith and knowledge do not apply in John for faith and knowledge “are not two processes distinct from each other, but instructive co-ordinates which speak of the reception of the testimony from different standpoints.”<sup>79</sup> Alan Richardson emphasizes the relational aspect of knowing in Johannine literature when he writes, “‘To know’ in the Johannine usage, as generally in the Bible, means to enter into relations with someone and thus to have personal experience of him, as distinct from mere knowledge by description; it is first-hand or ‘I-thou’ knowledge, not scientific-objective knowledge.”<sup>80</sup> Or, as Dulles so simply states, “Faith, indeed, may be described as a new mode of knowing.”<sup>81</sup>

On the surface John and Paul do seem to differ in conceiving the relationship between “faith and works.” Paul’s writings contrast faith and works while John’s stress their concord.<sup>82</sup> Faith and good works, like faith and knowledge, lead to one another in Johannine writings. Those who do what is true come to light (John 3:20-21), and Jesus says the Father is glorified by those who bear much fruit and become

---

<sup>76</sup>Richardson addresses the problem of knowledge and its meaning. He notes that the Hebrew word *yadha* is a relational form of knowledge as opposed to the typical Greek understanding of *gnosis* that was more theoretical. Richardson, challenging Bultmann, suggests that the use of *gnosis* in the NT should most often be understood in light of *yadha*, giving the notion of “knowledge of God” a personal denotation. For Richardson, “the Father knows the Son” means “he commissions him, sends him, works through him, and holds the closest possible personal relationship with him” (44). He also states that knowledge of God “does not mean the possession of certain philosophical truths about the nature and attributes of God, but knowledge-by-personal-relations with God. It is through Jesus Christ, the Messianic Son, and through him alone, that mankind can have knowledge of God in this biblical sense” (44). For more information, see Richardson’s *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 41-49.

<sup>77</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 15.

<sup>78</sup>Belief to knowledge: John 4:39-42 and 10:38. Knowledge to belief: John 16:30; 178; 1 John 4:16.

<sup>79</sup>Michel, “Faith,” 603.

<sup>80</sup>Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 45-46.

<sup>81</sup>Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 15.

<sup>82</sup>Bultmann states that in both Paul and John faith is surrender to God, but this is not a “work” for either writer. In each, faith leads to obedience and can be said to be an “act,” but that would not constitute a work. For more information see Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 6:225.

his disciples (15:8),<sup>83</sup> but he also says that belief is manifested in works of love (13:34-34; 14:15). The book of Revelation links faith and works so tightly that faith is a work: “I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first” (Rev. 2:19). It is in this sense that faith and testimony come together, not simply a message told in word but also in deeds of service and love.

Lastly, the content of faith in Johannine literature is significant. In Paul the focus is on the death and resurrection of Jesus, but, in John, it is the sending of the Son and the arrival of salvation. It is not a faith that awaits salvation, but one that recognizes that salvation has arrived.<sup>84</sup> This may be illustrated when Jesus speaks of eternal life as a present reality (i.e. John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47). The sending of the Son is not the ultimate object or content of faith, for the sending of the Son was predicated upon the love of the Father. John 3:16 speaks of the Father’s love instigating the sending of the Son and, likewise, 1 John 4:14-16 says that the testimony is that the Father sent the Son as Savior which results in knowing and believing “the love that God has for us.”

### ***Epistle to the Hebrews***

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains some of the most frequently cited passages concerning the theme of faith. The use of *pistis* and *pisteuein* are prolific, but faith is only given an object in 6:1, “faith towards God.” Chapter 11 has what some understand to be the biblical definition of faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>85</sup> This is hardly a definition of faith but a careful depiction that the author uses (crafts) to link his readers with the heroes of faith found later in the chapter and the apex found in the example of Jesus. The use of the word “perseverance” (*hypomenein*) in verses 10:36 and 12:1 suggests that the author understands faith itself to be a type of perseverance. Each example given in chapter 11 is one in which the hero of faith had to patiently wait for the promises of God to be actualized. These heroes of faith endured and did not fall away, a key theme for the epistle. Luke Timothy Johnson, noting the transition from 10:36 leading into chapter 11, suggests, “This will be the powerful lesson driven

---

<sup>83</sup>The order presented is striking for it suggests that bearing good fruit precedes becoming a disciple.

<sup>84</sup>Lührmann, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 2 D-G*, 2:755.

<sup>85</sup>It is a definition: Craig R Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol 36 *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 478-480. Not a definition: Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndal New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 225.

home in the next Chapter: all of the heroes of old held on to faith. Their faith was not simply belief, or even trust or obedience; it was all of these extended through trial by endurance.”<sup>86</sup> Faith in this context is an enduring hope in the promises of God.<sup>87</sup>

Heb. 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” has led some to suggest that the author of the epistle understands faith to be simply theoretical belief or intellectual assent, an idea possibly supported by the epistle’s noticeable Greek and Platonic influences. This is not simply a Greek notion however, for this “single statement of the content of faith...takes up a Jewish confessional formula: ‘that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek after him.’”<sup>88</sup> Some have suggested that the literal reading is that one must believe “that he is” calls up Exod. 3:14, the tetragramaton, in the mind of the reader.<sup>89</sup> The context of the statement, however, moves it from a purely intellectual rendering of faith given that Enoch was a man who “pleased God.” Enoch is a legendary figure of apocalyptic literature and is also the subject of some apocryphal writings such as Wisdom and Sirach. In each of these extrabiblical writings, Enoch is a moral and righteous man, not simply one who gave intellectual assent to God’s existence.<sup>90</sup> Hebrews 11:6 gives a two part rendering of faith which concerns approaching God and being rewarded for such. The emphasis is not on believing God exists but on approaching God and seeking after God. God then is the invisible creator of the visible world (11:3) and the rewarder of those who seek God (11:6).<sup>91</sup> This is what pleases God (11:5). Johnson concludes his treatment of 11:6 by noting that the idea of God rewarding those who seek God is common in OT literature, and that while 11:6 is in the context of “spatial language,” that is, God is “approached” and not simply “sought,” this verse “retains connotations of ‘seeking the Lord’ in the cult, although here it is a matter of moral disposition and relationship.”<sup>92</sup> Approaching

---

<sup>86</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 272.

<sup>87</sup>Lührmann sees this as an “attitude” of faith in contrast to Paul and John who focus on the content of faith. See Lührmann, “Faith,” 756.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 755.

<sup>89</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews: New International Biblical Commentary*, New Testament Series (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983, 1990), 185.

<sup>90</sup>For more information on Enoch, see Johnson, *Hebrews*, 282-284.

<sup>91</sup>“Seeking God” is a familiar theme in OT literature, i.e. Deut. 4:29; Ps. 23:6; 26:8; 69:4; 82:16; 104:3-4.

<sup>92</sup>Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, 284.

God as a rewarder of those who seek God is not merely intellectual but also includes trust, obedience, and relationship.

### *The Epistle of James*

Faith is a key theme throughout this letter, but it is James 2:14-26 which is the passage of most importance in dealing with the nature of faith. It is often understood as a polemic against the Pauline notion of “justification by faith alone.”<sup>93</sup> It is unclear whether the author of James<sup>94</sup> is correcting Paul as he understands him, or is correcting his readers’ misunderstanding of Paul.<sup>95</sup> What is clear is that the author is not focusing on “Paul’s Jews-Gentiles, works-faith debate; James is focused on Christian moral conduct.”<sup>96</sup> James seeks to have his readers do what is good and not merely offer good words.

The question regarding the nature of faith is whether James understands faith to be merely an intellectual belief that needs to be coupled with “works,” or whether faith without works is not actually faith at all. In other words, is it “faith alone,” a faith that manifests itself in works, which God desires, or is it faith *and* works, a two-part response that God desires?<sup>97</sup> At one point, it appears that for James faith is primarily intellectual assent, belief. It is something even the demons have. It is when faith is coupled with works that morality is complete. Faith as simple belief, which has as its object the mere existence of God, is dead faith if not paired with works. On the other side it might be argued that the author is suggesting that faith without works is not really faith at all, that the example of believing demons may be to show the ridiculousness of such a claim. It is an ineffectual, dead “faith.” Ralph Martin takes this approach when he says, “James...refuses to grant the possibility that faith and deeds can be torn apart and treated as individual entities.”<sup>98</sup> This discussion may in fact be going far beyond what the author intended to say about the nature of faith.

---

<sup>93</sup>This is made all the clearer by the author’s use of “justification” in 2:21; 24ff, and the theme of “Law” which is taken up in 2:8-13. For more information, see Lührmann, “Faith,” 756.

<sup>94</sup>It is unclear who this James is or even if the letter is actually written by “James.” There is even a as to whether there is a single author or if this book is a compilation of wisdom sayings. However, I will use the traditional denotation and refer to the author as James.

<sup>95</sup>It is highly unlikely that Paul was in fact responding to this epistle for the evidence seems to indicate that the epistle of James was written after the Diaspora. For more information, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 725-747.

<sup>96</sup>M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 718.

<sup>97</sup>My concern in this paper is not whether James actually contradicts Paul’s understanding of faith, or whether it is an issue of differing contextual uses of the same word or theme. For more information on this issue however, see Longnecker, “The Faith of Abraham,” 206-207.

<sup>98</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *James: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 48* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), 99.



The author mostly likely was not trying to say much about the nature of faith but about the life of the faithful that was to include more than good beliefs but also good works.

### ***Conclusion***

It may be wise to heed Dieter Lührmann's warning that it is "not advisable to determine the NT meaning of 'faith' on the basis of a phenomenological investigation. In order to do this, one needs to ascertain the general concept of faith, which can be done only by reference to the history of Christian theology."<sup>99</sup> The Bible does not offer a unified definition of faith, nor does it use the word systematically. The meaning of the word shifts depending on the author or circumstance. While the OT renders faith primarily as trust, the NT has a wider and more inclusive use, which includes belief, confidence, trust, perseverance, and perhaps much more. Since more than the Bible shapes contemporary uses of the word faith, and because of the multifaceted nature of faith, it is necessary to survey the various elements of faith.

### **Elements of Faith**

Perhaps it is the lack of a systematic biblical treatment of faith that sets the scene for the diverse theological approaches to faith over the centuries. Even though the Bible fails to justify reductionistic attempts, the temptation still remains to break down, dissect, and reduce faith to a single concept as complex as that concept might be. Some treatments of faith have reduced it to simply a type of belief, an action, or merely an attitude. If faith is a dynamic concept, as supposed, then this kind of terminology is problematic and perhaps even endangers the concept.<sup>100</sup> One cannot break down, reduce, and anatomize anything without doing it damage. The following will offer "facets" or "elements" of faith but not a formal definition.<sup>101</sup> It will be an examination of the many sides and depths of faith without attempting to suggest faith is anyone of these alone (or even all of these alone).

---

<sup>99</sup>Lührmann, "Faith," 749.

<sup>100</sup>I hesitated even using the word "element" in this depiction fearing the reader might mistakenly apply this imagery or metaphor to gem and mineral imagery. This type of application suggests that just as salt can be understood by the two elements sodium and chloride, faith is composed of different but essential parts. The elements of faith as discussed in this work should not be understood as components of which faith is built, but rather that these are ideas necessary for the understanding faith but which faith cannot be reduced to.

<sup>101</sup>Richard Rice also seems to avoid definition in his book and instead uses terms like "descriptions," "dimensions," and of course "contours." For more information see Richard Rice, *Reason & the Contours of Faith* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1991).

## Faith and Belief

It is not unusual to see authors dividing faith into two rather differing categories of *belief that* and *belief in*. This manner of dividing faith into two differing, and possibly even competing, conceptions of faith was introduced by Martin Luther and has continued to be an important distinction ever since.<sup>102</sup> The division suggests that *belief in* is to understand faith primarily as trust, more precisely, trust in the person of Christ or in God, while *belief that* is to understand faith as principally an intellectual or cognitive endeavor which manifests itself as assent to true propositions given by and about God. Even though each distinction uses the word “belief” it is typically understood that *belief in* is less about propositional assent and more about trust.

Faith and its features as related to trust will be explored in the next section as a more robust understanding of the concept is developed. Before that can be done, it is necessary to survey faith as a type of belief for three reasons. First, this approach to faith has a significant history. Understanding faith as being associated with belief is found in the writings of the Patristics, and, as we have seen, it can be argued that particular biblical authors link *pistis* to belief. Second, there is a popularized notion of faith and belief in which the terms are used synonymously. Lastly, since this work seeks to develop an understanding of God as a being subject of faith, I wish to circumvent any criticism that might suggest I have only explored or worked with conceptions of faith that easily or artificially fit with God.<sup>103</sup> If in fact belief, as understood as propositional assent, is a necessary element of faith then it will need to be applied to God as well, although not necessarily in exactly the same manner as human beings.

There is little question that for a long time belief has been understood to be the

---

<sup>102</sup>While many continue to use Luther’s nomenclature, others, such as Martin Buber, speak of *fides* (belief) and *fiducia* (trust). See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*.

<sup>103</sup>For example, William Lad Sessions develops several models of faith in his book *The Concept of Faith*. One of the models developed is completely nonrelational. Sessions labels it the “Confidence” model for it understands faith “as a quality that characterizes a person...without essential reference to anything else” and that faith is “characterized by a profound feeling of (self-)confidence” (88-89). A second model, “Devotion” which highlights the volitional character of faith could also be used exclusively to argue for God’s faith for this would communicate God’s faithfulness in a manner which might simply use the term faith. These models would be very convenient arguments for God’s faith, but neither of these fully describe how I understand the idea of faith, nor do I think they sufficiently explain God relationships. For more information on these two models, see William Lad Sessions *The Concept of Faith: A Philosophical Investigation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 88-114.

necessary, possibly the essential, element of faith. The Patristic tradition was not so much interested in an analysis of faith as the content of faith. The tradition's approach to faith has been described as, "the unwavering assent to the full, correct message of salvation as delivered by the Apostles and their authentic successors."<sup>104</sup> Faith, then, was understood primarily as giving assent to the teachings and testimony of the apostles. This does not mean theological development was absent in the Patristic tradition regarding the nature of faith, but such an approach is not surprising given the vast number of sects vying for supremacy in the formational years of the church, as well as the introduction (establishment?) of Greek intellectualists who would become church fathers. Justin Martyr, who owes much of his thinking to Greek philosophy, wrote his works in order to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian faith and that its teachings were not believed out of credulity. Clement of Alexandria spoke of Christ as the "Teacher" and saw faith as a foundation of knowledge.<sup>105</sup> Clement, working from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 7:9 ("unless you believe you will not understand") states that knowledge of God begins first with an acceptance of revelation.<sup>106</sup> Clement, as well as Origen, understood faith as the means to knowledge and not the end; "*pistis* (assent on authority) was just an inferior substitute for, and stepping stone to, *gnōsis* (demonstrative knowledge) of spiritual things."<sup>107</sup> This emphasis on knowledge should not be understood as human in origin but as divine. "Faith" in the Patristic expression "is not merely a natural prudential assent to the highly probable but a special gift of God whereby men are enlightened and share in the divine knowledge.... Faith is not a leap in the dark, but a leap through the dark into light."<sup>108</sup> Many of the early ideas of faith can be found in the writing of Augustine. While Augustine did not offer a full theory of faith, his works on the subject did maintain that, "faith is a condition of understanding."<sup>109</sup> Augustine held that all matters of knowledge, great and lesser, rest upon some level of belief and thus

---

<sup>104</sup>A. R. Jonsen, "Faith: Patristic Tradition," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume V*, ed. by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America (New York: Hill, McGraw, 1967-79), 796.

<sup>105</sup>Clement writes, "And as without the four elements it is not possible to live, so neither can knowledge be attained without faith. It is then the support of truth." *Stromata* 2.6 (Ante-Nicene Fathers 2.354)

<sup>106</sup>Jonsen, "Faith: Patristic Tradition," 796. Clement makes several statements which demonstrate a strong link between faith, belief, and knowledge. For more in formation see *Stromata* 2.1-6.

<sup>107</sup>J. I. Packer, "Faith," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984), 401.

<sup>108</sup>Jonsen, "Faith: Patristic Tradition," 796.

<sup>109</sup>Terence Penelhum, *Reason and Religious Faith*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), 14.

*credo ut intelligam*.<sup>110</sup> Faith was not merely mental assent for Augustine; it also demanded an act of the will, but the emphasis was squarely upon the intellect.

Faith came to be denoted by two distinct Latin terms: *fiducia*, chiefly understood as a trusting and confident stance before God, and *fides*, which was to believe that certain propositions held about God and God's relation to the cosmos are true. The *fides* understanding of faith is, according to John Hick, "used cognitively, referring to a state, act, or procedure which may be compared with standard instances of knowing and belief."<sup>111</sup> Hick labels this understanding of the nature of faith as the "Thomas-Catholic View" for the Catholic tradition has followed the path blazed by Thomas Aquinas who understood faith to be primarily a "propositional attitude."<sup>112</sup>

Hick summarizes Aquinas' thoughts on faith as found in the second part of the second part of the *Summa Theologica* in three main categories (although each idea clearly bleeds into the other). First, as stated above, faith is a propositional attitude. Aquinas held that knowledge about God could only be in the form of propositions even though it is God who is properly and eventually the object of faith and who is a being not a proposition. "Ultimately the object of faith is God himself, who is not, however, known by the human mind in his divine simplicity but only discursively and by means of propositions."<sup>113</sup> Faith in this scenario holds a position between knowledge (*scientia*) and opinion (*opinio*) for both faith and opinion are concerned with propositions. The person of faith has a degree of certainty fixed between knowledge and opinion. It can be ranked above opinion, for opinion is accompanied by doubts and fears that the opposite may be true, while faith is "firm and free from all such hesitations."<sup>114</sup> Faith must be ranked "below" knowledge for knowledge is reached when the knower has reached a conclusion of a demonstration or has seen the object of knowledge. Faith, however, is neither seen nor is it the necessary conclusion of a demonstration for faith requires an act of the will. It is a virtue. Faith for Aquinas is an act that is rewarded, a meritorious event, while assent must be given

---

<sup>110</sup>Augustine also held *intelligo ut credam*, that is, understanding aids in faith. Wilfred Cantwell Smith suggests that those who translate *credo ut intelligam* as "I believe so that I might understand" "make it seem ridiculous and offensive." For Smith, the better translation is "I become involved, in order that I may understand." For more information, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 103.

<sup>111</sup>John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2d ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 3. Hick's understanding of *fides* is almost exclusively as belief that God exists.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>113</sup>John Hick, "Faith," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Volumes 3 and 4*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 165.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

when truth has been genuinely demonstrated. As Terrence Penelhum states, “To say yes to something that has been proved is not meritorious because one cannot say no. The certainty that faith involves is meritorious, so it must be freely given. This is the result of divine empowerment of the will, which directs the intellect to say yes. It is not the result of proof.”<sup>115</sup> Hick adds that, “There can thus be no faith concerning matters which are objects of rational knowledge, for knowledge excludes faith.”<sup>116</sup>

Secondly, Hick writes, “the propositions which faith believes...are of a special kind.”<sup>117</sup> It is certainly true that, for Aquinas, faith “means believing the articles of the creeds.”<sup>118</sup> These are not beliefs that are somehow substitutes for faith in God. Rather, this is the only means human have of such faith. These propositions *about* God or propositions which suggest *that* God is such and such are “mysteries...whose truth can never (in this life) be directly evident to us, and which therefore have to be accepted on authority.”<sup>119</sup> Mysteries, such as God’s triunity or the perfect union of deity and humanity in Christ, can never be discovered by the human mind under its own strength further demonstrating the difference between faith and knowledge. Knowledge is when the mind is compelled to assent while faith is when the intellect assents by the “command of the will.”<sup>120</sup>

Faith, then, is propositional in nature. It is the believing of truths about God (belief *that*) that the intellect assents to although the human mind alone cannot grasp these truths for they are divine mysteries accepted on authority. This leads to Hick’s third category which has been alluded to already: “faith is belief which is not compellingly evoked by its object but which requires an act of the will on the believer’s part.”<sup>121</sup> This act of the will however is not a purely human act alone but is an act under the influence of divine grace.<sup>122</sup> Faith, along with the virtues of love and

---

<sup>115</sup>Penelhum, *Reason and Religious Faith*, 19.

<sup>116</sup>Hick, “Faith,” 165. Not all objects of truth need be excluded as objects of faith however. Hick does note that some truths can be objects of truth for one person and of faith for another. Certain theological concepts can be philosophically demonstrated to the point that they are objects of truth. But for those who lack sufficient skills of reasoning these concepts remain objects of faith. 165.

<sup>117</sup>Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 13-14.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>122</sup>Aquinas’ thoughts seem to be in line with the first official teaching on faith as issued by the Second Council of Orange (529) which stated that faith, while a free act, begins as God’s grace illuminates the human mind. For more information see A. R. Jonsen, “Faith: Patristic Tradition and Teaching of the Church,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 17 vols. (New York: Hill, McGraw, 1967-79).

hope, by the power of grace, “enables the will to move the intellect to assent the truths of revelation and to do so wholeheartedly and assuredly.”<sup>123</sup> Faith, which is enabled by grace but given assent by the will, believes the doctrines of the church are true. This is a faith that is obedient to the commands to believe. It is this voluntary character of faith which enables Aquinas to deal with the believing demons of James 2:19, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.” The demons, according to Aquinas, do not believe by an act of the will but are compelled to believe by “natural intellectual acumen.”<sup>124</sup> The demons have no meritorious faith, then, for they lack the ability not to believe. Aquinas makes the distinction between the two kinds of faith as formed and unformed. Formed faith is willful and completed by love and hope. It is a faith that submits to God’s grace and is empowered by that grace to believe. Unformed faith is that which is compelled to believe but not out of desire and obedience. In both cases the intellect is the hub of faith but only formed faith is a willful assent to the mysteries of the divine.<sup>125</sup>

The Catholic Church has remained true to the model of faith hammered out by Aquinas and the Patristics with its heavy emphasis on faith as belief. The first Vatican Council of 1870 defined faith as, “a supernatural virtue, by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.”<sup>126</sup> Hick thus summarizes the Catholic position suggesting that reason precedes faith: “[T]he whole structure of belief rests originally upon the historical evidences of miracles and other manifestations of divine activity which do not establish the articles of faith themselves, but rather the fact that the omniscient

---

<sup>123</sup>Penelhum, *Reason and Religious Faith*, 18.

<sup>124</sup>Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 19.

<sup>125</sup>Penelhum recognizes there is a problem with this approach that is not solved by disregarding the notion of demons as mythological. He writes, “Thomas’s attempt to incorporate the awkward scriptural passage here forces him to acknowledge that it is possible for someone to be convinced by signs of the truth that he or she at least thinks are conclusive but accepts reluctantly. It is not clear whether Aquinas thinks this takes away from the voluntariness of the assent or merely from its merit.” *Reason and Religious Faith*, 20. Hick sums up the problem saying, “On the one hand, in discussing human faith he teaches that the historic evidence for the revelatory status of the Church’s teaching does not compel assent, and that faith motivated by assent accordingly remains free and meritorious; but, on the other hand, in discussing demonic faith he teaches that this same evidence does compel assent even in the minds which are wickedly resistant to it.” *Faith and Knowledge*, 20-21.

<sup>126</sup>Decrees of the First Vatican Council, Chapter 3 “On faith.” <http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum20.htm#Chapter%203%20On%20faith> (accessed March 2, 2007). Hick states that “Such a definition provokes a query, for faith, characterized as belief in various truths on divine authority presupposes a knowledge both that God exists and that he has revealed the propositions in question.” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 165.

God has revealed these articles.”<sup>127</sup>

It should not be understood that only the Catholic tradition has elevated belief to the most significant element of faith. While Reformation thought on faith is typically linked to Luther’s belief *in*, (Luther’s emphasis that faith is “trusting the person of God”), John Calvin nonetheless emphasized the cognitive propositional belief aspect. Calvin defines faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded on the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>128</sup> Hick also demonstrates a heavy emphasis upon cognitive belief found in the Reformed tradition by quoting the fourteenth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647: “By this faith [saving faith], a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein.”<sup>129</sup> One of the most radically cognitive approaches to faith and belief comes from John Locke who saw reason’s role as judging between true and false propositions while faith was to give assent to those propositions that proved true. Much like Aquinas, Locke did not see this approach as having faith in the proposition at the expense of God. Rather faith could be seen as confidence in the one responsible for these truths.<sup>130</sup> Locke’s statement that faith is “a settled and sure principle of assent and assurance, and leaves no manner of room for doubt or hesitation”<sup>131</sup> demonstrates that the Enlightenment’s approach to knowledge is heavily indebted to him.

According to these thinkers, faith has a necessary cognitive element. Faith, to a large extent, consists of beliefs *that*; God exists, has acted upon the world, is true to a particular character, and seeks the best for all persons, for instance. Even though belief *that* has been a key aspect in theories of faith should it continue to be so? Is it necessary that faith contain beliefs at all?<sup>132</sup> Few have argued that belief is wholly

---

<sup>127</sup>Hick, “Faith,” 166.

<sup>128</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.7. By stating that Calvin emphasized faith’s cognitive elements, it is not meant that Calvin excluded other elements of faith such as trust. It is interesting, however, to note that many of the sources used in this work (written by those who have ties to the Reformed tradition) have omitted this statement by Calvin.

<sup>129</sup>Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 30.

<sup>130</sup>Garrett, “The Nature of Biblical Faith,” 92.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 92. No reference for the quote is given.

<sup>132</sup>To answer this question thoroughly would require an in-depth epistemological investigation beyond the scope of this paper. However, a basic understanding of the nature of belief is required. “To believe,” as this author uses the term, is to claim and hold with some amount of assurance that it is the case that one idea is more probable than another. For example, “I believe that today is Sunday and this

unnecessary in faith. Even those who vehemently maintain that faith is much more than simply belief will recognize that belief *in* has some kind of belief *that*.<sup>133</sup> Some have suggested, however, that propositional beliefs *that* God exists or has certain characteristics are not necessary for one to claim to have genuine faith. This school of thought has been called the Voluntarist Theory (Hick) or the Pragmatist View (Swinburne). These titles each emphasize the view that the essence of faith is an act of the will moved by a pragmatic impetus. Thinkers such as Blaise Pascal and William James have emphasized the act of faith over the content of belief.<sup>134</sup>

Pascal's Wager, from *Pensées*, begins with the supposition that reason can find no sure grounding upon which to decide whether God exists. This being the

---

idea is more probable than today actually being Monday." A belief then is structured by its negation... "It is the case that today is Sunday and it is not the case that today is some other day" even though this could possibly be wrong. I might believe today is Sunday because I have more assurance in this belief than I do in the belief that it is actually Monday (or any other day). From this approach then there is no absence of belief only alternative beliefs. It is a fallacy to say and understand literally, "I do not believe." To say "I do not believe it is Sunday" is in actuality to suggest, "I believe it is some other day than Sunday." Doubt, then is not the opposite of belief for when one doubts there is not an absence of belief but a redirection. To say, "I doubt that today is Sunday" is to say, "I believe with greater assurance that today is some other day than Sunday." The opposite of belief must be an ignorance of the choices of concepts to be assented to. One cannot believe counter to a concept one is unaware of.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith gives an interesting history to the evolution of the word "believe" in his book *Faith and Belief*. Smith does not challenge the idea that belief currently means something to the order of what is stated above, that to believe is to "claim and hold with some amount of confidence that it is the case that one idea is more probable than another." What Smith challenges is whether that was the original meaning of the word. Belief, or in Latin, *credo*, Smith states, "is a compound from *cor*, *cordial*, "heart"...plus *do*, "put, place, set," also "give." The first meaning of the compound in classical Latin had been and its primary meaning continued to be "to entrust, to commit, to trust something or someone," and of money, "to lend"...A secondary meaning in secular use was "to trust in," "to rely upon," "to place confidence in." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 76. Smith's point is that the modern notion of belief as a form of mental assent is not quite its original meaning. For more on the nature of belief, see Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-32 and Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 69-127.

<sup>133</sup>William Sessions reminds the reader that for every extreme position there is an equal and opposite reaction and faith is no exception. In a footnote he quotes Kent Smith who writes, "Faith has practically nothing to do with believing statements about anything, however much or little evidence there may be for those statements." Kent D. Smith, *Faith: Reflections on Experience, Theology, and Fiction* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), 3; quoted in Sessions, *The Concept of Faith*, 245.

<sup>134</sup>It might be argued that existentialist notions such as Søren Kierkegaard's "blind leap," Paul Tillich's "Ultimate Concern," and Rudolph Bultmann's "Demythologizing" all conceive of a form of faith which needs no propositional beliefs. The case might also be made that Wilfred Cantwell Smith's approach is anti-propositional when he writes, "The proper way to understand a religious statement is to endeavour not to see what its words and clauses mean, but to see what they meant to the man who first uttered them, and what they have meant to those since for whom they have served as expressions of their faith" (183). Smith's statement, as he goes on to explain, means that all propositional formulations (beliefs) reflect only the inner condition of the person uttering them. In short, according to Smith, while Christianity has a tradition of understanding faith as being tied to propositional beliefs (what he refers to as theology) it need not continue to do so for "Faith lies beyond theology, in the hearts of men. Truth lies beyond faith, in the heart of God" (185). For more information, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: McMillan, 1962; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), chapter seven.



case, an individual must *decide* to believe whether God exists or does not. This belief as decision is not an intellectual assent but an action and thus to believe is to choose to act in such a manner as if one did have belief (and trust) in God.<sup>135</sup> This belief might include such actions as “taking holy water, having masses said” and the like.<sup>136</sup> The assumption, or hope, is that the one who acts as if he or she has beliefs will eventually acquire them. In this sense then, one does not believe that God exists but operates as if God does either in the hope of coming to believe that God exists or in a pragmatic choice made in case God exists and rewards those who believe (or better, act as if they believed). Belief in this case is merely mimicking those who do profess to hold certain beliefs about God.

A second example comes from William James’ *Will to Believe*, which in many ways echoes Pascal’s position, and works from the assumption that there are grounds for evidence or reason in favor of the religious hypothesis.<sup>137</sup> Thus, if one acts as if he or she believes, then he or she may come to actual belief. This behavior on the part of the Pragmatist will put the “believer” in a position of good standing before God if God in fact does exist. As Swinburne states, “[the Pragmatist] may act on the assumption that there is a God—for unless there is, that which is most worthwhile cannot be had. He will do the same things as the man with Lutheran faith will do...worship and pray and live a good life partly in the hope to find a better life in the world to come.”<sup>138</sup> All the duties the Pragmatist performs are not out of a belief *that* God exists but in the case that such a God does exist—“because it is very important to express gratitude for existence if there is a God to whom to be grateful and there is some chance that there is.”<sup>139</sup>

The critique at this point is not that these approaches to faith are wrongheaded or even that there are not occasions in which faith operates in this sort of “pragmatic leap,” but that it is incoherent to suggest that this is a separate kind of faith or that such an approach to faith frees it from all cognitive propositions. As Swinburne asserts, “The man of Pragmatist faith need not believe that there is a God, but he must

---

<sup>135</sup>Hick, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 166.

<sup>136</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1966), 418; quoted in Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 116.

<sup>137</sup>Hick, “Faith,” 167.

<sup>138</sup>Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 117.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.* Swinburne fails to mention that James did not limit the benefit of holding a pragmatic form of belief to a future reward but also held that there are psychological benefits that accompany belief.

have certain other beliefs.”<sup>140</sup> The Pragmatist must believe that if there is a God, this God should be worshipped or acknowledged, that humans must help their fellow humans. The Pragmatist also “needs the belief that there is some (maybe small) finite probability that there is a God.”<sup>141</sup> Certainly the content of a belief may be radically different from one person to the next (for example, whether he or she believes God exists or believes God does not exist), but there is no condition in which one is void of any beliefs about God’s possible existence and potential character. A person who claims a faith based solely upon actions without any intellectual content will defend such an approach by using rational arguments and by asserting, or at least assuming, that *if* God exists, God will hold such and such characteristics. Particular beliefs about the possible existence and character of God will lead such a person to approach faith in such pragmatic ways.<sup>142</sup> I agree with William Wainwright when he plainly states, “Faith’s intellectual dimension may not be identical with propositional belief but it is difficult to see how it can fail to include it.”<sup>143</sup>

Hick maintains belief *that* is logically prior to belief *in*, although, as demonstrated above, Hick notes it need not be temporally prior.<sup>144</sup> Believing *that* God exists<sup>145</sup> leads to beliefs about God’s character, and it is these beliefs that lead into a belief in or better a trust in God. Richard Rice says it quite plainly, “People cannot believe or have faith in something, unless they also believe certain things about it.”<sup>146</sup> This is true whether the object of faith is a rock, a rope, a theory, or God. The book of Hebrews highlights this when it states, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (11:6). Faith in this sense has beliefs

---

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>This critique is in no way to suggest that the Pragmatist/Voluntarist is wholly mistaken. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, there is much to appreciate about this approach and its emphasis upon action. For a lengthier explanation and critique of the Pragmatist/Voluntarist view of faith see Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, chapter two.

<sup>143</sup>William J. Wainwright, “Wilfred Cantwell Smith on Faith and Belief,” *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1984): 357-358.

<sup>144</sup>Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 4. While I basically agree with Hick’s statement, it is understood that he is working with categories of logic and an understanding of existence that is highly debated today, some fifty years after his book’s publication.

<sup>145</sup>At this point, I am using the term “exists” in the most neutral sense possible. I do not think that qualifications on the meaning of this metaphysically pregnant term will adversely affect the point being argued. It can just as confidently be stated, “belief *that* God is existence or is beyond existence leads to beliefs about God.” Thus, for some it may not be acceptable to use propositional statements that “God exists” but still acceptable to suggest “God has such and such properties.”

<sup>146</sup>Rice, *Reason & the Contours of Faith*, 19.

about the object of faith.

Paul Helm makes a distinction between “thin” belief and “thick” belief to suggest that faith is more than propositional. In matters of thin belief, Helm writes, “a person may sincerely and confidently believe in the God of the philosophers, and do so on what he takes to be good grounds, the propositional content of such a belief or beliefs is such that no practical response from the believer can reasonably be called for. Such believing can only be thin believing, for no action is called for either from believing or disbelieving.”<sup>147</sup> While Helm’s focus at this point in his book is natural theology and a justification for believing in God’s existence, it is clear that thin belief in this sense represents belief that is distinct from, or at least shy of, faith. It is merely theoretical. Helm’s classification of thick belief calls for a “range of responses” including, but not limited to, “trust, obedience, devotion, and rebellion intelligible and rational.”<sup>148</sup> Helm is not suggesting the elimination of propositional beliefs or an irrational approach to theism but that faith and its cognitive character should also include trust.<sup>149</sup>

The question is not whether faith should have propositional beliefs, but rather, what role do such beliefs play in the life of faith. Are beliefs the most important aspect of faith? Do propositional beliefs hold a foundational place in the life of faith? Does Hick’s statement that propositional beliefs are logically prior to trust mean they have priority or greater importance?<sup>150</sup> At this point I cannot to give a firm and final answer as to the role the intellect and propositional beliefs play in the life of faith. In a nonreductionistic approach, one cannot say what prominence any single element of faith holds. I agree with Tillich when he writes, “If one of the functions which constitute the totality of the person is partly or completely identified with faith, the

---

<sup>147</sup>Paul Helm, *Faith with Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>149</sup>Helm does suggest that an individual can have “thick” belief where there are “no evidential grounds for such belief,” but this does not equate to the elimination of all propositional beliefs. Helm also suggests that the opposite of thick belief is not thin unbelieving, that is the denial of God’s existence based on evidentialist arguments, but thick disbelief or the lack of trust in God. Helm uses the James statement regarding the devils’ belief and trembling as an example not of thin belief but thick unbelief. For more information see *Faith with Reason*, 108-111.

<sup>150</sup>Sessions quickly surveys several ways in which the role of propositional beliefs in the life of faith has been understood. He notes first of all that some views exclude all propositional beliefs while others only exclude explicit beliefs. Some permit beliefs about the facets of faith but not its object. Second, there are various ideas as to what might replace propositional beliefs including “passional fervor” or acting on intentions. Thirdly, the relationship between propositional belief and faith vary in that some see propositional beliefs as damaging to faith while others suggest propositions hold no place in faith but are not harmful. For more on information, see *The Concept of Faith*, 245-248.

meaning of faith is distorted.”<sup>151</sup> Faith is an experience of the whole person, including the intellect. While some of those mentioned above have produced works that suggest they have come very close to reducing faith to simply mental assent, the vast majority of authors on the subject have recognized that faith is more than belief *that*.

### Faith and Trust

As stated above, it is quite common to see authors divide faith into categories of belief *that* and belief *in*.<sup>152</sup> Belief *in* has been understood as, and equated with, trust, and while this designation was popularized by Martin Luther, he was not the first to understand faith as having the element of trust. Luther’s view of faith goes beyond, without excluding, propositional beliefs about God’s existence and properties and highlights faith as an act of trust and commitment. In this section, I will give a brief overview of the Lutheran approach to faith and then explore how trust can be understood as an element of faith.

Alister McGrath suggests that Luther’s thoughts on faith can be formulated into three points, the first of which is “Faith has a personal, rather than a purely historical, reference.”<sup>153</sup> Here, the point is that faith must go beyond belief that certain events are historical or that the gospels are historically reliable. The personal aspect of this faith is not so much a belief that God is a personal being (an assumption Luther certainly held) but that the subjects of faith need to understand faith as being part of their persons. It is their faith in God and not a belief in the faith of those who came before them. McGrath gives an insightful quote:

I have often spoken about two different kinds of faith. The first goes like this: you believe that it is true that Christ is the person who is described and proclaimed in the gospels, but you do not believe that he is such a person for you. You doubt if you can receive that from him, and you think: ‘Yes, I’m sure

---

<sup>151</sup>Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 30.

<sup>152</sup>Despite some suggestions that belief and trust represent two different types of faith, I begin my argument concerning faith and trust by suggesting that faith which trusts is not a different kind of faith from that which believes. Again, the approach here is to explore many of the elements of faith and not the supposed kinds of faith. Certainly some understandings and expressions of faith are immature, deficient, or just different, but I am unwilling to categorically say what is or is not faith. In fact, this is what Buber seems to be claiming when he says the statements “it is true” as opposed to “we believe and know” are not two expressions of the same faith but two kinds of faith. Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, 35. I will approach trust as a necessary element, expression, or contour of faith but not a different faith.

<sup>153</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3d ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 111.

he is that person for someone else (like Peter and Paul, and for religious and holy people). But is he that person for me? Can I confidently expect to receive everything from him that the saints expect? You see, this faith is nothing. It receives nothing of Christ, and tastes nothing of him either. It cannot feel joy, nor love of him or for him. This is a faith related to Christ, but not a faith in Christ...The only faith which deserves to be called Christian is this: you believe unreservedly that it is not only for Peter and the saints that Christ is such a person, but also for you yourself – in fact, for you more than anyone else.<sup>154</sup>

Luther's second point, as formulated by McGrath, "Faith concerns trust in the promises of God," understands faith chiefly as *fiducia* rather than *fides*.<sup>155</sup> This distinction was later developed by Luther's followers into a three-part faith (*fides*) consisting of knowledge (*notita*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*), with the first two subordinate to the last. Trust then is the central element of the Lutheran approach.<sup>156</sup> Luther stated that, "Everything depends upon faith. The person who does not have faith is like someone who has to cross the sea, but is so frightened that he does not trust the ship. And so he stays where he is, and is never saved, because he will not get on board and cross over."<sup>157</sup> Faith in this sense moves the subject beyond simply believing that a statement is true or factual to acting upon the belief. Using the analogy above, faith is not simply believing that the ship exists; it is about stepping into it and entrusting ourselves to it.

Luther's third point is that "faith unites the believer with Christ."<sup>158</sup> Faith, then, is not merely assent to a set of doctrines but a joining of believer with Christ. It is the "wedding ring," a commitment to Christ that leads to the "real and personal presence of Christ in the believer."<sup>159</sup> The point here is that faith in Christ leads not merely to the benefits of believing or trusting but to Christ himself. Faith as trust is a communing with Christ.<sup>160</sup>

While Luther's approach was negated to some extent by Enlightenment thinking and its emphasis on epistemic categories of faith and knowing, the last

---

<sup>154</sup>Ibid. McGrath does not provide citation information.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 111.

<sup>157</sup>McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 111-112. McGrath does not provide citation information.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 113. McGrath also notes that this approach was not solely Luther's but held prominence in many of the Reformers. Philipp Melanchthon wrote, "To know Christ is to know his benefits" and Calvin insisted that Christ is not "received merely in the understanding and imagination. For the promises offer him, not so that we end up with the mere sight and knowledge of him, but that we enjoy a true communication of him."

hundred years have seen a resurgence of emphasizing trust in pisteological studies. In the remainder of this section, I will explore what it means to trust God as well as some of the necessary implications that come with this element of faith. It should be noted that the subject of trust will be treated here like that of belief in that I will assume that the use of these terms in a religious context does not change their meaning. Certainly the application and experience of trust will change (as would belief) as the context and object of trust also changes, but the basic meaning of the term remains.

In suggesting that faith has a necessary element of trust, it is necessary to say a few things about the meaning of trust and its apparent elements. Richard Swinburne explains that “To trust a man is to act on the assumption that he will do for you what he knows that you want or need, when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that he may not and where there will be bad consequences if the assumption is false.”<sup>161</sup> This explanation carries several of the elements normally associated with trust, such as belief and action, but it nonetheless falls short of explaining trust in a fully satisfactory way. It may be because Swinburne goes on to argue that trusting God is equivalent to believing propositions about God: “[O]ne who believes that God exists and believes the propositions of the Christian creeds about him already believes that God will do for us what he knows that we want or need; that follows immediately from those propositions.”<sup>162</sup> For Swinburne then, trust (although not necessarily faith), is equivalent to propositional belief that leads to some kind of action and that action is love responding to the propositions believed.

It is certainly true that trust includes belief,<sup>163</sup> but is trust, and in a larger sense faith, sufficiently explained by reducing trust to propositional beliefs which are acted upon? While I think Swinburne could further explain his thoughts in a way that might concede the fuller explanation, my presentation will certainly be less tidy than his. This is because faith seems to eschew any kind of systematic reductionism. As I will demonstrate, trust includes, not only beliefs which can be stated propositionally and then acted upon, but also hope, risk, and even doubt. But perhaps most importantly,

---

<sup>161</sup>Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 111.

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, 112. Swinburne’s main point in explaining trust in such a manner was to demonstrate that Luther’s treatment of faith was not necessarily an improvement on Aquinas but a restating of what Aquinas had already claimed. Swinburne sees each approach as flawed for a “scoundrel” could be a person of faith in each approach. He concludes in a manner that seems to challenge the traditional dichotomy of “faith and works” in stating that “A man must be ready to please God or do his duty or benefit his fellows, if his trust is to amount to faith” (113).

<sup>163</sup>Perhaps the best way to associate trust and belief is to suggest that to trust is to assent to the statement that the object of trust will be faithful. From this point, trust becomes more, but not wholly other, than belief.

faith, when understood as having a necessary element of trust, has a relational aspect that propositional belief and action upon those beliefs cannot convey. Faith understood as trust will pave the way for the final subject of this section, faith as relationship.

Trust can be explained in three different yet overlapping kinds of “relationships.”<sup>164</sup> One can trust an object such as a car or a chair. Secondly one can trust another person or even one’s self. Finally one can trust God. For the subject, each of these may have identical external actions, that is, I may act no differently in my trust of an object or a person or God. I may even trust all three simultaneously,<sup>165</sup> but it is the relationship I have with the object of faith that is different. Trust, in its most basic of understandings need not be a personal trust or that of subject to subject. It makes perfect sense to say, “I trust that the rope will hold me” as well as to say “I trust my daughter will finish her homework.” However, my relation to a rope and my relation to my daughter are significantly different. In the terms of an existentialist, it is the I-it relationship versus the I-Thou, and, as Paul Helm suggests, to trust an “it” is different from trusting a “thou” and thus it makes sense to see these as different kinds of trust.<sup>166</sup> Helm presents four arguments to suggest that there is no reason to categorize these as different *kinds* of trust.<sup>167</sup> It is not that the trust differs as the object differs as much as that the phenomenology of trusting differs. Helm states, “the phenomenology of trusting people is different from trusting things because in trusting another person I am trusting someone who may or may not trust me.”<sup>168</sup> The experience is different in trusting a person versus an object in the same way that

---

<sup>164</sup>For the discussion below concerning the nature of trust, I will follow the arguments given in Helm’s *Faith with Reason*, chapter 7, even though I ultimately disagree with Helm’s conclusion that there is no essential difference between trusting an object and trusting a person.

<sup>165</sup>For example, a friend may loan me a car that has a history of breaking down. I need this car to go visit my father who is very ill. My friend tells me that he has had the car serviced and it will work just fine. Fearing that searching for another means of transportation will not get me to my father in time, I use my friend’s car. As I begin my trip I pray that God will see to it that I get to my father before he grows worse. In this occasion, it could be said that I am trusting that my friend did have the car serviced, I am trusting that the car will not break down on the way, and I am trusting God will see to it that I get to my father before he gets any worse.

<sup>166</sup>Helm, *Faith with Reason*, 121.

<sup>167</sup>Even though I disagree with Helm’s conclusions, this section loosely follows and responds to his arguments. The four arguments as he presents them are labeled 1) interests 2) interpersonality 3) God and evidence 4) bare particularity.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.* Helm does not offer any suggestions as to which category God might fit; is God the “thing” that does not trust or a person who may or may not? It seems that Helm, if working under the presupposition of classical theism, would require a third category of trust. Is God a person who is trusted but cannot trust in return? It is not that God is in the category of a person who does not trust for reasons which might be perfectly acceptable or rather that God does not trust for there is no reason or need for God to trust.

regret is experienced. I may regret that I hurt a good friend's feelings, but this will be different from the regret I would feel from eating too many sweets or from neglecting to service my car. In the final analysis, trusting an object is not the same as trusting a person, even if there are not different kinds of trust. But it is not altogether different either.<sup>169</sup>

Trusting God is a unique phenomenon because in claiming to trust God one is not saying that he or she trusts that God exists. Rather, one must assume God exists in order to trust that God is true to God's promises and character. It is no wonder that so much of pisticology is concerned with the relationship of faith and reason. I must defer such studies to those involved in the philosophy of religion and religious philosophies and simply begin with the belief that God is. At this point, it is not important whether this belief is rationally grounded, if in fact it can be. It is best to simply begin in the middle and work outward from there.<sup>170</sup>

Trusting a person takes on a different phenomenology when the relationship to the other person is more than simply acquaintanceship. The more we have invested in the person who is the object of faith the more intense the experience of trust becomes. It can be said that I trust the stranger walking next to me not to rob me, or that I trust the rulers of the neighboring countries not to attack, but this is hardly a personal trust even though it is technically the trusting of persons. Personal trust more than the act of trusting a person (even though this act might be quite different from trusting an object) for even trust exhibited towards other persons is not necessarily a personal trust. Personal trust takes into consideration the other's history or character. Thus, it might be said that there is a difference between the "trusting of persons" and "personal trust." It is the latter sense of trusting that I will work with in this section.

---

<sup>169</sup>Helm concludes that "I shall take trusting God to fulfil[sic] what he is believed to have promised to be the central case of trusting." Helm understands trusting God as essentially trusting God's promises and the act of trusting an object, such as a bridge, is, in effect, to "trust some fact or state of affairs about the bridge which can be expressed in a proposition; say, the proposition that the bridge will take my weight" (123). In this sense then Helm is reducing trust to a propositional assent in which one acts upon the belief. However, it could just as easily be worded to suggest that to trust the bridge is in essence to trust a person and not the bridge. To trust the bridge is to trust the workmanship and ingenuity of its builders, or the integrity of its inspectors and users. Or, perhaps a fallen tree has made a natural bridge. To trust this object is to trust one's own abilities to assess the stability of such a bridge. In both senses then it is not the bridge(s) that is trustworthy but the persons associated with it. I am not disagreeing with Helm that trust can be so reduced that it is understood as a propositional statement by either a person or about an artifact for, as postmodern philosophies have demonstrated, all reality can be broken down into some kind of language game.

Helm also suggests that there are three preconditions to trusting (persons or objects) which include 1) propositional belief about the object/subject of trust 2) trust must be shown to be reasonable 3) the desire of something good. This last precondition will be addressed in the body of the work.

<sup>170</sup>It is understood that some will be troubled by this move because, as some have argued, the establishment of God's being is foundational to any kind of statement about God.



As stated above, personal trust involves knowing something about the character or integrity of the person being trusted. Personal trust then is trusting the moral character of the other; it is to trust that they have your interests in mind.<sup>171</sup> In a narrow sense, to trust God is to act on the belief that God cares about your ultimate good, while in a larger sense, God is trusted to do what is good and just. Both degrees of trust are based upon one's knowledge and experience of God.<sup>172</sup> Trust in a personal sense builds upon relationship, and vice versa, meaning that trust and relationship feed upon each other. The deeper the relationship, the greater the (potential for) trust, and the more trust given to the other, the deeper the relationship can go. Hence, faith is a kind of trusting relationship. Trust also becomes personal when there seems to be little reason to trust other than the relational history that two (or more) individuals share. For example, I may find evidence that a student has cheated on a test. However, this is a student I have known for some time; the student has served as an intern with me and has proven to be a very honest person. Thus, even if the evidence is damaging, trust may still be experienced because of the relationship between the professor and the student. This may be the understanding of trust being demonstrated in the story of Abraham and Isaac. In this situation, Abraham must rely on his experiences with God and the relationship gained in order to trust that God will do what is either in his best interest or what is just. It is in this sense that trust is not "blind" or even unconditional but is evidenced by, or grounded in, God's character.<sup>173</sup> Trust in this personal sense is not merely trusting when there is insufficient evidence to be conclusive (all trust fits that requirement) but trusting in spite of the evidence. This kind of trust can only be rational if it is between persons for it is trusting the moral character of the other. It is trust in spite of certain flaws (actual or perceived) in the other that gives reason to doubt whether the person should

---

<sup>171</sup>It might be argued that this sense of trust is no different from trusting an object, for when one trusts an object he or she acts in the belief that the object will produce a result, or behave in a manner, that is beneficial; i.e. the bridge supports the weight of my car. Also, trusting a stranger is believing that he or she will do what he or she thinks is in my best interest or at the very least will not do what is not in my interest. However, this misses the point of personal trust. Knowing the person being trusted, which as will be discussed, allows the individual to move into a relationship characterized by trust. Even when evidence seems to suggest the other (trustee) is not acting in the self's (truster) best interest, this is still a relationship of trust.

<sup>172</sup>It is certainly possible for these to conflict in reality but not in the mind of the person trusting. I may trust that God will do what is in my best interest and trust that God is just but be unaware that God's justice and my best interest may not be perfectly reconcilable.

<sup>173</sup>Helm argues that there is essentially no difference between trusting an object and trusting a person based on his or her character. In the end, moral reliability is essentially the same as product efficacy. "What one trusts in another person or thing is the reliable exercise of, or the reliable disposition to exercise, certain powers and capacities." See *Faith with Reason*, 127.

be trusted. One acts on the relational history between the two, and this, then, is trust. This kind of trust cannot be found between subject and object for it would make no sense to trust a frayed rope, worn from time and use, simply because it has held your weight in the past. There is no moral character in the rope and no reason to trust it in spite of the evidence. To trust God then might include trusting that God will do what is good or just in spite of the lack of evidence of God's caring. The tragedies of life most aptly demonstrate this facet of trust and element of faith.

Personal trust, in its highest form, is linked to love because trusting a person means trusting that he or she will do what is in one's best interest. In fact, trust and love have very similar attributes and the essential difference may be attitudinal. Trust, in a personal sense, is a way in which two or more persons interact when one is dependent upon the other for some kind of good. Personal trust, however, does not require the relationship between the two subjects of trust to include love, but does it exclude the element of love.<sup>174</sup> It is perfectly reasonable for an individual to trust someone whom he or she has known and has found to be trustworthy but not have a relationship in which there is a genuine sense of love between the two. I may trust a co-worker, student, or any individual with whom I have entered into a mutual agreement and each of these relationships could include personal trust and yet fail to meet the typical standards of love. I may not love them, and they not love me, and yet there is a relationship of personal trust between us. At the same time, I may deeply love another individual and yet not trust them. For example, I may be in a situation in which a loved one has a drug addiction. While my love for this individual may continue in my striving for their best interest, the circumstances prove that this person cannot be trusted.

Another characteristic of personal trust is that it takes place between two (or more) free beings and thus personal trust is ultimately unprovable.<sup>175</sup> The

---

<sup>174</sup>Vincent Brümmer gives a very nice summary of mutual loving relationships and suggests there are five characteristics. Even though I am not worried about an understanding of love as mutual, I believe Brümmer's treatment of love to be helpful. The characteristics of love are: 1) It strives to know and serve the trust interests of the other. 2) The partner in the relationship is unique and irreplaceable. In a business agreement the partner can be replaced and the arrangement seen to its end, but, in love, the person is unique and more than a means to an end. 3) Love cannot be earned or coerced. 4) It demands vulnerability, because if one cannot coerce love, then one is dependent upon the other for love. 5) It is a relationship between persons. See Vincent Brümmer *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 28-31.

<sup>175</sup>This characteristic certainly entails particular metaphysical beliefs about human nature that not all will share. This belief entails that humans are significantly free and thus inherently unpredictable and, as noted in chapter two, is a key belief in relational theology.

This discussion also assumes that personal trust, in a philosophical/theological sense, is akin to, but still differs from, the trust infants develop in parents. This discussion assumes a trust that is

trustworthiness of an object can ultimately be demonstrated and proven because an object is not free to act other than it is determined to act by a variety of factors. A rope or bridge then can be investigated, tested, and eventually proven to be trustworthy for it is not free to act in indeterminate ways. Persons, however, are not subject to the same kinds of testing. I can test the trustworthiness of a person and his or her character, but, ultimately, he or she is free to act otherwise than he or she has acted in the past or even in ways seemingly illogical. Personal trust then is evidenced by a relationship and the trustworthy behaviors demonstrated, but is ultimately a risk because the person trusted can act otherwise. This point naturally leads to the discussion of faith and risk below.

Before I move into faith and risk it might be helpful to make an excursus here regarding the relationship between the one trusting God and the doctrine of God this person maintains. To trust God to do what God promises is to presuppose that God is free to act otherwise in an open future. Believing that God has no future or that every event in God's future has been eternally predestined or determined by God means that there is no trust that God *will* do anything, only that God *has* done what is desired.<sup>176</sup> Thus, a future orientation of faith does not apply in this understanding. Faith in this sense is simply belief that God has preordained the future in a way that makes sense to the believer. Thus, what may be most important in the life of faith is not one's theory of faith but his or her doctrine of God. A deist has little (if any!) need for faith

---

cognitive and volitional. For more on trust development in children, see James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) and Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963).

<sup>176</sup>This critique can certainly be leveled against those who maintain that God exists "outside" of time in some sort of eternal now. Classical understandings of God's timeless simplicity and immutability render God "doing" anything in the future as utter nonsense. Trust, under this presupposition, cannot be applied to the God of classical theism.

William Placher's approach, however, is not as clear cut as the classical theist, for while he seems to suggest that God can only be trusted if God is not open to the future and the open-endedness of time, he also maintains that God is personal and does things (hope, deliberate, anticipate, etc.) that only make sense in time. Placher, in chapter two of his book *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, argues that God existing in the "perfect possession all at once of limitless life [sometimes known as *simultaneity*] brings time into a stable and coherent whole such that the love of one who is eternal can be trusted unconditionally, because existing in eternity means not being shaken by the problematics of time as we experience it" (28). It is difficult to fully understand Placher's stance for he argues God is not in a state of timelessness but is fully temporal and that in God "past, present, and future keep so intertwining that the perspective of temporal process merges with the perspective of eternal being" (45). Placher seems to want God in a state in which change and thus vulnerability are real for God but also in a state in which "eternity" *guarantees* that God will never be other than what God is. I am not arguing that Placher's treatment of God's eternity is incorrect but only suggesting that this understanding seems to require trust to be a belief about God's relationship to time and not trust in God's person or character. For more information, see William Placher *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

since the deist understands God to simply be, at best, a creator who is distantly interested in the evolution of the creation. The classical theist, on the other hand, needs to develop a theory of faith which can retain elements of hope and trust while making room for a timeless, immutable being who infallibly knows (or has predestined) the future. It seems all the classical theist can do is believe that he or she will understand that what has happened, is now happening, and eventually will happen is what has been, is, and will be for the best. There is no hope or trust that God will do anything but simply a belief that God is.

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that trust is an important (perhaps essential) element of faith. It has also been demonstrated that faith involves trusting God as one would trust another person, and not an object. One may trust God as one would trust an object but this would not be faith because faith, as will be demonstrated below, is a type of relationship that involves trust but is not defined by trust alone.

### Faith and Hope

As shown in the section above, biblical portraits of faith, faith is strongly linked to a confident hope that God will act for good in the future. That is, God will do what is good, loving, just, or what is in the person-of-faith's best interest. Hope, along with trust, then gives faith a future orientation and also an attitude of radical confidence that trust alone cannot.<sup>177</sup> Hope has been defined as "a uniquely human emotion that energizes us to engage in projects we believe will enhance our future well-being, even though they are of no immediate value to us."<sup>178</sup> It can also be understood as the "defining characteristic of those who seek God and experience his Grace."<sup>179</sup> In this treatment, hope is more than simply a feeling but still includes feelings. It is a positioning of the self in a place of anticipation.

Hope causes the person of faith to look forward and anticipate the future

---

<sup>177</sup>Helm rightly makes a distinction between hope and faith suggesting that one who has only hope and not faith is a "hoper" and not a believer. This is because Helm suggests, "hope can more intelligibly and plausibly be exercised in the absence of very much evidence." However, as we have seen, Helm makes a distinction between "thick" belief and "thin" belief and the same might rightly be applied to hope as well. Hope need not be a "pie in the sky" approach to God but one tied to one's experiences with God. *Faith with Reason*, 148.

<sup>178</sup>Anthony Reading, *Hope & Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 3. Reading goes on to explain that hope is not simply belief about the future but also taking an active role in bringing the hoped for future into being.

<sup>179</sup>*The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, ed. Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 500.

actions of God. The belief element could be understood (although this might be a caricature) as calling the person of faith to look back and believe that God has acted. It could be said that hope is belief that what has been said about God and Christ *in* history is true.<sup>180</sup> Faith, however, also has an element that calls a person to look forward and act in a manner that trusts God will act in beneficial ways. Trust does not require an attitude of hope. It is perfectly logical to act in a trusting manner and yet not actually expect anything to happen. As noted above, I may have a friend with a drug addiction who is in recovery and in order to help this person I need to demonstrate that I trust him. In this act, I may behave in every way associated with trust and yet have very little hope of the addict meeting my expectations. It may certainly be my desire or wish that he or she is found to be trustworthy, but I may have little hope. In this sense hope is fundamentally distinct from a mere desire or a wish. Hope is an attitudinal expectation that drives us on to act in trust. Certainly, without hope that the drug addict will recover, acts of trust will happen less and less. Hope in a sense gives endurance to trust.

Hope's future orientation and expectation of God's goodness and justice further moves faith beyond simply propositional beliefs, but it also moves us beyond an understanding of faith being merely, or primarily, trusting actions. Hope is a radical attitude giving faith an element that moves it beyond orthodoxy or orthopraxy. Sessions, in discussing a model of faith as a kind of hope, asks what makes hope distinct from idle wishing or simple desires. I would like to suggest that hope as understood as an element of faith can be explained from two models of faith in Session's book "Hope and Confidence." The Hope model of faith "is strongly future-oriented. It is a matter of deep yearning for some supreme, future, apparent good—fervently awaiting, anticipating, and expecting it—where the occurrence of that good is not subjectively probable. Its opposites lack a sufficiently strong desire for the future good (despair, hesitancy, dread) or denial of its improbability (evidential assurance)."<sup>181</sup> The sense anticipation and expectation in the model gives it some similar qualities to the Confidence model, which Sessions defines as a "nonrelational

---

<sup>180</sup>According to Robert McAfee Brown, "Trust in what God has already done in the past makes it possible to trust in what he will do in the future." *Is Faith Obsolete?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 64. In a sense, Brown is moving away from dealing with the past strictly in terms of propositional beliefs, but it is unclear how trust in the past is different from belief in the past for Brown. Brown works with a definition of faith as "the creative appropriation of an open past" and, by this, seems to note the inherent subjectivity of history as a source of meaning. History is not a lifeless book of events but events that shape our future both with and without our own choosing. For more on this, see chapter two.

<sup>181</sup>Sessions, *The Concept of Faith*, 128. For a full explanation see pages 114-128.

conscious state of a person, a state that lacks all objectives or contents of awareness though not, in all likelihood, any subject of awareness.” In short, it is “characterized by (self-) confidence, a profound and positive feeling-tone that persists, endures, and excludes both perturbations and conditional perdurability.”<sup>182</sup> Even though the Confidence model is nonrelational there is a sense in which hope, and not merely idle wishing, is characterized by a character or posture of confidence and positivity. This is akin to feeling certain, as opposed to being certain, which is an epistemic state and not a psychological state. This is what hope is, a psychological state of confident expectation.<sup>183</sup>

Hope as an element of faith relieves the tension, as Tillich put it, “between the cognitive function of man’s personal life, on the one hand, and emotion and will, on the other.”<sup>184</sup> Hope keeps faith from being reduced to either belief or trust, but gives a sense of courage or confidence in each.<sup>185</sup> I not only employ hope in trust-filled actions but also in my strained or tentative beliefs. Hope as courage, then, should not be understood as a feeling of being correct, that what I believe or do is the truth, but as a sense of believing and acting, despite fears or doubts. This leads into another, sometimes controversial, element of faith, risk.

### Faith and Risk

It is difficult to conceive of a faith that is wholly free and devoid of risk. In fact, it might rightly be said that faith without risk is a contradiction in terms. Faith is an event in which one thinks, acts, feels, and commits in the present reality that he or she might be wrong. Paul Helm notes the riskiness of faith as a type of belief when he says, “Because of the evidential gap between the evidence on which faith is based, and the truth of what is believed, all faith involves some risk.”<sup>186</sup> Helm moreover states that, “The different degrees of trust correspond to the different degrees of belief in the case of those who exercise faith. Some degree of trust is compatible with some degree of doubt, and if one trusts at the same time as one entertains doubts one is

---

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>184</sup>Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 7.

<sup>185</sup>Perhaps courage would be a better word choice since “confidence” literally means to “have faith” but then again, hope might be best described as “faith in faith.”

<sup>186</sup>Helm, *Faith with Reason*, 156.

knowingly taking a risk.”<sup>187</sup> The risk and doubt Helm is discussing appear to be merely intellectual. The doubt would be a hesitation in regard to whether the evidence rightly supports the conclusion of faith.<sup>188</sup>

In a belief-centered portrait of faith, doubt in a very basic sense is always a part of, or accompanied by, faith. In order to believe one proposition it is necessary to doubt its opposite or that which is contrary to the propositional belief held. If I believe “God is good,” then, I obviously doubt statements that deny this. In this sense, doubt may be understood as belief that such and such is not the case. When I say that I doubt a statement like, “God is evil,” I am saying that I believe it is not the case that “God is evil.” All doubt in this sense can never be eliminated because a shift of belief is also a shift of doubt. Certainly this is the most benign sense of doubt and is wholly compatible with faith.

The role of doubt in various faith theories is not so basic however; doubt is understood not merely as a necessary opposite of belief. Rather, doubt is seen as a problem, for what is believed should be believed with certainty or conviction. Doubt about that which should not be doubted creates tension. Tension arises when there seem to be good reasons (evidences, experiences, or both) for believing contradictory statements. It is important to note that this tension does not exist when one simply realizes the possibility of a proposition which is contrary to the currently held belief (i.e. when one knows what is proper to doubt and what is proper to believe), but rather when there seem to be good reasons for holding each belief. The greater the likelihood of each proposition the greater the doubt. One must ask what risk is involved in such a doubt. Is it merely the risk of being wrong? It is obvious that faith concerns much more than simply being wrong epistemologically. Doubt is significant, not simply because there are two opposing yet apparently true statements. It is the implications of the statements that makes doubt significant and not merely intellectual. This is not to downplay the role of belief in the concept of faith. In fact, it is beliefs subjected to reason that make faith authentic. “Blindly” believing a proposition will never result in doubt and doubt is a necessary condition of faith.

Faith, as has been shown, is more than propositional assent for it also has elements of personal trust and is thus a type of relationship. If faith by its very nature

---

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>This section of the paper is less interested in the different kinds of doubt than in the necessary aspect of doubt in the life of faith. For more information concerning types of doubt (intellectual, emotional, and volitional) see John Feinberg, “Doubt, Religious,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), 332-333.

is relational (it is about two or more subjects) then faith will always involve risk for there is a distinction between the two relational subjects of trust. The ontological gap or distinction between the two subjects ensures that one will never fully know the other. Tillich states that faith requires participation with the object of faith, but also that “faith would cease to be faith without separation—the opposite element. He who has faith is separated from the object of his faith. Otherwise he would possess it. It would be a matter of immediate certainty and not faith. The ‘in-spite-of’ element of faith would be lacking...There is no faith without separation.”<sup>189</sup> In this sense faith is relational, more than believing and even more than praxis. Faith is the commitment to a way of thinking and acting in fidelity to the person of God. Yet, because of the cleavage between God and humanity, subject and subject, it is necessary, perhaps a metaphysical reality, that faith include doubt and risk. Faith then includes a type of tension between risk and trust, belief and certainty. Yet one without the other cannot truly be faith. The cleavage between God and humanity need not always be the result of sin, but it is certainly exacerbated by it. It is not simply a schism between God and humanity but more basically that God is an “other” to us and we are an “other” to God. The gap between the parties of relationship necessitates trust and, in turn, risk and doubt. This is not a failure in relationship but an unavoidable aspect of it.

Doubt more properly can be thought of as hesitation. It is the realization that what is being offered for me to believe or trust does not fully meet my criteria but it is also something that cannot be shaken off immediately. I am drawn to the person of God, yet, I doubt God’s trustworthiness or fear risking my immediate happiness. Doubt is the necessary look before the leap. It is acknowledging the risks and sensing its fears, but leaps anyway. In this sense, then, blind faith is not faith at all. To leap without hesitation is not an act of trust but that of sheer habit, recklessness, or certitude. It is not possible to trust without knowing the risks involved for trust is a positive response despite the risk. Doubt, brought on by a realization of the risk, is not contrary to faith but is a necessary element of it.

If doubt is a necessary element of faith then faith can hardly be the opposite of doubt. The opposite of doubt is courage to continue in faith in spite of doubt. Likewise, the “opposite of faith...is not doubt. Rather, the opposite of faith is nihilism, the inability to imagine any transcendent environment and despair about the possibly of even negative meaning.”<sup>190</sup> Doubt in a destructive sense is despair over

---

<sup>189</sup>Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 100.

<sup>190</sup>Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 31.



the choice presented. It is a refusal to believe, act, or commit for fear of the implications of being wrong (or perhaps, right). Risk and doubt need not mean that faith is without conviction even though it is without certainty. Certainty is an epistemic category but conviction is much larger involving the will, emotion, and the mind. It is commitment born out of evidences of a great variety.<sup>191</sup> The risk involved in faith need not be understood as a monumental choice made daily, that is, the Christian faith is not one moment of existential angst after another. It is a commitment, born out of conviction, to live life in pursuit of a fellowship with both God and other humans. These relationships will inherently reveal risks and will thus foster doubts, but it is these events that make faith authentic and relational.

In light of this discussion, I would purpose two kinds of doubt: constructive and destructive. Constructive doubt is what makes faith real. It is the doubt that makes our commitments and actions not only meaningful but possible. It is in this sense that faith is not the absence of doubt but action in the face of doubt. It is a hesitation, a pause, but not a change in direction. It is coming face to face with the risks and anxieties of faith that make commitment possible. It is “entering into the darkness of the future and yet remaining confidently committed to the other, the object of faith.”<sup>192</sup> Donald Bloesch notes that faith’s risk element is conveyed in Isaiah 50:10: “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the LORD and relies upon his God?” Doubt reminds us of the risk of faith, entering into darkness in the hope of God’s presence without rational guarantees.<sup>193</sup> Constructive doubt leads to breakthrough and advancement in the relationship. It is, in a sense, dissatisfaction with what one presently has and wanting more.<sup>194</sup> It is to go deeper in full realization of the risk, it is to be vulnerable for sake of the relationship.

Destructive doubt results in denial and an end of the relationship with the object of faith. It refuses to continue in relation because of the risk of harm or the probability of being wrong. It is a faith that has been the subject of rational testing and has failed in the subject’s mind. However, this kind of doubt may come not from

---

<sup>191</sup>Sessions notes that if faith involves epistemic certainty then it will be at the expense of “fidelity, trust, venture, and zest that can exist only where the evidence is inadequate.” *The Concept of Faith*, 178.

<sup>192</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Volume 1 God, Authority, & Salvation*, Christian foundations (Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press, 1999), 1:226.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

<sup>194</sup>Brown, *Is Faith Obsolete?*, 88.

being convinced that the object of faith is false, but that it is true. One may feel certain that God does exist, that faith is a real relationship and not an intellectual game. It may be that one finally assents to the fact that God is not domesticated or simply a power to be admired from afar but a being we relate to and with in both fear and faith. It is a doubt that results in fear without love. Robert McAfee Brown rightly asks,

Who wants to become one of the “heroes of faith” that The Letter to the Hebrews describes when the catalog of such heroes quickly moves from those who “escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness” to those who “were tortured,...suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment” (Heb. 11:33-36)? ...There is no escape from the appalling possibility that the faith one holds is really true and that, if true, it would make inconvenient if not inordinate demands.<sup>195</sup>

Doubt in this sense may be especially destructive since it knows the risks of faith from the inside. It is not simply doubting one’s beliefs or the evidences regarding God but doubting God personally. It is in the truest sense infidelity.

Risk is an inherent part of faith and because of such risks doubt is also inevitable. But it is this reality that makes faith a kind of overcoming. It is this reality that helps reveal the necessary relational character of faith.

### Faith and Relationship

It has been suggested that faith is not simply belief or even trust but beliefs concerning the person of God and trust in the person and promises of God. Faith is personal and is thus relational. In this overview of faith, I have emphasized a nonreductionist approach to faith, seeking to avoid the error of understanding through only one facet or by a single term. It may seem that I am doing just what I argued against by understanding faith as a kind of relationality. But this is to misunderstand the nature of relationship, for it too cannot be reduced to any single concept or notion and so any discussion of faith as a kind of relationality is inherently nonreductionistic. Relationship is dynamic by its very nature. Relationships can be understood in terms of family, marriage, friendship, co-worker, or neighbor, and these relationships may also serve as metaphors for “relationships” we have with artifacts, nature, or even ideas. What is common in each of these is a kind of interconnectedness. There is a bond between the subjects. Certainly relationships can be prefaced with terms like “personal” or “working” to denote the level of intimacy between the subjects, but

---

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 96-97.

what is common is that there is an interconnection, but one amongst differences. L. Edna Rogers writes, “Relationships refer to coming together, a common thread existing or developing between people, with members being tied to one another in some manner that each constrains the other. We speak of being involved, of being socially bound to one another, of being *in* a relationship.”<sup>196</sup> It is the fact of differences that requires constraints on the other.

Relationship then needs faith to be actualized. Faith becomes theological only when one is in relationship with God. F. Gerrit Immink’s book, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*, thoroughly infuses the concept of faith with relationship. Immink writes, “Faith is a relationship between subjects, a communal bond between God and humans. A life of faith is not just a matter of taking certain beliefs about God and his salvation to be true; it is also a matter of our trust in God and God’s trustworthiness. These notions are given with the structure of faith as a relationship between two subjects.”<sup>197</sup> Relationship may be the only category in which elements of belief, trust, hope, and risk (and many others unexamined here) can all be used and understood in personal terms.

Faith has been understood in relational terms on several fronts. William Sessions speaks of the “Personal Relationship Model” of faith suggesting that:

According to the personal relationship model of faith, one person has faith in another only if the first is in a distinctively personal relationship with the second, a relationship centrally characterized by trust...on the basis of which the first person believes...certain crucial propositions about the second and their relationship...and where the second plays (and is believed to play) an agent-causal role in the relationship. Faith is absent when trust is lacking, even if distrust is not present.<sup>198</sup>

Session’s overview is very general but it does capture the essence of faith being a relationship between two persons. Under this model, faith can ultimately not exist between a person and an object nor between two persons who have no relationship. To say, “I have faith in the president” means that I hold certain beliefs about the person, but it cannot rightly be said that this is faith, in the fullest sense, since no personal relationship exists.

---

<sup>196</sup>L. Edna Rogers, “The Meaning of Relationship in Relational Communication,” in *The Meaning of "Relationship" in Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Richard L. Conville and Lilian Edna Rogers (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 70.

<sup>197</sup>F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: a Practical Theological Reconstruction*, Studies in Practical Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 26-27.

<sup>198</sup>Sessions, *The Concept of Faith*, 49. For more detail on the Personal Relationship Model see pages 26-49.

Faith presupposes relationship. There is no faith where there is no interaction with the one who is trusted or believed. As James Fowler writes, “faith is a *verb*; it is an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life.” Fowler adds, “faith is always *relational*; there is always *another* in faith. ‘I trust *in* and am loyal to...’”<sup>199</sup> Faith then, understood as a unique and interpersonal relationship with God, must include both trust and love.<sup>200</sup> Faith, in this sense, is not a means to a relationship but is a kind of relationship. It incorporates necessary, while somewhat independent, elements of trust and love for love alone does not require trust, and love will not always result in trust.<sup>201</sup> Faith, though, may result when love and trust are fused into dynamic relationship. When we can trust the one we love (or love the ones we trust) faith produces and becomes fellowship, community, and communion. This is the essence of faith, participation in the life and being of God. I am not suggesting that faith and love are the same in dealing with God. I am suggesting that loving, trusting, and hoping in God are the elements of having faith in God. Because faith is relational, I can say, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

If it is true that we can best learn what faith is by what faith does<sup>202</sup> then it will quickly be understood that faith is a way of relating. When understood or depicted merely as belief, trust, devotion, dependence, or concern, faith loses a very important concept: relationship. Belief, trust, devotion, etc. are not ends in themselves but are means to relationship. But because faith is often spoken of as an end, faith itself must be relationship. Just as love is not a means to an end, in that love is not sent away once the object of love is possessed, faith should not be seen as simply a way to God that is to be sent away after God is found. Faith does not lead to God; faith is being with God.

Faith is not the object of desire but the means to it. When I desire more faith it is not simply more confidence that is desired or greater assurance, it is God that I desire. We do not desire just any relationship but relationship with God. It is this point that Karl Barth so aptly makes when he states, “it was never a desirable tendency to exalt faith into an ontic and central concept, displacing the real object of

---

<sup>199</sup>Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 16.

<sup>200</sup>Faith, as I am using the word, is a situation in which the other is both trusted and loved.

<sup>201</sup>As noted above, love and trust are complimentary but not dependent upon one another.

<sup>202</sup>Garrett, “The Nature of Biblical Faith,” 103.

theology, as though faith were the theme and the true event of salvation.”<sup>203</sup> It might be suggested that portions of the Protestant Reform placed such an emphasis on faith as the object of desire that they might be guilty of *pistolotry*, worshipping faith itself. Faith is relationship with God and not the pursuit of confident belief. Tillich nicely summarizes faith as being in God when he writes, “Here lies its truth which no theology of ‘mere faith’ can destroy. Without the manifestation of God in man the question of God and faith in God are not possible. There is no faith without participation!”<sup>204</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Faith is a deeply multifaceted event that has been understood biblically, philosophically, and theologically in diverse terms and expressed in varied images. While conceptions of faith are diverse, this does not mean that ideas and images of faith are haphazard. The ideas and images of faith have been born out of traditions and experiences that have sought to make sense of this life and our relationship to one another and to the divine. I have avoided any attempt to suggest that faith is should be understood as a single idea or basic concept. I have sought to allow for the richness of faith with its complex nature and many attributes. Yet, I have endeavored to do this while framing faith within a model of personal relationship. This is not to suggest that there are not impersonal models of faith, for there are, but to suggest that faith, especially in a religious context, is about the advancement of the relationship between God and humanity.

Even though the nature and attributes of faith are varied and diverse it seems that the purpose of faith, in the most general of terms, is constant and singular. The purpose of faith is to help us relate to something that is ultimately other than our self and beyond our knowledge and grasp. Even in its most basic of conceptions faith is a form of propositional belief which seeks to bridge a gap and help us understand and relate to ideas that we otherwise have no way of knowing. In terms of relationships, faith’s purpose is to bridge the gap that exists either because of enmity or simply by the fact that the one whom we seek to relate with is an “other.” The various ways in which people will understand relationship may be the cause of diversity in the conception of faith, but if it is true that the purpose of faith is to connect us to the “other,” then we can see that there is a basic core concept to faith even if there is no

---

<sup>203</sup>Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963), 99.

<sup>204</sup>Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 100.

single conceptualization of faith.

I have discussed various understandings of faith both biblically and theologically and have suggested that the notion of faith will generally consist of attributes including belief, trust, hope, risk, and even doubt. In the following chapter, I will attempt to relate each of these attributes of faith to the relational model of God. I will argue that God, as a self-limiting being for the purposes of relationship, must employ genuine faith if God is to enter into authentic relationships with humanity as a whole and with persons in particular.



CHAPTER 4  
THE SUBJECTIVE FAITH OF GOD

**Conditions for Divine Faith**

As stated earlier, the purpose of this work is not to offer an apology for relational theology but to suggest that, given the theories, categories, and doctrines of relational theology, there is a need to include discussions of divine faith in this God-talk. Before a case can be made for divine faith, however, it is essential to discuss the conditions necessary for divine faith. Without the following conditions there would be no need and no possibility of divine faith. The conditions include: 1) human free will; 2) limited divine foreknowledge; and 3) purpose in creation.<sup>1</sup>

Human Free Will

As stated in chapter two, relational theists vigorously defend the reality of human free will. It is argued that if God is to relate to creation in any meaningful way, it is necessary that humans be significantly free to respond to the will of God. To phrase the argument another way, since God relates to the world, it is necessary to support human liberty. Without human free will there is nothing for God to *relate* or *respond* with. Sanders concludes that human free will is a core of relational theism stating that “God has granted us the libertarian freedom necessary for a truly personal relationship of love to develop.”<sup>2</sup> Relationships require that the persons involved be free and if faith is a type of relationship then it too requires its participants to have genuine freedom.

Human free will is a core necessity of relational theology but is also a core necessity of divine faith. If there is no human freedom, then God need not risk in an

---

<sup>1</sup>It is understood that other conditions might also be necessary including God’s existence in, or experiences of, time and limitations on divine omnipotence. However, I believe that these “additional” conditions can be assumed within the three conditions stated. For example, the notion that God experiences time is a necessary condition if conditions one and two are accepted for it would not be possible for humans to be free and God’s knowledge of the future be limited and yet God exist “outside” of time. Likewise a limited omnipotence is a necessary condition of divine-human partnership. To suggest that God gives a purpose and shares a task with humans and yet is not limited, either voluntarily or necessarily, in power is problematic for this would mean that God’s partnership is actually a facade. To partner is to share power.

<sup>2</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 282.

act of trust for all human actions are divinely caused. At this point, it is necessary to define free will more precisely for there are several ways in which philosophers understand humans to be free. Relational theists suggest that libertarianism or incompatibilism is the only way to make sense of human free and divine demands. Libertarianism is the view that “an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent’s power to perform the action and also in the agent’s power to refrain from the action.”<sup>3</sup> Libertarianism means that the power to choose lies solely with the individual if his or her choice is truly free. No free action can be caused by any other agent other than the self. This does not mean one is not influenced by outside agencies but simply that for a choice to be free it must be self-caused. Theological determinism or compatibilism, on the other hand, is the view that “Agents are free to do as they want and are morally responsible for the choices they make. But all their choices nevertheless fall within the sovereign plan of God, which governs all things.”<sup>4</sup> A choice is free or voluntarily made because the agent was not constrained from doing what was desired even though it was, nonetheless, determined by God. The determinists understanding of “freedom” is forged within the idea that everything that takes place is caused by God for God’s own purposes, and therefore, nothing happens outside the will of God. The limits of freedom are linked to one’s desires for one is only free if one can do what is desired but no one is free to choose a desire. Compatibilism would easily dismiss the notion of divine faith for God would have no need for belief or trust if all events and desires are divinely caused. God would never experience hope or doubt for risk would be eliminated because all which has taken or will take place has been divinely predestined.<sup>5</sup> Faith is unnecessary for humans are only free to act in ways that

---

<sup>3</sup>William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 136-137.

<sup>4</sup>James K. Beilby, and Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 11. This view should be distinguished from fatalism that holds that all things happen out of necessity and that even God has no choice in the matter. Some theological determinists go beyond compatibilism arguing that individuals have no freedom for God has divinely decreed every event in history and in the future to come, and yet humans are still morally culpable for their sin and rebellion. However, this approach is generally given over to mystery. Determinist John Feinberg laments such approaches by Calvinists who, when challenged on the truth of this question “respond that it is a paradox which nonetheless must be true because Scripture demands it.” For more information, see John Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 24

<sup>5</sup>For arguments in support of theological determinism, see Thomas R. Schreiner, and Bruce A. Ware, *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000).



guarantee God's divinely decreed plan. However, relational theists adamantly reject compatibilism and theological determinism because libertarian freedom is pivotal to the understanding that God and human genuinely relate. Pinnock writes, "By its very nature this covenant relationship cannot be coerced but is something which both parties enter into voluntarily."<sup>6</sup> Daniel Day Williams suggests that freedom can beget greater freedom when he writes, "God wills communion on terms of man's real freedom and responsiveness. It is to know that the love God offers is responsive love, in which he takes into himself the consequences of human actions, bears with the world, and urges all things toward a society of real freedom in communion."<sup>7</sup>

Just as human free will is key to a relational theology, it is also key to a theology of divine faith. If God has faith in humans, then God has faith in human choices. Faith presupposes that one is not locked into a particular behavior but can do other than what is believed or hoped. It would be irrational to believe or have faith that a friend could leap over a ten-story building for such a feat is impossible for humans. Faith requires that what is hoped for is possible, for if what is hoped is not possible, then faith is not possible. Likewise, it is only rational for a person to assume that God has the freedom to do what is hoped for and believed. If God is not free to act, then faith in God, at least in this instance, is pointless.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, God will not have faith in humans to do what is beyond human ability for such a faith would be counter to divine knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in order to maintain a principle of divine faith, it is necessary to claim human free will for without it humans could not do other than what is predetermined. Any proposal for divine faith must presuppose the genuine condition of human free will and this is exactly what relational theists argue.

In the end, affirming significant libertarian human free will is not enough to necessitate the reality of a divine faith. The condition of limited divine foreknowledge is also necessary.

---

<sup>6</sup>Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 147-148.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel Day Williams, "God and Man," in *Process Theology: Basic Writing by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement* (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 181.

<sup>8</sup>Key to this discussion for the relational theist is whether what is hoped for is within God's power for not all relational theists maintain God is free to do all that is hoped of God. The process thinker, for example, suggests that God is not free to unilaterally bring an end to evil and suffering, while the open theist maintains God will one day bring about its end.

<sup>9</sup>Expecting God to have faith that humans can do what God never granted them the ability to do would be beyond Kierkegaard's leap of faith. It would be tantamount to a denial of God's very being.

## Limited Foreknowledge

It is possible for one to advocate that humans are genuinely free and yet also believe God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all future free human choices.<sup>10</sup> If this is the stance taken then there is no place for divine faith for God would have no need for belief or trust. With exhaustive foreknowledge, God would infallibly know how every future free choice would turn out, and, with this knowledge, the need to trust individuals to make the right choices would vanish. It is required then to explore the second necessary condition of divine faith.

Faith, as a type of relationality, can only be real where there exists a relationship in which there is authentic potential and genuine novelty. To know without exception the future free choice of an individual eliminates the ability to relate to them and their choice. If all future free actions are known, even if they remain perfectly free, there is no need of faith. However, relational theists suggest that if humans are free, then this necessitates God's knowledge of the future to be, at the least, significantly limited. It is not enough to simply say that God knows all future free choices without causing them for "Freedom requires more than the absence of coercion. It also requires the presence of genuine alternatives."<sup>11</sup> But these genuine alternatives are only possible if the future is truly open and God's infallible knowledge limited to past and present knowable realities.

If God, being all-knowing, has exhaustive and accurate knowledge of all future events, even free events, the future only appears to be distant and unknowable from a human perspective, but with God the future is fixed and without potential or novelty, known in full. If one accepts this approach in regard to God, there would be no expectation, anticipation, or frustration when a potential future became actual because God would have an eternally actualized knowledge of every event, past, present, and future, whether the events are predetermined or free. There would be no cognitive difference between past and future for God's knowledge of each would be full and complete, essentially timeless even if God were not. The issue then, as relational theists have argued, is not purely about God's ability to know but the nature of the future. The future, not being actual but potential, is not knowable, and thus,

---

<sup>10</sup>Simple divine foreknowledge has been advocated by many theologians from Jacob Arminius to C.S. Lewis. The theory seeks to save both human freedom and absolute divine foreknowledge asserting that God knows all future free choices without having caused any of them. This view is rejected by all relational theists. For more information concerning the incompatibility of relational theism and simple divine foreknowledge, see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 194-206.

<sup>11</sup>Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*, 20.

any relation to it rests on other types of relating such as belief and hope.

Human faith is necessitated by the fact that knowledge is limited for there are genuine unknowns. It is not that faith exists and therefore the future must contain the unknown, but rather, the future is “composed” of unknowable possibilities and thus faith is necessary. If there was absolute human knowledge of God’s being and God’s future acts there would be no need for faith since we could simply act upon knowledge that would serve as a detailed and infallible roadmap. Humans would watch as all their knowledge simply played out in front of their eyes. However, we do not have such knowledge because humans do not have the ability to discern within such profusion of possibilities and also because the future, according to relational theists, is inherently unknowable.<sup>12</sup> Humans then must have faith regarding God’s future actions.

If God has absolute and exhaustive knowledge of all future human choices, free or otherwise, then any discussion of God’s faith is futile for faith is dependent upon the unknown and unknowable. Faith is a positive response to a person or persons when one cannot know the future and yet chooses to believe and act as though the person is reliable and true. Faith is not only dependent upon, it is necessitated by, an unknowable future. If the future is completely known by God then God has no need or use for faith. If God knows the outcome of every event as if it were the past God would have no need to believe, trust, hope, or risk anything. Obviously the simple divine foreknowledge approach will not support a God of faith. But if the situation is that God does not have the ability to know the future (for the future is unknowable because it does not exist) and that faith is necessary where there is a lack of knowledge, then it is prudent to continue this discussion of God’s faith. This issue is certainly two-sided, for if the future is unknowable, then it is possible to discuss God’s faith, but if a case can be made for God’s faith, it is also prudent to continue discussion of God’s relation to, and ability to know, the future.

### Purpose in Creation

The first condition (human free will) applies to creation while the second (limited foreknowledge) applies to the divine. The third condition applies to each

---

<sup>12</sup>As noted in chapter two, open theists will suggest that the future is only partially unknowable for there are unilateral decisions made by God about the future and God knows these fully. But, this really is not knowledge of the future but a present knowledge of God’s future intentions. They do not exist yet in order to be known, even by God. This does not negate the reality of these future events or relegate them to pure potential, but they are nonetheless distinct from “knowledge of the future.”

equally. The first is a condition placed squarely upon humans and perhaps, to a lesser extent, all of creation. If we are not free then faith (human or divine) is folly. The second condition concerns God and divine foreknowledge. If God has exhaustive foreknowledge, then divine faith is unnecessary given God's knowledge of every human use of freedom. The third condition involves all parties. The third condition necessary for faith is the instillation of task or purpose. This is not merely a matter of God having a purpose behind the act of creating but a purpose for the creation, a mission or duty. If there is no purpose or mission for the creation, then there is no need for God to have faith that creation will be trustworthy.

It is certainly possible that the first two conditions are true without the third. It is conceivable that God has instilled creation with freedom and has limited knowledge of the future but has not given creation a task. This creation could be simply an exercise in the divine power to create. Creation could be an experiment in which God is merely observing how we freely act out of divine curiosity. Creation conceivably could be for God's amusement. It is even possible that, much like the deists<sup>13</sup> have suggested, this planet was set in motion by God but then abandoned. God is no longer involved. If any of these are true, then a discussion of divine faith is foolish. But if God has partnered with creation to achieve something good or lovely, then faith is a necessary discussion point.

If the first two conditions are true and it is the case that God has imparted a purpose upon creation, it is then necessary that God trust that creation will fulfill its purpose. Purpose for creation can be understood in a variety of ways, but I believe Keith Ward expresses them all in suggesting:

If there is no creation, then there can be no pursuit of creative activity by God, no delighting in the being of creatures and their happiness, no sharing of the Divine goodness with others, and no object upon which God's love could be centered. The basic reason for creation is that it brings about forms of goodness and value which otherwise would not exist. In brief, it makes it possible for God to be a God of love, possessing the properties of creativity, appreciative

---

<sup>13</sup>Alister McGrath offers a nice summary of the deistic idea of God as that being who "created the world, and endowed it with the ability to develop and function without the need for his continuing presence or interference. This viewpoint, which became especially influential in the eighteenth century, regarded the world as a watch, and God as the watchmaker. God endowed the world with a design, such that it could subsequently function on its own." The deist model is not simply that the world can function on its own but that God makes no contribution to the world's sustenance. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 238.

knowledge and sharing communion, which are the highest perfections of personal being.<sup>14</sup>

Ward goes on to say that God created for purpose of community and partnership in the hope that such a creation might “express forms of positive goodness” and that a free creation might choose goals and values rooted in the nature of God.<sup>15</sup>

Ward also addresses God’s purpose for humans in particular. “From a religious point of view, the deepest purpose of human existence is the free development of a relationship of joyful obedience to the will of God, within a community of justice, peace and love.”<sup>16</sup> God did not simply create out of curiosity but with the intention that creation produce values and goods which otherwise could not be actualized. Loving relationships between the divine and mortal is one such value. God cannot create this alone but has created beings who can freely choose to lovingly obey and enter into a divine/human partnership of love and faith. This divine purpose for the creation is also demonstrated in the cross as God’s restoration of the divine purpose.

The cross reveals a God who does not wish to let human sin, disobedience, and rejection thwart the divine purpose of partnership and fellowship with creation. The cross can be understood as God working to aid and facilitate the human purpose; to save humanity for its purpose. S. Mark Heim speaks of salvation as relationship. “Salvation is a relation of communion with God and other creatures in Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Salvation is a saving of the relationship and the purpose of creation. God’s purpose for creation, according to Heim, is human communion with God because God created creation for communion. Heim argues that salvation is the restoration of communion between God and creation. “Communion is the way Christ saves, and it is the salvation that results.”<sup>18</sup>

If creation was made for the purpose of communion with the creator and, yet, humans are significantly free beings, then it makes sense to investigate God’s faith. If

---

<sup>14</sup>Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>16</sup>Keith Ward, *God, Faith & the New Millennium: Christian Belief in an Age of Science* (Boston, MA: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 133. While Ward does not believe creation is only valuable to God in its production of humans, he does believe the goal of creation was the eventual evolution of relational and mindful beings.

<sup>17</sup>S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 49.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 53.

God does not infallibly know the future outcome of this communal partnership of love and creativity, then it is necessary to ask whether God must trust in God's communal partners. God's faith is a condition necessitated by human freedom, divine limitation, and creator/creation partnership. If relational theists are espousing all three of these conditions, then it is necessary that relational theists consider the inclusion of faith as a divine attribute.

### **God Believes**

God's knowledge of the future, according to relational theists, is significantly limited by the future free actions of individuals and, therefore, God does not know the future in any infallible absolute manner. If it is true that God's knowledge is significantly limited this raises a number of questions concerning God's juxtaposition to a future of free potentials. What does God think about these future potentials? Or better, how does God think about these potentials? Does God only think true thoughts? That is, does God only allow what is knowable to enter the divine mind, or does God ever ponder and deliberate whether an idea is or will be true? In addition, does God ever believe an idea to be true (at some time) without knowing it to be true? In short, does God believe when God cannot know? If it is granted that God's knowledge is limited, then such questions are valid and necessitate a discussion of divine beliefs. In this section, I will address the idea that relational theism's stance concerning God's limited foreknowledge means that God holds beliefs about the future because the future is open and significantly unknowable. However, more problematic than a discussion of God's beliefs will be a discussion of God's erroneous beliefs.

### **Divine Belief and Omniscience**

The purpose of this section is not to defend, or offer arguments for, the notion of God's limited knowledge of an open or indeterminate future, but to suggest that if the three conditions stated above are true, then God exercises faith in the form of *belief that* in regard to human action and choice. If these conditions exist, then it can be said that God, at least at various times, has held beliefs about future human choices and perhaps even present conditions of the human heart. Later in this section, I will examine the binding of Isaac narrative that not only makes most sense when read in light of relational theism but also clearly supports the notion that God held particular beliefs about the future outcome of the events. It will also be suggested that at times

God's beliefs were justified (and thus became knowledge) while other narratives reveal that what God believed would occur did not. Yet before these narratives can be examined, it is necessary to explain how the terms *belief* and *knowledge* are being used in regard to God.

In philosophical discussions, *belief* and *knowledge* are understood differently than in "common sense" usages as well as many theological debates. In this discussion, I am speaking of belief in a more "common sense" understanding of in a manner akin to those typically used in faith theories. Because this work suggests that God has faith it is best to define the terms as they are used in discussions surrounding the subject of faith. Hick defines belief, in the larger discussion of faith, as "believing strongly various propositions...which the believer cannot *know* to be true."<sup>19</sup> Knowledge, according to Hick, is a condition in which there is no room for faith or, better, belief. Belief, in this context, is reserved for those notions or propositions beyond the scope of knowledge. Belief, then, is the acceptance of something that cannot be proven, at least at that moment.<sup>20</sup> Belief is incomplete while knowledge is settled. Belief assumes epistemological gaps and that one can be incorrect for these gaps keep the proposition from being knowable or knowledge. Knowledge, it is presumed, is fundamentally distinct from belief, in that, knowledge is having a complete awareness of truth. It is not simply a feeling of certainty, for feelings of certainty can and often are incorrectly felt in regard to inaccuracies and complete falsehoods. Knowledge, however, especially in regard to God's knowledge, is complete and does not merely feel complete. For this argument, I will take the position that belief is something shy of knowledge for there are still epistemological gaps yet to be filled. It is also assumed that, for God, belief has a distinct feeling from knowledge.

When beliefs are applied to God, it is generally argued that God, being omniscient, has beliefs in the form of accurate affirmations of factual events or true propositions. God, therefore, can be said to have beliefs but that God believes only that which is factual. Beliefs in this sense are a part of God's omniscience. As John Martin Fischer writes, "God is taken to be omniscient. A person is omniscient just in case he believes all and only true propositions."<sup>21</sup> In this sense then, God's

---

<sup>19</sup>Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 11.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>21</sup>John Martin Fischer, "Introduction," in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, Stanford Series in Philosophy (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 4. Fischer is not using this definition

knowledge is composed of beliefs,<sup>22</sup> but only *true* beliefs, thus putting God's beliefs in a wholly distinct category from that of human beliefs.<sup>23</sup> Relational theists will often affirm that while God holds only true beliefs, the future is of a nature that cannot be known for there is nothing actual to be known. Its reality is of the nature of sheer possibility. Thus God cannot hold true beliefs about the future, or at least an aspect of it, for the future is inherently unknowable.<sup>24</sup> Gregory Boyd writes that, "Reality...is composed of both settled and open aspects. Since God knows all of reality perfectly, this view holds that he knows the possible aspects as possible and knows the settled aspects as settled."<sup>25</sup> In this sense, God knows the future as in part possible and in part actual. God knows only what can be known about the future but also *knows* the future as possible. But does God know the possible as if it were actual? And if so, does this leave room for God to believe certain things about the

---

in order to support traditional omniscience and exhaustive foreknowledge for this book is comprised of essays arguing for ways to show that God's omniscience is incompatible with human freedom.

<sup>22</sup>Not all philosophers define omniscience as God having *true beliefs*. William Alston, in his article, "Does God Have Beliefs?" discusses the nature of God's knowledge (but not the extent of that knowledge). The question for Alston is whether God, "Who is necessarily omniscient," has a kind of knowledge which consists of warranted true beliefs, that is, whether God's knowledge is composed of propositional beliefs which are in fact true. Alston ultimately rejects such an understanding of God's knowledge instead positing that God's knowledge is intuitive, "that knowledge of a fact is simply the immediate awareness of that fact." In this sense God does not hold or believe true statements about reality as some kind of psychological state, but God intuits the "actual existence of the object" suggesting that, for God, "knowledge, on this construal, is infallible in a strong sense; its inherent nature guarantees the reality of the object." Alston argues that a God who has knowledge composed of beliefs is ultimately subject to holding false beliefs or beliefs that fail to qualify as knowledge. He argues that it would prove to be "cognitive imperfection and not attributable to God" to suggest that God believes but does not know some future event. I believe this article only makes sense if God is assumed to be omniscient, in the traditional sense, as well as timeless, both of which are vehemently denied by relational theologians. For more information, see William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996) 178-193 (originally published in *Religious Studies*, 22 (1987), 287-306).

Openness philosopher William Hasker responded to Alston's approach. He argues that if Alston's approach of divine knowledge as intuitive is accepted this approach "requires us to acknowledge...the divine existence as temporally successive rather than timeless." Also, according to Hasker, "we have found that the conception of divine knowledge through the immediate presence of the object known [intuitive knowledge] cannot supplant, but rather requires to be supplanted by, the conception of such knowledge as involving inner mental representations [beliefs] of the objects known...So God *does* have beliefs!" For more information, see William Hasker, "Yes, God Has Beliefs!" *Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (1988).

<sup>23</sup>Humans however do not have the ability to only believe what is true. Certainly, in this understanding, when a human has knowledge he or she has a mental affirmation of a true belief, but humans never know if their knowledge is in fact a true belief. Thus, humans can only believe that their mental affirmations are true while, according to this approach, God knows God's beliefs are in fact true.

<sup>24</sup>The extent of God's knowledge of future possibilities is debated among relational theists. Generally, open theists maintain that God can unilaterally determine aspects of the future and thus know what God has foreordained, while process theists suggest that the future is wholly unknowable for God cannot ever act coercively.

<sup>25</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 14.



future in a way that is compatible with faith? Boyd is suggesting that God's knowledge includes real knowledge, true beliefs, about both actualities and possibilities. But the question remains, can God *believe that* a possibility will become an actuality without it being the case? Ward simply states, concerning knowledge in general, "To know something is to know that something is the case."<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is true that God cannot know what is not factual and thus God "cannot know something that is not the case" even though God can know what might have been the case.<sup>27</sup> It is this last statement that concerns this subject. If God can know all potentials or possibilities, does this leave room for a belief understood as something less than knowledge? If God can know every past possibility or every future potentiality, then there seems to be little place for *belief that*. This will be addressed in a moment, but it may be helpful to first look at Swinburne's approach to omniscience.

Swinburne places the notion of omniscience within time. A being that is said to be omniscient must be so at a given point in time. Thus, to say God is omniscient is to say that God knows all true propositions that are true at any given moment.<sup>28</sup> Swinburne argues that to suggest omniscience means that "a person knew everything" implying that that this person had the "ability to answer any question correctly" would only be possible if said person "was the only person and that was the only moment of time," for there are some propositions that can only be known at certain times or by certain persons.<sup>29</sup> Since God is not, according to convention, every person existing at a certain moment, we cannot say that God can correctly answer every question. This leads Swinburne to suggest that a more "coherent account of omniscience" would affirm a restricted notion of divine omniscience, one in which "a being is omniscient if he knows at each time all true propositions which it is logically possible that he entertain them."<sup>30</sup> Does this mean that God will hold beliefs about propositions that cannot be demonstrated or known to be true? Swinburne seems to suggest that God, knowing all of the past in a conclusive manner, could make justified predictions about

---

<sup>26</sup>Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 275.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>28</sup>Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 167.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.* Examples would include statements like "It is now 12:41 p.m. on May 26, 2007," for this is only a true proposition at a very small moment in time and God could not know this as a true belief before or after that particular moment. Likewise, the statement "my left hand is throbbing in pain" could only be a true statement for the person uttering it at a particular time.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 172. Swinburne earlier suggests that just as omnipotence should be defined in terms of what is logically possible so should omniscience, and thus, it is not logically possible for God to be able to correctly answer any question posed.

future free choices of individuals and these would be “justified beliefs,” but these would not be “justified true beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> From this standpoint it would make sense to speak of God having beliefs in a way that is consistent with faith discussions. Perhaps God has beliefs so accurate, based on exhaustive knowledge of all past and current events, that future predictions could accidentally, but not necessarily, always be correct. This would still mean that God holds beliefs, but not knowledge, of human future free action.

If we say that God has “justified beliefs” about what is unknowable at a given time would this mean that God cannot know possibilities and potentials in any absolute manner? This question can be addressed in regard to God’s so called “middle-knowledge” or knowledge of counterfactuals.<sup>32</sup> Middle-knowledge is the notion that God’s knowledge includes not only what will happen but what *would* have happened in every alternative scenario. If God has knowledge of counterfactuals, then God needs no beliefs for God “knows what any free creature would do in any situation” and can guarantee God’s desired ends by “creating appropriate situations” in which free creatures *will* freely do what God plans.<sup>33</sup> God knows all possibilities as actualities for God equally knows what will happen and what would happen in every case. However, as William Hasker points out, this raises a metaphysical question. “What, if anything, is the *ground* of the truth of the counterfactuals of freedom?”<sup>34</sup> There is no actual state of affairs or reality for God to know. Basinger suggests that such an approach is simply not compatible with genuine (libertarian) freedom, for in every situation God might create, we are still free to do other than what God desires.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately this approach does not work for it is contra-relational. It is not a type of knowledge that allows God to respond to the free choices made by persons about their future. It simply seems to be a more complex version of divine determinism, for, in middle-knowledge, God knows what *would* be the case in every possible situation. There is no potential for God knows not only what will be the case in all particular

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 176-177. The predictions would be justified, that is more than merely careful guesses, because of an exhaustive knowledge of the past and present.

<sup>32</sup>A counterfactual is a conditional (if-then) statement concerning what *would* be the case if the antecedent were true. William Lane Craig states that counterfactuals are what lie between what could be and what will be. They are conditional statements in the subjunctive mood. For more information, see William Lane Craig, “The Middle-Knowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 120.

<sup>33</sup>William Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Bake Book House, 1987), 135; quoted in Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 43.

<sup>34</sup>Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 29.

<sup>35</sup>Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 44-46.

routes taken but also what would have been the case in all routes not taken.

In response to the middle-knowledge approach, Boyd offers an idea that might prove helpful in developing a case for God's beliefs. Boyd suggests that instead of "would-counterfactuals" we should include "might-counterfactuals." God's knowledge, given genuine human freedom, could in some occasions include would-counterfactuals but most likely freedom would necessity might-counterfactuals. God's knowledge includes what free agents "might or might not do" in particular situations.<sup>36</sup> God's relation to future events consists of both God's knowledge of what will be and God's knowledge of what might be. However, for clarity, I think it would be best to distinguish these two mental states into knowledge (what was, is, or will be) and belief (what might possibly be). In this way a theory of God's knowledge, which is limited to "what is the case" has room for a theory of God's belief, which is God's knowledge of what might be the case.<sup>37</sup>

For this work, it is unnecessary to develop a theory of omniscience, or even to formally choose one already advanced, in order to explore the concept God *believes that*. However, for the sake of clarity, I will suggest that omniscience should be defined as "God knowing all that is possible for anyone to know."<sup>38</sup> Yet, all that is necessary at this point is to demonstrate, according to the presuppositions of relational theology as well as a careful reading of particular biblical narratives, that it makes sense to speak of God having beliefs. A God of beliefs is completely coherent given the arguments advanced by relational theists, for a God who relates to a world of free creatures and real possibilities must logically believe prior to knowing. I am suggesting that "God believes," means that, based upon the knowledge of all things knowable, God judges something to most likely be the case without it actually being

---

<sup>36</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, "An Open-Theism Response," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 146-147. Boyd ultimately seems more receptive to the possibility of "would-counterfactuals" than other relational theists.

<sup>37</sup>For a complete theory of God's knowledge and beliefs, it would be necessary to tighten up the conditions in which God believes something might be the case and when God only knows it's possibly the case but does not believe it will be the case. This, however, is beyond the purpose of this work.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Taliaferro, "Unknowable Truths and Omniscience: A Reply to Kvanvig," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (fall 1993): 553. This definition obviously follows a limited theory of omniscience whereas an unlimited theory would suggest, "God knows all truths" (or all truth values). Those who advocate the view that God knows all truths are forced to discuss the nature of truth and whether future truths "exists" in order for God to know them, or if the future is unknowable because there are no (or very few) truths which exist concerning the future. The approach which suggests that God knows all that can be known does not eliminate end discussions concerning knowledge, especially those concerning the existence of future truths, but rather adds a new discussion to the table.

the case (unknowable future truth) or without knowing if it is currently the case (unknowable present truth). God judges something to be the case, based on all known truths, even though it cannot be known whether it will be the case. “God believes” means then that the divine makes decisions and acts based upon all known truths but without being certain that what is believed is (or will be) accurate or true.

As a mental state, belief for God is not all that different in form than belief for humans. According to Aquinas, “Faith is the midway between knowledge and opinion.”<sup>39</sup> Intellectually, belief is a kind of mental confidence that is greater than opinion but less than knowledge.<sup>40</sup> However, for God, unlike humans, there is never confusion between belief and knowledge. God knows what is knowledge while also knowing what is belief. And while human and divine belief have similarities there is also a wide cleft between human and divine belief. Divine belief is limited to the unknowable, be that an unknowable current truth or a future possible reality. Human belief, however, can and will include all things knowable including past and current realities. Just as human knowledge pales in comparison to divine knowledge, human belief is fragile and exceedingly more tentative than divine. Whatever God knows, God knows perfectly, and thus, God’s beliefs are infinitely superior to human beliefs both in God’s ability to accurately judge and predict, as well as, God’s knowledge of what is a belief versus what is knowledge. If the relational theists are correct and there are realities, be they actual or potential, which are inherently unknowable, then both human and divine are not free from forming beliefs about the unknown. The unknowable forces both human and divine to act and react based upon beliefs—judgments of what might be the case.

I supposed it could be suggested that God, while not having knowledge of all future realities, approaches the unknowable without any beliefs or judgments. This would mean that God’s beliefs pertain only to what God knows and that all unknowable truths are simply known as such, unknowable. This approach would mean God does not make judgments concerning what might be true. In this view, God does not consider these mental events (beliefs) but only considers or ponders what is known and knowable. This would mean that God acts solely on absolute knowledge. Even though this may be possible, it makes no sense to suggest that God has only knowledge but no beliefs, meaning that God only thinks true thoughts and

---

<sup>39</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2s, 2ae, I.2; quoted in Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 107.

<sup>40</sup>Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 107.

never ponders, considers, or assumes anything that is less than knowledge. This would hardly be a God who is free for God would be locked into what is and never able to act on what might be. From a relational stance, this could never be a God of risk, love, or vulnerability for each of these ideas necessitate acting on beliefs less than knowledge. Just as a God who holds no beliefs regarding a closed future is not free, neither is a God without beliefs facing an open future. This God would be just as static or, perhaps at best, a totally reactionary being, but never proactive in facing an open future. If God knows every future event as actual and fixed in eternity God is not free to do other than what God knows to be true.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, if God has no beliefs about an open future then the divine cannot act in freedom for God cannot plan, desire, risk, or work towards any divine ends. A God with no beliefs concerning an open future is completely passive and thus not relational. Sanders relates God's beliefs to God's love stating that when "we begin with the understanding of God bringing into being creatures with whom he desires to enter into genuine personal and loving relationships, then it is quite permissible to speak of God's believing and hoping all things will go a certain way."<sup>42</sup> Sanders also suggests that God's loving nature allows us to apply Paul's description of love to God and that God "believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).<sup>43</sup> Thus, a loving God who operates with an open future cannot eschew beliefs but must embrace them and the risks of their incompleteness if God is to truly be relational.

#### Situations of Divine Belief

It is my task in the rest of this section to explore situations in which it can be argued that God does hold beliefs concerning future and some current free human states. I believe this approach is the most coherent stance given the doctrines of relational theology as well as particular biblical narratives. Many of these cases in which it makes sense to speak of God's beliefs are centered in situations which reveal that what God planned, expected, or hoped for did not come to fruition. In some

---

<sup>41</sup>This is the problem of multiple absolutes. If we suggest that God has absolute foreknowledge and that God has absolute or unrestricted omnipotence, we face a situation in which one must trump the other. For example, if God has absolute foreknowledge, then the divine is not free to act other than how God knows God will act for this would mean that divine foreknowledge was incorrect. Likewise, if God is omnipotent, then God can do whatever God desires in the future, yet if God can change God's mind, then God cannot have absolute foreknowledge. For more on the "uselessness of simple foreknowledge," see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 200-207.

<sup>42</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 181. In the section "God Hopes" I will discuss the difference between God's believing and God's hoping.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

situations, however, it can be argued that God did believe, without knowing, that something was the case and it in fact was the case.

### *Changes in the Divine Mind*

The proposition that “God changes his mind” is central to the openness approach to relational theology and can be found in nearly every openness argument. The argument is widely used for good reason; it is compelling and effective in suggesting God is relational. The biblical teaching that God changes what God once intended to do, as is unmistakably stated in several passages, demonstrates that many of the biblical authors believed God’s future was indeed open. It is not my intention to use these occasions of changes in the divine mind as arguments for an open or unsettled future but rather to suggest that these changes of mind, in light of an open and unsettled future, mean that God believed one thing to be the case when in fact it was not the case. It must be said again, not that God thought that God knew something to be the case but that God held beliefs, that is made judgments based on God’s complete knowledge of all things knowable, that these were the most likely of all possible outcomes. And, since these are beliefs about God’s own intentions, these were very strong beliefs, but nonetheless, beliefs and not knowledge.

Several passages teach that the divine mind changed. For example the narratives concerning the Israelite exodus, wandering, and eventual settling contain occasions of God intending to destroy Israel because of their covenant breaking. Exodus 32 relates the story of Israel casting the golden calf and God’s intention of consuming them because of their unfaithfulness. However, Moses intervenes, and calls upon God to “Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.” Verse 14 states that “the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.” A second occasion of the divine mind changing (although it does not explicitly state that “God changed his mind”) is found in the following chapter in which God states to Moses concerning the promised land entry, “I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Exod. 33:3). However, after Moses’ appeal, God eventually states, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exod. 33:14). If the relational theist’s readings of these texts are correct and God’s mind truly changed, then there is no reason to suggest that God did not actually believe that God would consume Israel and that God did in fact believe that Israel would also be consumed if God went with them into the promised land. The passages reveal a relational God who is not only open to future possibilities but a God who is open to

real deliberation and even counsel with God's covenant partners. This is certainly a picture of divine trust! But that is not the main point being made here, at least not at this time. The point is that these passages only make sense if God truly believed these actions would be taken if circumstances did not change. If God's mind actually changed, then this means God once believed one situation was the case (Israel would be consumed and God would not enter the land) but God came to believe (and eventually know) that something else was in fact the case (Israel was preserved and God entered the land with them). If God did not believe that what was said would eventually become true, then there can be no case of God's mind changing, for we would have to ask, "changed from what?" Fretheim rightly comments that God was not indecisive, vacillating, or filled with uncertainties.<sup>44</sup> God believed without indecision, vacillation, or uncertainty that God would do what was declared. Yet, because of God's relationality and willingness to hear counsel from a covenant partner the possibility existed that God's beliefs would not be actualized and, as the narrative reveals, could be changed. All things being equal God would have done what was declared, but, because these were possibilities, God's mind was free to change given new actualities or possibilities.

### ***God Changes What God Believed to be True***

A second situation concerning God's beliefs is arguably less about God's mind changing from what is intended but rather a situation in which God believes one thing will be the case but instead intervenes and changes the situation and thus the divine's own beliefs were changed. II Kings 20:1-6 relates the story of God healing King Hezekiah. We are told that God, through the prophet Isaiah, informed Hezekiah of an impending death and that he needed to get his affairs in order for he would soon die. The statement is rather emphatic, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'" Yet, because of the prayer of Hezekiah, Isaiah is sent back to declare "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you." Now, unless it can be argued that God actually lied to Hezekiah in the original pronouncement, God believed that Hezekiah would in fact die. As Boyd argues:

---

<sup>44</sup>Terence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1991), 291. On page 292 Fretheim goes on to say that, "we do not know what God would have done if Moses had not entered into the discussion as he did. But the picture that finally emerges from the chapter is that Moses is responsible for shaping the future other than what would have been the case had he been passive and kept silent."

Now, if we accept the classical view of foreknowledge and suppose that the Lord was certain that he would *not* let Hezekiah die, wasn't he being duplicitous when he initially told Hezekiah that he would not recover? And if we suppose that the Lord was certain all along that Hezekiah would, in fact, live fifteen years after this episode, wasn't it misleading for God to tell him that he was *adding* fifteen years to his life?<sup>45</sup>

Based upon what God *knew* of Hezekiah's health, God *believed* that Hezekiah would in fact die.<sup>46</sup> Yet, because of the prayer of Hezekiah, God changed the situation and extended Hezekiah's life. This need not be read as a case in which "God's changed his mind" for it is not clear that God brought this illness upon Hezekiah, only that God was informing him of what God knew to be imminent if God did not intervene.<sup>47</sup> Thus, if we can say that God was being completely honest, God believed Hezekiah would die. If we wish to avoid charges of duplicity against God, then we must also say that this situation reveals more than God simply lacking certainty regarding Hezekiah's death and could therefore tell him he would die but later change that outcome. It would still be duplicitous if God intended, without knowing, that God would heal Hezekiah.

It has been suggested that a relational reading of this text also renders God as duplicitous. Steven Roy contends that God's statement to Hezekiah came with an "unexpressed condition" that "You are going to die; you will not recover, unless you repent and pray." This added condition means that saying "you will surely die" when God actually meant, "you might die, but you won't if you repent and pray" is God being deceitful. Roy suggests that a relational reading is trumped by God knowing "in advance that Hezekiah would meet the unspoken conditional."<sup>48</sup> Roy seems to be saying that any definitive statement made by God has to be understood as potentially duplicitous, according to relational readings, since the divine mind might always change. This would mean that nearly every biblical declaration made by God would

---

<sup>45</sup>Boyd., *God of the Possible*, 82.

<sup>46</sup>Some commentators have suggested that Hezekiah's illness was an infected boil. See Iain Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series, vol. 7 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 263.

<sup>47</sup>This statement is based on the narrative itself and not on the Jeremiah use of the text (Jer. 26:19) in which he states "Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favour of the LORD, and did not the LORD change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!" Jeremiah is certainly using this story to encourage the Israelites to believe that God's mind can be changed about the disaster pronounced against them. However, the story of Hezekiah needs to be read so as to suggest God is bringing this disaster on Hezekiah. This illness is quite likely a natural illness.

<sup>48</sup>Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?: A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 146-147.



need to clearly come with the qualifier, “unless I change my mind.” But this is what many of the biblical characters seem to think, that God’s statements are given, no matter how emphatically, with the possibility of there being a qualifier. Does God’s statement, “you shall surely die, you shall not recover” coupled with the implied conditional mean that God was deceitful? If we understand this statement made by God to be a divine belief, that is a judgment of what will happen based on divine knowledge of all things knowable, including God’s knowledge that the situation could be changed, then God is not being duplicitous but straightforward and candid. God did not say to Hezekiah “you shall surely die” with a wink knowing that Hezekiah would repent and pray, but God believed (and rightly so) that Hezekiah would surely die. However, because of the prayers of Hezekiah (and possibly God’s own desire for a Davidic kingdom) God changed the situation and added to Hezekiah’s life.<sup>49</sup>

I believe the best way to protect God’s integrity against charges of duplicity<sup>50</sup> is to say that God believed Hezekiah would in fact die when the pronouncement was made. This was not a rush to judgment nor a statement made in haste without God considering all possibilities. It was God’s belief based on all truths known. At that moment, when God pronounced “you shall die, you shall not recover,” God was expressing what would be true if nothing else changed. However, something did change and thus we must say based on this narrative that God’s belief here, while hardly unfounded, turned out to be incorrect. God did not merely misread the information or guess wrongly, God changed the situation, seemingly due to the prayers of Hezekiah, and in turn changed the accuracy of God’s own beliefs. God believed that Hezekiah would die and not recover, and yet, because of new truths that became known to God, these beliefs changed and new beliefs arose.

While many other texts could be used to demonstrate that, under the assumptions of relational theology, God at times operates on *belief that*, it is beneficial to relate one other narrative that conveys God’s belief in a manner which is much more conducive to faith discussions. It should be remembered, *belief that* in

---

<sup>49</sup>Roy’s reading of this passage does not protect God from charges of duplicity for in suggesting that God’s statement to Hezekiah, “you shall surely die, you shall not recover” implies the unspoken conditional “unless you repent and pray” changes the meaning of the statement completely. If Roy’s addition is correct and God were to be totally honest the pronouncement to Hezekiah would needed to have been something like, “‘you shall surely die, you shall not recover’ is what would have been true if I, the Lord, had not known for all time that you would repent and pray and therefore you shall continue to live for another fifteen years.”

<sup>50</sup>This passage would not be the most compelling indictment against God’s integrity but there are others that *appear* to suggest that God is duplicitous and deceitful. See 1 Sam. 16:1-4; 1 Kings 22:20-23; Ezra 20:25.

faith discussions is not simply assenting to propositions which cannot be known about God. Rather it is the belief that the person of God is true to God's character. To have a faith that includes *belief that* is to affirm, not simply that God exists, but that God's character is good, loving, and holy. Likewise, to say that God believes is not simply to say that God affirms or judges particular propositions to be true, either now or at some future time, but that God also believes particular persons are of good character, are true, and trustworthy. And this is what the following narrative can be shown to demonstrate: God *believes that* Abraham is trustworthy.

### ***God Believes Abraham is True***

The story of Abraham is but one of several biblical narratives in which God tests, either individually or corporately, the character of those with whom God relates.<sup>51</sup> In this famous and infamous story of Abraham and the binding of Isaac, we see that God believed, but did not know, that the character of Abraham was such that when tested Abraham would prove himself righteous. This is not a story of God simply gaining new information once unknowable. God is not conducting an experiment on Abraham in a manner appropriate of a scientist. This is a test of character.<sup>52</sup> God seeks to know if Abraham is the person God needs him to be. It is a test of relationship, not whether God would relate to Abraham but in what way and with what responsibilities. It is also a test, I believe, in which God expected Abraham to be successful; God believed that he was a person of faith, fear, and character.<sup>53</sup> By testing persons, God demonstrates an expectation of their success. God not only hopes they will succeed but actually believes they will prove faithful and worthy of God's trust.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Other texts of God's testing in order to know character include 2 Chron. 32:31 in which "God left him [Hezekiah] to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart" and Deut. 8:2 "God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments."

<sup>52</sup>Not all commentators see this as simply a testing narrative. Leon R. Kass argues that this narrative, while having elements of testing Abraham's obedience, faith, and love of God, is something other than a test for God does not command the sacrifice of Isaac. Kass states that the use of the Hebrew word *na'* in Gen. 22:2 should be read as "Take, *please*, thy son..." In this sense God requests, but does not command, Abraham to bind Isaac and so Abraham is free to refuse in ways a command would not allow. For more information, see *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 336-337.

<sup>53</sup>In stories like these we see that the lines between *belief that* and *belief in* become quite blurred. Certainly these stories could be read to reveal God's trust. However, keeping with Hick's statement that belief is logically prior to trust, I will speak of these narratives as belief stories.

<sup>54</sup>I am not suggesting that in every case of testing God believes or expects that the ones tested will succeed. For example, Exod. 16: 4 states that God will test whether Israel will follow God's instructions. Yet, this test is in the midst of a complaining Israel. Israel at this point is giving God very little to believe about their obedience and character and so it is unlikely that, given the context of this situation, God necessarily expected or believed Israel would pass the test.

Before this narrative is looked at from the perspective of relational theology, the issue of God's knowledge of the human "heart" needs to be addressed because the passage in question, Gen. 22:12 contains the divine statement, "for *now* I know you fear God." Is this a statement of God coming to know what was presently true? Or is this a statement about a reality that did not exist prior to Abraham's test? As noted above it is generally held by relational theists that God has exhaustive knowledge of the past and present while it is only the future that remains unknowable.<sup>55</sup> The future is unknowable because there is nothing to know since the future is sheer possibility, while the past and present are actualities and thus have truth values known to God. Since the future is pure potential, it has no actual truth values in relation to it. Thus, when it is said that God is omniscient, meaning that God knows all true propositions, God is not seen as lacking any knowledge of what is true for the future cannot be said to be true or false.<sup>56</sup> However, some narratives and passages in the Bible seem to suggest that there are present truths that are unknowable to God without some kind of testing or searching. This would mean that God's knowledge does not include all true propositions but only all knowable ones. In these situations, it would prove better to suggest that God does not know everything that is the case, but that God knows all truths knowable and that God can come to know all knowable truths. If we take these testing stories at face value, they suggest that at times the human heart, that is a person's character or virtue, cannot be known by God without some kind of outward expression or are only knowable indirectly and thus, the need for testing narratives.

Michael Carasik demonstrates that there are several places in the OT where God is said to examine a person's heart in order to know their thoughts.<sup>57</sup> In these examinations, God is said to "try" the human heart that the thoughts might be known. One example is Ps. 139:23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts."<sup>58</sup> "The unspoken assumption that implicitly underlies this

---

<sup>55</sup>This view is sometimes referred to as "present knowledge," which is the view that "God's knowledge is limited to everything that is (or has been) actual and to what follows deterministically from it." Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 39.

<sup>56</sup>Of course the extent to which the future does or does not contain knowable truths is debated amongst relational theists given debates about God's ability to unilaterally act in the future.

<sup>57</sup>I will use the modern notion of "mind" even though the Hebrew scripture speak of the "heart." Heart, and kidneys, is a poetic term and is used "as an organ of mentality." Michael Carasik, "The Limits of Omniscience," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 2 (summer 2000): 222.

<sup>58</sup>A sampling of passages in which it is said that God test in order to know the heart includes: Ps. 17:3; 26:2; Prov. 16:2. Even Jer. 20:12, which might be understood to suggest God knows human thoughts, for it reads that God "sees" the heart and mind. However, this is stated after a call for God to "test the righteous." Thus it can be argued that once God does test the righteous then God sees the heart and mind.

repeated focus on God's testing the heart" according to Carasik "is that when God wants to know what is in a particular human being's mind, God cannot sense it, but must deduce it."<sup>59</sup> Carasik adds, "Moreover, the details of an individual's secret thoughts are not at question in these passages but the nature or moral character of the person."<sup>60</sup> The key is the sequence of God's knowing for God knows after searching and testing, not before.<sup>61</sup> I am not disagreeing with Carasik, nor suggesting that all human thought is beyond God or that God cannot know human thoughts without some kind of external test or examination.<sup>62</sup> I would suggest that God can know the internal thoughts of all people but that knowing these thoughts are not the same as knowing a person's character or virtue. Virtues or character are dispositions that are manifested and known only through outward expression. Thus, for God to know one's thoughts is not the same as knowing one's character, for there are particular issues of character that cannot be known merely by knowing a person's history, no matter how exhaustively, or by knowing a person's thoughts and beliefs, no matter how deeply. Courage may serve as an example of a virtue that a person may have that is unknowable until tested. Courage is only revealed, and thus knowable, situationally. Persons may not know what kind of courage they actually possess until they find themselves in situations that test their character and virtue. A person may feel quite frightened and seriously doubt whether he or she is a person of courage at that moment and yet rise to the occasion. If this is the case, then the person had courage all along, but it was not knowable, to God or the individual, until externally demonstrated.

It might be argued that the person did not have courage until tested, that is, the situation produced courage. This is the approach taken by Sanders concerning the Abraham narrative. Sanders states that an open reading of this text "does not call into question God's 'present knowledge' of Abraham's character. Rather, the point would be that Abraham's character is *not fully formed* in crucial aspects until he has faced

---

<sup>59</sup>Carasik, "The Limits of Omniscience," 223.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Patrick D. Miller, "The Omniscience of God and Human Freedom," in *And God Saw It Was Good: Essays on Creation and God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim*, (Saint Paul, Minn.: Word & World [Supplement Series, 5], April, 2006), 146.

<sup>62</sup>A sampling of passages which might support God's knowledge of human thought prior to an examination include: Gen. 18:12; Prov. 15:11; Ezek. 11:5. For more on these and other passages, see Miller, "The Omniscience of God and Human Freedom." However, a detailed study of these and others passages concerning God's ability and manner of knowing the hearts and minds of individuals is beyond the scope of this paper.

this ultimate test.”<sup>63</sup> God learns something new because after the test there is a new truth about Abraham that did not exist prior to the test. While this might be true, it does not seem to fit the context of a testing story. Sanders himself states that “God puts a great many people to the test in order to find out what they value and believe... Yes, God knows our hearts, but seems to obtain this knowledge by testing.”<sup>64</sup> Here, Sanders’ comments seem to imply, not that the test produces a belief or value to be known by God, but that God is learning what the person *currently* believes or values.<sup>65</sup> If Sanders is correct, that God tested Abraham in order *produce* a fear of God, then the only thing God could have hoped to have learned is whether that test was successful, for it is entirely possible that this test would fail to produce the necessary fear, whereas another test might have proved successful. Could God have tried another test if this one had failed? However, if it is suggested that Abraham did fear God while neither knew of this for certain (for it is a truth unknowable without an external display), then God was right to test Abraham and learned something about his character which God could only believe and not know prior to the test.<sup>66</sup> According to Sanders, “All this is to say that Abraham is not a finished person, or the kind of person God believes he can count on, until he passes this test.”<sup>67</sup> However, I believe a slight rephrasing might help; “All this is to say that Abraham is not a finished person, but God believes he is and can be the kind of person he can count on, but God cannot know this until he passes the test.” In the end, it can still be suggested that God believes regardless of whether God knows all present truths or whether God only knows all things knowable. God nonetheless faces the unknown, acting upon beliefs because the situation is unknowable in its entirety.

The account of Abraham’s testing is so pivotal in the history of Israel it is cited by three different NT authors, yet it is so brief that much must be left to

---

<sup>63</sup>Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?: A Debate on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 25.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>It may not be a case of Sanders being contradictory but simply that he chose his words poorly given that these quotes come from a book which is a transcription of an email dialogue between Sanders and Chris Hall. This point may be further made in that between the passages quoted above Sanders puts these tests in the context of the future. He says that God tests in order to see “whether they would trust and follow” (Ibid., 25).

<sup>66</sup>And, as Sanders suggest, Abraham’s character was also developed in the event. This need not be seen as an “either/or” in which tests like this either reveal character or produce it for the truth is most likely both. Test and trials both create and reveal character.

<sup>67</sup>Hall and Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?*, 26.

inference and imagination.<sup>68</sup> This story, found in a scant 14 verses, has been read in a myriad of ways with dozens of possible questions left for the reader by the brevity of the story.<sup>69</sup> I am not suggesting that my reading of this narrative is *the* correct one. My brief approach to this story, however, is consistent with a relational theology reading, assuming and building upon relational theologian's treatments in careful but imaginative ways.

The Akidah ("binding") is often told and considered from Abraham's vantage. We seek to know his thoughts and beliefs. We contemplate the emotional state of this soon to be "knight of faith." However, relational theists focus instead upon God's thoughts and contemplate God's emotional state and, thus, I wonder if God too is a knight of faith. Is it possible that God wrestled with the horror of such a demand? God needed to know the character of this person to whom God would entrust the progeny who would become the nation who would bless all the nations. If God is a God of love, then such a horrific demand could only be placed upon an individual who God believed had the character to rise to the occasion. To make such a demand of a person believed to be weak minded or desolate in faith would certainly make no sense. God needed to know if Abraham was trustworthy, a person who feared God,<sup>70</sup> but if God believed him to be easily swayed and equivocal, then to demand the life of the promised child is not the act of an all-wise being. No, it would be unwise and even cruel for God to demand such a thing if God did not believe Abraham, although surely in existential pain and deep questioning, would pass the test.

Abraham needed to be a person of character; he needed to be obedient, yet not act blindly. Earlier Abraham had shown himself to be a person who would stand "toe to toe" with God questioning divine plans for the destruction of Sodom and

---

<sup>68</sup>Howard Moltz, "God and Abraham in the Binding of Isaac," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 96 (December 2001): 60.

<sup>69</sup>For example, Howard Moltz ends his treatment by suggesting that, "the story reaches beyond Abraham's failure as a father to tell of God's failure as God" (Ibid., 69). Terrence Fretheim asks, "Is God guilty of child abuse in this text?" Terrence E. Fretheim, "God, Abraham, and the Abuse of Isaac," *Word & World* XV, no. 1 (winter 1995): 49. Perhaps that is one of the purposes of the story, to force the reader to ask questions.

<sup>70</sup>Fear in this sense should not be associated with anxiety or terror. Rather in this context to fear God is to have "a deep reverential regard for God's character as a provider." Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 96. Borgman notes that Abraham had demonstrated fear many times given his wife's attractiveness. But does God want Abraham to simply replace one fear with another? Unlikely. The progression of God and Abraham's relationship was leading toward "friendship, not fear; dedication, not dread; trust, not trembling" (97).

Gomorrah.<sup>71</sup> When God made known plans to destroy the cities, Abraham took the risky path of challenging God's justice in possibly destroying the righteous with the wicked.<sup>72</sup> God was not looking for a person who would fear and obey recklessly but with integrity and contemplation. Given Abraham's past experiences with God, God had reason to believe Abraham was the right person. God's belief in Abraham was justified by Abraham's prior acts. Certainly, Abraham had given God reason to question. Over the twenty-five year journey he had shown both faith and faithlessness. Abraham's trouble on the journey has been summed up as "Abraham has a history of faithfulness, but it is mixed with a history of not trusting God as well. He twice passes Sarah off as his sister because he fears man rather than God, has a son through Hagar, and complains to God that God has not fulfilled what he has promised."<sup>73</sup> This certainly justifies God's need and motivation for the test. But I would also add that God had reason to believe Abraham would be true. Yet in the end, God could not know until the binding of Isaac. God did not know, but God believed. Perhaps it could be said that just as Abraham believed and thus said to Isaac "God will provide," God too believed that it would in fact be Abraham who would provide.

This story of testing and others like it should not be understood as revealing a lack of faith on God's part, even though faith is never without questions, but rather that testing is an activity born out of God's faith. God believes it is worthwhile to test those who have faithfully demonstrated their merit. While Sanders does not use the word "faith" in relation to God in his treatment of this story, I will nonetheless add-on the word "faith" for I think it fits beautifully as a suitable synonym. "There is risk involved for both God and Abraham. God takes the risk that Abraham will exercise trust. Abraham takes the risk that God will provide a way into the future. In the

---

<sup>71</sup>The text states that "Abraham stood before the LORD" and this is surely a place of subordination. Some early texts read, "The LORD stood before Abraham" possibly revealing a part of Abraham's character (a heart for justice?) not revealed earlier. For more information see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 168.

<sup>72</sup>This story of Abraham and God bartering over the number of righteous necessary to spare the cities also suggests that God cannot know a person's character without an outward display. The dialogue between Abraham and God is inauthentic if God genuinely knows there are not even ten righteous persons in the cities and is thus toying with Abraham. But if God is being authentic then the bartering was real and thus the sending of the messengers was for God to know the hearts of the people. And as the story states in 19:4 "the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house" in order to rape the visitors. God's intentions were confirmed for there were not even ten righteous men for "all" came out and revealed their character, or lack thereof, before God.

<sup>73</sup>Hall and Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?*, 26.

dialogical relationship God finds reason to have confidence [*faith*] in Abraham, and Abraham's confidence in God proves to be well placed."<sup>74</sup>

Chris Hall asks this question: Given the stance of relational theism how can God possibly know that Abraham will remain faithful in the future?<sup>75</sup> The answer is that God cannot and this is why God must continue in relationship with Abraham and believe. God does not test and learn of Abraham's faith in order to leave Abraham to the task alone but tests in order to deepen the partnership and relationship between the two. God's goal in testing is to confirm beliefs held and move the relationship into more profound communion.

### ***Conclusion***

Belief is not an option for God given the conditions of human free will and an unsettled future. A future made up of sheer possibility and present truths only knowable by searching and testing mean that if God seeks to be relational, God must hold and act on beliefs.

### **God Trusts**

*Belief that necessarily moves into belief in.* God desires relationship with creation and specifically those made in the *imago Dei*, but relationship is only one-sided without trust and fidelity. God calls us to a life of faithfulness, but this is not enough for relationship if there is not trust which motivates and receives human faithfulness. Martin Buber understood this when he wrote, "Both, fidelity and trust, exist in the actual realm of relationship between two persons. Only in the full actuality of such a relationship can one be both loyal and trusting."<sup>76</sup> Humans are called to trust that God is a loyal and faithful God. Likewise humans are called to be faithful and loyal to God, but doesn't symmetry require us to include God's trust?

In this section, I will explain that relationship needs both fidelity and trust from both parties involved. However, when speaking of divine trust it is necessary to reexamine what it means for God to be "all-powerful," for if God has all the power, then there cannot be trust because nothing is entrusted. Dorothee Soelle rightly notes that love is shared power.<sup>77</sup> Out of love and a desire for authentic relationship, God

---

<sup>74</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 53.

<sup>75</sup>Hall and Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?*, 23. Hall states that he is relating a question originally asked by Bruce Ware but Hall does not cite the source.

<sup>76</sup>Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, 29.

<sup>77</sup>Dorothee Soelle, *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 14.



must share power with creation, give up absolute control and trust that God's partner(s) will be faithful. In the act of sharing power, God can now do more than act; God can interact with humanity and creation.<sup>78</sup> A power that is shared is a power that can, and perhaps must, include trust.

### Partnership and Trust

As noted above, if God has not *entrusted* humanity with a purpose, either corporately or individually, then there is little need to discuss divine trust. If God is solely responsible for every event in history, even those performed by persons other than God, then there is no need to speak of divine trust for God has not entrusted anyone with anything. But, if God has given a mission to individuals, nations, communities, even all creation then divine trust needs to be explored. Because God has given instructions, teachings, laws, and commissions, it only makes sense that God has at times partnered with humans in this commissioning. If God is not acting alone and yet desires that these tasks be accomplished then God must trust those who have been granted a mission. Relational theology insists that God does not work alone nor do humans work without the aid of God in the mission of creation but that God has partnered with humanity.<sup>79</sup>

Divine trust, while real, is quite different from human trust. Humanity must trust its very being to God. Human existence is dependent upon God's grace. Yet a life of trust is born out of uncertainty and faces a future in which the only thing known is our own mortality. As Hans Küng states, "Fundamental trust means that a person...says Yes to the uncertain reality of himself and the world."<sup>80</sup> God does not face such uncertainty for God's own being and future (and the world's in general) are not fundamentally uncertain to God. However, the final outcome of God's plans and purposes are uncertain. God does not know, given human free will and an open future, whether all God's plans will come to realization. Certainly some of God's plans for humanity have failed in part, but not in totality. Since God's desire is to be in relation with persons and yet persons rebel, God plans for humanity and for God's self have been frustrated to some extent. In order for God's plans to be realized, God must partner with humanity. God does face a great amount of uncertainty, and while

---

<sup>78</sup>Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1990), 143.

<sup>79</sup>This will be explored further in chapter 5.

<sup>80</sup>Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 445.

not the kind of uncertainty faced by humans, it is nonetheless real as a risky venture for God.

Partnership can take many forms. It can be seen in co-worker relationships in which two or more persons form a partnership in order to better accomplish the task at hand. Friendship is a community and partnership in which persons come together in their pursuit of happiness but one that can only be found in the sharing of oneself with others.<sup>81</sup> Marriage is a partnership that brings lovers together to make one union out of two lives. In marriage there is one purpose for two lives. Communities and societies are partnerships, which, in the best of occasions, work together, and partner for justice and peace. Partnerships and relationships of trust need not only be understood as existing in situations in which all parties are equal for there are partnerships which are unequal in relationship. A king must partner with his subjects in order to establish a functioning kingdom. Parents must partner with children to make a cohesive family. And God, given the creation that exists, must partner with humans to achieve the desired ends for creation. God's relationship with humans can be seen explicitly in a variety of metaphors including King,<sup>82</sup> Judge,<sup>83</sup> and

---

<sup>81</sup>Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 1999), 153 (Book IX.12.1).

<sup>82</sup>It is not uncommon to understand the metaphor of God as King to imply God having and exercising total sovereignty over humanity. This is often called the Monarchial Model of God. In this sense God is understood primarily, if not exclusively, as authorial law-giver. There is relationship, but not partnership in this model for humans are simply subjects who must obey in order to win their desserts. Feminist theologians, such as Sallie McFague, argue that the metaphor of God as King supports the idea of a distant God who rules and controls from a far. The image of King promotes a God, not in relation, but in control for it is not God's being that is found among the people but simply God's power. See McFague, *Models of God*, 63-68. It is not only Feminist theologians who see the Monarchial model as promoting a distant God. Biblical scholar Marcus Borg also argues that this model promotes a God who is distant "politically, economically, and architecturally, as well as in power, wealth, and lifestyle." Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 63. Borg believes this model does not eliminate talk of God's love but ultimately frames such talk in terms of legalism and wrath appeasement. However, relational theologians Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow speak of God's kingdom involving a sharing of power for the goodness of the kingdom. "When creative love theists think of monarchy, we do not picture an all-determining power but a Davidic king who protects and shepherds his flock and delegates power to others." *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 29.

<sup>83</sup>Contemporary images of a judge are typically associated with a courtroom in which a sentence is handed down to guilty perpetrators. In this model there can be no relationship and certainly no partnership for the judge must be objective and uninvolved. This modern picture of a judge is not necessarily the biblical model. The biblical model is that of a judge for the people, a judge who seeks to restore and save. It might even be said that God's wrath is for those who refuse to partner, those who seek autonomy over community with God. Terrence Fretheim adds that God is not "cool and detached" but is one with a "binding relationship with those at whom the divine anger is directed." God is "personally caught up in the situation" for "the judge behind the bench is the spouse of the accused one in the dock." Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 159-160. See also Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 67-77.

It might also be suggested that the very concept of a judge presupposes a relationship of trust. For God, if there is no trust there is no need to judge for judgment is only necessary where there has

Parent<sup>84</sup> all of which require a real partnering between God and persons. The relationship can also be implicitly seen in the metaphors such as Lover<sup>85</sup> and Friend.<sup>86</sup> God's partnering need not be understood as a relationship between equals, for there is not equity or equality between God and human, but inequality need not result in something less than partnership in the divine/human relationship.

Relational theists have developed theologies dedicated to divine-world affairs. The very heart of relational theism is the understanding and developing theologies that utilize the biblical, philosophical, and theological sources that make sense of the very real divine-world relationship, or better, partnership. Relational theology sees God interacting with the world in real ways. But a significant way in which God has chosen to be relational is in partnership with creation and most explicitly, humanity.

---

been a breach of trust and relationship. Judgment occurs when trust has been broken and the relationship needs to be saved. If God has not entered into relationships of trust then there is nothing to judge. As Fretheim writes, "judgment is understood fundamentally in relational terms; a relationship is at stake, not an agreement or a contract or a set of rules." See Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 159.

<sup>84</sup>I am using the term Parent over Father even though God is never called "Mother" because there are allusions to God's matronly governance. Various feminine pictures of God include Deut. 32:18 God gives birth, Hos. 11:3-4 God is a watchful mother, Isa. 42:14 God is a pregnant woman, 49:15 God is a nursing mother, 66:13 God is a comforting mother, and Luke 15:8-10 which depicts God as a woman searching for a lost coin.

The idea of a parent partnering with a child might seem wrongheaded for we mainly think of parents as ones who conceive, birth, nurture, and discipline the child. Certainly the relationship between parent and child evolves as the two parties change. The parent is mainly a caregiver when the child is young but as the child matures so does the relationship. A child's relationship to the parent grows from that of obedience into a relationship of honoring. Whereas a parent once acted for the child, the parent now acts with the child in order to foster growth and bring maturity. Philip Yancey has this vision of God when he writes, "'Take me seriously! Treat me like an adult, not a child' is the cry of every teenager. God honors that request. He makes me a partner for his work in and through me. He grants me freedom in full knowledge that I will abuse it. He abdicates power to such an extent that he pleads with me to such an extent not to 'grieve' or 'quench' his Spirit." Changing metaphors a bit Yancey concluded, "God does all this because he wants a mature lover as a partner, not a puppy-love adolescent." Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 182.

Imaging God as a parent does not exclude and render incoherent the image of God as partner. Even the image of God as parental partner makes sense if it is understood that God does not forever want infants for children but desires growth and maturity so the child can now serve and aid the Parent in the Parents' mission.

<sup>85</sup>God as Lover can certainly be built from the many scripture passages that speak of God loving the world, Israel, and the church. There are also many places that speak of God's relationship with Israel and the Church in marital terms. God is even spoken of as the husband to barren women who are abandoned or widowed, "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called" (Isa. 54:5). But more precisely for the relational theist God's love denotes partnership. The relationship between love and faith will be explored below. For more on the metaphor of God as Love, see McFague, *Models of God*, 125-156.

<sup>86</sup>There are no biblical passages that speak of God as "friend" like those which speak of God as King or Father but there are passages that imply such a relationship. Exod. 33:11 tells us that the LORD would speak with Moses as one speaks to a friend. 2 Chron. 20:7 speaks of Abraham as God's friend. John 15, with its high Christology, could also be added to the passages that speak of God as a friend. For a treatment on the metaphor of God as Friend see McFague, *Models of God*, 157-180.

God is not simply associated with creation but has called on creation to work with God on maximizing good and sharing in the divine life. Because of this, God is never in isolation, never alone, but is always “Yahweh-in-relation.”<sup>87</sup> For God to be in relation means that God acts in, with, for, upon, and through God’s partners.

Partnership means that there is a certain amount of autonomy for each partner. Genuine relationship also assumes genuine autonomy for there cannot be relationship or partnering without freedom and power for each in the relationship. Ward writes:

God brings into being that which has a certain degree of autonomy. If God really relates to those who are created as distinct beings, God must show some of the qualities which mark the most valued relationships between autonomous persons. In the case of human persons, these will include respect for the autonomy of the other, a giving and receiving of experience, insight, and feeling, a co-operation in realizing states and activities of values. This is how a perfectly wise and loving relationship is understood at its best in human communities, and it is that sort of perfection which will be realized at its fullest in God, who is the most perfect conceivable being.<sup>88</sup>

Ward does not explicitly mention trust, but the very idea of co-operation requires it. There can be no co-operation without trust for without trust it would simply be God’s operation. But God’s co-operating with humans means God is not independent of the world in the achievement of divine goals. In fact, God is thoroughly dependent upon the world for achieving these plans for God’s plans are fellowship. Sanders speaks of the “divine project” because projects denote openness and fluidity while a plan tends to be understood as closed to any new options. “The promises of God should be understood as part of the divine *project* rather than as some eternal blueprint, a project in which God has not scripted the way everything in human history will go. God has a goal, but the routes remain open.”<sup>89</sup> In this way then, God’s project is also the human project. It is not merely God’s preordained and foreordained blueprint for all reality but a project entered into with humans to share in its working out. According to Sanders, “God’s project is to develop people who love and trust him in response to his love and manifest their love of God in effective action to others.”<sup>90</sup> God’s project involves love and trust from humans as the likely response to God’s love. And, while Sanders did not mention God’s trust, I believe it only makes sense to suggest that if

---

<sup>87</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 409.

<sup>88</sup>Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 256.

<sup>89</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 127.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 124. Sanders also cites 2 Cor. 5:15-20 in support of Paul believing God to be “some what dependent” on humanity in the accomplishment of the ministry of reconciliation (125).

God desires us to love in response to being loved and that God desires us to trust, then this trust may best be understood in response to God's trust. Just as love begets love, trust begets trust.

The free creation of autonomous beings whom God partners with in order to succeed in the divine plan or project means that God has willfully become dependent upon others. Fretheim argues that God, by creating the kind of world that in fact exists, chose to be relational and, in making such a choice, God became dependent.

All creatures, of course, are *deeply dependent* upon God for their existence and continuing life. At the same time, God has freely chosen to establish an *interdependent* relationship with the creation, with respect to both origins and continuation and with overlapping spheres of responsibility. Indeed, God has freely chosen to be *dependent* upon human and nonhuman in the furtherance of God's purposes in the world. All creatures have a God-given vocation within God's creation-wide purposes; in other words, God has freely chosen to rely upon that which is not God to engage those purposes.<sup>91</sup>

God and creation are in a co-dependent relationship. Each needs the other, according to relational theists, to achieve the purposes, plans, and projects set out by God.

God's partnering is generally understood through the metaphor of covenant. Covenant is a powerful image and symbol of how God enters into an agreement with individuals (Abraham, David), nations (Israel), communities (Church), and creation itself (Noachian). A covenant is generally understood to be a treaty or formal agreement between two parties.<sup>92</sup> But these two parties need not be equals. There can be a greater and a lesser party. The covenants between God and various persons all certainly fit this image. God is the greater who initiates and acts to conceive the covenant. Adrio König discusses this covenant relationship as "monopluralistic" because "it is one-sidedly ('mono'-) established by the LORD, but involves obligations on the part of both the LORD and his people ('pluristic')." <sup>93</sup> Each party of the covenant is free. God freely establishes the covenant for God is under no obligation to enter such an agreement. But God's human partners are also free for otherwise there would be no point to the covenant. Humans need to be free for they have

---

<sup>91</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 270.

<sup>92</sup>Covenant is a subject simply too large to cover adequately in the space of this paper. For more extensive studies see: Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume 1*; Mont W. Smith, *What the Bible Says About Covenant* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1981); Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969); Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>93</sup>König, *Here Am I*, 128.

“responsibility, a task to fulfill and a contribution to make.”<sup>94</sup>

It is really rather odd for an omnipotent and totally sovereign God to enter into covenant. What possible reason could God have to employ Israel and particular persons to do what God could do, and do infinitely better? God risks everything by entering into covenant. This is certainly not how other gods behave. This is not how we as humans would expect an omnipotent God to behave. God’s power, self-sufficiency, knowledge, immutability, and freedom are put on the line. God is risking everything by entering into covenantal relationship for there is no going back. God’s future and God’s history will forever be altered by this relational act. If we are to think of God as one covenanting with Israel, the Church, and creation as a whole and that this covenant is a risk then we must proclaim God’s trust in the covenant partner. While it is a limitation of foreknowledge that allows the covenant to be authentic, God is not foolish in this act of divine risk. God as all-wise can discern whether it is a relationship worth entering. God trusts, but not blindly for, even in the depths of human egoism, God still knows what kind of being humans we were created to be: relational. God trusts the covenant partners to be true, not only to the covenant but to the person God created them to be. Is it too much to think that God is wise enough to know when to risk and when not to risk? When to commit in trust and when to act alone? The risk of covenanting reveals God’s trust for there is no means of entering into covenant without real trust.

Covenant is not an agreement entered into for some other end. Covenant as relationship is the goal. Relationship, community, and fellowship are the means and ends of covenant. God makes covenants because God loves communion with creation. As Pinnock writes, “This is a God who loves being in covenant partnership with the creature and longs to draw us into a community of love, both with God and among ourselves.”<sup>95</sup> By being a God who loves community and being in partnership, God must necessarily love trusting. Simply being trusted is not enough; God loves to trust if God in fact loves community and partnership for there can be no community and no partnership without trust. Is trust a necessary evil of relationality or is trust an aspect of love and self-giving?

Covenant ultimately is about trust. It allows God’s partners to trust. “Trust is

---

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 5.

possible; the paralyzing capriciousness of Near Eastern gods is totally excluded.”<sup>96</sup> But can't we imagine the same for God? The covenant is two-sided and God is freely given the promise of the covenant partner. Those who enter into the covenant make promises that are only as good as each partner allows. If humans do not trust God then the covenant will not allow God to act in terms of blessings, only curses. If God refuses to trust the covenant is void and useless for the blessings and curses would not be based on the fidelity of the partner but simply upon the capricious preordaining of God alone. The entire institution of covenant rests on the presupposition that trust is a living reality for each person in covenant. Covenant then is one type of partnership in which God has made known God's willingness and active cooperation with humans in the accomplishing of divine plans. Without both human and divine trust, covenant is but a façade. Likewise, “Trust without covenant is empty and meaningless as ethic or religion.”<sup>97</sup> How can persons genuinely enter and remain in covenant with God if they do not trust? They can't. Neither can God, for God has given up unilateral power in exchange for cooperation, fellowship, and community. And in this exchange God, has given up control and in its place has acted in trust, plain and simple. To covenant and cooperate is to share power and enter into a relationship filled with trust and faith.

While covenant is a pervasive metaphor throughout scripture, it does not exhaust the many ways God relates to and partners with humanity. Relationship is the model while covenant is but one metaphor. The dynamics of God's relating are not wholly expressed in the idea of covenant even though covenant is a very expressive metaphor.<sup>98</sup> God is perhaps best understood as a God who partners for the other's

---

<sup>96</sup>William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 125.

<sup>97</sup>Smith, *What the Bible Says About Covenant*, 181.

<sup>98</sup>Others have held that covenant is the chief biblical and theological model and that, “Every major philosophic and theological idea in the Bible is related in some way to covenant.” Smith, *What the Bible Says About Covenant*, 29-30.

One problem with speaking about God's dealings and interactions with humanity strictly in terms of covenant is that covenant language is often limited to overly legal or forensic images. There is nothing wrong with forensic images in the Bible or in theology. Certainly the Law was meant to be understood more or less in legal terms but theology overly fixated with covenantal language can lead to misunderstandings of how God relates to humanity and creation. For discussion of forensic verses relational theism, see Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, especially chapter two.

A second problem is that even if covenant imagery can move beyond forensic language there is still the problem of seeing God's relationality limited to contractual relationships. Fretheim argues that God's relationship with Israel preceded any formal covenant; the covenant was to formalize a vocation for Israel within an already established relationship. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 15. He also argues that theologically, the relationship that exists between Israel and God is more personal than contractual. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 256. Fretheim's larger treatment is found in pages 255-261.

good. This is what truly distinguishes Yahweh from the other gods of the OT and Greek mythology. “The God of the Bible distances himself from the other gods who are preoccupied with their rule, their majesty, their well-being in the plush silence of heaven.”<sup>99</sup> This description of the false gods of history might be an apt description of those who God has chosen to partner with in humanity. We have shown ourselves to be distant from God, preoccupied with our own rule and autonomy, along with the comforts of this heaven on earth. Yet, in spite of this God has still chosen to partner with humanity. This is the heart of passion. God in partnership has suffered for and is suffering with humanity. God has moved beyond covenant and has sought to partner and preserve the relationship even when humanity has shown itself to be unfaithful. God has remained in relation and partnership with humanity amongst broken covenants. This is a supreme act of trust for God continues to be faithful and trustworthy when persons have not. God continues to trust and have faith when God’s partners have not.

#### Divine Trust and Omnipotence

Relational theology has made a name for itself by challenging traditional notions of divine omnipotence and sovereignty. While there are disagreements between the various relational theologians concerning God’s power and abilities,<sup>100</sup> they unanimously agree that any theology which proposes a vision of God as one who unilaterally acts to achieve the divine will is utterly false and even harmful to the Christian mission. If God has not acted in concert with creation in the achievement of the divine will, then everything that has happened or will happen is God’s will. This view pictures God in total sovereignty decreeing all pleasures and pains, joys and concerns, healings and wounds and all for God’s own good delight. Relational theists have vehemently argued that a God with this kind of unilateral power is not and cannot be relational for there is no way in which the world can act upon God. There is nothing for which God *relates*. God simply acts on the world and is unaffected and

---

Thirdly, covenant language sometimes promotes the idea that God’s relationship is limited to those who have formal covenants with God or that the more specific that covenant the deeper the relationship.

<sup>99</sup>Walter Brueggemann, “Covenant as a Subversive Paradigm,” *Christian Century*, no. 36 (November 1980): 1094.

<sup>100</sup>As noted in chapter two process theologians maintain that God cannot act in coercion but must partner with humanity in the creative-love process while other relational theologians argue that God can act alone but has freely chosen to limit divine control. It might be helpful to suggest the difference as thus: while some relational theists use the language of God *preferring* to act in relational ways others maintain that God can do no other than be relational.



uninfluenced by the events in the world for these events are ultimately not the world's but God's events merely effected in or through the world.

As noted above Soelle speaks of love as shared power, a concept shared by many feminist theologians and relational theologians alike. Relational theists understand that if relationship is to be authentic and the relationship is to have integrity there must be a sharing of power. This giving of power is not one-sided but is necessary for all involved. "Each party to the relationship must give up any monopoly on power for the sake of the relationship...any relationship of integrity will entail a sharing of power."<sup>101</sup> Partnership means that neither person in the relationship can be totally free and independent of the other. There are necessary limitations for each involved if the relationship is to be authentically mutual. These limitations are for the relationship and they are the price of love. "[T]he advantage of creating free beings is that they are thereby nearer to the Divine nature, and can respond to God's love and interact with him in a way not possible to necessitated beings."<sup>102</sup>

The creation of free creatures means that God cannot have the only say in the relation. God may command but God cannot control if relationship is to be real. God's power is limited by giving the freedom to relate with God or turn from God. This freedom given is nothing less than power. There is no other term for it, it is the power to self-create, and when this kind of power is given by God to a free creature God's own power is limited for there is no longer a guarantee that God's will shall be done. Ward, while not diminishing God's power, understands that power is limited when it is shared for the sake of relationship.

Whatever God intends inevitably comes about. But even God cannot intend on behalf of another rational creature; he can hope, wish and desire. And those hopes not only can be, but are constantly thwarted; that is precisely the import of moral evil and sin. The whole idea of creation as a from of Divine self-giving, a love which goes out of itself to a freely responsive object, entails that God puts himself at the disposal of creatures, and limits himself in relation to them.<sup>103</sup>

God's giving of power means that God's plans can be altered and frustrated. As Basinger writes, "since God has chosen to create a world in which we possess significant freedom, and since we can be significantly free only if he does not

---

<sup>101</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 36.

<sup>102</sup>Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 82.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

unilaterally control how this freedom is utilized, God voluntarily forfeits control over earthly affairs in those cases where he allows us to exercise this freedom.”<sup>104</sup>

Kierkegaard sums up this relational idea:

O wonderful omnipotence and love! A human being cannot bear this that his “creations” should be something directly over against him; they should be nothing, and therefore he calls them “creations” with contempt. But God, who creates out of nothing, who almightily takes from nothing and says “Be!” lovingly adds, “Be something even over against me.” Wonderful love, even his omnipotence is under the power of love!...Thus love which made a human being to be something (for omnipotence let him come into being, but love let him come into being over against God), lovingly demands something of him. Now that is the reciprocal relation.<sup>105</sup>

God is limited, not simply in relation but for relation. This was also God’s free choice and an act of God’s power to create a world in which those “other” than God have real power themselves. God’s power is directly linked to God’s love then. It is not a power which steps on or snuffs out the power of others but a power that serves God’s other attributes that serve God’s relationality. God’s power then is at the service of God’s love and love is the source of power. Power and love need not be in opposition for they are in need of one another. Power without love is manipulation and control while love without power is idle and ineffective. Love is the goal of creation, human and divine. God created in order to love and created in the hope of being loved. The creation then comes with a paradox for it took a being of all the power possible to bring into reality a world of free creatures that are able to love, yet this all-powerful being cannot coerce these creatures to love their creator. As Philip Yancey states, “Power can do everything but the most important thing: it cannot control love.”<sup>106</sup> Because of God creating a world in which a loving relationship stands as its goal God cannot control all that happens for love is not controllable. Love is something that requires a giving of power and thus is an act of trust.

God’s power is reworked in relational theology. While few have suggested

---

<sup>104</sup>David Basinger, “Practical Implications,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 159.

<sup>105</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Samlede Vaerker*, ed. A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg, and H.O. Lang, 15 vols. (Copenhagen: Guldendals, 1901-36), 10:132-33 (translation Sponheim). Cf. Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, ed. and trans Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 127-28; quoted in Paul R. Sponheim, *Speaking of God: Relational Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>106</sup>Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), 75.

God can do anything, most theologians over the centuries have proclaimed God can do anything that is logically possible. Covenant necessarily entails a restraint of power and a willingness to restrain and self-limit reveals a God who longs for community and cooperation. How one understands God's power controls much of his or her theology. "If two philosophers were to take as their presuppositions the contrasting ideas of 'Power is God's greatest attribute' and 'Restraint of power is God's greatest attribute,' and each followed those assumptions down their respective paths, those two thinkers would never meet again. One assumption leads to determinism. The other leads to covenant."<sup>107</sup> It is not a question so much of how God partners but whether God partners at all. Partnering is not possible without self-limitation and a sharing of power. God's power is necessarily restrained, limited, shared, or given up in order to achieve God's purpose of creating values and sharing in the giving and receiving of love.

This all leads to the question at hand; does the relational God act in trust? I see no other answer but the affirmative. If God's power is limited by necessity or voluntarily and God partners with those who are also beings of power, no matter how diminished in comparison to God, and if there is a divine will or edict for those who share power with God, then trust is necessary for the divine. To will something while at the same time giving others the power to frustrate that will is to enter into relations of trust. While divine limitation is debated in terms of God's necessity, divine trust seems beyond question. It is absolutely necessary that God trust the creation and those who have been created for relationship. To speak of God as one who risks and is in relationship implies a God who enters into relationships of trust. God is vulnerable, believes in, and trusts that creation and the relation partners will not ultimately fail but will do and become what God desires.

### The Call to Trustworthiness

Relational theists remind us that the Bible contains stories and passages that speak of God's regret and frustration, testing and changing of mind. These biblical passages are generally used as examples of God's genuine relatedness to humanity as well as God having an open future. But little is said in regard to these events in the life of God in relation to faith. Each one of these events, however, presupposes a God who trusts. For example, 1 Samuel 15 speaks of God regretting (15:10) and being

---

<sup>107</sup>Smith, *What the Bible Says About Covenant*, 68.

sorry (15:35) for making Saul king. We are told that God is sorry and regrets making Saul king after Saul fails to obey God completely. When told to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites, he instead captures their king.<sup>108</sup> God regrets because Saul proved himself to be untrustworthy. Saul did not obey and that is the utmost strain upon trustworthiness. The narrative seems to imply that God desired a king in whom God could trust, perhaps with even the harshest of commands. God regretted making Saul king meaning that God regretted that he could no longer trust Saul to rule Israel as their king.

The various testing stories also presuppose that God was testing for the reason of learning the trustworthiness of those tested. Why else would God test? Idle curiosity? Divine wagers? Perhaps, but it seems to make more sense that these various stories presuppose that God tested in order to know the character of those tested for the purpose of entrusting them with a mission, especially if God is genuinely relational. Abraham was tested to see if he had the character necessary to be a trustworthy patriarch, and in fact a symbol of trustworthiness for the following generations.

Throughout scripture, there are repeated calls for human faithfulness and trustworthiness by God. But what do “faithful” and “trustworthy” mean to a God who does not trust? The message is clear. When God is called trustworthy or faithful, it means that God is reliable, dependable, and a person we can commit to without fear of abandonment. God being faithful means we can rightly put our faith in God because God was, is, and will be true to us. This does not mean trust is risk free. Because of epistemological gaps trust is always a risk, for human and the divine. But we are called to trust God because God is trustworthy and we are to put our faith in God because God is faithful. As Deut. 7:9 states, “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

But the Bible does not simply speak of God being faithful or trustworthy; it also reveals that we have been called to faithfulness and trust. God is said to have placed faith and trust in Moses. Numbers 12 says that God speaks to prophets in dreams and riddles but God speaks to Moses face to face because “he is entrusted with all my house” (12:7). 1 Sam. 2:35 relates to us that God desires to raise up a “faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.”

---

<sup>108</sup>Even though the divinely ordered ban raises theological difficulties, these do not alter the point made that God trusts.

2 Chronicles 19 speaks of the reforms brought about by Jehoshaphat that included righteous judges. “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but on the LORD’s behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. Now, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes” (19:9-10).

Jehoshaphat reminds the judges that they have been entrusted to do justly for they represent God in their judgments. They were acting on God’s behalf. The various leaders, be they judges, kings, or prophets, were those who God entrusted to do right, obey, and act as God’s spokespersons. Sometimes they were faithful and proved God right in trusting them, but other times they failed and showed themselves to be untrustworthy.

The NT also speaks of human faithfulness and trustworthiness. Matthew 24 contains Jesus’ eschatological discourse that concludes with a call for faithfulness. “Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions” (24:45-47).<sup>109</sup> Matthew is using this parable as a call (or warning) to faithfulness for the church leaders of the day.<sup>110</sup> These leaders have been put in charge of (entrusted with) God’s “possessions.” The ones who have shown themselves trustworthy will be entrusted with even more. The point of the parable is not necessarily to teach that God operates in a relationship of trust with the church leaders, but this is a necessary condition for the parable to be meaningful. If God does not have faith, then a call to faithfulness loses its meaning.

This call for faithfulness is followed up in Matthew 25 by the parables of the ten virgins and the talents. The parable of the ten virgins focuses upon being prepared for the coming Son of Man. The parable does not seem to focus on issues of trust but they are there. To be a bridesmaid was a great honor and held great responsibility for making the bride’s day truly special.<sup>111</sup> But the virgins who did not bring the oil with the torches proved themselves foolish and ultimately untrustworthy to be

---

<sup>109</sup>cf. Luke 12:35-48.

<sup>110</sup>Boring and Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, 92-93.

<sup>111</sup>Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 357-358.

bridesmaids.<sup>112</sup> These bridesmaids showed themselves untrustworthy, that is persons who cannot be trusted.

The parable of the talents,<sup>113</sup> however, is unmistakably and clearly about trust and faithfulness. This parable, like the eschatological discourse, speaks about slaves being given a sum of the master's possessions. The slaves being entrusted with the "talents" (very large sums of money), as we learn by the end of the story, were expected to use the money and give back to the master more than was given to them.<sup>114</sup> It was not simply that the master entrusted them to hold and return the talents, but that the servants were expected to use them and increase his riches. The first two slaves, one given five and the other two, risked the talents and in the process doubled the master's investment in them. But the third slave buried the talent. When the master returned he praised and rewarded those who returned more than was given. The good and faithful servants, surprisingly, were the ones who risked the master's talents! It was not the one who kept the talent safe and secure but the ones who risked. Those who risked the talents acted in faith while the last slave did not risk because he feared the master. The slave who buried the talent did not realize the master had entrusted him. His relationship was born out of fear and not faith. When he returned the talent to the master, he even failed to recognize the master's trust in him thus insulting the master.<sup>115</sup> While the other slaves said, "Master, you entrusted me..." (verses 20 and 22, NAS) the third slave stated, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man..." This is not a response expected when one has been trusted. The master responded to the slave's lack of trust and faithfulness by chastising him, calling him wicked and lazy, breaking all ties, and finally pronouncing him as he is, "worthless."

While the parable at times feels callous and unfair from a modern vantage, it

---

<sup>112</sup>Oil in this parable most likely represents deeds of love, justice, and general obedience. See Boring and Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*, 93. I believe Stanley Hauerwas may be most accurate in not understanding the talents to be an allegory for anything in particular but simply continued obedience in the absence of the master. The obedience, for Hauerwas, is the good work of love, mercy and justice. See *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 208-212.

<sup>113</sup>Matt. 25: 14-30. cf. Luke 19:12-27.

<sup>114</sup>The exact meaning of "talent" in the parable is unclear. Some believe the talents represent "personal gifts and abilities rather than the gospel itself" given the fact that the amounts differed for each slave. See Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33b, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 734. Daniel J. Harrington offers that the talent is "a reference to the gift of the Spirit." See *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 352.

<sup>115</sup>Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 601.

also denotes tremendous praise for those who act in faith and joy for the master because his trust in some of them was not unfounded. It is a story of relational trust. Those who trust God (or the Son of Man) are in return trusted by God and when they show themselves faithful they are then entrusted with very much. They are expected to live a kind of faith that is risky but productive in knowing that they have been trusted by the Father. Those who are trusted by God are given great gifts with which to produce even more. However, those who seem to be untrustworthy are still given talents, or at the least a talent, to use and show themselves worthy of God's faith. God still gives the opportunity to be proven wrong. Yet, in this parable the slave entrusted with little proves the master correct for he was wicked and lazy. Not because he stole what was not his but because he failed to trust the one who trusted him. The parable, given its literary context, is certainly speaking about how those who are patiently waiting the parousia should live. It is a call for faithfulness and obedience. But this should not overshadow the clear and remarkable statement of divine trust conveyed in this story.

The point behind considering these passages is that each speaks of humans being called to trustworthiness. To speak in terms of God being the master and us being trustworthy slaves makes no sense if God does not entrust something to us and therefore acts in trust and faith. The call to faithfulness and trustworthiness further demonstrates God's partnership with persons in doing God's will and carrying out God's plans.

### God's Trust in Job

Like the story of Abraham, the story of Job is set up as a testing narrative. Yet from there, the stories are quite different. While Abraham had a history of failures including deceit, Job was "blameless and upright," he feared God and turned away from evil. And while Isaac was spared, Job's children and servants were not so fortunate. The Abraham story is neatly and quickly wrapped up once Abraham raises the blade, Isaac is saved and a proper sacrifice provided, thus averting human death. Yet, the modern reader (and assumedly the ancient as well) is left feeling less than satisfied at the conclusion of Job's narrative with God's ending speeches that hardly comfort Job or justify his suffering.<sup>116</sup> Finally, Abraham was tested so God could learn if he was trustworthy, yet it is suggested that Job is trustworthy and this is why

---

<sup>116</sup>Fretheim humorously, yet rightly, adds that these speeches would "provoke a failing grade in most pastoral counseling classes." *God and World in the Old Testament*, 220.

he is tested. It seems that testing took place in both situations in order for God to learn, but perhaps the level of faith God has in Job is greater than that of Abraham prior to the testing. Amongst these differences, however, I believe the story of Job, like that of Abraham, portrays God as one who believes in and trusts these persons to be faithful.

Certainly, the highest purpose of the book of Job is not to teach that God trusts humanity. Job is a book that addresses, yet hardly completely answers, issues of suffering, double retribution, and theodicy.<sup>117</sup> The book does not set out to teach that God trusts, but this theme is necessary, and it makes the idea of God's faith that much more imbedded in the theology of the book. God's trust is not an argument but a natural assumption, certainly for this drama and perhaps, for reality as well. The central messages of the book are difficult to discern given its dialectical nature. The book seems to present many viewpoints without a clear condemnation of those which are wrong. Fretheim suggests this book invites the reader to engage in a "hermeneutics of evaluation."<sup>118</sup> While the central message may not be clear there are themes and messages to be found and explored.

The divine-human relationship is a theme that arises in the prologue. Job 1:6-12 sets up the remainder of the book. In this section, God calls the heavenly court together, most especially the satan.<sup>119</sup> When the satan informs God that he has been going "to and fro on the earth," looking for one to accuse, God asks him to consider Job. God proudly confesses that there is none like him for he is "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (1:8).<sup>120</sup> It is at this point that God is forced to ponder a question asked by the satan, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" God is forced to face questions concerning the authenticity of the divine-human relationship.<sup>121</sup> Like all relationships, when times are good, the relationship is strong, but what happens in times of trial? What happens to the relationship if one

---

<sup>117</sup>John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 47. Hartley actually expands these into six themes which are: "(1) a righteous person may suffer; (2) the dimensions of human suffering; (3) a righteous person's struggle to overcome suffering; (4) qualifications for the doctrine of double retribution; (5) the question of theodicy; (6) an encounter with God." For more detail see pages 47-50.

<sup>118</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 222.

<sup>119</sup>In the book of Job, the accuser (the satan) is this character's job and title and thus it is inappropriate to capitalize "satan" as if it were a proper name. For further information concerning the satan in the book of Job see David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 17 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 18-23.

<sup>120</sup>The reader is first informed of Job's righteousness in 1:1 even before God's statement.

<sup>121</sup>J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 38-42.



party fails to be true to the partnership? God knows God is faithful even when the other strays and God knows Job is faithful when God is faithful. But does God know the depths of Job's faithfulness? Does God know if Job will remain faithful, even if God is not? Is this the internal dialogue we are to assume God is having as God ponders the satan's question? It is ultimately a question posed to both God, and through the author, to humanity. Is Job (and anyone else in relation to God) faithful only for the blessings? Gerald Janzen suggests that the question posed by the satan raises the question of "whether there could be such a thing as independent and free piety on the part of humanity." This question leads to another:

Is the creator of the world and the divine benefactor of humankind worshipful only by virtue of what deity does for humankind? Or is God intrinsically worshipful? Is deity capable of creating a creature who, somehow attains to such freedom and independence, such spiritual and moral maturity, as to be in a position to choose to offer God worship and service because of God's intrinsic worthiness to be loved? In other words, what sort of covenant is possible between God and humankind?<sup>122</sup>

It is doubtful that Janzen believes God is unsure of God's own value or abilities but these are questions ultimately about the kind of relationship possible between the divine and human. These are questions God cannot know a priori but only in continuing relationship with humanity. Relationships cannot be evaluated in the light of happy times alone for the true worth of a relationship is known only in its fullness, good and bad. In light of such existential questions God seeks to know whether Job fears God for nothing and thus Job is tested.

Fretheim raises questions concerning this story being read as a testing story. Theologically it is problematic for the test would not be given in order for God to learn something about Job and thus deepen the divine-human relationship but Job would be tested to prove something to the satan. Fretheim believes "testing" is a poor term to be used if Job's trials are to settle a "celestial dispute."<sup>123</sup> However, if the question posed by the satan, and the ensuing "wager," are understood as literary and poetic ways of introducing this existential question to God then this is essentially a test of Job in order for God to know the depths of their relationship. Because this is poetic literature, there is great freedom in the imagery allowed. Fretheim notes that the portrayal of God is troublesome and raises the question of whether God can be trusted. But, given that the book is a "didactic tale" perhaps we might also ask, "Can

---

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>123</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 223-224.

God trust Job?”<sup>124</sup>

There are many ways in which to understand the story of Job. I am offering this approach in light of the subject of God’s faith.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps the book’s strength is that it cannot be pinned down to a single reading or moral. From a relational theology, this story is demonstrating the narrator’s belief that God did not know exactly how Job would respond. With the fact of Job’s faithfulness as an open question and with God accepting the accuser’s challenge, it should nonetheless be clear and obvious that this story only makes sense if God believes that Job will succeed and prove trustworthy. The story requires the hearer to presuppose God has faith in Job. Can the hearer then also conclude that when he or she is tested that God also has faith in the hearer?

Before moving on from the book of Job, there is an apparent wrinkle in reading Job as a trust story. In chapter four, one of Job’s “comforters,” Eliphaz, theoretically speaking under the influence of divinely given wisdom, says of God that “Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error.”<sup>126</sup> What should be done with such a statement? This would be a very problematic proclamation were it not for the fact that “we must keep in mind that the overall purpose of the book includes the concept that the counselors were basically wrong even though their words were often right.”<sup>127</sup> The friends of Job are to be read with suspicion. And while it need not be suggested that all of their advice is blatantly wrong, Eliphaz’s revelatory experience is presented as near parody.<sup>128</sup> Eliphaz’s revelatory statement in 4:17, that no mortals are righteous before God or pure before their maker, contradicts what God says about Job in the book’s opening chapter. Given the contradiction, should the reader really conclude Eliphaz is speaking for

---

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 220-221.

<sup>125</sup>It has been suggested that the book’s prologue sets up the question for the rest of the book, “what should innocents do when inexplicable suffering comes upon them?” Clines, *Job 1-20*, 66. Others see the story of Job, and thus the reader, learning that before God “all human righteousness is as filthy rags” and that the relationship with God is a pilgrimage “from God the Enemy to God the Friend and Companion” Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, 3d ed. The Anchor Bible, ed. no. 15 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973) LLXXXIII. Fretheim also notes that the prologue can be seen to portray God in a variety of ways. God can be seen as the “proud parent confident of his child’s integrity.” Or perhaps the problem of evil is answered by the picture of God as one who makes arbitrary decisions. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament*, 223-224.

<sup>126</sup>Job 4:18. Eliphaz basically repeats the statement in 15:15 “God puts no trust even in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight.”

<sup>127</sup>Elmer B. Smick, “Job,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 4*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 894.

<sup>128</sup>Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 123.

God? Janzen suggests that Eliphaz is ironically speaking, not on behalf of God but actually on behalf of the satan.

What Eliphaz, of course, does not know is that in imputing to humankind the qualities of inevitable untrustworthiness and inevitable error, he (or his “revelation”) is speaking on one side of the issue already joined in the heavenly meeting between Yahweh and the Satan...The “inspiration” of Eliphaz derives, not from God, but from the Satan...Insofar as Eliphaz claims to speak by heavenly inspiration, we see here one of the many instances in Job where the author ironically subverts a speaker’s intended meaning.<sup>129</sup>

If Janzen is correct, we should not see Eliphaz’s statement as counter to the thesis of this work but as a backhanded agreement. It is the satan who is raising the issue of human untrustworthiness and in light of this question it was “Yahweh who was willing to risk the test in hope of Job’s vindication.”<sup>130</sup>

The trials Job faces, while presented as the work of the satan by the authority of God, are the trials and tragedies all humans can potentially face in a world of moral and natural evil. God trusted that Job would not “Curse God, and die” (2:9) and that Job would continue in relationship with God in spite of the trials. It is a relationship that is hardly idyllic. Yet, amongst questions and doubts, both Job and God pursue the relationship. God trusts that Job will remain faithful in spite of Job living in a world that often harms the faithful and rewards the unjust. It is a world all the more tiresome given God’s hiddenness and silence. The irony of the story is that Job does not know of God’s trust and confidence in him.<sup>131</sup> If only Job had known of the heavenly dialogue between God and the satan perhaps he would have faced the trials with greater trust knowing God trusted him. Perhaps this is an aspect of the message of Job.

### Conclusion

Trust is basically an attitude and actions that denote positive expectation concerning the other.<sup>132</sup> Relationship is not possible without this positive expectation for even the most superficial of relationships involves trust to one degree or another. Relationships born out of love and care will always have at least one who trusts and at least one who is trusted. As philosopher Trudy Govier explains, it is ideal when

---

<sup>129</sup>Janzen, *Job*, 73-74.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>131</sup>Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 183.

<sup>132</sup>Trudy Govier, *Dilemmas of Trust* (Montreal: Queen’s University Press, McGill, 1998), 6.

“each person trusts *and* is trusted in turn.”<sup>133</sup>

Sanders writes, “Human faith and action make a difference to God in the fulfillment of his plans. In choosing to depend on [*trust*] human beings for some things, God takes the risk of being either delighted or disappointed in what transpires.”<sup>134</sup> By God working with humanity, God shares in the life of humanity. The two, in a sense, become one. It is God’s desire that humanity and God become one in mission, purpose, and love.

Trust creates a particular reality. The future is created and shaped by who we trust and how we trust and this is no different for God. Trust brings about a positive expectation and hopeful relationship, while distrust positions oneself in relation to the future in anxiety.<sup>135</sup> God’s relationship with humanity is in effect created by God’s willingness to trust. God creates a reality of intimate relationship by trusting humans to be actual partners with the divine.

### God Hopes

Relational theists have noted that the OT contains a considerable amount of conditional statements attributed to God. God speaks in terms of *if* and *might*.<sup>136</sup> These passages along with statements of divine mind changing and regret make a strong case for the future being open and unsettled. An unsettled future coupled with divine plans that God does not unilaterally bring to fruition means that God does not control what happens and yet has particular desires about how the future unfolds. Given this reality, what is God’s disposition towards the future? Is God cynical with regard to divine partnership with humanity? Is God anxious about what might or might not happen? The reality of human failure throughout history would make it perfectly natural for God to be cynical and anxious, yet it seems that God is neither. God is in fact hopeful in relationship. God waits patiently for the divine project to become actualized. While God is a realist, God nonetheless faces the future with hopefulness and anticipation of particular possibilities.

Hope is a necessary element of God’s relationship with creation. Just as God believes and trusts, God also hopes. One quality of belief is that it makes trust easier

---

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>134</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 53.

<sup>135</sup>Trudy Govier, *Social Trust and Human Communities* (Montreal: Queen’s University Press, McGill, 1997), 35.

<sup>136</sup>See Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 69-71; Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 47-49;

for when one believes that another will be true it is easier to commit to that person. But when there is little reason to trust and yet the relationship necessitates that God trust hope becomes a necessary element of faith. God hopes that the trust exercised will not be in vain. God hopes humanity will respond to the divine call to relationship and that we will become what God desires humanity to be.

Basinger writes, “The God of FWT [free will theism] hopes that individuals will always freely choose to do what he would have them do. But for the free will theist there can be no assurance that they will do so.”<sup>137</sup> Because God has created significantly free beings, there is never complete assurance that these free agents will do what God has decreed or become what God has intended them to become. But God remains committed to the relationship being forged between the divine and humanity with all creation. This commitment is fostered and fueled by divine hope for without hope a relational God could only foresee wrath and destruction. Hope delays judgment, meaning that God patiently awaits pure fellowship with the creation. God waits for love given to become love returned.

#### Hope for the Future

God is a being situated in history. Relational theists of every kind affirm this statement. God remembers the past, knows the present, and faces a significantly unknowable future. Process theology is firmly rooted in the notion of a God who acts to bring about a particular future both near and far. God is a being shaped by the past and is now actively shaping the future in concert with other persons. In fact, God cannot bring about the future alone for all reality is relational.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, open theism depicts God as acting in the past and present while facing an unknowable future. This is the basis for God’s mutability and mutuality.

Because the future is significantly unknowable, and because God is in partnership with a free humanity, God will not always get what is planned or desired. Much of the future is in the hands of limited and fallible humanity. God has chosen to become dependent upon others in entering into this partnership. There is no guarantee that the future will be shaped as God desires and thus when it seems that it is going wide of the mark and is out of God’s hands hope is a natural and necessary element of any true relationship. God hopes that those who have been entrusted with overseeing and fostering creativity, justice, and goodness will bring these to reality. God hopes

---

<sup>137</sup>Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 36.

<sup>138</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 28-30.

that the love shown will not be given in vain but will be returned. God hopes the trusted will be true.

Hope is a future-oriented stance that drives a current action. We currently hope that in the future that which is desired will come about, but we do not sit idle as if that which is desired is totally out of our hands. To wait without acting is simply wishing or expecting. Wishing means that one has little, if any, hope concerning the future and sees all future outcomes concerning that which is desired as out of one's hands. It is desire without deed. This is a natural feeling when one gambles but it is quite unnatural concerning relationships. Wishing is the feeling when one does not have hope or is too self-centered to act on the hope. Expectation, likewise, has no reason to hope for there is no deliberation regarding that which is desired. There is no concern about it not happening for it is expected. Expectation means there is no need to act or act differently for it is the belief that what is desired will come. Neither wish nor expectation change a course of action or inaction. Hope, however, like belief, is active. It seeks and works to bring about that which is desired even if it is not completely within one's own power. God thus hopes as God works to bring about what is desired all the while knowing that it is to some extent out of God's control. God, as a dependent being, must hope from time to time if God is to be truly loving and relational.

Hope is also born out of adversity. Without trouble, there is no need for hope. Hope is what keeps one from despair. It is the power to continue to be in relation when there is evidence that the relationship is in need. In this sense, hope gives power to faith for faith is a type of relationship. But likewise faith gives power to hope in that faith gives a reason to hope. Perhaps Rosemarie Rizzo Parse summarizes hope most accurately when she writes that hope is the "creative pull between now and the future, which persistently believes in the possibility of a thing becoming other than what it is."<sup>139</sup> This "thing" for God is the relationship the divine has with creation. God continues in the hope that the relationship between God and creation will develop and mature in mutual love and a fellowship of communion.

“Perhaps”

Conditional statements attributed to God reveal, according to relational theists,

---

<sup>139</sup>Rosemarie Rizzo Parse, *Hope: An International Human Becoming Perspective* (Sudbury, Mass.: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1999), 15. Parse gives many definitions of hope from various sources but her own is most relationally oriented.

God's limited knowledge of an open future, but these statements at times also reveal God's hope. Exodus 4 reveals a dialogue between God and Moses that is replete with conditional language by both. God instructs Moses to go to the Israelite elders and reveal God's intentions for Moses to be God's delegate. Moses responds to God's instructions with, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me?" God gives Moses a miraculous sign and replies, "so that they *may* believe that the LORD... has appeared to you" (Exod. 4:5). In the event that this miracle was unconvincing, God gives further instructions followed by the statement, "*If* they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they *may* believe the second sign. *If* they will not believe even these two signs or heed you..." (Exod. 4:8-9). Later in the book God's inner thoughts are said to contain deliberations and possible conditions concerning the path the Israelites should take in their exodus. "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, 'If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt'" (Exod. 13:17). These statements of "if" not only reveal that God does not know the future outcome of the action but also seem to reveal that God is hopeful that such actions will produce their desired ends. God gives signs to Moses in hope that the Egyptians may listen.

Along with the conditional statements "if" and "may," there are OT passages in which the word "perhaps" is spoken by God concerning future actions of a person. The Hebrew word *'ūlay* (אִי), typically translated as "perhaps" or "it may be" is primarily "used in human speech to indicate uncertainty regarding the future."<sup>140</sup> Of the 45 occurrences of *'ūlay* in the OT, there are five passages in which the word is spoken by God (Isa. 47:12; Jer. 26:3; 36:3, 7; 51:8; Ezek. 12:3). Fretheim suggests that the word *'ūlay* is "often tinged with a note of hope."<sup>141</sup> However, I believe there is more than a tinge of hope expressed in the usage of this word given the contexts. David Reimer, in his essay, "An Overlooked Term in Old Testament Theology: Perhaps," investigates *'ūlay* and how it is used in relation to both human and divine.<sup>142</sup> He first explores a few of the uses of *'ūlay* involving humans to get a

---

<sup>140</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering God*, 45.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>David J. Reimer, "An Overlooked Term in Old Testament Theology: Perhaps," in *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E.W. Nicholson*, ed. Mayes, A.D.H., and Salters, R.B. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 325-346.

clearer picture of divine uses.<sup>143</sup> First, in Genesis 16 we have Sarai planning to establish Abram's heir by having him conceive a child with Hagar. In verse two Sarai states "Please go in to my maid; *perhaps* I will obtain children through her" (NAS). Reiner suggests that we cannot precisely know what is meant by *'ūlay* but it appears that "Sarai hopes by this plan to overcome her own barrenness."<sup>144</sup> Likewise, the story of Jacob's fearful meeting with his estranged brother Esau leads Jacob to pray for God's help and deliverance. Jacob also planned on giving Esau many gifts in the hope of winning his brother's favor. This is all couched in contingent, yet hopeful language. Jacob thought that after the gifts were delivered "perhaps he will accept me" (Gen. 32:20). It could be said, "Jacob hopes for a favourable reception based not on his prayers, but on his presents."<sup>145</sup> Reiner deals with several other passages in which he argues that the human use of *'ūlay* clearly suggests that the person was hopeful.<sup>146</sup> It could be said then that *'ūlay* expresses hope where knowledge is uncertain, even when God has made known divine commitments to a particular course of action. Amos, as well, holds out hope (Amos 5:15) that an Israelite "return to justice might possibly promote the chances of divine mercy" and also that God would "act for good in spite of his announced intention."<sup>147</sup> In each of these cases, the use of "perhaps" denotes more than an expression of the unknown; it expresses a hopefulness in a particular end.

The human use of this word is generally in situations where the user seems to be hoping for a change in the expected outcome. There is uncertainty about what will happen next, perhaps even a negative expectation, but there is hope that "perhaps" some other result will come. But can this be applied to the divine utterances and uses of *'ūlay*? Reiner thinks so. "In the same way that human behaviour is the basis for a hope-for response from God, so too God holds out such hopes for his people."<sup>148</sup> Of

---

<sup>143</sup>Reiner puts the uses of *'ūlay* into three categories: *'ūlay* + hypothetical situation; action/situation + *'ūlay* + possible past/future outcome [human]; action/situation + *'ūlay* + possible past/future outcome [divine]. Reiner focuses upon examples of the second since these deal with possible future human outcomes and include three passages in which God utters *'ūlay* in relation to human action/situation (334).

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 335.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Caleb's hope of entering the promised land (Josh. 14), Jonathan's hope and risk in attacking the Philistine garrison (1 Sam. 14:6), David's hope for a good outcome after being cured (2 Sam. 16:12), and the story of Balaam (Num. 22-24) contains five occurrences of *'ūlay* in which a specific outcome is hoped for. For more information see Ibid., 335-339.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 336-337.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 339.



the five times *'ūlay* is attributed to God three can be said to convey the idea that God is hoping that the message will affect change in the hearers (Jer. 26:3; 36:3; and Ezek. 12:3).<sup>149</sup>

Ezek. 12:3 reads, “Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house.” In context, God is hoping the stern words of the prophet might, perhaps, lead the Jerusalemites out of rebellion and coming exile. Likewise, both passages from Jeremiah reveal God’s hopefulness: 26:3 “Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds” (NAS) and 36:3 “Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin” (NAS). Each statement delivered through the prophet reveals God’s desired and hopeful outcome; a turning from evil. But the desire is not simply for a change in the audience but also in God’s actions as well. Jer. 36:3 shows that God desires to forgive and thus hopes they will turn from their evil. And even more powerfully, 26:3 states that God seeks to change God’s mind concerning what is intended. In this passage belief and hope are powerfully linked in the life of the divine. God believes disaster awaits Judah but nonetheless hopes they will listen and turn from evil. In this sense, God experiences what all humans have experienced. God’s belief is at odds with God’s hope. God knows Judah too well and believes they will not heed the warning but God still holds out hope. “God in essence is hoping that an unpredictable event might in fact occur.”<sup>150</sup> In the end, God’s hope was unfulfilled for Judah did not listen. These passages undoubtedly demonstrate God’s posture before an open future since “perhaps” language is deceitful if God fully knows the outcome. But more than revealing an open future, these reveal a God who hopes. As Reiner emphatically states, “In all three cases, the prophet, receiving a word from Yahweh, is instructed to convey a message which Yahweh hopes—it cannot be stated more strongly than that—will have an intended effect on his people.”<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup>The other two uses do not seem to convey a message of hope. Isa. 47:12 is a hypothetical situation and Jer. 51:8, while it has a hopeful tone, is not directed to persons in order to change a situation.

<sup>150</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 46.

<sup>151</sup>Reiner, “An Overlooked Term,” 339. Steven Roy offers the suggestion that these passages reveal God speaking in anthropomorphic metaphor. God is speaking in terms of the uncertainty experienced by those hearing the message. In this view God knows the future free choice of the audience but speaks to them from the human vantage point of Jeremiah. For more information see *How Much Does God Foreknow?*, 185-187.

This hopeful expression of “perhaps” is also found in the NT, although only once. The Septuagint typically translates *’ūlay* into *isōs*<sup>152</sup> a word found only in Luke 20:13, the parable of the vineyard and tenants. The parable is clearly a lesson in Israel’s history. God is the vineyard owner, the servants are the prophets, and the “beloved son” is Jesus.<sup>153</sup> The author of Luke derived the parable from Mark 12:1-12 but with some changes. Most important for this work is the addition of *isōs*. When the vineyard owner’s messengers have all been rejected, the owner’s son is introduced. Mark 12:6 says, “He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” The author however changes the story to include a soliloquy followed by a statement of hopefulness, yet unquestionably shy of certainty. Luke 20:13 reads, “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps [*isōs*] they will respect him.’” Luke’s version has an added sense of hopefulness that Mark and Matthew do not. The vineyard owner is hopeful that the workers, although they have beaten the messengers, will respect his son. There is no sense of certainty in this passage. Luke’s addition of “What shall I do?” and the inclusion of *isōs* shifts and softens Mark’s original definitive statement, “They will respect my son.” The Lukan version leaves Jesus’ parable somewhat open-ended with the readers wondering along with the vineyard owner “maybe so, maybe not.”<sup>154</sup> Some have suggested that Luke’s redaction of Mark is meant to soften the reading and “spare God the error of not foreseeing the rejection of his son.”<sup>155</sup> Others, however, reject such ideas outright. Alfred Plummer writes, “We must remember that it is the anthropos of ver. 9 who deliberates as to what he shall do, says *isōs*, and expects that his son will be well received. All this is the setting of the parable, and must not be pressed as referring to God. This man represents God, not by his perplexity, but by his long-suffering and

---

<sup>152</sup>Ezek. 12:3 is an exception translating *’ūlay* into *ōpos*.

<sup>153</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 726. Allusions to Israel’s history are made even stronger in the Mark and Matthew’s renderings of the parable.

<sup>154</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 305.

<sup>155</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible, vol. 28a (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 1284. Fitzmyer cites this approach as found in Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1910; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 391-392. Fitzmyer rejects this, stating, “Luke was scarcely concerned with problems of God’s foreknowledge. Luke has rather added a dramatic touch!”

mercy.”<sup>156</sup> Likewise, Darrel Bock believes that the word *isōs* and the parable itself convey a message of “the master’s hope for a respectful response,” but that the soliloquy, and parable as a whole, “shows how a parable often does not correspond to reality, since God is never said to be hesitant or uncertain about the fate of his Son.”<sup>157</sup>

While it may be true that up to this point there had been no uncertainty, that can no longer be said. Mark’s rendering of the parable does suggest that the vineyard owner was wrong for the son was not respected but killed. I am not necessarily suggesting that the author of Mark, in relating this parable, believed God as the vineyard owner, was subject to error. Luke’s redaction of Mark however seems to suggest that Luke understood Mark to be saying God erred and so he shifted the reading from error to hopefulness. While it is problematic to suggest that Mark ignored the fact that the vineyard owner was wrong, it is equally problematic to suggest that Luke adds *isōs* without any thought concerning its connotations of hope and uncertainty in relation to God. We have Luke redacting Mark and adding the element of hope amidst uncertainty. Otherwise the Lukan change makes no sense. Could it be that both Plummer and Bock have their theological presuppositions driving their exegesis?

In light of relational theology, Luke 20:13 supports the OT passages in which God utters “perhaps” in a hopeful context. The Lukan version of the parable depicts God, not simply in error, but in hopefulness as a vineyard owner who sends his son that the tenants will hopefully (“perhaps”) listen to him. In the end, the vineyard owner does not get what is hoped. This is true of both Mark and Luke but I think that Luke is trying to make explicit what is only implicit in the Mark version. God is a God who hopes and waits in patient anticipation.

### God is Patient

It is interesting how often authors speak about God’s patience but with seemingly little thought concerning what it would mean for God to be patient. Patience, like hope, assumes a God existing in time with an unsettled future. If all

---

<sup>156</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 28 (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 460. It should be asked why “long-suffering” is applicable to God but not hopefulness!

<sup>157</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 1599-1600.

things in the future were foreordained or foreknown there would be no need for patience. Patience makes no sense if God is timeless, for patience assumes waiting with a great sense of anticipation or in discomfort with the current process of events.

Patience is not identical with hope, but they are quite similar. Hope is an attitude and posture of positive expectation. It is believing that a good result is at least possible if not likely. Patience is the ability to wait without provocation. It is the capacity to take the time and care necessary to obtain the desired outcome. It is not being apathetic or indifferent but trusting over time and waiting for the best of all possibilities.<sup>158</sup> Stanley Hauerwas rightly notes the necessary relationship between the two stating, “Without patience, those filled with hope threaten to destroy that for which they hope. Without hope, the patient threaten to leave the world as they find it.”<sup>159</sup> If God is not patient in hope, the free expression of love by God’s creation may not come to fruition. Without hope, God might simply abandon the relationship altogether. Thus, in the proper context, patience and hope are complementary if not at times synonymous. An example is 2 Pet. 3:9, “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” This passage can easily be read that God is patiently waiting in hopes that all will come to repentance. For what other reason could it be said that God is patient in this context?

The parables of Jesus quite often speak to the patient hope of God even if that is not the central focus. Luke 13:6-9, the parable of the barren tree, is a story of mercy and warning but also of hope.<sup>160</sup> It speaks of a vineyard owner who has a barren tree. The tree has not produced fruit for three years and as anyone listening might advise, the tree needed to come down. But here is where the parable shocks the sensibilities. The vinedresser asks for the owner to give it one more year. The parable is a call for repentance. Jesus had just spoken of tragedies that had befallen some first century Judeans using this as an opportunity to a call for repentance, but then, strangely enough, this parable is given. “The parable is an encouragement. We live in the midst of God’s absurd mercy, unbelievably patient and generous. Let us then respond to grace, grace stretched wide, and repent! God is waiting,

---

<sup>158</sup>Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2:65.

<sup>159</sup>Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 207.

<sup>160</sup>Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 515.

waiting...Quick! Take advantage of the divine ellipsis!”<sup>161</sup> The call for repentance is couched in the reality of God’s hopefulness. The tree has been given enough time to produce fruit and when by all accounts it should be removed it is given one more year, a year of care and attention. The vinedresser will cultivate the soil around the tree and will supply it with the manure it needs. In the end, neither knows if the tree will bear the fruit, the parable has no final act. In this sense, the parable is quite real for no one knows if the tree will bear fruit, in fact it seems hopeless. But the pleading of the vinedresser and the openness of the ending is the basis for hope.<sup>162</sup> The parable is left to the hearers to complete and thus there is a cautious hopefulness that the tree still has the ability to produce fruit. Otherwise why spend another year on a dead tree?

Luke 15 has three parables all pertaining to lost items and joyful returns. There is the lost sheep, coin, and son. Yet the focus and intent of the parables are somewhat missed when the focus is centered on the items lost and not the activity of the persons seeking and the attitudes expressed in their finding. In the first parable we are told of a person who sets off to find a single lost sheep while leaving the other ninety-nine behind. What seems like a foolish and risky act pays off with the lost sheep being found. But that is what hope and faith do, they inspire persons to do risky things. The second parable is of a woman who loses a coin and who lights a lamp and searches, either in desperation or in hope, until she finds the coin. While we are not told whether the woman is desperate or hopeful (perhaps some of each), I think the attitude presented is one of hopefulness for the angels rejoice. There is no shock or surprise over the sinner repenting but rejoicing seemingly born out of animated hope.

The parable of the prodigal son, as it is typically termed, has come to be renamed more appropriately as “the parable of the waiting father.”<sup>163</sup> This is a good shift for, even though the younger son seems to be the central character, the parable is actually about the nature of God, not the nature of sinners. The parable is quite

---

<sup>161</sup>David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 196.

<sup>162</sup>Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 337-338.

<sup>163</sup>This title is typically credited to Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper, 1959). It is also used by Arland J. Hultgren who comments that this title is only in the English version while the original German is *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000), 72. Joachim Jeremias titles the parable “The Father’s Love” in *Rediscovering the Parables*, Scribner Lyceum library editions (New York: Scribner, 1966), 191.

fascinating and any number of aspects can be discussed. But the image of the father is what would have been most scandalous, but also most revolutionary, to the original hearers. The story is a shock to ancient Hebrew sensibilities for in the first place the father is represented as quite undignified. The image of the father running was both unusual and unbecoming, but the father running to a child who had insulted and embarrassed him was unthinkable.<sup>164</sup> Yet this is how the parable depicts God, running in abandonment towards to returning son. But the image of the father running to his son was set up by the image of a father patiently waiting in hopeful anticipation of the son's return.

The story is not only of the son coming home and addressing the father, or even merely about the father being informed of the son's return and then running to meet him. The parable also gives a beautiful picture of a father waiting, looking, and hoping. Unlike the parables of the lost sheep and coin, this parable speaks in terms that convey the reality of authentic human relationships. The sheep and coin had to be sought, but, as a free human being, the son must return on his own. The father could not chase the son and bring him home for the relationship would still be estranged. The father had to let the son return of his own volition for that is a condition of relationality. Because the son had to return to reestablish the relationship himself, a father of love and mercy could only wait and hope.

The point of a parable should not be stretched beyond recognition, but if the parable's emphasis is to teach us something about the nature of God is it too much to suggest that this parable depicts God not only as a running father but also as a hoping father?<sup>165</sup> The idea of the father seeing the son while he was still far off, running to him, and falling on his neck with kisses only makes sense in light of a father whose hopes and desires were made real. If the father was not hoping for the son's return then the actions of the father make no sense. The father loved the son and hoped to love him again.

This parable is certainly more about God's hope than God's belief for there is little reason to believe the son would return. The fact of requesting the inheritance for less than noble purposes leads the hearer to believe that the son had disdain for the

---

<sup>164</sup>Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 120.

<sup>165</sup>*Ibid.*, 122-123. Stein argues that the main point of the parable was not to teach that God is loving and gracious to sinners, something which the parable teaches but only secondarily, but that the scribes and Pharisees' opposition to Jesus' ministry was wrong because of God's graciousness.

father. In that culture, this would be equivalent to wishing the father were dead.<sup>166</sup> Yet the father's waiting and looking for the son revealed a hope and optimism amidst hopelessness and despair. He was not hopeless for he waited and looked for the son, but the picture of the father running depicts one who is surprised by the joy of a returning son and a relationship restored. The parable's title has rightly been shifted from the "prodigal son" to the "waiting father." But I believe it may be time for another shift and that we address this as the parable of the "hopeful father."

### **Conclusion**

Because God has created a world with genuinely free agents who can and do sin, God's desire or will is not always realized. We have the God-given ability and power to thwart many of God's plans and purposes. Sanders rightly notes:

The divine project of developing people who freely enter into a loving and trusting relationship with God lacks an unconditional guarantee of success. Will anyone trust God? God expected positive results, but all things have not gone as God desired. God nevertheless continued to invest himself in the project in the hope of regaining what was lost.<sup>167</sup>

But this is the risk God has freely chosen to enter into which must mean it is a good and noble route. God, by creating the world that exists, chose to enter into a relationship of hope with humanity. God as a relational partner must demonstrate the power of restraint if the relationship is to continue. But in God's restraint God truly hopes that we, as the other partner, will be faithful and trustworthy.

Hope is that position between belief and doubt. Belief, while still shy of knowledge, confidently expects a particular outcome. Doubt, also shy of knowledge, also expects and anticipates a particular outcome, though not the one desired. Hope sits between these. While God may not believe, based upon God's actual knowledge, that the desired end will come to fruition, God is not in a state of anticipating disappointment and failure on our part. Hope means that God is unsure about the outcome and yet still plans and acts in the expectation of desired ends. Hope continues relationship in spite of broken trust and without enough evidence to push the hope into belief.

Hope is not divine hand wringing, expecting disaster but hoping for goodness nonetheless. Hope for God is what hope for humanity should be. Hope is what makes God's risky trust and binding faith a joyful experience. God anticipates and

---

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 119. See also Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 111.

<sup>167</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 89.

looks forward as the relationship with creation continues to grow and mature. In this sense, hope can never be separated from faith. They are inseparable companions.<sup>168</sup> Without hope God's faith in humanity, the commitment of a trusting partnership, would be a matter of obligation and not relationship. It is hope that makes God's commitment and faith a labor of love and joy. Hope reveals the power of restraint, a power too often neglected. Power is more than the ability to do but can often be the power to wait and see what happens. As Brueggemann states, "We are dealing here with a peculiar kind of sovereignty...It invites but does not compel. It hopes rather than requires."<sup>169</sup>

In the end our hope rests on God's hope. Our hope is that God will never lose hope in us. That amidst human failure and relational fragility God will not give up on us but will continue to hope against hope in our continued process of maturing and relationship. That God will continue to seek communion with us even though the situation at times seem hopeless. Our goal is to share in God's hope of a healed creation. Moltmann sees this in relational terms of sympathy. We enter into union with God, a union of sympathy in which we share in the pathos of God. The one who does this is the one who "is angry with God's wrath. He suffers with God's suffering. He loves with God's love." Moltmann concludes by adding, "He hopes with God's hope."<sup>170</sup> Hope should not be understood as something God has no need of but as something most divine.

### God Risks

Risk is a ubiquitous theme in relational theology. God is not understood to be an impassible and immutable sovereign who never risks because God is never in want. Rather, God is a being who has chosen to enter into genuine reciprocal relationships of fellowship and communion. The idea of God entering into relationship means that God must become a risk-taker, vulnerable to suffering and humiliation for God has given power to the other in the relationship and has become dependent upon the other to be faithful. Sanders have explored the idea of God as a

---

<sup>168</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 20.

<sup>169</sup>Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 18. Brueggemann offered these words in the context of God's calling creation into being and the nature of that creation.

<sup>170</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993; New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1974), 272.



risk-taker, most notably, in his book, *The God Who Risks*. In it, Sanders states that all theology can be placed under the categories of “no-risk” and “risk.” “Either God does take risks or does not take risks in providentially creating and governing the world. Either God is in some respects conditioned by the creatures he created or he is not conditioned by them...[I]f God is in some respects conditioned by his creatures, then God takes risks in bringing about this particular type of world.”<sup>171</sup> The world that God desires is a world that is created in and for partnership between God and humanity, but this is a world that brings with it a huge risk. The creation of such a world brings with it the possibility of apathy or rebellion just as much as the possibility of love. There can be no guarantees in free a world.

#### A Passionate Risk

Risk taking is only possible if there is something for God to risk. If God has no stake in the creation then there is no risk on God’s part. Even if the creation was deemed a complete failure, it would not constitute a risk on God’s part if God was apathetic towards the creation. Risk, however, means the possibility of loss. If one does not have anything to lose one cannot risk. God’s risk is the possibility of losing what is desired. God risks the experience of pain and suffering. Not only God’s own suffering but also the divine’s experience of human suffering. In this way loving what is free and autonomous is a risky act of faith.

The discussion of a risk-taking God necessitates a discussion of God’s passions. Passion, historically, has meant suffering and grief but it has also come to be associated with love, adoration, and care. This is logical, for love means being open to suffering through rejection and betrayal. To be in a relationship of love means to become vulnerable. It is to open oneself up to the power of the other. To love is to empower the other with the ability to care and comfort or to harm through rejection or unfaithfulness. Love then is an act of vulnerability in both caring for the other and their wellbeing as well as in entrusting the self into the care of the other. God’s love means not only that God seeks our best but also that God has entrusted God’s best to us. God has allowed God’s own wellbeing to be dependent upon others returning the love given by the divine. This is vulnerability, to love without guarantee of love in return, to share power with those who have no power alone, to empathize and feel what the other feels.

---

<sup>171</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 10.

God takes the risk that creation might not accept God's call to relationship and reciprocal love. God risks that humanity will choose selfishness and egoism over community and fellowship. Fretheim shows how God reveals God's vulnerability and love in asking painful questions like, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?" (Hos. 6:4). God's love and care have been spurned and now God is wavering in how to best restore the broken fellowship. It is not simply that God is wrestling with such questions but also that "God shares such questions" for this "reveals something about God; God opens himself up to risk; God becomes vulnerable. For the more one shares of oneself, the greater the possibility of being hurt."<sup>172</sup> This is what love does, it causes the one who loves to draw close, but closeness means vulnerability and vulnerability is risky.

Love can bring suffering for love seeks to be with the one who is loved. Separation, however, brings passionate suffering to the situation for one longs to be with the one who is loved but cannot due to a distancing between lovers. The separating distance may be physical for humans, but between God and humanity, it is an existential, spiritual, and emotional distance. God's response to such separation reveals God's faith. Brümmer, in his book *The Model of Love*, discusses various ways in which separated lovers might respond given the distance and suffering which distance brings.<sup>173</sup> One way is to accept the pain and suffering brought by distance and turn it into a way of life in which one revels. It becomes a lifestyle of melancholy. Secondly, one might renounce all desire for love to be returned. "In this way the lover becomes invulnerable to the response of the beloved, and to the suffering which results when the beloved fails to return his or her love."<sup>174</sup> In this sense, the lover becomes almost a martyr to love, always giving but never receiving. Lastly, one can overcome vulnerability in love by controlling the one who is loved. This response seeks to manipulate the lover so that love is returned out of a sense of obligation. While this last response, according to Brümmer, is the most common all three are perversions of real personal love for each seeks to turn love into what it is not.

Authentic love means waiting for and trusting the other to freely respond. It is not reveling in the hurt, quietly accepting the hurt, or eliminating the hurt through manipulation but overcoming the hurt by faith in the other. Brümmer explains that

---

<sup>172</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 55.

<sup>173</sup>Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 223-232.

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, 224.

the proper relationship between faith and suffering is acceptance of suffering through knowing that authentic love must face such possibilities.

The only response which does not pervert love which it seeks is to accept the vulnerability, not for its own sake, but for the sake of love itself. I long for your love, but I will restrain this longing when it tries to control your love and prevents you from bestowing it on me freely. I long for your love as a gift which only you can freely bestow on me, and I wait on you to bestow it rather than trying to earn it or extort it from you. I put my trust in you to bestow your love on me and not in my own capacity to earn or extort your love from you. I know that such efforts on my part will only pervert the fellowship which they seek to establish. In other words, I value our mutual fellowship more than the invulnerability which I can attain by denying your freedom as a person to let me down from time to time. I am willing to bear the affliction of being let down rather than to pervert the fellowship with you...[A]lthough love does not desire affliction, it is always permitted to love 'the possibility of affliction', which is another name for the vulnerability of love.<sup>175</sup>

This kind of love is only possible if one has faith in the other. Love which becomes vulnerable to pain and suffering without reveling in them is a love infused with faith and trust in the other to be faithful and return love in kind. If one has no faith that love will be returned then one will not enter into a relationship of mutual love and vulnerability. Invulnerability is not a lifestyle to be chosen. This sort of life does not keep one safe from pain due to the numbing effects of pursuing and embracing suffering but it makes one invulnerable to joy and delight. If one becomes numb to pain he or she equally becomes numb to pleasure for the pain and pleasure are sensed aspects of life and being alive. Hartshorne made the same claims when he wrote, "the supposition that immunity to suffering entails incapacity for rejoicing or bliss is not merely arbitrary; rather it is what life teaches us in innumerable ways. Life *is* sensitivity; openness to sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, harmony and discord. God is said to be 'living.' What this means if a total divine immunity to sorrow or grief is assumed no one has told us."<sup>176</sup> This means that God must be willing to act in faith, to trust and risk being disappointed and hurt if God is to experience joy and to love authentically. In this sense, faith not only makes real sorrow possible but it is the only way to make joy possible. This is why God risks,

---

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>176</sup>Charles Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1984), 21. Hartshorne's thoughts come in response to Jonathan Edward's and Urian Oakes' ideas that God cannot be disappointed for this would constitute God not having complete control and thus being subject to evil. Hartshorne's response is that God being subject to suffering or disappointment (evil) does not mean God is less than worthy of worship. If a suffering deity is rejected so too must be a joyful deity.

for the joy of loving and being loved. This may be what the author of Hebrews had in mind when writing, “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).

God’s risk of suffering is not limited to God’s relationships of mutual love but actually goes much deeper than this. God also suffers because God experiences our sufferings. God’s relationship with creation is such that God cannot escape feeling what humanity feels but experiences creation’s own joy and sorrows. This notion was so significant to Whitehead that he concluded his book *Process and Reality* with the now famous statement, “God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.”<sup>177</sup> Process theologian C. Robert Mesle explains that this concept of God as “fellow-sufferer” means that God not only suffers with humanity but all reality. “God fully shares the pain of the person with the skinned knee. In fact, God even shares the experience of the damaged cells themselves, as well as the more complex and conscious pain of the person.”<sup>178</sup> God’s experience of the joys and sufferings of creation is not limited to humanity but includes all of creation. If all of creation is metaphorically the “body” of God then God would surely feel and experience all the joys and sorrows of all creation whether sentient or not.<sup>179</sup> The doctrine of pantheism strongly supports the idea of a God who is a fellow-sufferer. Pantheism is the idea that God and creation are so united that the creation is understood, metaphorically, to be the body of God. God is not withdrawn from creation but creates within God’s self. If the creation is akin to God’s body then the divine is not simply a fellow-sufferer. Rather we, God and humanity (and all of creation), suffer as one. God does not experience something similar or identical to that which we feel in some sort of mirroring sense. God feels what we feel. The experience is not related to God but felt within God. Our experiences are God’s experiences. “Now, when the natural world, with all its suffering, is pantheistically conceived of as ‘in God,’ it follows that the evils of pain, suffering, and death in the world are internal to God’s own self.”<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

<sup>178</sup>Mesle, *Process Theology*, 20.

<sup>179</sup>McFague explores this metaphor at great length and reveals just how vulnerable a pantheistic God might be. She suggests that if the world is conceived of as God’s body then God becomes dependent upon God’s body and vulnerable to poor care, ravaging, and even being destroyed. See *Models of God*, 71-74.

<sup>180</sup>Arthur Peacocke, “God’s Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a*

Risk is also born out of conceptions concerning how God rules in love and not simply in power. If God is defined as sheer power then risk is not necessary for God. Unilateral power means that God controls and decrees all that takes place. If God is omnipotent and acts in power alone then God must always get what is wanted for absolute power guarantees satisfaction. To want what cannot be had means a limitation on power but if there is no limitation to power then God must always get what God wants.<sup>181</sup> And naturally if God always gets what God wants, there is no need to discuss suffering for God never experiences the suffering associated with disappointment or loss. Since God's power guarantees that God gets all that is wanted, there is and would be no risk. But is this the God of scripture and Christian experience? It is difficult to conceive of a God who loves and is never disappointed, unless God's love is exclusively for God's self. A God however who loves a free creation must risk for there is no assurance that a free creation will return God's love. A God of love then is a God who risks real suffering and loss. As William Placher writes,

God suffers because God is vulnerable, and God is vulnerable because God loves—and it is love, not suffering or even vulnerability, that is finally the point. God can help because God acts out of love, and love risks suffering. A God defined in terms of power is precisely not a reliable rescuer, because power provides no guarantee of concern, and power, in the way most cultures have most often used the word, too often grows out of fear of vulnerability that makes really searching out in love, with all the risks entailed, impossible.<sup>182</sup>

God rules the world out of love and not unrefined power. This means God can be disobey and rejected. A world ruled by something other than raw power is subject to flaw and sin and is thus a risky adventure.

### Relationship and Risk

One of the chief metaphors for God of the past hundred years is “God is love.” Simply identifying God as love, however, does not say enough for God is a God of intimate fellowship. God does not love from a safe distance nor does God love without relating. God is relational, but this too may not say enough for not all relationships are equal. Relationships naturally fall under two categories, personal

---

*Scientific World*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 151-152; quoted in Cooper, *Panentheism*, 309.

<sup>181</sup>If God does not always get what God desires, wants, or wills then God's power needs to be redefined, which is exactly what relational theists are doing!

<sup>182</sup>Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, 18-19.

and impersonal. According to Brümmer, impersonal relationships, while possible between persons, are those that are manipulative while personal relationships are based upon either rights and duties or mutual fellowship.<sup>183</sup> Impersonal relationships are asymmetrical and power based, which only allows for one of the “partners” to be a personal agent while the other is subjugated to being an object in the relationship.<sup>184</sup> The goal of the relationship is for one individual to use the other as an object in order to get what he or she desires. In this relationship only one person has power including the power to establish or end the relationship. Some have conceived of God’s relationship to the world in these terms making God the sole power and even suggesting that God freely decides whether the other in the relationship will love God or not.<sup>185</sup> In this sense, God “relates” to humans in a risk-free manner for God only gets and always gets what God wants or wills for the other is manipulated in every aspect.

A personal relationship in which the other is a free agent brings a certain amount of risk to the situation but it is a risk that can be minimized if the personal relationship is based upon an agreement of rights and duties. A relationship built upon rights and duties is personal because it recognizes the other as a subject who has rights as a free being. The relationship is purely contractual, an agreement between the two concerning goods or services. This kind of personal relationship certainly has risk given there is no guarantee that goods or services will be rendered in the manner agreed upon. However, while the relationship is personal the risk is not for what is risked is not the self’s well-being but something outside the self. A relationship of this kind does not take emotional or spiritual risks. This kind of personal relationship is also absent of love for each party enters, maintains, and possibly ends the relationship out self-interest. The goal of the relationship is to use the other to get what the self cannot get alone.

Brümmer suggests that relationships of mutual fellowship are a stark contrast to contractual agreements of rights and duties for each individual “chooses to serve the interests of the other and not primarily our own,” adding, “I do not merely *recognize* your interests and the claims you make on me, but I *identify* myself with

---

<sup>183</sup>Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 156-157. The greater part of Brümmer’s book is dedicated to exploring the meanings and differences of personal and impersonal relationships in order to conceive of a proper model for the relationship between God and humanity.

<sup>184</sup>*Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>185</sup>*Ibid.*, 158-159. Brümmer cites Anders Nygren as one who maintains such a view of God. For Brümmer’s critique of this approach see pages 131-139.

you by treating your interest and claims as my own.”<sup>186</sup> This is what it means to love the other as one’s self. This kind of relationship, built upon mutual fellowship, loves *with* the other. It is not a relationship of equals but of unequals, each seeing the other’s interests as more important than the interests of the self.

In exploring the aspects of a relationship of mutual fellowship Brümmer notes that this kind of relationship requires one to be vulnerable and thus it is a very risky relationship. Vulnerability comes from the fact that in establishing and entering into such a mutual relationship one becomes dependent on the other for establishing and maintaining the relationship.<sup>187</sup> Each becomes dependent on the other for the continuing joy and pleasure brought by the relationship. In this kind of relationship there can be no manipulation for each person is free to love or not. In fact love, by its very nature, cannot be manipulated. Each person enters and maintains the relationship in a state of vulnerability.

Brümmer explains that there are four ways in which a relationship of mutual fellowship is riskier than a relationship of rights and duties. It is for these reasons that faith is all the more necessary in a relationship of mutual fellowship. First, while agreements are not coerced by manipulation, they do place the partners under obligation to serve the other’s interests. Risk is limited by the obligation. The relationship is one that is merited.<sup>188</sup> I would add that the risk is also minimized by the fact that each person enters and maintains the relationship for his or her own interest even if that means serving the interest of the other in the process. Mutual fellowship, however, is a relationship that cannot be manipulated or merited without perverting the relationship and fellowship. Fellowship based on love gives freely, not out of obligation, and thus there is risk that love or friendship may not be returned.<sup>189</sup> Second, there is much more at stake in a relationship of mutual fellowship than an agreement of rights and duties and thus fellowship is riskier. The rejection that might come in an agreement is a rejection of services or goods but in fellowship it is the

---

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 164. This does not mean that the self has no interest in the relationship for when the relationship partners treat the other’s interests as their own they each receive the benefit of being loved. In a sense, only relationships in which one stands to receive as well as give can be risky relationships for if the relationship was simply about loving the other without any benefit to the self then there would be no risk involved for there would be no expectation and without expectation there is no disappointment. This is why the relationship is one of mutual love and not simply expressed love.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 167. Interestingly Brümmer makes a distinction between being lovers and being married. He does not exclude love from marriage but rightly suggests, “a love relationship is not identical with a marriage bond.” See note 33 on page 167.

person who is rejected. To have my love rejected is to have my person and worth rejected.<sup>190</sup> Third, a relationship of mutual fellowship “involves me as a person and not merely as an impersonal evaluator of your services or your characteristics.”<sup>191</sup> Whereas in relationships of agreement there is an evaluation of the goods or services and an expectation to end the relationship if the agreement is not as promised, a relationship of mutual fellowship does not evaluate but creates value. Recognition of value means the relationship is conditional upon those values but mutual fellowship is unconditional for there is no promise or obligation of services or goods. Mutual fellowship does not simply seek to find good characteristics in the other but acts to create or foster such characteristic in the other out of love for the individual and not out of a love for the characteristic itself.

In brief: in an agreement of rights and duties, my future actions toward you depend upon you, while in fellowship they depend upon me. In becoming unfaithful to our fellowship, I become unfaithful to my very self. In an agreement, I can shift the obligation to you and avoid putting myself personally at risk. Love is risky because it constitutes the self of the lover whereas agreement of rights and duties do not.<sup>192</sup>

Fourthly, relationships of mutual fellowship are risky in that they depend on the faithfulness of the partner. Because relationships of fellowship are not obligatory or manipulated the other cannot be coerced into love, friendship, or caring. There is no assurance that the one will not change and grow apart from the other.<sup>193</sup>

Relationships of mutual fellowship and love are valuable while also dangerous. There is potential for both good and bad. The relationship is risky because there is such great potential for such good. The more potential good, the greater the risk, for the more good that can come from a relationship, the greater the pain which accompanies unfaithfulness or rejection. A relationship with the potential for little good will have little risk for the less good lost the less pain felt. However, the greater the risk of pain, the greater the potential for joy for it is the “reward” in a relationship of mutual love and fellowship.

To enter into risk generally means one will risk that which one seeks to gain. The risk of gambling is the loss of money in the hopes of gaining money. In order to

---

<sup>190</sup>Dwight Van de Vate Jr., *Romantic Love: A Philosophical Inquiry* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 26-27; quoted in Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 167-168.

<sup>191</sup>Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 169.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*, 172. Brümmer notes that loving God in this sense is not risky for God will not change or grow apart from us like other humans might. God is faithful and God’s character unchanging.



play a dangerous sport one must risk future participation in that sport, due to potential injury. Likewise, God must risk relationship in order to facilitate relationship. God must risk faith in order to build faith. Relationships cannot be protected or shielded from threat or harm if they are to thrive and grow. To build a relationship of faith one must be willing to exercise faith. This is demonstrated in the testing of Abraham for in this test God risks the very covenantal relationship built between the two. God desires to build faith, Abraham's and God's own, but this is only possible if God is willing to risk the very relationship sought to be made mature. God, in essence, asks Abraham if he is willing to destroy the covenant between himself and God out of awe and reverence for God.<sup>194</sup> Abraham is asked to risk the very thing that binds the covenant and their future relationship for without Isaac there is no more promise. God had to risk Abraham's refusal to follow God's lead no matter the request. God had to risk Abraham not trusting in order for God to trust Abraham. This idea of relational risk leads Leon Kass to write, "In a strange way the present passage speaks more about God's faith in Abraham than Abraham's faith in God."<sup>195</sup> God's faith is demonstrated by God's risky request just as Abraham's faith was demonstrated by his risky agreement.

Intimate relationships are by their nature risky, especially if they are to grow and mature. The deeper and more intimate the relationship, the riskier it is. Persons are certainly hurt more when betrayed by a loved one than when someone of casual acquaintance fails to meet expectations. Failure and betrayal are not the same thing when it comes to relationship. We will disappoint God, which is to be expected for we are fallible beings capable of great mistakes. But this is not what God risks in entering into relationship with persons. God's risk is that of betrayal, of opening up God's self in vulnerability and being let down by the ones in whom God has trusted the most. "Betrayal is worse than unreliability or deception, worse than many acts of harm. It is a special sort of violation, one that jolts against the background of what seemed to be a relationship of deep trust with particular [sic] strong expectations of loyalty and intimacy."<sup>196</sup> The fact that the relationship is loving means it is riskier.

---

<sup>194</sup>Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 337.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 338. Kass notes that this idea of God's faith in Abraham is found also in Midrash. In a Job-like setting Satan comes to God stating that Abraham gave a feast for Isaac but did not even offer a turtledove unto God. God's reply is that if God were to say to Abraham, "Sacrifice your son to me" Abraham would obey at once. Satan replies, "Try him" and God does just that. Kass says that this Midrash teaches that "God has faith that Abraham will refute Satan's claim that he too is, at bottom, self-centered and God-forgetting."

<sup>196</sup>Govier, *Dilemmas of Trust*, 144.

To enter into a loving relationship necessitates that God become vulnerable to the pain of rejection, humiliation, and betrayal. To enter into loving relationships means trusting the other with your best interest.

The more trustworthy a person is the less risky the relationship. Experiences of the relational partner being reliable, loyal, dependable, and consistent means that trust is less risky than when one needs to trust an unknown factor.<sup>197</sup> But risk is never wholly eliminated. Because humans are free and fallible risk is always present and the sting of betrayal increases the more one is felt to be trustworthy. If it were possible for God to create beings who genuinely love without being free God could have eliminated risk but that is by nature impossible. Love must be a free act and free beings mean risk. Jewish theologian, Norman Lamm, notes the risk involved with creating free beings when he writes:

The drama of human existence is predicated upon the divine grant of freedom to man. Only in terms of this gift of ethical sovereignty does the human predicament become worthy of consideration. But such freedom for man implies that God has willingly surrendered part of His control, that He has, paradoxically, willed that things may go against His will. The built-in risks in the creation of an ethically autonomous being are implied in the symbolic story in the Midrash about the debates amongst the Heavenly hosts as to whether or not such a creation ought to take place...He knew that man might well fail, yet He was willing to take His chances on him.<sup>198</sup>

Perhaps it could be argued that the more trustworthy a person is the greater the risk involved for the one who allows them self to become vulnerable. Certainly experiences of a partner's faithfulness and loyalty bring a sense of confidence but it may be this confidence that makes the faith even greater. The more confidence the more open we become and the more open the more vulnerable. This is why betrayal is so painful. While it is never pleasant, to be hurt by a stranger or an acquaintance does not carry the sting that being betrayed by a loved one brings. Those we love the most are the ones to whom we have become most vulnerable and so there is an even greater risk. The likelihood of betrayal may be less but the heightened degree of pain and sorrow felt if betrayal does come is of a significantly greater risk.

### **Conclusion**

Relationships of mutual fellowship and love must be extremely valuable to God if God is so willing to risk suffering, humiliation, and even the relationship itself.

---

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>198</sup>Norman Lamm, *Faith and Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 32.

God is left with only two options: safety or risk. Safety is assured when one relates only contractually, by manipulation, or in agreements of rights and duties. But God, by risking, enters and develops relationships of loving faith and trust. This is God's chance to know humanity in ways not possible outside of risk taking. God, by risking and trusting the other is able to experience love and learn of the other in ways impossible without risk. Faith then is a risk for God since there is no love without vulnerability and there is no vulnerability without risk and there is no risk without faith. Faith is the willingness to risk. Entering into relationship amongst the risk means the risk taker has faith in the other that he or she will respond in kind and will be faithful.

The fact that God risks means God is a being of faith. Risk is simply not possible without the faith that that which is risked will not be lost. Risk is to put something on the line while believing it will not be lost or harmed. If one believes that what is risked will be lost then this is not risk but abandonment. It is the giving over of that which is valued because all hope is lost. Risk, while potentially damaging, can be an expression of great hope and deep faith. God's risk, and thus faith, is expressed in many of the parables of Jesus and OT narratives. These writings portray God as willing to risk God's own plans and wellbeing because God has faith that those with whom God is in relationship will be faithful and true. This is the heart of relationship, faith that the other will be true in spite of the risks that come with such faith.

The risk does not always pay off for God, however, for there are times in which God is betrayed and rejected. This is always the risk. Betrayal brings an element into the relationship that jeopardizes its very existence and forces God to question the future of the relation. Thus, faith for a relational being means facing questions and doubts.

### **God Doubts**

Doubt is that element of faith that keeps faith honest and which in fact makes faith necessary. If there were no doubts there would be no faith. Doubt is also a natural element of relationship. Where there are relationships in which both parties have power there will be doubts and questions since vulnerability is great.<sup>199</sup> If God is relational and it has been shown that God has faith then it is necessary to discuss

---

<sup>199</sup>Govier, *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 86.

God having doubts. Entering into relationships with humans in whom God has shared power means that there is reason for God to doubt.

It takes tremendous faith for God to share power with a free humanity. As humans we seek to hoard what is given, refusing to share with others or give back. God shares power but we seek to keep power which leads to, and is, evil. Feminist theologian Beverly Wildung Harrison notes what happens when power is not shared. “Power that is not reciprocal is *always* violent power, abusive power. It destroys our capacity for, and cuts us off from, embodied, serious relationships with one another. Power that does that—alienated power—is evil.”<sup>200</sup> The giving of power is an act of trust but one that understandably must come with doubts. What will humans do with the power to create and self-create? What will humans do with the power to build up but also to break down? God empowered humanity with the ability to embrace and seek God but that power also enables humanity to escape and distance it self from God. With such power comes many fears and questions.

If it has been shown that God is a person of faith, that God holds beliefs, trusts, hopes, and takes risks then God is a being capable of doubt. The doubt of God cannot be eschewed but must be discussed if God’s faith is to be properly understood for faith is not possible without doubt, even for the divine. When speaking of divine doubt it is obvious that many will bristle at the thought for doubt has such negative connotations. However, as noted above, doubt should not always be understood as the absence of faith for doubt can also be a condition that brings faith by action and commitment in the face of doubt. “In a word, God had, or has, faith in man; He trusts him, believes in him...But faith always implies the possibility of doubt. If, then, God has faith in man, he can also doubt man.”<sup>201</sup>

Destructive doubt is not uncertainty or even vacillation but a denial of the other and the relationship. The question doubt brings is whether the relationship should be affirmed or denied. When doubt destroys relationship it can be understood as cynicism or despair. It is an attitude of suspicion, which colors how one sees the other, and thus colors the relationship keeping one from trusting.<sup>202</sup> While doubt makes faith and trust necessary, suspicion, cynicism, and despair keep one from exercising faith and trust. God certainly questions and hesitates concerning divine

---

<sup>200</sup>Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>201</sup>Lamm, *Faith and Doubt*, 32.

<sup>202</sup>Govier, *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 238.

action and human response but this form of doubt rarely brings an end to divine faith but in fact makes it that much more necessary. Rom. 8:38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,” reveals that God’s doubt is never utterly destructive concerning relationships for God is ever seeking of fellowship and communion and that is why nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even God’s own doubts.

While human doubt is born out of insecurity and uncertainty divine doubt is born out of human betrayal. God does not doubt or lose faith by simply being unsure of what we will do for if that were the case God would never trust. Doubt on God’s part is born out of what we have done and what God knows of our character. It is a doubt born out of knowledge not ignorance. God doubts whether we will continue the relationship after we have betrayed God and trusted in another. The narratives of God’s doubt are all born out of betrayals, which lead God to question the future of the relationship’s intimacy and fellowship. Humans hurt the relationship when they turn from the one who is trustworthy and faithful and trust in the idols of power and security. God is faithful, the one who will not forsake. God is forever faithful and to distrust God is to abandon and deny God.

### God Laments

A lamentation is an expression of sorrow, grief, or regret. It is a complaint or voice of distress.<sup>203</sup> It is usually an expression of deep frustration with little sense of hope concerning the situation. These various portions of scripture, identified as divine lamentations, are expressions of God’s frustration coupled with questions concerning the future. God expresses experiences of suffering because of the unfaithfulness of God’s relational partners.<sup>204</sup> The statements convey not only God’s suffering but concerns and doubts regarding the relationship due to Israel’s

---

<sup>203</sup>“Lament,” in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 638.

<sup>204</sup>Human lamentations are expressions of grief or sorrow generally in the situation of sickness, oppression, guilt, or want. Lamentations attributed to God focus on grief concerning Israel’s unfaithfulness and the damaged relationship between the two. In this section I will focus on how some of these lamentations can be understood as expressions of divine doubt but they are certainly more than that. God’s laments are expressions of God’s suffering but divine suffering is not always suffering *because* of the other. God also suffers *with* the other and *for* the other. It might also be noted however that there is not always a clear distinction among these three in God’s suffering because God will also suffer with and for. The cross itself may be the best expression of divine suffering in all three states. For more on these three forms of divine suffering see Fretheim, *The Suffering God*, 107-148.

unfaithfulness and increasing rejection of God and God's plans.<sup>205</sup> God asks what to do in light of such unfaithfulness. While always seeking to preserve the relationship, God expresses doubts about its future.

The flood epic is a powerful narrative that communicates not only the depths of human sin but also the passion of God. The narrative conveys a God with high hopes for a creation that refuses to be what God intends. Instead of order and good will creation is fraught with rebellion, disobedience, chaos, and disorder. The sin and disorder reach a point that causes God to lament having made such a world. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" (Gen. 6:5-6). While this statement reveals much concerning God's thinking and nature it cannot be overlooked that this also expresses God's doubt concerning the future goodness of creation. Given what God has seen the creation become God has serious reservation about what the world's future holds and whether it will regain its original order. The narrative deals with creation collectively, revealing that it has only evil intentions. Like a parent whose child has become unrecognizable due to rebellion and evil, God laments having ever created such a world. God is a troubled parent grieving over the kind of being humanity has become.<sup>206</sup> God's thoughts and hopes concerning creation have changed. God now doubts, that is, God's beliefs about the creation's future have changed significantly. Where God had once believed the creation to be "very good," God now doubts and believes creation to be wicked and evil.

While it was God's will that creation follow the plan and pattern of order decreed for it by God, creation was not compelled to obey. God trusted the creation would follow the plan set before it but it refused. God's doubt leads to the decree that God is sorry humankind was made. God seems to be looking back and wishing that humankind had never existed. Can this statement be understood in any way other than expressing reservation, concern, and doubt about humanity's future faithfulness?

In the end, the epic reveals more than God's doubt and judgment. It also reveals God's hope and faith, for humankind is not completely destroyed and there is

---

<sup>205</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering God*, 108-109.

<sup>206</sup>Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 76. Brueggemann explains that the language used denotes God's grief, not anger. The word used is the same as found in Gen. 3:16 when the woman is cursed with increased pain. Once again we see this story depicted in parental terms and not in that of a distant or unrelated manufacturer. God is creator in the way a mother "creates" her child.

a chance to begin again. It is not a completely new beginning for that would mean utter destruction. Instead God is revealed as one who seeks to restore after judgment, to heal after the effects of evil. The story is not about the flood per se but about a “change wrought in God which makes possible a new beginning for creation.”<sup>207</sup> And new beginnings bring with them faith that past failures might be avoided and hope for a renewed relationship. “He will not let the rebellion of humankind sway him away from his grand dream for creation.”<sup>208</sup> The flood epic then is a story about God’s doubts concerning humankind, doubts that are overcome by faith, even if it is a cautious faith.

The book of Hosea addresses the relationship between God and the northern kingdom not long before its destruction. The book is a collection of speeches but is also a metaphoric treatment of Hosea’s family life<sup>209</sup> that reveals the inner life and ponderings of God concerning the divine’s relationship with Israel.<sup>210</sup> This book reveals many things about the thoughts and feelings of God regarding the relationship God has with Israel. God is angry, frustrated, and feels betrayed but yet is still hopeful that Israel will return. Because the book discusses the sins of Israel through the metaphor of a marital relationship these sins leave God with doubts concerning the future of the relationship. The statements reveal that God is wondering what to do with Israel because of their unfaithfulness. God asks, “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early” (6:4) revealing a God who is unsure and doubtful concerning Israel’s love. The statements reveal both the anger of a betrayed lover in wishing to expose Israel’s true colors, “Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand” (2:10), but also the hope that one day Israel will be restored and faithful, “And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy” (2:19). It is the juxtaposition that reveals the nature of faith and doubt. God is hurting because of Israel’s acts of betrayal. This hurt naturally becomes anger and doubt concerning the future of their relationship. But also in these feelings of doubt

---

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 81. Brueggemann just as easily could have said that God will not allow the rebellion to sway God away from *belief in* creation without changing the meaning of the statement.

<sup>209</sup>While it is not always clear what pertains to God’s relationship with Israel and what concerns Hosea’s marriage with Gomer, Hosea’s marriage is certainly to be understood as symbolically “participating in the realities of God’s life.” See Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 155-156.

<sup>210</sup>Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1:47. Heschel notes that it is interesting that the focus of the book is not on the apostasy of the people but rather on the pathos of the abandoned God.

and concern God remains faithful believing that one day the two will be restored. Even though Heschel does not use the terms “faith” or “doubt” I believe his sentiments are the same when he writes, “The pathos of love, expressed in the bitterness of disillusionment, finds its climax in the hope of reconciliation.”<sup>211</sup> God is doubtful but God ultimately has faith in a reunion.

The prophet Jeremiah also uses imagery of marriage and even divorce in revealing God’s sense of questioning and doubt regarding the state of God’s relationship with Israel.<sup>212</sup> God is depicted as conflicted concerning Israel and their relationship. The question is asked, “How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods...shall I not punish them for these things?”<sup>213</sup> God had once believed Judah would return after following other gods, “And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me’; but she did not return” (3:7). Again, “And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel” (3:19b-20). God’s belief that Israel would be faithful was proven wrong. God’s belief that Israel would return was also proven wrong and now God has grave concerns and doubts about Israel’s future faithfulness. These passages reveal a God who “suffers the effects of the broken relationship at multiple levels of intimacy.”<sup>214</sup> Can we expect anything less than God having reservations, concerns, and even doubts about continuing the relationship?

While such statements and questions reveal God’s hurt, frustration, and doubt they do not constitute God being unfaithful. In the end God never forsakes those who have betrayed God but is ever hopeful of their return. Just as Fretheim states that “God is indeed a vulnerable God, touched and affected in the deepest possible way by what people have done to the relationship, God’s grief does not entail being emotionally overwhelmed or embittered by the barrage of rejection.”<sup>215</sup> It could also be said that God is not overwhelmed by doubt and questions. This is the faith of God made real by doubts that come with being in relationship with fallible beings.

---

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 1:51.

<sup>212</sup>Jer. 3:8, “She saw that for all the adulteries of the faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.”

<sup>213</sup>Jer. 5:7a and 5:9a. See also 9:9

<sup>214</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 116.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 111.



## Doubting Narratives

As demonstrated in earlier sections, the Bible has stories that reveal God's belief, trust, hope, and risk-taking but there are also stories that depict God's questioning and doubting. These stories convey God's doubt as revealed by what God does. While there is no language used which plainly states, "God doubted," these narratives, if understood relationally, are clearly the actions of one who is unsure about the relationship's future.

While the creation narratives are not the earliest biblical writings they still serve to set the tone for the rest of the OT. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter divine faith can be seen from the opening verses of the Hebrew Bible, but divine doubting can be seen as well.<sup>216</sup> The garden narrative conveys the story of humans who disobey and of a God who must respond to this disobedience as well as the humans' new found freedoms. The narrative conveys, in poetic fashion, the "fall" of humanity and much more. The man and woman disobey and eat of the tree changing their relationship with God and one another. While they were once innocent and ignorant they now are guilty and knowledgeable which brings fear and feelings of shame. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and now their eyes are open; this forever changes the dynamics of the relationship between God and humanity. God is concerned about the fact that "man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil." The events reveal that God cannot trust the man and woman as God had once believed. The man and woman have changed and likewise so have the relationships for with such knowledge came potentials that had once not existed.

The sin in the garden is that of mistrust. The man and woman are led to mistrust and eventually doubt what God had said because of the serpent's malicious (mis)use of God's words. Because of this mistrust the two eat from the tree that brings its own problems all born from a mistrust of God. "The primal sin may thus best be defined as mistrust of God and God's words, which then manifests itself in disobedience and other negative behaviors (e.g. blaming)."<sup>217</sup> The first sin leads to other problems such as blame and dissention but it could also be said that this act of mistrust leads God to distrust. God can no longer allow the two to remain in the garden for fear that they might eat of the tree of life. God cannot trust the two to obey

---

<sup>216</sup>The garden narratives are certainly not univocal and thus I do not believe that seeing doubt in this story is the only way in which they should be read. However, I do believe that with such rich poetic imagery there is room for various interpretations. Thus I do not believe it is asking too much of the reader to concede elements of (faith and) doubt in these stories.

<sup>217</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 74.

and thus must expel the couple from the garden. In this way it appears that doubt breeds further doubt and human mistrust gives way to divine distrust.

Another key example is found in the narrative of the golden calf. Exodus 32 is a fascinating story of Moses meeting with God high upon a mountain in order to obtain the commandments while the Israelites below cast an idol of gold. We first see God's doubt born out of anger when God exclaims to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely" (32:8). One can see that God is already speaking in terms of disassociation; *your* people...whom *you* brought out. There is a disconnect between God and the people. God's doubt concerning these Hebrews hits its apex when God tells Moses that the people will be consumed and God will start again with Moses (32:10). God is unsure if these people can be entrusted to be the people of God, to be the ones to carry on the promise given to Abraham. God has "seen this people, how stiff-necked they are" and this is a vice that raises significant doubts for God. It must be noted that this narrative does not reveal a God who is "indecisive or vacillating, filled with uncertainties" but instead reveals a God who takes the relationship as utmost and is conflicted.<sup>218</sup> Just as the garden narrative reveals that human mistrust bred divine distrust it might be argued that this story is paradigmatic of Israel and God's relationship throughout the scriptures. It might be said, "Jews doubt God, and God doubts the Jews—it's been part of our relationship since the golden calf."<sup>219</sup> While Gerald Shapiro is being a bit "tongue in cheek" he nonetheless has captured the logical effects when persons misplace trust: divine doubt.

While I have used the testing narratives of Abraham and Job as stories of God's belief and trust these might also be read to suggest God had doubts. It is possible that the testing stories do not reveal a God of faith who puts people to the test because God believes they will prove themselves faithful but rather that God tests because God is truly doubtful concerning their character. This is the approach Howard Moltz takes regarding these two particular narratives. "I would suggest God had come to doubt Abraham, as in time he would come to doubt Job. And as he

---

<sup>218</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 291. Many passages, especially OT, reveal a God who is at times conflicted concerning the relationship with Israel. Hos. 11:8-9 is but one example of God's conflict concerning a relationship: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath."

<sup>219</sup>Gerald Shapiro, *Bad Jews and Other Stories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zoland Books, 1999), 185.

would soon test Abraham, so eventually he would test Job (Job 2.5-6).”<sup>220</sup> While I believe these stories are better understood as suggesting that God believes, it makes sense also to see the necessary doubt that always accompanies faith. It makes sense to speak of the testing stories as being filled with faith and doubt because trust is born from doubt. Doubt or question is the condition necessary for trust to sprout and grow.

### Conclusion

Even though God knows all that can be known, entering into relationship with free beings brings about risks and therefore doubt. But this is no more a flaw in God’s character than it is in our own for faith cannot exist without doubt. “Where there is doubt, faith has its reason for being. Clearly faith is not needed where certainty supposedly exists, but only in situations where doubt is possible, even present.”<sup>221</sup> But God’s doubts are not based solely upon God’s uncertainties as they are with humans. If humans knew all there is to know about God faith would be unnecessary on our part. But God does know all that can be known about us and this is as much a reason for God to doubt as are the limitations of God’s knowledge. God knows our character flaws and vices for we display these regularly. We may not know what a free but relational God will do in the future but we can be sure it will be loving toward the other with whom God is in relationship. God is not so fortunate for we are quite often fickle and capricious in our relationship with God and others. We are free in an unpredictable way while God’s actions, while free, are consistent with God’s person and nature. God doubts because we sinfully pursue our own interests at the expense of the relationship. Humans will too often move beyond constructive doubt which consistent of questions and seeking and will enter into destructive doubt which ends relationships instead of building them. In this way God and humanity are quite different.

It is not human to doubt, it is simply the nature of relationship. Where there is trust there is doubt and where there is doubt there is fertile ground for faith. “Man’s trust in and doubt of *Elohim* is paralleled by God’s trust in and doubt of the *tzellem Elohim*, the divine image. Wherever a relationship involves at least one free agent, there are immediately implied the possibilities of both faith and doubt in that free

---

<sup>220</sup>Moltz, “God and Abraham in the Binding of Isaac,” 67.

<sup>221</sup>Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian & the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 81.

agent.”<sup>222</sup>

### Conclusion

The proposal that God is a being of faith should not come as a shock to the relational theist. Relational theism has proposed a God who is vulnerable, limited, and responsive and each of these assumes a certain amount of faith. For God to enter into relationships in which there is risk and vulnerability because of limitations, accidental or necessary, means that God must trust the other in the relationship. To relate and be reciprocal in the full knowledge that some amount of pain and suffering is likely means that God believes the relationship is worthy of such risks. Relationship means that God trusts God's own well being to the other. Faith is a necessary element of any relationship of love, communion, or mutual fellowship. God is more than a God who risks but is a God who trusts, believes, hopes, and even doubts. Risk is a necessary element of any reciprocal relationship but so is faith. Therefore if God is to be understood as a risk taker, creative lover, or co-sufferer God must also be conceived of as trusting and faithful.

It is not enough, however, only to speak of God as one who has faith in humanity and creation. The faith of God is a faith *with* and not simply a faith *in*. God, in choosing to partner with humanity chose to have faith with humanity. God's faith is not distant or safe but is a faith with allows God to get involved with humanity. It is a faith that is the ground of relationship. God relates to and with creation in faith making God a confidant: a fellow believer.

God as a confidant means that God is one we share faith with. The word *confide* comes from Latin, meaning to share faith with or to have faith together. From *confide* we get words like confidence, confidential, and confidant. God has entered in to covenant with, suffers with, loves with, and creates with, all of which assume a God who joins in faith together with us. God as confidant is a model which exceeds other models like parent, friend, and lover for each of these relationships presuppose the other is one in whom we can be confident and confide. The models that speak of God as a parent, friend, and lover must assume that God in all of these is a confidant for relationship without mutual faith is a strained relationship. Parent and child must trust and believe in and with the other. Friends can only be friends where there is a fellowship of trust. Love cannot mature and grow where there is not faith with the

---

<sup>222</sup>Lamm, *Faith and Doubt*, 32.

other. Faith, like love, reaches a new height when the faith is shared with the other and not simply in the other. Being in love is not the goal of a relationship for being in love does not necessitate a relationship of mutual fellowship and communion. The goal of the one in love is to enter into relationship with the other. Likewise, the goal of faith is not simply to have faith in the other but to come together and share in faith with the other. This is the hallmark of relationality and love: communal faith. A relational God is one who believes, trusts, and hopes with the other.

This model of divine faith opens the door to new insights regarding God's actions in the world. And while examples have been given to demonstrate God's faith as a relational partner there are two momentous events in the life of God which can be understood as hallmarks of God's faith: the creation and the cross. In the final two chapters theologies of creation and the cross will be explored in light of God's faith and will demonstrate that just as we love God because God first loved us we believe in God because God first believed in us.



## CHAPTER 5 CREATIO EX FIDE

Historically, Christians have asserted that the world is indebted to God for its very existence. The “heavens and the earth” are not a cosmic accident as advanced by modern scientism, nor are they the product of divine wars in the celestial realm as once taught in many ancient myths. The heavens and the earth, as affirmed by Christian theologies, are the result of purposeful acts of God. To call God Creator is to affirm that this universe is the purposeful product of God. “To say that the universe is created is to say that it is brought about intentionally, that its existence is the expression of a consciously formed purpose.”<sup>1</sup> To speak of the universe as wholly indebted to God does not say enough, however, for questions of why and how God created remain to be debated. Did God create the universe once and for all in a single moment, or is creation the ongoing activity of God? Was it necessary that God create or is creation the free act of a God who could have chosen not to create at all? Questions like these, and all attempted answers, are formulated within particular theologies concerning the nature of God, as well as guiding metaphors of creation and the work of God. To speak of God as creator is (or should be) always done within the context of God’s attributes or nature. To speak of God as “creator” is not to introduce a different or new metaphor but to expound upon metaphors and models already held. God’s creating should be understood in concert with other guiding metaphors.<sup>2</sup> From a relational theism model, the metaphor of creator needs to be understood and informed by a relational conception of God. Upon this model and metaphor, I wish to introduce another metaphor of God as a relational creator who creates out of faith.

Along with guiding metaphors, creation has been explored as a manifestation or expression of a divine attribute. For example, creation is sometimes spoken of as

---

<sup>1</sup>Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 289.

<sup>2</sup>For example, metaphorically, God should not be understood as parent *and* creator as if they are unrelated metaphors but as a parent who creates. In this way, the root metaphor or model is retained and a metaphor built from within. One could possibly suggest that God is a creator who parents. This, however, might strain the fuller meaning of parent. Typically, a parent is one who is responsible (jointly with the other parent) for the creation of the offspring. To parent a child, in this sense, would mean more than rearing a child but also giving life to the child.

an exercise and expression of divine power or omnipotence. In this sense, the creation reflects God's power and ability to call matter and life into existence. Creation can also be understood as chiefly an act of divine love.<sup>3</sup> The creation then is the result of an overflow and outpouring of divine love, which has eternally existed, in the triune Godhead. Creation can also be conceptualized as the result of divine creativity.<sup>4</sup> The creation is not simply an expression of power or love but of divine imagination and a longing for novelty and play. While these are all useful and theologically influential metaphors, in this chapter, I will offer thoughts on creation as an act of divine faith. Just as others have suggested that creation is an outpouring of primordial power, creativity, or love, I wish add to the discussion the possibility of creation as an act born out of faith. The creation, while dependent on God's power, creativity, and love, is also the result of divine risk and faith. And just as power, love, and creativity are not mutually exclusive, divine faith alone is not responsible for creation. The creation is an act(s) of God's full being which is more than power or love alone; it is multifaceted with love, power, creativity, and faith each having an important place. God's creative acts of power and love therefore are creative acts of faith as well. In fact, I will speak of creation as God's faithful act of creativity, power, and love.<sup>5</sup> The point being made in this chapter is that, from a stance within relational theology, acts of love, power, and creativity are also to be understood as faith acts. That is, creation is a risk for God in which God must trust and hope. God does not create by virtue of any one ability or attribute but creates out of the full divine being. The creation is an expression of the fullness of God and not simply God's power, love, creativity, or even faith.

Daniel L. Migliore proposes five models or analogies generally used by Christians to speak of God's act(s) of creation: generation, formation, emanation, mind/body, and artistic expression.<sup>6</sup> The generation model emphasizes God's role as parent and life giver. The formation (or fabrication) model depicts God as a builder or potter. This model of God emphasizes a God who forms or builds out of existing

---

<sup>3</sup>See Paul Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love," in *The Work of Love: Creation As Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>One example is from Ward who suggests that divine power should be conceived as "divine creativity" and this in turn is divine love. See Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 343.

<sup>5</sup>Any one of these attributes could be used as noun or adjective and thus I could also speak of God's "powerful acts of faith, creativity, and love," or "God's loving acts of power, creativity, and faith."

<sup>6</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 111-113.

materials. According to the model of emanation, creation is the by-product of God's overflowing creativity and goodness. The mind/body analogy seeks to overcome some of the inherent dangers of impersonality or hierarchical oppression possibly found in the previous models. The mind/body model suggests that the world is akin to God's body. The final model discussed by Migliore is that of artistic expression. This model which speaks of God as artisan emphasizes creation as an act of play more than work.

To uphold one of these models to the exclusion of others is problematic. Each model or analogy has its strengths and weaknesses. My intention is not to advocate any one analogy but to suggest that as one explores all the analogies it would be fruitful to consider the role of God's faith in the creational acts.

### **Creatio Ex Nihilo**

In the realm of relational theology, *creatio ex nihilo* elicits a variety of definitions as well as some absolute rejections. Open theists tend to accept the doctrine with little modification from its historical conception while process theologians either reject it completely or reinterpret it in ways that keep it consistent with process metaphysics but quite distinct from its origins. The concept raises important considerations for one's doctrine of God in the areas of divine freedom and power but also raises questions about the problem of evil and eschatology. The concern for this chapter is how an application of divine faith might apply to *creatio ex nihilo* and whether *creatio ex nihilo* necessitates a God of faith.

It could be said that those who have affirmed the doctrine of "creation out of nothing" or *creatio ex nihilo* have agreed with the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 which states, "We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God ... the Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who from the very beginning of time by His omnipotent power created out of nothing [*de nihilo condidit*] both the spiritual beings and the corporeal."<sup>7</sup> Historically, *creatio ex nihilo* was developed and advanced as a means of safeguarding second century Christian theology from the threat of Gnostic teachings. The Gnostics held that the physical world and all its matter was evil, being the work of a lesser god or demiurge.<sup>8</sup> At

---

<sup>7</sup>Paul Copan, "Is Creatio Ex Nihilo A Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal," *Trinity Journal* 17, no. 1 spring 1996: 79 [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article\\_exnihilo\\_copan.html](http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article_exnihilo_copan.html); Internet; accessed 28 August 2007.

<sup>8</sup>Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 201.



times, this demiurge was even identified as Yahweh and classified as the God of the OT, the creator God.<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to separate orthodox Christianity from the Gnostic teachings, early church fathers such as Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Irenaeus developed a doctrine of creation out of nothing. The “nothing” from which creation emerged is a theological and philosophical debate all its own, but one thing the church fathers sought to eliminate was any thought of God using some kind of primordial or co-eternal “stuff” as the substance from which creation was formed.<sup>10</sup> As Emil Brunner states, “The ‘ex’ of the *creatio ex nihilo* does not suggest any kind of ‘matter’—however vague and shadowy—but it means the fact that God alone brought the world into being. There never was a ‘nothing’ alongside God, as it were, but God alone.”<sup>11</sup> *Creatio ex nihilo* served to distance ancient and modern Christian thought from theological and philosophical dualisms as well as to advance God as a free and purposeful creator. At the same time, *creatio ex nihilo* distances Christian thought from radical theological and philosophical monism, better known as pantheism, which purports that God and creation are ontologically one. Like most theologies, *creatio ex nihilo* developed negatively, that is, not simply to advance a particular idea but to negate another. Early Christian doctrines of creation were focused more on ontological assertions than on temporal beginnings.<sup>12</sup> The doctrine sought to say much more about the creator than it did the creation.

While *creatio ex nihilo* had nearly universal support for centuries, it has come under fire in recent years for various reasons. First, creation out of nothing has problems biblically. Most OT scholars suggest that OT concepts of creation dramatically depict God ordering and subduing the powers of chaos.<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:1-2, for example, has been thoroughly dismissed as an unequivocal statement of *creatio ex*

---

<sup>9</sup>Sjoerd L. Bonting, *Creation and Double Chaos: Science and Theology in Discussion*, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 67.

<sup>10</sup>For a history of the doctrine see Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation Out of Nothing” in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). While May’s book is often thought of as the leading work on the subject, others have challenged his findings and have offered a more traditional approach. For example, see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), chapters 1-3.

<sup>11</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon, Dogmatics, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 201.

<sup>13</sup>Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I:150. Von Rad cites Ps. 104:7 as God rebuking chaos and Ps. 74:13ff as example of God smiting chaos. See also Bonting, *Creation and Double Chaos*, 50-53; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 29-30; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 32-34.

*nihilo* but is instead understood as advancing the idea of God's giving order to chaos.<sup>14</sup> The word *bārā* ("create") also does not automatically entail "creation out of nothing," for, even though it is a term used exclusively for divine creative activity, it does not always imply a "new" creation.<sup>15</sup> In spite of biblical problems, some scholars have suggested both OT and NT passages which seemingly support some kind of *creatio ex nihilo*. Isaiah 45:7 and 18 suggest a hyper-monotheism in which all reality, even tragedy, is the result of divine activity: "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things... For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the LORD, and there is no other." The NT also contains passages which are used to support the doctrine. John 1:3 "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being..." and Romans 4:17b "God... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."<sup>16</sup> In exploring the many creation texts of the Bible, it may be best to follow the thought of Dennis Olson:

Creation in the Bible is not about the very beginnings of the appearance of matter or the cosmos. In Genesis 1, the narrative begins with God's spirit or wind sweeping over already existing waters of chaos (Gen. 1:2). We are not

---

<sup>14</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987). Wenham shows that there are four different ways in which the opening text of Gen. 1:1 can be translated. 1) "In the beginning when God created..., the earth was without form..." This reading has verse 1 as a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause. 2) "In the beginning when God created...(now the earth was formless) God said..." This reading has verse 1 as a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in verse 3. 3) "In the beginning God was the creator of heaven and earth." In this reading verse 1 is a descriptive title of the events describe in verses 2-31. 4) Verse 1 is a main clause that describes the first event of creation. Of the four only the last could be used to support a *creatio ex nihilo* reading of the text. Wenham seems to support the fourth translation as the most appropriate but is still resistant to suggest that this verse supports the idea that the author had a *creatio ex nihilo* in mind (11-13). "Through such an interpretation of Gen. 1:1 is quite possible, the phraseology used leaves the author's precise meaning uncertain on this point" (14).

Brueggemann states that "Verse 2 appeals to traditional imagery and is informed by the common notion that creation is an ordering out of an already existing chaos. Conventionally, it has been held that Genesis 1 is creation by God out of nothing. But this verse denies that." Later, he suggests that the "very ambiguity of *creation from nothing* and *creation from chaos* is a rich expository possibility. We need not choose between them, even as the text does not." Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 29.

<sup>15</sup>Fretheim explains that the word is used to reference re-creation or transformation (e.g., Ps 51:10; 102:18; Is. 41:20; 65:18). *God and World in the Old Testament*, 36-37. Louis Jacobs offers the thought that *bārā*, while it might be used to convey a creation out of nothing, more simply, yet no less powerfully, expresses the beginning of something new which only God can be responsible for. This would mean that the creation of life, and not matter, is the thrust of *bārā*. See Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), 94-95.

<sup>16</sup>Along with these might be added 2 Macc. 7:28 "I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being," which von Rad believes to be the oldest conceptual formulation of *creatio ex nihilo*. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:150.

told how these waters came to be or what God was doing before this moment. In Gen. 2:4, the second creation story begins with an already pre-existing desert that is lifeless. Waters begin to flow, and only then does God begin to form and create...In other words, the two primary creation stories in the Bible begin at some point *after* the very beginnings of the cosmos.<sup>17</sup>

Some theologians retreat from *creatio ex nihilo* for reasons other than the lack of solid biblical support and instead suggest that *creatio ex nihilo* supports a God-world relationship of “total distance and difference.”<sup>18</sup> John D. Caputo argues that the “delicate balance between God’s lordship and the chanciness of creation” found in the Hebrew narratives is “upset by an excess of metaphysical zeal.”<sup>19</sup> By this, Caputo means that the church’s early theologians exchanged a God of limited power who had to work with an “element of indeterminacy in things that frustrates us all, God, human, and beast” for *omnipotens duces*, a God distorted by irresolvable paradoxes of limitless power.<sup>20</sup> For Caputo, *creatio ex nihilo* is irreversibly tied to classical conceptions of an all-determining deity who is utterly responsible for evil and human misery.

Process theology also rejects *creatio ex nihilo*:

...if that means creation out of absolute nothingness. That doctrine is part and parcel of the doctrine of God as absolute controller. Process theology affirms instead a doctrine of creation out of chaos...A state of absolute chaos would be one in which there is nothing but very low-grade actual occasions happening at random, i.e., without being ordered into enduring individuals.<sup>21</sup>

*Creatio ex nihilo*, according to Hartshorne, implies that “matter” came into existence but process metaphysics has no “matter” but only actual entity or drops of experience which come in and out of being. Hartshorne states that the preexistent substance from which God created “is not matter; for that is a label for what, in the psychicalist view, is really an extremely elementary form of creaturely mind in the form of feeling, in huge numbers of momentary flashes with no conscious knowledge of the individual identity through change.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, creation is not formed out of some kind of

---

<sup>17</sup>Dennis Olson, “God the Creator: Bible, Creation, Vocation,” *Dialog* 36, no. 3 (summer 1997): 172, quoted in Paul R. Sponheim, *The Pulse of Creation: God and the Transformation of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>18</sup>Sallie McFague, “Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence,” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 103.

<sup>19</sup>John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>20</sup>Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 75-76.

<sup>21</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 65.

<sup>22</sup>Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 75.

immutable stuff called matter but is built out of events. Creation also had no first moment, according to process theology, for God and creativity are co-eternal. This world has been created “out of the ashes of some temporally antecedent universe, and that both universes belong within an infinitely prolonged series of created universes that collectively fulfill the necessity of divine creativity, sociality, love, and embodiment.”<sup>23</sup> The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* fails to meet the rigors of rationality for process theologians, but more importantly, it fails to adequately support a mutual God-world relationship. If creation happened at a particular time, then there was a time in which God was independent of the world, and there may again be a time in which God is independent. Process theology, by rejecting *creatio ex nihilo*, seeks to maintain not only the world’s dependence on God but God’s relational dependence on the world.<sup>24</sup>

*Creatio ex nihilo*, however, need not be theologically chained to its historical origins, the creeds, or even biblical imagery.<sup>25</sup> This doctrine, like all others, needs to remain open to critique, correction, and reformulation. At this point, I am unconvinced by arguments which suggest the doctrine should be utterly abandoned. Biblically, while the Genesis narratives and other parts of the OT do not make explicit *creatio ex nihilo*, they do not prohibit such conclusions either. Brueggemann rightly argues that Genesis and other OT texts do not require, but do permit, us to expound a notion *creatio ex nihilo* from the OT.<sup>26</sup> Scientifically, “Big Bang” cosmology has caused both theologian and philosopher to reevaluate *ex nihilo*,<sup>27</sup> but, in the end, it

---

<sup>23</sup>Rem B. Edwards, “How Process Theology Can Affirm Creation Ex Nihilo,” *Process Studies* 29, no. 1 Spring-Summer 2000: 77 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3000>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2007.

<sup>24</sup>For a brief explanation of Process theism’s view of *creatio ex nihilo* in light of Open theism, see Nancy R. Howell, “Openness and Process Theism: Respecting the Integrity of the Two Views,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 72-78.

<sup>25</sup>Kenneth Mathews, while not supporting *creatio ex nihilo*, does not dismiss it either writing, “If the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is expounded here, it must be done from the tenor of the text and not from this [bārā] single lexical term. Elsewhere it is apparent that God created ex nihilo (e.g., 1:3).” While it is still debatable whether Gen. 1:3 denotes *creatio ex nihilo*, Mathews is correct in asserting that the “tenor” of the narrative can lend itself to further thinking on, and development of, *creatio ex nihilo*. See Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 129.

<sup>26</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 158.

<sup>27</sup>Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly suggest that Big Bang science does not serve as an “eyewitness” but as a “character witness” to God’s creating. They also note that such science, while supporting Christian models, pose a problem for Christian eschatology given the “freeze or fry” predictions. “Natural Law and Divine Action,” in *Bridging Science and Religion*, *Theology and the Sciences* (London: SCM, 2002), 55-59; 66-68. For an unwavering affirmation of modern physics’ support of creation out of nothing see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig who write, “At a minimum

needs to be affirmed that *creatio ex nihilo* is a theological statement of faith and one that cannot be finally settled by either the biblical witness or science.<sup>28</sup> It is a concept that must be upheld or rejected based on one's doctrine of God and the theology's coherence.

From the standpoint of relational theology, there is room to ask, "Why could not a passible God create the world *ex nihilo*? How would the mutability of God entail the falsity of *creatio ex nihilo*?"<sup>29</sup> Is there anything necessarily included in *creatio ex nihilo* which prevents the theologian from applying the doctrine to a relational theology? Because there is no one, hard and fast way to understand *creatio ex nihilo*, it is possible not only to accept the doctrine, but even to argue that it better serves a relational understanding of God. *Creatio ex nihilo* is a very fruitful notion with many possibilities for aiding in our understanding of God, and, even though, like the larger doctrine of creation, it may have produced more variety than unity,<sup>30</sup> there must be some things within this concept scholars can agree upon. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* can be stripped down to a basic concept upon which a variety of imaginative and resourceful notions can be built. Ward offers this most basic of understandings, "The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* simply maintains that there is nothing other than God from which the universe is made, and that the universe is other than God and wholly dependent upon God for its existence."<sup>31</sup> Langdon Gilkey offers this basic conception: "*creatio ex nihilo* means that God brought the finite world into being out of nothing through a 'purposive' act of His free will."<sup>32</sup> There are problems in uncritically affirming *creatio ex nihilo*, but there is also danger in denying it. To deny *creatio ex nihilo* means that one is left with the affirmation of either *creatio ex materia* (creation out of matter) or *creatio ex deo* (creation out of

---

we can say confidently that those who believe in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* will not find themselves contradicted by the empirical evidence of contemporary cosmology but on the contrary will be fully in line with it." See *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 248.

<sup>28</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 27.

<sup>29</sup>Interestingly these questions are asked by one who is critical of relational theism. See William Lane Craig, "Creatio Ex Nihilo," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987), 149.

<sup>30</sup>Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), 42. Gilkey states that the doctrine of creation may have more variety than unity but believes that the one central theological idea running through all Christian ideas of creation is *creatio ex nihilo*. Gilkey wrote this nearly a half century ago and one wonders if he would still affirm such a thought today.

<sup>31</sup>Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 290.

<sup>32</sup>Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, 43.

God), a choice between dualism and pantheism. Neither of these are acceptable, not only from the standpoint of traditional Christian theism but also from the point of a theology of God's faith. As will be demonstrated, creation (viewed from a theology of divine faith) must be a free act of the will (something those who affirm *creatio ex materia* deny) but faith also requires an "other" to trust which pantheism cannot supply. What needs to be worked out is a way to understand creation as a free and willful act of God which is born out of God's relational love. I propose each of these are preserved when creation is understood as an act of divine faith.

### Kenosis and Creation

Kenosis is the incarnational theory developed by nineteenth century Lutheran theologians which proclaims that the Divine Son or Logos "abandoned His attributes of deity, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and cosmic sovereignty, in order to become man."<sup>33</sup> This has, in recent years, been applied to God and the divine act of creation.<sup>34</sup> Kenosis is not limited to the second person of the trinity, nor is it limited to the incarnation. The self-denial of God began with creation, but reached its fulfillment in the incarnation.<sup>35</sup> Creation has often been understood as an act of divine power and sovereignty, and while this is not being denied, power and sovereignty are only part of the story. Another part is that creation is the product of divine love which shares power and fosters freedom. A kenotic creation allows for each of these truths, power and love, to be proclaimed in the creational acts of God. A kenotic creation also means that God acted in faith, for self-denial is a risky act that hopes and works toward a creation which produces the values God values. Kenosis is becoming less to allow the other to have power and freedom and this is an act of faith, even for the divine creator.

In exploring *creatio ex fide*, I will begin with Jürgen Moltmann's development of *creatio ex nihilo*. Moltmann begins by stating:

In order to create a world 'outside' himself, the infinite God must have made room beforehand for a finitude in himself. It is only a withdrawal by God into himself that can free the space into which God can act creatively. The *nihil* for

---

<sup>33</sup>"Kenotic Theories," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. E. A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 923.

<sup>34</sup>One such example is the collective work, *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (London: SPCK, 2001).

<sup>35</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 118. This will be further developed in the next chapter.

his *creatio ex nihilo* only comes into being because—and in as far as—the omnipotent and omnipresent God withdraws his presence and restricts his power.<sup>36</sup>

Moltmann employs the concept of *zimsum*,<sup>37</sup> a Kabbalistic doctrine of divine withdrawal into limited space. By God withdrawing the divine self, what comes into being, according to Moltmann, is *nihil* “which represents the partial negation of the divine Being... [and] comes into being and is set free by God’s self-limitation.”<sup>38</sup>

Moltmann is not primarily interested in developing an ontological description of *nihil* but instead focuses on the fact and implications of a divine withdrawal.<sup>39</sup> God’s creative activity is the result of a love which must first self-restrict and self-humiliate.

*Zimsum*, while a foreign notion to most modern Christians, makes perfect sense given the omnipresence of God. If there is no place where God is not, then it is problematic to speak of God creating something “other” than God without also speaking of God’s self-limitation. God has no boundaries in which the creation could be made to exist just beyond for God is infinite, without end. There was no “space” that was not completely “occupied” by the being of God. There was no co-existent and eternal void waiting to be filled by a creation, for only the full and complete presence of God without limit could exist. There was no limitation of presence for God. Pantheistic ontology was the pre-creational state of God. While it is still necessary to discuss pre-creational limits of divine power (for example, has it always been impossible for God to create another God more powerful than God’s self?) and divine knowledge (for example, has it always been impossible for God to know the future free thoughts and action of free creatures, even when they were only a conception in the mind of God?), there is no logic in advancing a necessary pre-creational limitation of God’s presence. For this reason God must create that which is

---

<sup>36</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 86-87.

<sup>37</sup>*Zimsum*, also spelled *tsimsum* and *zimzum*, historically, had two basic meanings. First it denoted, as in Moltmann’s usage, a divine self-limitation or withdrawal so that there could be a space for creation. *Zimsum* could also mean a divine constriction or shrinkage of power and presence so that divine word or speech could be given and understood in human speech. For more information, see Maureena Fritz, “A Midrash: The Self-Limitation of God,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 4 (fall 1985).

<sup>38</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 87. While Moltmann does not make this obvious, it seems clear this “space” is meant metaphorically. I do not believe Moltmann is suggesting that if one traveled to the end of the universe she would find God on the other side. Yet there is a literalness to God’s making room *in* the divine self. Also see Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 111-126.

<sup>39</sup>It would have been quite appropriate for Moltmann to make a connection between *nihil* and chaos but he does not. He does state that the *nihil* is a “God-forsaken space” of hell and absolute death. However, *nihil* only becomes menacing when created beings seek self-isolation, that is, sin and godlessness. See *God in Creation*, 87-88.

not God. God must become one in relation to another and not simply all. Yet, that which is not God exists “within” God, in the space created by the self-denying and self-humiliating power of God. This should not be understood as there being places God does not go or even dwell for God is “all in all,” and yet, God is other whose presence can advance and retreat. The issue at stake is that the creation is a genuine “other” from God that is free and autonomous. If the creation is not truly “other” than God, then creation and God are one in nature and pantheism remains. The creation is not a creation at all but simply an internal mutation in a pantheistic deity. *Creatio ex nihilo* and *zimsum* mean that God creates that which is not God (transcendence) but also a place in which God can truly dwell (imminence). God’s creation dwells within God and God dwells within the creation.<sup>40</sup> The space of creation is now a place in which the Spirit of God can shape and move and the Word of God reveal God to that which is not God. God created a space from which God “withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation.”<sup>41</sup>

The act of creation, if God is omnipresent and creation is something other than a pantheistic emanation, is an act of divine self-restriction, self-humiliation, and self-emptying. But, also, if the creation is a kenotic self-denial, must it not also be an act of faith? This act of radical self-denial in order for an “other” to exist, not only with God but in opposition to God, is risky business. God brought about creation by becoming limited in order to reflect the divine image but this means granting the ability and possibility for creation to distort the divine image. God’s willingness to become self-limited and experience finitude first hand can only be an act of faith. God trusts that this risky act will not be in vain and the purpose of creation not fail.

### Creation and Other

Paul Sponheim suggests that to speak of “other” means to speak of “someone or something meeting us truly from outside—outside our skin, our thinking, our believing, our world.”<sup>42</sup> We should all be able to understand this given that we encounter otherness every day. But should we assume that this otherness is reserved for the human alone? Not at all, for God is not simply other to us, we are other to God. In this sense, “other” need not mean “Wholly Other” for even two items which

---

<sup>40</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 119-124.

<sup>41</sup>Ephraim E. Urback, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 189-191; quoted in Fritz, “A Midrash,” 705.

<sup>42</sup>Paul R. Sponheim, *Faith and the Other: A Relational Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), v.



are identical in every way are still other by virtue of being ontologically two and not one. Thus, while creation may reflect divine goodness and be the image and likeness of God, it is nonetheless other. God too is “other,” but, unlike creation, God’s otherness is not essential to God’s being but freely chosen. God, unlike creation, had no need to be “other” for otherness was completely at God’s discretion. However, otherness was necessary if God were to be creator for there is no alternative path by which God can be creator but not be “other.” Even if God had chosen to create only that which is static and wholly determined, that in which there is no relationship of mutual fellowship, God would still be other. Only if God sought to retain pantheistic existence can otherness be eschewed, but in this case there could be no free and autonomous creation but simply an extension of God’s very being. In both cases, there is only determinism and certainly no need or expression of faith.

“[I]n creation God wills to be in relationship, God wills to know otherness...To know otherness is to receive or take in that which is other.”<sup>43</sup> In this sense, then, God knows the creation as an other but also knows otherness in God’s own being. God knows what it is like to be “other” both by the existence of creation and also by God’s relationship with creation. Prior to creation, God was all, God was pantheistic, but in the kenotic event of creation God chose to be other and experience the joys and stings of otherness. And while God has not always been other, God will now, forever, and always know otherness. For the world of humans, being other is not a free act of faith for it never was and never will be an option for any to choose. Humans, by virtue of being created, are other, but, for God, becoming other meant that God freely chose to be other, to limit the divine self in an act of creation. God created the other to be and even if this meant it would be something over and against God.<sup>44</sup>

God must create other and become other if God is to be creator. That is, God cannot create without creating that which is different, distinct, and other from God. To speak of God as creator, but eliminate the truly other, is to undermine the meaning of creator. If dualism is true and God and “chaos” are co-eternal, then we can certainly speak of the creativity of God when God acted upon the chaos to form and shape it into this world; but we cannot speak of God as creator in the fullest and most glorious sense. Likewise, creativity applies to God if this world exists as a pantheistic emanation of God, but, because there is nothing new, nothing other, God cannot

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

properly or fully be called creator. Yet, if by creator we mean God gave existence to that which had no existence and gave it existence within God's self, then it seems we must speak of God creating the other out of love and faith. Out of love for it is from this nature that God creates, out of overflowing love, but also from faith for God must give up part of who or what God is to allow for an other to coexist. God's kenotic act of creation in which God made space within the divine self is God's first graceful act of sacrifice. In a note of irony, God's love is not limited to that which is but is a love for that which is not yet. God's love was for the other before the other ever was. God's love brought the other into existence. As mentioned above, God became other by the creational act but along with otherness came relationship. God creates out of love and power, and, in faith, God relates to creation.

Relationship is the logical result of a loving act of creation. God created in order to relate. Relationship to creation is not a byproduct or afterthought but the loving and purposeful reason for creation. God sought to love that which was other than God and, by God's power, created and now relates to creation in faith. Saying that relationship logically followed creation, however, does not suggest that relationship is new to God. Theologians have long maintained that God has existed eternally in the triune relationship of love. As Moltmann says, "Because he not only loves but is himself love, he has to be understood as the triune God. Love cannot be consummated by a solitary subject. An individuality cannot communicate itself: individuality is ineffable, unutterable. If God is love he is at once the lover, the beloved and the love itself."<sup>45</sup> Eternally being lover, beloved, and love itself means that God has been eternally relational but God has not always been lover of that which is other. God has not eternally been the beloved of the other. And God has not eternally been the love freely flowing between God's self and the other and as an other. This is a type of love God had not experienced, a risky love that involves passion and the joy of surprise. Prior to creation, God never loved that which was not guaranteed to offer love in return. The point I am making is that to create in love is to create relationships and relationships of love with the other always demand faith. God's creation of the other was an act of faith and an entering into relationships of faith. God willed to be creator, an act in faith, but God also acted in a way in which would change the kinds of relationship and love God had known. Relationships of love with an other are always relationships of and for faith. Certainly, these actions

---

<sup>45</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 57.

are linked to God's love but love without faith is distant and ineffective. God's first loving act of creation is to become something other than God was in that the divine self creates finitude within and of God's self. For God to become self-limited and make space for finitude means that God experiences finitude within God's self and in a paradoxical way becomes finite. God is finite for there is the space of creation within God. God's finitude was complete in the incarnation but began in the creation. Can this be understood as anything less than love? Can a love, which is expressed in God's willingness to create and enter into radical newness and diversity, be anything less than faith? To radically alter what one is, in the hope that new forms of love and goodness can be created and experience, appears to be faith in its fullest. This is what relational love is, the hope and faith that by entering into relationship with the other new forms of goodness and new experiences of love can come from the union. But there is always the risk that the other will not return the love given and so the creation of relationships is an act of faith for faith for God must trust that the other will return love for love given and goodness for freedom.

In scripture, the call to faith is a call to be something other than we are. It is by faith that the sick came to Jesus for healing and were transformed into something other than they were prior to their healing. It is by faith that one's sins are forgiven and one becomes other in the cleansing. It is by faith that one is open to the Holy Spirit and becomes other by being filled. By faith come justification, righteousness, freedom, confidence, and power. In short, by faith we become a new creature, a new being, something other than we were (2 Cor. 5:17). In a similar fashion, God's becoming other is also born out of faith. While human faith brings otherness by renewal, faithfully loving God, and receiving the love of God, divine faith made God other by creating beings who are free to love and accept God's love but who are also able to reject the divine plans of goodness for creation. God's faith in the other is faith as an other.

#### Freedom Verses Security

From a kenotic viewpoint, God's choice to create was a choice to become self-limited and self-humiliated. God's choice to create that which is other and which can oppose God and the divine will means that God chose to limit God's own power in choosing to be other. But should we include in this set of divine limitations a limitation on freedom? Was the act of creating an act in which God limits divine freedom and if so was this a free act of restraint?

First it should be noted that, just as there can be no such thing as absolute power, there can be no absolute freedom. Relational theists have shown that God as omnipotent being cannot do anything but God can do all things logically possible for an omnipotent being to do. For example, God is not so powerful that God can create that which is even more powerful than God's self. That, by definition, is logically impossible. In that same sense, God cannot have an absolute freedom for this would be illogical. For example, God's freedom is limited by God's own nature. God is not absolutely free to act or become that which is contradictory to the divine nature. Likewise, God was not free to choose the divine nature but God is free to act in all ways in harmony with that nature. As Ward writes, "God must have a given nature, which is not chosen, but which God possesses of necessity. It does not make sense to suppose that God chooses the divine nature completely, since there must already be a choosing nature in existence to make such a choice."<sup>46</sup> God's freedom, then, is constrained only by God's own nature. God cannot do that which is not in God's nature, for example do something contradictory to love. God's power, however, permits God to create situations in which love and faith have opportunities for divine expression.

For creation to be an act of faith, it needs to be a choice, not a necessity. Faith is not a compulsory attribute. In fact, anything that is necessary is not free and anything not done in freedom is not done in faith. Faith cannot be forced even if actions which appear to be trusting can be forced. At gunpoint, a person can be made to leap off a building and into a net below but this is not an act of faith. The jumper is avoiding gunshot, not trusting the net or the person compelling the jump. Faith is an act of self-giving and freely trusting someone other than the self. If creation is an act of faith, it cannot have been compelled. Therefore, if creation is not compelled, it is an act of faith.

Process theologians maintain that creation is not only necessary for God but is an eternal activity. As stated above God is not free to contradict God's own nature and if God is by nature loving and creative then, according to process thinkers, God must be eternally creating. Process affirms a creation out of chaos, chaos being understood as "very low-grade actual occasions happening at random."<sup>47</sup> These actual occasions are not matter but they are primordial "stuff" out of which God is said to have created the world. By having this random and chaotic stuff from which

---

<sup>46</sup>Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 171.

<sup>47</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 65.

creation is formed (or persuaded<sup>48</sup>), process theology argues that God can be understood as being eternally creative because “creativity is primordial, not created.”<sup>49</sup> And, according to Griffin, both God and the chaos of actual occasions are each embodied with primordial creativity.<sup>50</sup> For process thinkers, this means that God has been creating eternally and will continue to create eternally as well for there is no final telos of creation.<sup>51</sup> Hartshorne argues that God is absolute but this should not be understood as meaning that at any time God was without relationship to the creation. The creation’s outcome may be contingent but not the fact of creation. “In any case, God might be essentially ‘creator,’ incapable of not creating, though perfectly capable of not creating this or that creature—any creature you choose.”<sup>52</sup> God cannot be God without a creative outlet and since God has eternally been God creation is eternal.<sup>53</sup> For the process approach, God is in no way free not to create for this would be a denial of God’s essential self.<sup>54</sup>

If God is not free to choose between creating or not creating, can creation be an act of faith for the process theologian? In a limited sense, the answer is yes. While creation itself cannot be an act of faith, given that God is compelled by creativity itself to create, God can and will exercise faith in the free creatures God has been

---

<sup>48</sup>For more information on the process approach to creation through persuasion see Griffin, “Process Theology and the Christian Good News,” 27-32.

<sup>49</sup>David Ray Griffin, *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 87.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>It also means that logically God is a creature of creativity. As Ward writes, “Whitehead at least once misleadingly spoke of God as ‘the primordial creature’ and of creativity itself as ‘the ultimate.’” *Religion and Creation*, 177. While Whitehead does not state the matter quite so succinctly he does refer to God as, “the primordial creature” and creativity as “that ultimate notion of the highest generality at the base of actuality.” Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31. Griffin writes, “Whereas God is the ultimate actuality of the universe, creativity is the ultimate reality...” Griffin, “Process and the Christian Good News,” 26.

<sup>52</sup>Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 74.

<sup>53</sup>Also, because creation and creativity require a divine limitation, God is not self-limited, that is God did not at a particular moment become limited but is metaphysically limited by necessity.

<sup>54</sup>The idea that God must create in order to be creative misses the distinction between an ability and an essence. Love is an example of a trait that is more than an ability but a virtue which is only real in its active manifestation. One cannot say they love without actually loving someone. But one can be creative without ever having demonstrated that ability. To do something creative is not to become creative but to discover one’s creativity. Also, to refuse to act in a creative manner is not to deny one’s actual creativity but simply to refrain from this ability. Creativity then is like power, for power need not be demonstrated for it to be actual. A person can be powerful without using or demonstrating power. I may have the power to lift 100 kg but choosing not to do so would not mean the power and ability were not real. Creativity then is an ability God has whether God uses it or not.

compelled to create.<sup>55</sup> God's faith is found in how God relates to a creation which exists necessarily. So, from a process approach, while creation itself cannot be a work of faith, God will nonetheless take chances and employ faith in God's dealings with creation.<sup>56</sup>

Paul Fiddes, like process thinkers, believes that creation is necessary, but, unlike process, he contends that God was not compelled by an outside agency (like the process "creativity") to create.<sup>57</sup> Fiddes argues that God freely chooses to make creation necessary even though "God does not 'need' the world in the sense that there is some intrinsic necessity in his nature, binding his free choice...but that he does need the world in the sense that he has freely chosen to be in need."<sup>58</sup> God chooses to create, but God's choice is a choice of self-completion.<sup>59</sup> Without creation, God would be incomplete and thus, Fiddes creates the paradoxical notion of "necessary choice." It was necessary, then, that God choose to create, for, if God had not made such a choice, God would have been incomplete, and thus, not truly God. Even though Fiddes is attempting to smuggle freedom and choice into the creation, it is nonetheless undermined by his conclusion that God's choice to create was a necessity. Because creation was necessary, it cannot fully have been an act of faith.

Both process thought and Fiddes argue that creation was not a truly free act, even though there are elements of divine freedom in the act of creation.<sup>60</sup> God was free to give creation one form or another but was not free to not create. God is also free to act upon creation and with creation in its current state but again was not free to choose whether creation would be or not be. However, if creation is understood as an act of faith, and an act in which God risks, even when it was not necessary, we see creation, not only as an act of freedom but as an act *for* freedom. Creation is not only an act out of love and creativity but also an act for new expressions and experiences

---

<sup>55</sup>Hartshorne states that "God takes chances with free creatures" but this is not the same as taking a chance with creation from nothing. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 71.

<sup>56</sup>Even suggesting that God, while not having faith in the act of creation, has faith in creatures is a bit shaky for God is in no position not to trust humanity. God is forced to trust for in process theology God has not the ability to act unilaterally. God is compelled to trust which necessitates the question whether the process understanding of God allows for divine trust.

<sup>57</sup>Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 135. Fiddes not only disagrees with process for subordinating God to the principle of creativity but also rightly challenges process for undercutting the notion of divine commitment to suffering.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>60</sup>Fiddes also agrees with the process position that creation was not truly *ex nihilo* but instead created out of God's will and love...and a "material universe that coexists eternally with God." *Ibid.*, 75.

of divine love and creativity. It is a creation out of faith for faith. It is an act from faith which provides new opportunities for God to express and exercise faith.

Creation can be understood as the divine choice of freedom over security.<sup>61</sup> God was not compelled to create for God was and is complete without a creation. Those who ascribe to a social understanding of the trinity have argued that God is fully relational love in the triunity of the Godhead. Pinnock speaks of God's triunity as there being no more than one God but that this one God is not solitary "but a loving communion that is distinguished by overflowing life."<sup>62</sup> Stanley Grenz argues that the creation flowed out of the eternal love of God which existed in completeness in the triune relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

[W]e must not see in this desire to create an internal compulsion placed upon God which demands that he create. Rather, God's love is already complete within the Trinity apart from the act of creation...precisely because creation is God's loving act, it is free, voluntary, and non necessary...Because God is the trinitarian community of love, God need not create the world to actualize his character.<sup>63</sup>

As noted above, the divine realm can be thought of as a place of pantheistic enjoyment. God is all there is and everything that is. Prior to creation, there could be no conflict, no suffering, no division, no object, no disorder, no confusion, no other, no sin, no evil, and no death. This also means that, within the precreational Godhead, there was no risk. But also prior to creation, there is no way in which to act upon divine freedom. Freedom means opportunities and choice, not just ability. Without the creation of choices, there was no way in which God could act upon God's freedom. While it can be said that God was ontologically free, just as God was creative, God's freedom was limited in expression. What is even better than being free is acting on one's freedom. God freely chose to risk God's own well being and security to exercise faith and freely love in new and creative ways, ways that did not exist prior to the creation. God was not dissatisfied with this existence for existence prior to creation was full and complete, but, in creating, God fashioned new opportunities for creativity, love, and faith itself. God made a situation in which God could do more than be but, in faith, God chose to become.

---

<sup>61</sup>I am indebted to Hal Shrader for the imagery of "freedom verses security." See, *Freedom Versus Security in the Theology of Dorothee Soelle* (M.A. thesis, Pepperdine University, 1998).

<sup>62</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>63</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 101.

We should not confuse aseity with static existence. God can desire without God's necessary existence being challenged. God having unfulfilled desires does not mean that God's essential being or existence is in question any more than human desires challenge human existence. Desires for freedom, creativity, and new expressions of love are not the same as God needing such things for a continued existence. Certainly, humans have needs that if unfulfilled mean death (i.e. food, water, oxygen) and God does not and cannot have such needs. However, it is possible to speak of God needing one thing or another if God desires a particular state of being which is not possible without that thing. For example, God needs a created universe if God desires to exercise divine creativity. God needs free creatures if God desires to be loved by someone other than the Godhead. God needs to create a universe of free beings if God desires to exercise divine freedom. And God needs to act in faith if God desires to act in freedom and creative love. God "needs it [the universe], in that he would not be completely what he is without it; though he need not have been just what he is in every respect."<sup>64</sup> Fiddes states, "Thus God needs the world 'in a qualified sense'; he does not need it to be himself, but he needs it to be what he chooses to be. He does not need it to be good; but he needs it to be good in a particular way he has chosen to be good, that is in expressing love to others."<sup>65</sup> God is complete without creation but this does not mean God cannot increase and be increased by creation. Creation is a freely chosen source of God's desired growth and becoming.

God had the freedom to remain in the bliss and security of the pantheistic triune completeness. God was not compelled by the divine nature to create, but this does not mean God was not drawn to create. God's nature is love, and this nature was complete without a creation but in creating it was freed to be more than complete. God became empty in order to be more, more than complete. God is overflowing love. Just as the first shall be last, and the least the greatest, God's nature is one in which God increases by decreasing. Love is only truly love when it is given. Love is most loving when there is self-sacrifice and denial for the other. Likewise then God as love becomes most godly when God denies the divine self. By denying the self, God becomes even godlier, even though God was never in want of godliness. If God were not to deny God's self, God would be less than who God is and who God is becoming. By God creating and choosing freedom over security, God, in faith,

---

<sup>64</sup>Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 144.

<sup>65</sup>Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 69.



fulfilled the divine nature in kenosis. As Ward states:

this sort of kenosis is not just a self-giving. It is also, and equally importantly, a self-realization, a way in which God realizes possibilities that are eternally present in the divine being, and comes to experience new forms of value that otherwise would never have been actualized. When God gives up pure bliss, he obtains in return many new sorts of values that could only be actualized in a cosmic process from which finite agents emerge.<sup>66</sup>

Again, it should not be suggested that God needed to become empty to be God, but that, in becoming empty, God became even more godly, thus, further fulfilling God's own nature.

This brings us back to security, freedom, and faith. God's act of creation should be understood as a radical act of faith. God gave up the safety and security of the Godhead and denied God's self in order to express goodness, love, and creativity in ways unavailable without creation. This was and is a continued act of faith. God risked God's own wellbeing, happiness, and bliss in the hope of bringing about even greater happiness and bliss. In faith, God risked nearly all (except God's own necessary existence, something even God cannot do) in order to be free in new and lovingly creative ways. By creating free beings, God's love was free to be expressed in ways not possible prior to creation. God is now free to grant mercy, extend grace, and offer forgiveness. God is now free to watch and wait as the universe itself evolves and develops value-understanding persons. But all this freedom was born out of the faith to risk and chance that creation could facilitate even more goodness, love, and creativity than existed in the safety and security of the Godhead.

I am not suggesting that God would not have exercised faith if God had chosen not to create. Faith is a "forced option" whether God created or not.<sup>67</sup> If God did not know the absolute future of the material creation, then not creating would also have been an act of faith. If God's desire in creating was to bring about new and greater forms of goodness but, because of creation's freedom, God could not absolutely know the final outcome, then God's choice to not create and remain in the

---

<sup>66</sup>Keith Ward, "Cosmos and Kenosis," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 158.

<sup>67</sup>By this, it is meant, in the language of William James, that God's choice to create or not create was an act of faith regardless of the actual path taken. There was something to lose and gain by creating or by not creating. For God, creation was a living, forced, and momentous choice. It was a living option for the choice was real. It was forced for God had two mutually exclusive options, to create or not create. God could not choose not to choose for in not choosing a choice is made. Lastly, it was not a trivial but a momentous choice for the stakes were high and, as noted above, quite risky. For more information about faith as a forced option, see William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1948).

unchanged Godhead would have also been an act of faith. God, facing an unknowable creation as pure potentiality, could not know if it would be what God desired and, thus, not to create would have been an act of faith because God would have chosen to do without creation believing that the creation would not be what God desired it to be. God would have trusted that the current reality of the pantheistic Godhead was better than self-humiliation and self-emptying. If there was a “time” in which God did not create prior to God’s act of creation, this state was lived out in faith given God’s choice to not create until the actual “time” of creation.<sup>68</sup> Regardless, God acted in faith by either creating or not creating, but, given our state of being, we can clearly know that God’s faith was expressed by risking in creation.

Lastly, *creatio ex nihilo* should also be understood as an act of divine faith because God can never again be what God was prior to creation. Even for God, there is no going home. Some might protest, suggesting that God’s omnipotence allows God to uncreate, to utterly destroy that which exists, and return it to *nihil*. While God has the power to utterly destroy, God can never uncreate the fact that God became creator and other. God cannot uncreate the experiences and memories formed by this act of creation. God cannot uncreate what God has become in freely expressing God’s nature as creator. For this reason, creation was a radical act of faith. God risked God’s very being and future in becoming a creator of a free creation. In creating from kenosis, God’s experiences of self-denial, self-humiliation, and self-emptying changed who God will be forevermore. At this point, I am not suggesting that this universe is the first or only universe ever created. God may have created millions prior to this one and may create millions more, but God at some point, given the Christian doctrine of creation, became a creator and forever changed God’s being.

### **Creatio Continua**

As noted above, a competing approach to the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* is the notion that creation is an eternal act. Sometimes referred to as *creatio continua*, the idea is that God and God’s creative acts, and thus some form of creation, are co-eternal.<sup>69</sup> *Creatio continua*, however, need not be understood as a theory or analogy rivaling *creatio ex nihilo*. *Creatio continua* is not a corrective of *ex nihilo* for each on

---

<sup>68</sup>I am not suggesting that God before, or even since, creation exists in and experiences time in the exact manner humans do, but I would suggest with all relational theists that God has a history and a future.

<sup>69</sup>In the field of science, this discussion is not couched in *creatio ex nihilo* verses *creatio continua* but might be couched as Big Bang theory versus Steady-State theory.

its own is deficient in fully explaining God's creative acts or creation. I suggest, with Moltmann, that *creation continua* means "the continuous sustaining of the creation which was once brought into being."<sup>70</sup> Brunner suggests that *creatio continua* can be understood as the recognition that "God is still actively and creatively at work in a world which He has already created, and which He preserves."<sup>71</sup> The doctrine of *creatio continua* serves to reject the deistic notion of a God who creates and then abandons the divine work. It rejects the notion that "God's only creative act was at the beginning of a static, deterministic world."<sup>72</sup> I will not discuss these doctrines being in opposition but that "Together *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continua* form complementary models of interpreting the central theological insight that God the Creator is both transcendent to and immanent in all creation."<sup>73</sup>

God is not simply the one time creator of the heavens and the earth, nor is God simply the manager of a completed creation. God is the continuing creator and sustainer of all things in existence.<sup>74</sup> Fretheim argues that too often God's continuing relationship with creation is understood as sustainer or preserver alone, but this distorts the fact that open-endedness and unpredictability are fundamental aspects of this creation. Creation has a balance to it in that the creation is stable and reliable while at the same time being made new at each moment. There is a "development of the creation through time and space, to the emergence of genuinely new realities in an increasingly complex world."<sup>75</sup>

The creation narratives of Genesis can be interpreted as God creating over time. Creation is not a once and for all event but a process. While the scientific theory of a creation taking place over billions of years does not neatly correspond to the six days of creation in Genesis, there is nonetheless the idea of a progressive creation in the text. Each day of creation builds upon the work of the previous day. The sun, moon, and stars can do their work only because of the prior separation of light from darkness. The fish of the sea and birds of the air can only exist because of the separation of the waters above from the waters below. Animals, and humans as

---

<sup>70</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 209.

<sup>71</sup>Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 34.

<sup>72</sup>Robert John Russell, "Cosmology: Evidence for God or Partner for Theology?" in *Evidence of Purpose: Scientists Discover the Creator*, ed. John Marks Templeton (New York: Continuum, 1994), 74.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>74</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 7.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

well, can only exist and multiply because of the previous work of separating the seas from the land and the development of vegetation. The second creation narrative too is a progressive or continuing story in which creation is not created in an instant but over a period of time. In Genesis 2, Adam is created from the dust of the earth. A garden is then created within which Adam is placed. A partner is needed for the man and so animals are created from the dust of the ground, but, when no suitable partner is found in these creatures, God creates woman from the rib of man. These are not stories of creation which are then followed by the rest of the story; these are the stories of the *beginnings* of creation. Sponheim argues that the Genesis text suggests that “the Creator from the beginning intended that it be so—that there be change, development, drama...at the end of the sixth day God’s life with the other is not finished. It is well begun...indeed, very well begun.”<sup>76</sup>

Arthur Peacocke reminds us that the idea of God creating once, long ago, is incomplete:

Any notion of God as Creator must now assert that God is continuously creating, continuously giving existence to what is new; that God is *semper Creator*; that the world is *creatio continua*. The traditional notions of God sustaining the world in its general order and structure now has to be replaced by one with a dynamic and creative dimension—a model of God giving continuous existence to a process that has an inbuilt creativity, built into it by God and manifest in a ‘time’ itself given existence by God.<sup>77</sup>

Peacocke is not just arguing for God’s continuing creation but a creation by means of natural evolutionary processes. The scientific theories of planetary and biological evolution point not only to a continuing creation but a creator who creates out of faith.

### Faith in an Evolving Creation

Creation by the processes of evolution can at times seem counter intuitive to the idea of a loving and all-powerful God. Evolution has been branded “red in tooth and claw” and not necessarily out of small-mindedness.<sup>78</sup> Theologians who believe that evolution is a theory irreconcilable with an omnipotent creator mock all such sciences for these sciences do not reveal in nature the kind of power many theologians

---

<sup>76</sup>Sponheim, *The Pulse of Creation*, 25.

<sup>77</sup>Arthur Peacocke, “The Cost of New Life,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (London: SPCK, 2001), 23.

<sup>78</sup>While it is true that evolution comes at the cost of life, the other laws of nature are no less responsible for countless deaths. Gravity has taken the life of countless creatures, human and animal, but it is not derided for such results. Also, evolution is not the cause of suffering but simply reveals in previously unknown ways suffering and struggle that has been taking place since the beginning of life.

believe God should have. Similarly, some reject evolution citing that a God of love would not use a method so thoroughly built upon “struggle” and death.<sup>79</sup> One answer to this problem is the very thesis of this work; God should be understood by more than simply the metaphor of love or power. While classical theists emphasize power as the ruling model for God’s providence, the relational theists argue that love is the very essence of God and the creational works. However, I see no reason to reduce God to either of these metaphors at the expense of the other. God is love and power, but God is also creativity, justice, mercy, and faith. And, thus, while love and power alone present obstacles for the reconciliation of creation and evolution, a non-reductionistic approach which sees love and power working in concert can help bridge the two concepts. The introduction of faith to the story of creation and evolution, however, will add one more sorely needed concept, for faith is the necessary element which keeps power from being sheer domination and love from being mere sentimentality.

The theory of evolution presents us with an understanding of an ongoing creational event that has no end in the near future. To understand God as creator in the twenty first century means to understand God working in and through evolutionary processes.<sup>80</sup> For many science-minded theologians, this has led to a relational reformulation of the doctrine of God. Evolution has led to reformulations of divine omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability. If the creation reveals the nature of its creator, then we get a thoroughly different picture of God than that found in classical theism. As Polkinghorne states, “If we learn anything about the character of the Creator from what science can tell us about the history of this creation, it is surely that God is patient and subtle, content to work through unfolding process and not by sudden intervention of arbitrary powers.”<sup>81</sup> The picture of God we get from the information provided by evolution is a God who does not create alone out of absolute power but a God who gives a great amount of autonomy to the cosmos and helps or leads it into creation and eventually completion. This must, as Polkinghorne

---

<sup>79</sup>John Haught sees the problems of God’s power and God’s love as the two most significant challenges to reconciling evolution and the Christian faith. For more information, see *Response to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001), 10-11.

<sup>80</sup>Arthur Peacocke writes, “If one asks where do we see God-as-Creator during, say, the processes of biological evolution, one has to reply: ‘The processes themselves, as unveiled by the biological sciences, are God-acting-as-Creator, God *qua* Creator.’” See “The Cost of new Life,” 23.

<sup>81</sup>John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 158. See also *Living with Hope: A Scientist Looks at Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 36.

writes, be a patient God to allow the creation to unfold over great lengths of time with many wrong turns and dead-ends. This God is not only a patient God but one who must have faith, not only in the divine self to create such a world through these processes but in the creation itself which is free and creative in its own development. Evolution does not necessarily suggest an absent or distant God who creates the initial conditions of creation and then moves on, but it does give reason to understand God as a creator who gives room for creation to grow and develop much of the time on its own terms. This is what faithful lovers do. They trust their beloved, giving them the space and freedom to be and become.<sup>82</sup> This is why God chose to self-limit omnipotence and omniscience, out of a love for and faith in the creation.

The evolutionary picture of the world is one of chance, change, and random mutations. Over the span of 15 billion years, planets form, the earth becomes hospitable to life, and creatures appear. Simple life forms evolved into ecosystems which produced more complex organisms that eventually became self-conscious. From the simplest of cells came communities of men and women who think, laugh, dream, pray, and wonder. Evolutionary systems are built upon the ideas of chance and law, randomness and information. This approach to life and its development necessitates an open future in which there are a myriad of possibilities. It also necessitates that each moment of the present be the product of its own history. And while evolution itself means change, the world is not pure flux but an interesting steadiness within the flux and instability within the confines of stability. It is unity within the diversity and diversity within unity. Theologians and theistic-minded scientists regularly argue that the evidence for evolution reveals that creation could not have been micromanaged by God. The process is wasteful and competitive, two things difficult to reconcile with a micro-managing deity. It is for these reasons that creation has been linked to the concept of a kenotic God. God has limited God's self to give the space and power for creation to be its own co-creator with God. But if God chooses to empty God's self to create through evolutionary processes, then we must also see that God chose to have faith in the creation.

To speak of God having faith in the evolutionary processes does not mean God is removed from the process of creation and creativity. God should not be understood as an observant bystander in the history of evolution. Such a view speaks of a deistic being who set the creation on its course, but this picture is incompatible

---

<sup>82</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (London: SPCK, 2001), 147.

with a God of faith who cares for the creation and has a purpose in and for its development. The God of faith is a God of careful creativity in which the divine seeks to be involved in the life of the creation while sharing power with creation and giving it autonomy. Using the image of a loving parent, it is necessary for a parent to lead and guide a child into maturity, and yet this leading is not done through compulsion for that is counter to the goal of a parent who wishes to raise a child who is free to make good choices. A loving parent is not absent, leaving the child to make all choices on its own, but seeks to guide and influence the child into all goodness. This is how God can be understood as creator and sustainer of an evolving creation. If there is purpose in this creative act that God has chosen, and if God's desire is to bring about rational creatures capable of creating good and knowing values, then God, as a loving parent, must be a part of the creational process and not simply the one who establishes the materials from which creation will develop. God's creative purpose is to create a creative world capable of love, but this means that God must be relationally involved in the creational activity of evolution. If God's will is to have faith with the world, then God must also create with the world. The world's evolutionary history, while having many dead-ends, has nonetheless produced self-aware beings who can recognize and create values such as love, creativity, justice, kindness, and trust—beings who can receive and return love. The processes of evolution have produced loving, creative, and faithful beings. But is it wise to speak of evolution alone bringing about such diversity and complexity? This is not merely a scientific question but a theological one. Can we presume that God let the creation on its own find goodness and value? It seems necessary to suggest that “a continuing causal activity of God seems the best explanation of the progress towards greater consciousness and intentionality that one sees in the actual course of the evolution of life on earth.”<sup>83</sup> My intent is not to use God as an explanatory hypothesis for complexity and self-consciousness but to argue that a loving God of faith is best understood as a God who is involved as a guiding cause of the growth and development of the world and humanity.

Peacocke believes that we can logically speak of God's interaction with, and influence upon, the world in a way that preserves the world's autonomy. He proposes a “top-down” or “whole-part” causation. Causation is typically thought of as “bottom-up” in which the parts determine the whole. The whole is merely a system of

---

<sup>83</sup>Keith Ward, *God, Chance & Necessity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 78.

low-level units. Yet, in a “top-down” model, the parts are caused or influenced by the whole system, which includes both God and the universe. Peacocke argues that “changes at the micro-level, that of the constituent units, are what they are *because* of their incorporation into the system as a whole, which is exerting specific constraints on its units, making them behave otherwise than they would in isolation.”<sup>84</sup> On a “top-down” model, God relates to the world as a whole on innumerable levels. God’s influence and relation to creation is like that, analogously, between the mind and the body.<sup>85</sup> A “top-down” causation respects the causal influence of the laws of nature and the world’s history without eliminating God’s presence in those laws and influence at all levels of creation.

Howard Van Till, like Peacocke, wishes to avoid the shortcomings of an either/or approach to creation being either “episodic creationism” or “evolutionary naturalism.” Van Till proposes that we understand nature as “optimally gifted,” meaning that “the universe is sufficiently robust to make possible the actualization of all inanimate structures and all life forms that have ever appeared in the course of time.”<sup>86</sup> While Van Till’s objective is to show that, in science, there is no need to appeal to miracle when there are epistemological gaps in the sciences, he does believe God is active in the creation process even now. “I believe God acts by calling upon the creation to employ its creaturely capabilities to bring about a fruitful outcome, and that *the fruitful character of creation’s formational history is the manifestation of that divine calling.*”<sup>87</sup> In this way, God is active in the creational process but not in a scientifically observable “cause and effect” scenario. In many ways, Van Till’s approach echoes process theology’s concept of God luring<sup>88</sup> creation into greater

---

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming, Natural and Divine*, Signposts in Theology (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 53-54. Peacocke adds that “top-down” causation does not eliminate “bottom-up.” He suggests a dual characteristic or two-way causation in which both can be explored and yet neither eliminated or reduced to a mere explanation or method of exploration.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-160. Peacocke employs a panenteistic model of God to help facilitate this top-down model of causation.

<sup>86</sup> Howard J. Van Till, “The Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped,” *Theology Today* 55, no. 3 (October 1998): 351. See also Howard F. Van Till, “Partnership: Science & Christian Theology as Partners in Theorizing” in *Science & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 215.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>88</sup> Whitehead speaks of God’s influence on “creation” (which is without beginning or end) when he states that at the “initial stage of its aim is an endowment which the subject inherits from the inevitable ordering of things, conceptually realized in the nature of God.” Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 244. Cobb and Griffin understand Whitehead essentially to be saying, “God is that factor in the universe which establishes what-is-not as relevant to what-is, and lures the world toward new forms of realization.” Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 43.



manifestations of complexity. The difference is that Van Till believes God has an ultimate purpose for creation while process sees no ultimate end for this creation because creativity is both the means and the ends.<sup>89</sup>

God's faith in an evolving creation does not mean that God simply provided the material and set creation "free" to do its thing. God created with a specific purpose and has been guiding creation over these 15 billion years. God's act of creation has not ended for "God does not create merely by calling something into existence, or by setting afoot. In a more profound sense he 'creates' by letting-be, by making room, and by withdrawing himself."<sup>90</sup> God is not the micro-manager but the lover who wishes to share the power of creation because God trusts that the creation will hear the divine voice and follow God's lure. It is a beautiful picture of a God who gives freedom without abandoning, who loves without smothering creative expression. It is the picture of a God who has faith with the creation.

#### Faith in Chance

The fossil record shows that the history of evolutionary movement has not been a straight line. Quantum physicists have demonstrated that, at the most basic of subatomic levels, randomness appears to be built into the structure of the universe. Randomness and chance are key to the novelty the earth displays.<sup>91</sup> But isn't chance simply counter to purpose and design? Can a God of faith trust a world of chance events and random happenings? Doesn't faith require stability and rationality?

Chance is not the notion that anything is possible. Chance means that there is an inherent unpredictability in the natural processes at their lower levels. These processes cannot be mapped out exactly ahead of time, not even by God. However, there are limits to what might happen by chance due to the existence of natural laws or necessity. Chance and law interplay, Polkinghorne argues, in a way that makes for "the fruitful history of the universe."<sup>92</sup> Polkinghorne says that chance does not turn evolution into a "cosmic lottery" and its presence does not make history absurd.<sup>93</sup> Likewise law or necessity need not mean that all things happen exactly as God willed.

---

<sup>89</sup> Another difference is that Van Till does not seem to understand God as being unable to act unilaterally.

<sup>90</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 88.

<sup>91</sup> Edwards, *The God of Evolution*, 45.

<sup>92</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 39.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Law gives meaning to chance making it creative without being purely chaotic. In this sense, we could say that God does not eliminate chance, but God does limit it. Likewise, evolution does not mean the elimination of necessity but breadth in necessity with room for play and unpredictability.

Law and predictability mean we can throw a stone in a pond and rightly expect to see a splash, the ripples move outward from the entry point, and know that the stone will sink. It is right to speak about this in cause and effect terms. The stone caused the splash and ripples while gravity caused the stone to sink. But at the same time, there was randomness to this event. The randomness of that stone being in that place, of the person seeing it and desiring to throw it, the type of splash which resulted, the number of skips the stone makes on the water, and a host of other chance occurrences which make up this benign event. With all this randomness, there is the predictability of the results of the tossed stone with random unpredictable results and causes. So while there is no absolute predictability in this event, it does not reduce to sheer chance. Paul Davies, commenting on the apparent randomness at the quantum level asks, “So does this mean that the universe is irrational after all? No, it doesn’t. There is a difference between the role of chance in quantum mechanics and the unrestricted chaos of a lawless universe. Although there is generally no certainty about the future states of a quantum system, the relative probabilities of the different possible states are still determined.”<sup>94</sup> God does not eliminate chance, God limits chance. God does not eliminate determinism, God limits determinism. Within the world, there is “directed framework” and openness. “The world is neither wholly determined nor arbitrary but...an intimate amalgam of chance and choice.”<sup>95</sup>

The combination of predictability and chance is what makes tossing or skipping stones delightful. If it could be predicted with every toss what the stone would do, there would be no need to toss the stone. The event would be mundane and boring. Yet, if there was no predictability with every toss, something completely different might happen—the stone disappears, it floats away, the water makes no splash, and an infinite amount of other possibilities. This would mean there could be no expectation of delight or joy in tossing the stone for each toss would bring something totally unpredictable. While this might seem, at first thought, to be interesting, it would not be. Randomness is interesting within predictability. If there

---

<sup>94</sup>Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 31.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 185.

was nothing but randomness, that would be as uninteresting as determinism for the one thing that would always be expected is the unexpected. Life is a careful balance of relative predictability and relative chance. Without chance or randomness, there could be no creativity in the universe. Absolute predictability and absolute chance is neither exciting nor creative. They are stale and meaningless. Not only would absolute chance or predictability spell the end of creativity, it would mean there is no need for faith.

Faith needs a reality of consistency and chance. If all reality is purely determined, there is no need for faith for there is never the possibility of being disappointed. Yet, faith does require a level of predictability and consistency. If reality was absolutely random, there could be no faith for faith is the belief that someone or something is predictable. If there were no consistency, there would be no faith for if one could not trust a bridge, a person, or God to do what is expected or promised, there can be no acceptance of a promise. We trust because we believe there is consistency of character in the person trusted. Yet there is a risk for there is chance and randomness in the world. God's faith is not only necessary because of chance and randomness, it is necessary because of predictability and consistency. God's faith in an evolving creation is the belief that random chance events will somehow eventually go the way God wishes. God's faith is that a universe infused with chance events can and will eventually follow God's influence and become what God plans and desires.

There is no necessary choice between two extremes. We are not forced to choose between a God who plays dice and a God who slavishly follows the blueprints. Perhaps the blueprints call for the rolling of the dice. There is a planned randomness which allows the creation to be what it is. Ted Peters argues that "the interplay of randomness and chance makes possible leaps in creativity, fluctuations out of which new and higher forms of order can emerge. The fact that the earth is an open system has made possible the evolution of life."<sup>96</sup> And I would add that this interplay of chance and randomness along with necessity not only makes life possible, but faith and freedom possible.

### Ongoing Creation means Ongoing Faith

The creation and God's self-limitation are not without purpose. The process

---

<sup>96</sup>Ted Peters, *God—the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 133.

of evolution, while it seems random and driven by chance, is still the purposeful product of God's good design. God's plan never involved determination but a universe which, under the guiding influence of God, would produce value-loving creatures with whom God could share faith with, love, and be loved. This was a plan, but it need not be understood as a fixed plan. John Haught prefers to speak of creation as God's "promise" and vision of perfection. It is a world in which promises and hope mean something.<sup>97</sup> We may never fully recognize or understand why God created this world in this way, but if God has a purpose for creation and yet has allowed chance and randomness to be creatational features of the world, then we must recognize God's faith in the world and the evolutionary processes. God desires a world which freely loves and trusts but a world without chance and randomness would need no such qualities. The world is dynamic and change is constant, and yet God's purpose for the world and its creatures is immutable. God's faith in the world began before the universe was formed, and God's faith has never ceased, nor has it failed. God must have believed that the divine lure and "top-down" influence upon a world optimally gifted with potential would produce creatures who, like God, had the freedom and ability to be creative, love what is good, and enter into faith with God. God trusted not only God's own handiwork but also the autonomy of nature.

God's faith actually makes creation much more precious and valuable. It is a world that can never be reproduced. A world in which God designed every last detail could be produced and reproduced over and over again, but a world of novelty, chance, and co-creators has a one of a kind quality. If God creates a million other universes none will be exactly like this one. That kind of quality is possible only if God trusts the universe to be and exist independent of God's control. Haught argues that "A world given lease to become more and more autonomous, even to help create itself and eventually attain the status of human consciousness and freedom, has much more integrity and value than any conceivable world determined in every respect by an external 'divine designer.'"<sup>98</sup> While Haught does not speak of divine faith, it is necessary to posit just such a quality in God for without faith in and with the creation consciousness and freedom are not possible. If God does not have the quality of faith, then God would not make room for freedom, and without freedom consciousness serves no real purpose.

---

<sup>97</sup>Haught, *Response to 101 Questions on God and Evolution*, 112-113.

<sup>98</sup>John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), 41.

It was not a micromanaging approach to creativeness. God acted as an artist who works with living paints. God the artist is a powerful metaphor. In years past, God the designer or engineer spoke to the culture who understood God to be the great watchmaker. But the watchmaker is giving way to the artist who never stops creating this masterful scene. God's creative work is ongoing for creation is ongoing. And God has chosen to create with the aid of co-creators. Neither a demiurge, nor a heavenly court has God chosen as the divine's co-creator. No, God has chosen the creation itself. God has entrusted the world to be created co-creators. God had and continues to have faith in creation by entrusting it with the ability and freedom to be a co-creator. "To say we are created," Peters reminds us, is to say that:

we are dependent creatures. We depend for our very existence on our cosmic and biological prehistory. Yet we are also creators. Each human being is an open system, so to speak. We use our personal freedom and cultural power to alter the course of historical events. We may even find ourselves altering the course of evolutionary events. Theologically speaking, we participate with God in the ongoing creative advance.<sup>99</sup>

The choice between a single creational event and an ongoing continuing creation is a false dichotomy. God created and creates. We were created and are creators. God seems to delight in the rational paradox.

### **Creatio Imago Dei**

The creation of humankind is the focal point of the two creation narratives. Each narrative uniquely spotlights humanity either as the central character of creation, as in Genesis 2-3, or as the climax of God's creative acts, as in Genesis 1. Humanity is not the only object of God's faith but God's faith in the creation has a new dimension when humanity arrives on the scene. Because chapter four's emphasis was God's relational faith with humanity, I will limit this section to an overview of the two creation narratives of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 and will center my attention on how these narratives each suggest a God of faith.

With the introduction of self-conscious creatures that can sin, God's faith takes on new challenges. Yet, with creatures who can trust and love in ways creation never could prior to humanity, God's faith experiences new joys as well. With the emergence of humans, God's love, faith, and freedom are given opportunities not available prior to the creation or even until this time in the process. God's belief and

---

<sup>99</sup>Peters, *God—the World's Future*, 134.

trust that creation would ultimately produce, under divine influence, a creature that God could love and have faith with was ultimately brought to fruition in the introduction of homo sapiens. God's faith and hope is demonstrated by the patience God displayed in waiting roughly 14 billion years for creation's readiness for humans. While some might understand this immense period of time to be a problem, I believe it demonstrates God's trust and patience that creation, if allowed to evolve, would be and produce what God intended. If God is a being who experiences the passage of time, then this time between the initial stage of creation and the appearance of humans demonstrates God's ability to wait and allow the created other to bring into being rational creatures on its own time. This is not to suggest that God was unhappy with the time it took for creation to produce humans, for that is simply impossible to know. But, if the time was anywhere as long for God as it seems to be from a human perspective, we can see this as God's patient faith at work.

While humanity appears to be the apex of God's creative work with creation, both in the creation narratives, and also in evolutionary history thus far, this does not mean that God's faith and relational character were idle before human emergence. As shown above, God's faith became active at the moment of creation. God's faith has been instrumental throughout creational history. Relationality between God and the creation has also been constant. God does not begin to relate with creation with the appearance of humans but begins in and with the first moment of the creative act. While God is personal, it should not be assumed that God can only relate on an I-thou level. God's relational abilities, love, and faith should not be understood as exclusive to humanity. It is not anthropocentric to suggest that humanity is God's highest purpose in creation, to the contrary anthropocentrism is the notion that God's only purpose in creation is to be found in humanity. God as a relational being can relate to nonhuman creation in ways we can speak of metaphorically but may never fully understand. God, as the artist of creation, has a relationship with creation like that of the artist to her art. The artist creates and is, in effect, created by the art she produces. She relates to and with that art in ways no one else can ever fully appreciate. If creation is a great painting, are we to think that God's artistry, care, and love for the painting only began with the final figure painted in the foreground? All the creatures and animals which existed and died out long before humanity's appearance must have been for God's enjoyment and not simply for our own amusement as we find

fossilized bones here and there.<sup>100</sup> It is important to understand that God has related to and with creation since its inception. God did not create and then wait and watch for creation to finish so relationship might begin. God's creative activities are relational activities, and God's love extends beyond the human. God's loving guidance and influence on creation is God's relationality and faith with creation. Thus, God was certainly patient while working in and with creation to produce humanity. God's faith has found a new dimension with humanity's inception but did not sit idle until that time.

A striking analogy for God's patience and trust regarding humanity's late emergence is that of a musical composer who seeks to write, and then have an orchestra play, a great composed score. God is such a composer who has a particular musical idea and score in mind but must wait until an orchestra is found who can play them properly. God, as composer, must wait until abilities develop, theories are understood, and, perhaps most importantly, the joy of the song is in the musician's soul.<sup>101</sup> God and creation then are jointly producing a beautiful concert in which God has composed the score and yet gives the musicians the time and freedom to express themselves in the playing of their instruments. God has had a particular musical score in mind and has longed to play it with humanity for the whole of creation, but this has meant that God has had to be patient as the musical talents of the creation evolve. If God's purpose for the creation is the loving and faithful relationships between God and human, then God has had to wait patiently as creation evolved to the point in which self-conscious beings arrived to relate with God in the most meaningful of ways. While the ability to play the instrument has arrived, the ability to play in tune is still a future goal that God is leading us toward by the sacrifice and example of Christ. Thus God's faith in humanity's ability to play the score as God has written it is still a hope of God's but one in which God faithfully acts and waits. Is it that God waits for the *imago Dei* to return to what the divine created them to be, or is it that the *imago Dei* is the future goal of a *creatio continua*?

---

<sup>100</sup>James Austin Baker, "Biblical Views of Nature," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* [book on-line], ed. Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, accessed 29 September 2007); available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2312>; Internet.

<sup>101</sup>I have appropriated this analogy from Keith Ward who uses the idea of God as a composer in relation to the cross of Christ as the "key idea" of what God is trying to do at every culture in all times. For more information, see Ward, *God, Faith & the New Millennium*, 133-136.

## Genesis One

The doctrine of *imago Dei* has taken many forms over the centuries. Doctrines of humanity nearly all begin with Genesis 1:26-27,<sup>102</sup> but there is no consensus on what the “image” or “likeness” of God means. I am not interested in formulating one argument or one reading of *imago Dei* over another. My intent is to show that the concept, in its many understandings, generally presupposes or points toward a doctrine of divine faith.

The creation narrative of Genesis 1 reaches its apex in the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God. “That this *is* the focal point of the story emerges from the way that it is set up as a unique event capping God’s creative activity...But, the creation of humanity in God’s image is more than just the climax of the particular story: it is the foundation event for the entire Priestly narrative.”<sup>103</sup> Two questions do emerge from this understanding of humanity being the foundation and apex of the first creation narrative: what does it mean that humans are made in the image and likeness of God?<sup>104</sup> And why does God create beings in the divine image?

Various ideas have developed as to what “image and likeness” mean. One understanding is that these refer to mental qualities that humans alone share with God. These abilities would include personality, free will, self-consciousness, and intelligence.<sup>105</sup> In this way, humans are distinguished from the animals. Others have suggested that the term originally referred to the physical make up of humans, i.e. humans look like God.<sup>106</sup> Moral abilities, spiritual endowments, aesthetic

---

<sup>102</sup>Other OT passages also speak specifically of the image of God (Gen. 5:1-2 and 9:6-7) while others speak indirectly (e.g. Psalm 8).

<sup>103</sup>Edwin Firmage, “Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda,” in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 82 (March 1999): 101.

<sup>104</sup>I am not making a distinction between “image” (*šelem*) and “likeness” (*dē mût*). From about the time of Irenaeus, it has been the custom of Christian exegesis to treat image and likeness as two distinct aspects or qualities of humans. From the second century through the Middle Ages, it was generally understood that “image refers to the natural qualities in man (reason, personality, etc.) that make man resemble God, while the likeness refers to the supernatural graces, e.g., ethical, that make the redeemed godlike.” Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29. However, scholars today generally agree that the original intent was that these two words were used to express one idea. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 164-165.

<sup>105</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 30. Wenham states that there is little biblical evidence for such an understanding and that modern commentators have either abandoned this idea or are still searching out better clues to support it.

<sup>106</sup>Wenham notes that there is room to make this case given that the term “image” is used in Gen. 5:3 when it is said that Adam fathered Seth “after his image.” If the material in question is attributed to late P source, then this would be “too gross an anthropomorphism for exilic literature.” While there are those who believe this may have been part of the explanation (see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:145), it is unlikely this exhausts the meaning of the idea of “image and likeness.”



appreciation, and the division of humankind into female and male have also been proposals for the meaning of *imago Dei*.<sup>107</sup> The two approaches I wish to focus on are those which seem to have the widest theological support. These two approaches are *imago Dei* as divine representative and *imago Dei* as relational.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Divine Representation: Stewardship***

The statements of “image and likeness” can be read in light of the directive given in 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” If these assignments to subdue and take dominion are tied to “image and likeness,” then God created humans to be agents of the divine will. There is a long exegetical tradition of linking these commands of God with the image and likeness.<sup>109</sup> The tradition basically argues that the Priestly texts are not so much concerned with the nature of God’s image but the purpose of image.<sup>110</sup> This is the creature’s role as the image-bearer of God on earth. Gordon Wenham states that “God’s purpose in creating man was that he should rule over the animal world...Because man is created in God’s image, he is king over nature. He rules the world on God’s behalf.”<sup>111</sup> “The creature is seen as the one entrusted with power and authority to rule.”<sup>112</sup> God’s creation of humanity as the apex of the creative work is for the purpose of being God’s representative devoted to the welfare of nature.

The *imago Dei* is the ability or giftedness to “have dominion.” The syntax of verse 1:28 ties image and dominion together so that it might best read “Let us make *ādām* in our image, according to our likeness, *so that they may have dominion...*”<sup>113</sup> To be in the image of God is to be a representative of God. Humanness in the first chapter of Genesis begins with a call to be a representative of God and to do the work

---

<sup>107</sup>W. Sibley Towner lists ten categories of interpretation for the meaning of *imago Dei* as well as the leading advocates of each view in the article “Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (October 2005): 343.

<sup>108</sup>Claus Westermann takes this approach in speaking of humanity’s dignity being tied to its responsibility. See *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 10-11.

It should be stated that, while two approaches will be articulated and applied to an understanding of divine faith, the biblical authors seemed to think it unnecessary to define or explain the meaning and use of “image and likeness.”

<sup>109</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg states that this tradition began with the Socinians. See *Anthropology in the Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 74-75.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>111</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 33.

<sup>112</sup>Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 33.

<sup>113</sup>Towner, “Clones of God,” 348.

God created the human to do. Likewise, stewardship is not something merely charged to the human but is what being human is about. Nevertheless, it should be understood that humans are not given *carte blanche* to rule in any way they deemed appropriate. “[W]e are designated as God’s ‘vice-regents’, called to manage and utilize together the created world, not as wholly independent agents, but as persons accountable to our Creator.”<sup>114</sup> As the second chapter of Genesis will show, humans are accountable to God for their actions.

The *imago Dei* “are to exercise their kingly rule within the ecosphere in God’s manner, the way God would do it. That means treating the creation with tenderness and appreciation for its intrinsic goodness and beauty.”<sup>115</sup> Humans have, especially in the last couple hundred years, been careless in their treatment of the earth. The misuse of the earth is born out of ignorance: ignorance of the fragility of the planet and ignorance of the meaning of “dominion.” And even though there is reason to associate *rādāh* and *kābash* with conceptions of “trampling, enslavement, and harsh rule by the powerful over the weak,”<sup>116</sup> this is not absolute for the “syntactical understanding trumps the etymological background of the words...and suggests that in the Priestly account of the human vocation, meanings consistent with the Creator’s own strong, universal, but loving ‘dominion’ are intended.”<sup>117</sup> Humanity is to care for creation as God cares for humanity, to lovingly rule creation as God lovingly rules humanity.

What is most striking in all this is that God created humans to be co-creating rulers on God’s behalf. One meaning of *imago Dei* then is “representative;” humans are to represent the rule of the loving God to a creation which God has granted the power to create. Creation has been given the permission and commission to “let be,” to become that which God desires it to be, and part of the “let be” is the blessing and commission to humans to rule the earth in such a way that it can become what God desires it to be. Thus, what we have in the very first divine communication to humanity is a commission to act on God’s behalf and to be subjects of divine trust. The call to act on God’s behalf means that God created humans to be objects of divine faith. God created beings to entrust with a mission and to trust them to follow the

---

<sup>114</sup>Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity: Contours of Christian Theology*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>115</sup>Towner, “Clones of God,” 348.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 347. Towner notes the use of *rādāh* in Ezek. 34:4 and *kābash* in Jer. 34:11 and Zech. 9:15.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 348.

divine call. Stanley Grenz writes, “Thus, ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ carry the sense of ‘representation.’ God has *entrusted* to humans a special task with reference to creation, namely, that we serve as God’s representatives. We are to reflect to creation the nature of God.”<sup>118</sup> God creates and calls humans to be agents of divine trust. For God, the creation of humans in the divine image is an act of trust for trust. God’s faith in humanity is not an afterthought; rather, humanity is created for God to have faith with.

### ***Relationality with the Divine: Fellowship***

The divine does something very different in Genesis 1:28. God speaks *to* creation in the form of humans. This does not happen prior to this event. Up to this point God has made a creation which is allowed to take form by “letting be.” With the creation of humanity, God shifts from “Let *the...*” and “Let *us...*” to, finally, “Be fruitful and multiply.” God speaks to the human creatures blessing them and giving them a mission. Humanity, then, is shown to be relational, a vice regent but also partner with God.

The *relationalist* understanding of *imago Dei* is often contrasted to a *substantialist* understanding, which suggests that being the *imago Dei* consists of have a particular ability (reason) or substance (soul or spirit). However, “we are not told what the image of God *is*, we are shown something of what being in the image of God *involves*: living in a series of relationships.”<sup>119</sup> Emil Brunner proposes a relational understanding of humanity and that “God, who wills to glorify Himself and impart Himself, wills man to be a creature who responds to His call of love with a grateful, responsive love.”<sup>120</sup> The *relationalist* suggests that *imago Dei* is characterized by the ability to be relational with God and other persons.<sup>121</sup> Moltmann argues that the relational approach does not tell us about humans first and foremost but about God. *Imago Dei* is a theological statement before it is anthropological. Moltmann writes:

The human being’s likeness to God is a theological term before it becomes an anthropological one. It first of all says something about the God who creates his image for himself, and who enters into a particular relationship with that image, before it says anything about the human being who is created in this form. Likeness to God means God’s relationship to human beings first of all, and only

---

<sup>118</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 199. Emphasis added.

<sup>119</sup>Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, 37.

<sup>120</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon, Dogmatics, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 55.

<sup>121</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 220.

then, and as a consequence of that, the human being's relationship to God. God puts himself in a particular relationship to human beings – a relationship in which human beings become his image and his glory on earth. The nature of human beings springs from their relationship to God. It is this relationship which gives human nature its definition –not some characteristic or other which sets human beings apart from other living things.<sup>122</sup>

God creates a divine image for relationality. The *imago Dei* says as much, if not more, about God as it does humanity.<sup>123</sup>

If *imago Dei* is to tell us simultaneously about God's relationality and our own, then we need to speak about divine faith in the same breath as human faith. As noted in the previous chapters of this work, relationality presupposes faith for there cannot be authentic relationship if there is not a faith bond that unites to the two in mutual loving fellowship. If the scripture teaches us both about God and about humanity, then it should be reasonable to look to the nature of humanity to learn something about the nature of God. As the image of God, we become a living analogy for God. We have learned in the last several decades that "whatever the self may be, it is a social reality."<sup>124</sup> Humans are a "social reality" who reflect God as a social reality as proclaimed in the Christian doctrine of the trinity. Because the trinity can only be expressed in human terms and by human relationships, the human can be seen as an image that reflects and reveals the nature of the triune God. Stanley Grenz and John Franke emphasize this when they write, "The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be."<sup>125</sup>

It is quite common to suggest that loving human relationships reveal and represent the triune nature of God. Just as God loves in relation as Father, Son, and Spirit, humans most reflect God when we love as relational beings. However, humans are also to be in faithful and trusting relationships and humans must live in faith. As the *imago Dei*, we are in relationship, relationship which consists of love and faith. So, while it is common to suggest that a relational anthropology ushers in a "Christian declaration that God is love,"<sup>126</sup> it must also declare that God is a person of faith.

---

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>It has been argued that the purpose behind the Priestly authors making this statement was purely theological and meant to speak exclusively about God. See Christian D. von Dehsen, "The Imago Dei in Genesis 1:26-27," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1997).

<sup>124</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 200.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 201.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 202.

Both of these concepts, representation and relationality, speak of the “now and not yet” for the *imago Dei* is God’s representative and yet is still only potential in that role. Likewise, the *imago Dei* is relational with God and yet has potential for that relationality. These are not static ideas to be understood as given in full and then lost in a “fall,” nor are they merely future concepts that only have reality in the eschaton.<sup>127</sup> Humans are and yet are not the *imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* has tied up in it the idea of potential and becoming. God did not create humanity completed but completes creation with the mindful co-creator. Humanity continues to change and become. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 3:18, humans are being transformed into the likeness of God. Humans, as caretakers and the object of God’s mutual fellowship are the image of God, but we also continue to move deeper into the image and reflection. Grenz and Franke see the entire biblical landscape suggesting,

the purpose of God as that of bringing into being a people who reflect the divine character and thus are the *imago dei*. At the eschaton, God will complete what was the divine intention from the beginning and has from the beginning been set before us as our human destiny. On that eschatological day we will reflect fully the divine image as God’s representatives after the pattern of Christ.<sup>128</sup>

The eschaton will bring with it not only a completed image of God but also a complete faith with God.

### Genesis Two & Three

The Yahwist creation narrative, while unique, shares with the Priestly account an emphasis on faith as a key, yet often subtle, element of the story. While the Priestly account is more theologically refined, the Yahwist account is earthier with a vision of God who gets dirty in the act of creation. The creation account of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 portrays a God who trusts the first humans to care for the garden and be compliant with the divine warnings. But it is also a story of trust betrayed yet not utterly lost.

#### ***Trust in the Human Couple***

Not all understand the Yahwist creation account to be about faith and trust. In fact, Caputo sees the story as emphasizing just the opposite.

---

<sup>127</sup>This is the approach Migliore seems to take when he writes, “Being created in the image of God is not a state or condition but a movement with a goal: human beings are restless for a fulfillment of life not yet realized.” See Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 147.

<sup>128</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 200.

[W]hat interests me about this Yahweh is that he has little taste *for the risk of creation, for the risk of parenting*. He does not so much give the first couple life as he gives them a *test* to see if they are worthy of life; he gives them life on a kind of conditional trial loan to see if they are going to abuse it and try to become like him, in which case he is prepared to withdraw from the deal and wipe—or wash—they out.<sup>129</sup>

Is this the proper way to read this narrative? As the story of a God who fears risk? Is Caputo suggesting that the opening stories of the OT set us up for a God who hasn't the stomach for risk? I find this to be a very problematic reading of the story. In fact, it should be argued that the heart of the narrative is risk and faith. It is the story of God's faith and Adam and Eve's lack of faith, of divine trust and human mistrust.

The narrative begins with imagery similar to the ending of the Priestly account. Genesis 1 has the *imago Dei* introduced for the “dominion” and “subduing” of the earth. Genesis 2 begins with an earth void of plant life for God had not caused it to rain and “there was no one to till the ground.” The earth is not yet, in this narrative, what it is meant to be, and the divine plans for the earth will require someone to partner with God in the bringing forth of plant life. The narrative begins with God needing a partner who can be trusted to care for the ground and bring it to the state God desires. Just as creation reached its apex with the introduction of the *imago Dei* in whom God chose to have faith, this narrative begins with God knowing that if the earth is to be what is intended, then the creation of someone to till the ground is necessary. “Responsible human beings are said to be as important to the development of creation as is rain!”<sup>130</sup> This idea is repeated in 2:15 when God is said to take man and put him in the garden to “till it and keep it.” The work of humanity on the earth and for the earth is not the result of disobedience; it is an aspect of being human. God has created humans in each of these stories to be partners with the divine in the continuous acts of creation. Humans, then, are to be understood as objects of divine faith that God has created in order to partner with and trust. The partnership is imaged in God's “tilling” the ground in order to create man<sup>131</sup> and man will then till the ground to create the world God desires. Faith in humanity is not absent from this story but is seen even before God creates the first man from the dust of the ground.

---

<sup>129</sup>Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 68.

<sup>130</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 53.

<sup>131</sup>While I have consistently used the term “human” when speaking of the whole of humankind, the term “man” is appropriate here since, in this story, Adam is clearly meant to be understood as a single character even though there is also reason to interpret Adam as representative of all humankind.

The Yahwist narrative continues with God instructing the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:16-17). While this imagery will reappear in the third chapter, it is interesting to note that, contra Caputo, this is not simply to test whether the couple are worthy of life, this is a story of faith. But faith stories only make sense when there is something to be risked and lost. Brueggemann sees the story containing vocation, permission, and prohibition.<sup>132</sup> The man is given the *vocation* of tilling the ground, making it useful to humanity and the delight of God. But there is also *permission* granted to eat of all trees but one. There is far more permission than *prohibition* and yet permission has no meaning without prohibition. God prohibiting the man (and later the woman) from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not an example of the divine fearing risk and lacking trust but is clearly the opposite. Trust is only possible if there is prohibition. To say all things are lawful is not to trust but rather is to throw out any and all forms of trust and faith. At the same time, God granted permission to eat of all the other trees. If this were the story of a faithless God it would not begin with God graciously granting permission to eat widely but logically begin with God’s prohibition and command not to eat. The vocation and permission are examples of God’s faith only because there is prohibition. As Brueggemann states, “The primary human task is to find a way to hold the three facets of divine purpose together. Any two of them without the third is surely to pervert life.”<sup>133</sup>

The prohibition also lacks the language of threat. The man is not told that if he eats of the tree he will be “put to death” but that he will surely die.<sup>134</sup> This is definitely a commandment with a warning but if the lack of trust is as intense as Caputo suggests, then threat would have been a natural element. If God does not trust the couple, then God’s words to the man should have been littered with intimidation and menace. Instead, we see a command not to eat with the explanation that death will follow. The story even seems to suggest that God was surprised to find out the couple had eaten of the tree. Chapter three, after the couple disobeys the divine command, depicts God casually walking in the garden, seemingly without a care. The couple has been left alone in the garden, a strange action if Caputo’s reading is correct. In a Caputo-like reading, one would expect God to secretly watch the couple

---

<sup>132</sup>Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid

<sup>134</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67-68.

and spring forth to pronounce judgment when the deed is done, but instead the Yahwist presents God as trusting the couple enough to leave them alone in the garden (even with the serpent). This is a move that some may see as foolish but one that cannot be read as untrusting!

The tree and the prohibition against eating its fruit “indicates that, for all the creative power God entrusts to human beings, the human relationship to God provides an indispensable matrix for the proper exercise of power...The tree is a concrete metaphor for the limits of creatureliness.”<sup>135</sup> Human freedom and divine faith only make sense in light of real limitations and warnings. Without the tree and the prohibition of eating its fruit, freedom becomes meaningless and faith is unnecessary. God’s faith in granting freedom is real because of the risks symbolized in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and, without the “tree,” the relationship is stale for relationship without trust is never intimate.

One final allusion to divine faith comes in the call for the man to name the animals in his pursuit to find a helper. God trusts and empowers the man to name the animals, and, as Fretheim notes, the power to name is given without any qualification: “*whatever* the human being called each animal, that was its name (2:19). Whatever!”<sup>136</sup> God does not know ahead of time what their names would be but entrusts the man to name the animals “to see what he would call them.” Just as the Priestly account speaks of God giving humans dominion over the animals, the Yahwist account also portrays this idea in the man’s naming of the animals. God and human act together in the creation of the animals. God gives them existence and life while the man gives them a name and thus gives them their place in the world.<sup>137</sup> The giving of names is often associated with the exercise of power or sovereignty over the being named. This is not always the case, however, and Victor Hamilton suggests that it is stretching the point to argue that Adam’s naming of the animals is an exercise of sovereignty.<sup>138</sup> This is a God-given task and, thus, God still retains the rule, but it is an act of trust in which God shares power with the man in the giving of full existence to the animals.

The Priestly account of the creation of humankind focuses on a relationship

---

<sup>135</sup>Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 59.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>137</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 228.

<sup>138</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 177.



between God and humans that is not seen in the rest of creation. Neither God nor humans trust the animal in a manner similar to the trust bestowed on humans by God. God gives humans the responsibility of caring for the creation God lovingly fashioned. God gives responsibility to humanity which must be understood as God having faith in humanity. Sanders puts it well when he writes,

Not only does God choose to share existence, the fact that God delegates responsibility implies that God is willing to share power with humans. God sovereignly decides that not everything will be up to God. Some important things are left in the hands of humanity as God's cocreators such that we are to collaborate with God in the achievement of the divine project.<sup>139</sup>

### ***Mistrust by the Human Couple***

The first words of God are not that of a demand for obedience but a call to trust. When God says that the fruit of all trees but one may be eaten, God is calling on the humans to trust God's words. Again, God does not threaten with death but gives a warning that if they eat they will die. The question is will they trust God when temptation comes?

Traditionally, the story of the serpent, Eve, Adam, and the tree of knowledge is discussed as a "fall" story that includes the "original sin" of pride. Historically, this part of the narrative has been designated "the fall" given its apparent depiction of the first humans' first sin and expulsion from the garden.<sup>140</sup> Also historically, it has been argued that with the "fall" came serious damage, if not the utter destruction, to the *imago Dei*. Calvin, while not completely eradicating the *imago Dei* after the "fall," sees it as functionally useless.

There is no doubt that Adam, when he fell from his state, was by this defection alienated from God. Therefore, even though we grant that God's image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupt that whatever remains is frightful deformity...God's image is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection, but was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and diseased-ridden.<sup>141</sup>

Likewise, Puritan Jonathan Edwards emphasized humanity's inability and unwillingness to come to God. Edwards says that the human mind in matters of

---

<sup>139</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 44.

<sup>140</sup>Textually, the word "sin" does not appear in the text until chapter four.

<sup>141</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.15.4.

religious truth is “totally blind, dead and senseless, yea dead.”<sup>142</sup> Even though the garden event has, historically, been referred to as “the fall,” modern scholars have found this title and its implications problematic.<sup>143</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, for example, conceived of the garden story as representing the childhood of the human race and a state of primeval innocence. “In Hegel’s view the eating from the tree of knowledge signifies the rise rather than the fall of man.”<sup>144</sup> Brueggemann argues that, “The text is commonly treated as the account of ‘*the fall*.’ Nothing could be more remote from the narrative itself. This is one story which needs to be set alongside many others in the Old Testament. In general, the Old Testament does not assume such a ‘fall.’”<sup>145</sup> Others have sought to retain “fall” imagery but with careful alterations. Reinhold Niebuhr spoke of humanity’s “fall” and “essence nature” paradoxically, suggesting that the human nature is good while its state is sinful. Niebuhr wrote that “sin is the corruption of man’s true essence but not its destruction.”<sup>146</sup> Fretheim retains the language of “fall” but with qualifications when he writes,

the primary metaphors in chapters 3-6 are those of estrangement, alienation, separation, and displacement, with ever-increasing distance from Eden, each other and God. Perhaps these themes would allow for a variation on the “fall” metaphor, namely, a “falling out.” This metaphor would also be true to the basically relational character of what happens here.<sup>147</sup>

The issue at hand is not whether “fall” language is most appropriate or whether there was at some point in time a first sin. The issue is whether the language and imagery given in Genesis 1 of human beings created in the *imago Dei* for the purposes of stewardship and fellowship is compatible with human sinfulness.

The text itself gives no reason to conclude that the trust shown in chapters 1 and 2 is now removed and replaced by complete perdition. The couple will continue

---

<sup>142</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1959), 274; quoted in Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 100.

<sup>143</sup>For example, see James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1993).

<sup>144</sup>Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 105. For an Hegelian treatment of “the fall,” see Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 74-78.

<sup>145</sup>Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 41. Brueggemann suggests that if one is looking for a “pessimistic” view of human nature, it is more likely to be found in Hosea, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel than in Genesis.

<sup>146</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume 1 Human Nature* (Charles Scribner’s Sons; New York, 1941: reprint 1964), 269.

<sup>147</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, “Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?,” *Word & World* 14, no. 2 (spring 1992): 153.

as co-creators even though there will be greater pain for the woman. Adam is still commissioned to till the now-cursed ground. In an act of grace, God clothes the couple in garments<sup>148</sup> made of skins so they would not be put out of the garden in a vulnerable state.<sup>149</sup> Sanders also suggests that the fact that the couple did not die the day they ate the fruit could be a sign of God's willingness to "adjust his project in response to the horrible turn of events."<sup>150</sup> This would mean that God did not give up on the plan and project of creation. Sin, selfishness, and faithlessness do not mean God has lost faith. In fact, it seems that God's desire to trust has greater resolve because of the "fall." The story reveals a God who is frustrated, but not faithless. God's faith in humanity is tested, but not thwarted.

While God is surprised, these events were not wholly unexpected.<sup>151</sup> God gave the humans room to be free and exercise their autonomy. Sanders says that the interchange between the serpent and woman demonstrates that God created a world in which it is possible to question divine wisdom. "God leaves enough space for trust to develop, but this also allows space for doubt. God leaves room in his universe for him to be challenged by his creatures."<sup>152</sup> By placing humans in a world in which doubt is feasible, and by giving them the freedom to question divine commands and wisdom, God knew that sin was possible. God does not have to rethink this whole project because of the "fall" but does have to respond differently. God certainly must have known that God's faith and trust would be put to the test just as the humans' was. The garden story is basically a trust story. It is not simply a story of a "fall" into sin or of human pride. It is first and foremost a story of trust given, trust tested, trust betrayed, and trust continued. Fretheim states that:

The primal sin is thus not disobedience, pride, rebellion, or violence, or even the desire to become like God; each is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem of trust. There is no storming of the heavens language here, no desire to take over the divine realm or run the universe, no declaration of independence and no celebration of a new-found autonomy. And that, of course, may be precisely the point. Temptation and sin are often quiet, seemingly innocent realities,

---

<sup>148</sup>The Hebrew word used here for "garments" is *katan* and is the word used for priestly robes in Ex. 28:39 and 39:27.

<sup>149</sup>Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 207.

<sup>150</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 48.

<sup>151</sup>Fiddes argues that sin and evil were either something strange to God or was part of the divine plan. I see no reason to have such a dichotomy. Sin, while never part of God's plan, was recognized by God as a possibility if not a probability. For more on Fiddes, see *The Creative Suffering of God*, chapter 8.

<sup>152</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 47.

associated with that which seems far removed from obvious sins. Mistrust is never initially visible.<sup>153</sup>

Christian ethicist Kyle Fedler writes,

There is something in the human pair that leads them to disobey. While most people identify this as pride, I think it is more accurate to say that it is pride mixed with independence and *lack of trust*. The serpent is able to instill doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve. Recall that his first words to the woman are “Did God really say...?” Instead of turning to God for reassurance and strength, the human couple tries to handle the situation alone.<sup>154</sup>

The story of the garden begins with God entrusting the couple to keep the garden and to heed God’s warning about eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge. God does not hover over the couple or dictate their actions but trusts them to do what they were created for and to obey the divine command. That trust is tested when the serpent challenges their trust in God and gets them to doubt divine goodness. Tragically, the couple does not trust the words of God and betrays God’s trust in them. What follows is what happens in all relationships when trust is betrayed: estrangement and alienation. The man and the woman first hide themselves from the other and then they hide from God. Adam, when hearing God, becomes afraid, but not so afraid as to keep him from blaming God for his own lack of trust. God longed to trust and keep trusting the couple. Even when the man explains his fear was due to his nakedness, God responds with the questions, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” It seems that God is giving the man the opportunity to trust God again. If Adam were to confess and return to trusting God it seems the events which followed may not have been so profound. But the opportunity for trust becomes an occasion for blame. Adam blames God for giving him the woman. Likewise, the woman blames the serpent. Neither accepts responsibility for their unfaithfulness. Estrangement between man and woman and between human and God is not the full effect for there is even estrangement between man and the soil. Adam is a man of the soil. He came from the soil, he is to till the soil, and now, by the sweat of his face, will he labor with the soil only to return to it one day. That which he was a part of and was to lovingly keep has now become that which he must struggle against only to die and return to his origins.

---

<sup>153</sup>Fretheim, “Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?,” 151.

<sup>154</sup>Kyle D. Fedler, *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 85.

The story does not end in complete tragedy however, for the reader is given glimpses of hope. God, while angry and suffering due to the actions of the divine creation, does not give up on creation and the humans. God seems to be resolved to trust this creation in spite it not trusting God. God does not utterly destroy the creation nor does God pronounce it as anything less than “good.” The remainder of the Genesis prehistory of chapters 1 through 11 gives a picture of a God who must face serious challenges to the divine plan of mutual fellowship, but these challenges do not stop God from trusting. “God does not give up hope and will continue his project through Noah’s family. In Noah God finds a possibility for a future that is open despite the pervasiveness of sin.”<sup>155</sup>

The creation narratives in general, and the garden story specifically, are not simply stories about human faith and human failure. They are stories of human faith and divine faith. They seek to convey not simply what went wrong but what is right in God not giving up on humanity and continuing to trust and hope that all will come to faith with God. Mike Mason rightly states that:

Such faith is not a religion but a relationship. In other words, it is not one-sided but two-sided, being comprised not merely as our faith in God but His in us. It is our faith that behind all the fear and pain of life in a fallen world lies a loving and all-sufficient God, and it is God’s faith that behind our corrupt nature lies a being with a capacity for perfection and everlasting life.<sup>156</sup>

God’s faith in humanity is the basis for relation and relationship. The creation stories of Genesis 1-3 reveal a God who longs to trust the creation God deeply loves.

### **Conclusion**

The creation narratives of Genesis 1-11 show that, while humanity is deeply flawed, we are not beyond being trusted. God’s faith is betrayed and doubts ensue, but God never completely loses faith. God’s faith is that humanity will move toward its potential, that it will grow in faith and faithfulness. It is quite common to speak of creation as a “risk” both within and out of relational theology. Relational theology has emphasized that God, in simply being relational, must risk. God risks God’s own wellbeing in the hope that the loving relationships God enters into will produce love and goodness in return. Creation, it has been argued, is a risk for the divine. Macquarrie suggests the creation as risk when he writes, “Man is God’s risk. But

---

<sup>155</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 50.

<sup>156</sup>Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1994), 158.

even when one allows for the risk, how much richer is a universe that can freely respond through some of its members than one which can be no more than an object of contemplation, however infinite its interest!”<sup>157</sup> Likewise, Helmut Thielicke suggests that with the story of the creation of humans there is a “hesitation or even a recoil” for the reader senses “that there is a risk connected with it.”<sup>158</sup> Risk is acting in full knowledge that what one desires or loves might be lost and yet acting anyway believing that what is to be gained by risking is much greater than what might be lost. While God freely enters into loving relationships, risk is not a choice for God. The choice God had was in deciding what risks God would take, but the elimination of risk and choice was not possible given the creation God fashioned. God knew there would be risk in creating a world of beings free to reject and betray God’s love and faith. Yet there was also a risk in not creating this kind of world for if God had chosen not to create, God would never have known the experience of being loved by beings such as us. God knew the potential, God knew what it might be like, but God could not know the actual joy of love returned from beings other than God’s self. At the deepest level, God risked not knowing the experience of forgiving a sinful human as well as the experience of having a repentant child return from broken fellowship. Creation, then, was a risk but so was not creating. Thus, for God, faith was a forced option.

Moltmann states that when one says God created the world “out of freedom” it must immediately be added that creation was “out of love,” but I suggest that as soon as we say “out of love” it must be added “out of faith.”<sup>159</sup> We emphasize love as the essence of God and thus proclaim that if we are to be like God we must love. There is no doubt this is true but the scriptures also speak of faith as key to being human. In fact faith may precede love for we come to know the love of God first by faith in God. Given all that has been shown about the faith of God, is it too much to say that in *imago Dei* we have the faith of God? The garden story does not begin with a call to love God but to trust God.

The creation narratives might be understood as the beginnings of divine trust. God freely choosing to create means that God freely chose to become a being of trust and hope, in short, a God who has faith. And while the creation can be seen as the

---

<sup>157</sup>John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1982; reprint, Eugene Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 23.

<sup>158</sup>Helmut Thielicke, *How the World Began: Man in the First Chapters of the Bible*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 60.

<sup>159</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 75.

beginnings of divine faith, it is hardly the paramount story of God's faith. Just as it was argued that God did not lose all faith with the lack of trust in the first couple, it can be said that this merely set the stage for God's greatest demonstration of divine faith, Jesus Christ.



## CHAPTER 6 DIVINE FAITH AND THE ADVENT OF CHRIST

God's faith did not end with the original act of creation. God's faith has continued throughout the entire history of the universe. But God's faith has faced new experiences and has been tested in various ways. The high point of God's faith, however, might be said to have taken place in the advent of Christ. In the coming of Christ, God left the heavenly realm, became fully human, died the death of a forsaken and cursed person, all in the hope of reconciling humanity; all of which God did out of love but also by faith. In this chapter, I explore the faith of God as seen primarily in the acts of Christ for the salvation of the world.

This chapter is not about reworking the doctrines of the trinity, christology, or the atonement through the single lens of divine faith. The purpose is to introduce the metaphor to the subjects and suggest some ways in which divine faith might be found in these doctrines.

### **Trinity**

The faith of God has been examined in the previous chapters but the discussion has not formally extended beyond discussions of "God." In order to properly discuss God's faith *in* Christ and the faith *of* Christ, it is necessary to discuss the trinity or triunity of God. Relational theists do not have any sort of official conceptualization regarding the nature of the trinity. Some support a more Latinized model which emphasizes unity while seeking to make sense of divine diversity, while others support a more Eastern Greek model which begins with threeness and seeks to make sense of God's oneness.<sup>1</sup> Process theology, especially in its earlier years, has eschewed trinitarian models opting instead for a "bi-polar" conception of God but has

---

<sup>1</sup>This is an informal way of labeling the two basic approaches to the trinity. In the section below, I will offer related, yet different, labels. The biggest problem in labeling these approaches to the trinity is that the lines of demarcation are fuzzy and trinitarian thinkers rarely fit neatly into one category.



more recently begun to incorporate trinitarian theories.<sup>2</sup> While relational theists can be found in support of various trinitarian models, or no model at all, I believe that the most prominent conception in relational theology is that of a social trinity. The approach begins with the idea that God is analogous to a unified society of persons. While the advocates of a social trinity seek to avoid claims that they support tritheism, they nonetheless wish to emphasize God's threeness without diminishing God's oneness.

Historically the trinity has been understood as God being "one substance and three persons" (*una substantia, tres personae* or *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*). There have been problems surrounding this formula, most notably the proper way in which to interpret the words "substance" and "person." Classically "substance" came to mean divine attributes such as "invisible, unchangeable, and eternal" as well as "fullness of being" and "pure act."<sup>3</sup> In the modern era, classical substantialism<sup>4</sup> has come under fire. The most prominent critique surrounds "the apparent incompatibility of an eternal unchanging God with the biblical view of a God in relationship to a world he loves."<sup>5</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, has argued that classical substantialism has erroneously tied individuality to substance in a way that obfuscates person and substance. The goal is to find a way to speak of the singular subjectivity of God and affirm the threefold personhood of the trinity.<sup>6</sup> Questions also remain concerning ways in which the church fathers understood "person." Roger Olson notes "*hypostasis* was often the Greek translation of *substantia*, creating a significant confusion as the Greeks applied *hypostasis* to persons rather than divine substance."<sup>7</sup> *Hypostasis* was the word chosen at Constantinople in 381 to refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seemingly because it was opaque and could apply to either "substance" or "person." Given these problems, some have felt that

---

<sup>2</sup>For a list of process publications concerning the trinity see: Center for Process Studies, "Process Thought and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity," <http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/Biblio/Thematic/Trinity.html> (accessed October 10, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1993), 31. Peters associates these understandings of substance with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>4</sup>Substantialism is the notion that there is a noumena which exists as a basis for phenomena. The classical substantialist assumption is that there is an absolute essence (noumena) which has relational attributes (phenomena). Essence is unchanging while relationality through the attributes could take on differing dimensions. See Peters, *God as Trinity*, 31.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>7</sup>Olson, *Trinity*, 30.

etymological studies, which seek to determine the historical meaning of the words “substance” and “person,” offer little if any help.<sup>8</sup> This has left modern theologians with the task of formulating innovative models and analogies in the hope of shedding new light on a very old dilemma.

The problem of formulating a meaningful and coherent trinitarian model is in discovering how something so utterly one can only be fully acknowledged as genuinely three—and vice versa. This is the problem of diversity within the unity of God, and it is what the psychological analogy seeks to illuminate. How can we authentically speak of God as three when God is so thoroughly one? The other problem is that if we begin with threeness or diversity how are we to understand and speak of God’s unity or oneness? This is the problem of unity within authentic diversity and it is what the social analogy seeks to illuminate. The different approaches are not new and can be traced back to the earliest formulations of the trinity. Placher summarizes how the Greek and Latin churches began with differing approaches in trying to formulate a coherent idea regarding the nature of God.

Greek theology always begins with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Greek-speaking Christians, for instance, generally addresses prayers to one particular *hypostasis*, not just God. For them, the problem was how to unite the three *hypostaseis* in one *ousia*. Latin-speaking Christians, on the other hand, began with the unity of one God. Their problem lay in explaining how that *substantia* could involve three *personae*...In short, Greeks emphasized the threeness, Latins the oneness.<sup>9</sup>

#### Essence over Persons: Psychological Analogy

“Augustine is no doubt the true father of the psychological analogy.”<sup>10</sup>

Augustine understands the divine three-in-one relationship more logically than ontologically.<sup>11</sup> Augustine’s approach begins in a way reflective of Western thought, focusing on the oneness of God and not the threeness. Augustine seems to make a painstaking effort to note that the Godhead is not indistinguishable and yet

---

<sup>8</sup>Peters, *God as Trinity*, 34-35. Peters would be just such a scholar.

<sup>9</sup>William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 79.

<sup>10</sup>Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 147.

<sup>11</sup>Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 44-45. Olson and Hall note that there is much controversy regarding the proper way to interpret Augustine’s works on the trinity. While some believe he was building upon the work of the Cappadocians others believe he took a different approach entirely.

inseparable. For example, it was the Son and not the Father who was born, it was the Son who died and was resurrected and not the Father, but each of these events was the work of the Father and the Son together.<sup>12</sup> Thus, whatever is affirmed of the Father must be affirmed of the Son (and Spirit). It is not their work alone, however, that makes the Godhead inseparable; it is God's very essence.<sup>13</sup> While Augustine speaks of the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit it has been argued that his approach merely supports the theology of three persons but does not hold that threeness constitutes God's true being.<sup>14</sup> This critique may find support in his development and use of the psychological analogy.

Augustine's most famous contribution to trinitarian theology is his analogy found in *On the Trinity*. Augustine's "psychological analogies" were quite unique, especially for the time. He believed that these might be the most useful in our understanding of the trinity, for we are the image of God (and not merely the Father) and our mind or reason is a characteristic of that image, and we should not be afraid to turn to our own humanity to understand the divine.<sup>15</sup> The mind (or perhaps personality), according to Augustine, is made up of an inseparable triad of memory, understanding and will. Each is necessary, and one cannot be known or used without the other two. But Augustine does not indicate which member of the trinity is which part of the mind leaving that to each person in quiet reflection.<sup>16</sup> The analogy of the mind assumes that there can be three distinct parts of one mind. It is not three separate minds with each doing their respective duty to understand, remember, or will, but one mind alone which does each duty. Also, a mind that does not will, remember, or understand is not really a mind at all for it lacks what is necessary to be a full and complete mind. And thus if God is not three, God is not complete.

Regarding the role and relationship of the three Augustine believed that the Son was the personification of Wisdom and that the Spirit was love. The Spirit is the union between divinity and humanity for the Spirit "makes us dwell in God and God

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>13</sup>J.N.D. Kelly notes that Augustine preferred essence to substance for the "latter suggests a subject with attributes, whereas God for Augustine is identical with His attributes." See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 272.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>15</sup>McGrath believes this is a weakness in Augustine's theology for he seems to elevate intellectualism over personal relationships in understanding humanity and that the inner workings of the mind, according to Augustine, seems to tell us more about the Godhead than the economy of salvation. See McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 259.

<sup>16</sup>Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 48.

in us.” It is the Spirit that makes community, not only between the human and God but even within God’s self.<sup>17</sup> Just as the Spirit binds us to God in love, the Spirit is the bond between Father and Son. An obvious criticism of this view is that it seems to depersonalize the Spirit as little more than spiritual glue that holds the Father and Son together.<sup>18</sup> Augustine, however, maintained that God’s greatest gift is love and if God has also given the gift of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit must be love and it is this love that unites humanity with the Godhead and the Father with the Son. In all, Augustine knew his and others’ attempts to understand the trinity, regardless of the analogies used, would all fall short. The trinity is divine and utter mystery. God will always be beyond, and the human mind will always be limited.

Augustine’s influence is seen in many twentieth-century trinitarian developments.<sup>19</sup> These modern approaches, like Augustine, emphasize the unity of God over diversity, even if that may not have been the author’s foremost intent. Even though he does not use the psychological analogy in his trinitarian theology, Karl Barth can be placed in the Latin category for he emphasizes divine unity over diversity.<sup>20</sup> Barth, who is often credited with the revitalization of trinitarian thinking, first thought of the trinity as necessarily linked to revelation. The trinity is not a formulation tacked on to notions of God but is the first idea revealed of God. “God is revealed as Trinity, and our task as theologians is to analyze the revelation.”<sup>21</sup> For Barth God’s threefold nature is expressed or revealed in revelation for revelation itself has a threefold nature—revealer, revealedness, and revelation.<sup>22</sup> God is the event of

---

<sup>17</sup>McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 258.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 259. Augustine’s language may have helped usher in the ninth century skirmish between the east and west known as the *filioque* controversy. *Filioque*, Latin for “and from the Son” was a western church addition to the Nicene Creed to express that the Holy Spirit did not simply proceed from the Father but also from the Son. This caused theological difficulties for the eastern Greek Church. The notion of the Spirit proceeding from the Father alone is traced back to the Cappadocian fathers while the idea of double procession is traced back to Augustine. The Greek writers insisted that the Father is the one and only being to create and cause and so it was the Father who *begot* the Son and from which the Spirit *proceeded*. To suggest that the Spirit proceeded from the Son would compromise the idea of the Father being the ground of all divinity. To say that the Son imparted divinity would appear to imply two gods and not one. Since Augustine understood the Spirit to be the bond of love between Father and Son, the Spirit must proceed from each so that their love was reciprocal. This would also insure that the Father and Son were distinguishable from one another. The Council of Lyons (1274) attempted to solve the controversy by stating, “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, yet not as two origins but as from one origin.” For more information, see McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 266-269.

<sup>19</sup>Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 148.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Peters, *God as Trinity*, 39.

<sup>22</sup>Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 148.

revelation in the *modes* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Barth argues that because God can only be revealed by God that which reveals God is God. Jesus is the Word of God who reveals the Father and this revelation in Jesus is nothing less than the work of God. The Spirit is the illumination, the one who stirs up humans by means of the Word and on behalf of the Word.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the “persons” of Barth’s trinitarian theology, Colin Brown summarizes Barth in saying, “We may call each member of the trinity a *person* and employ the modern concept of personality in the sense of an individual self-consciousness. But we must always add the rider that we are doing this to distinguish the divine *Thou* from an *it*, and that ‘we are not speaking of three divine ‘I’s’, but thrice of the one divine ‘I’.”<sup>24</sup>

In order to emphasize God’s oneness, Barth stayed away from speaking of “persons” and instead spoke of God’s *Seinsweisen* (“modes of being”) for the distinctions within the trinity.<sup>25</sup> In trying to guard against tritheism, however, Barth comes very close to affirming the third century heresy of modalism which teaches that the persons of the trinity were temporary modes of being in an otherwise single divine being.<sup>26</sup> Brown argues that the charge is unfounded for Barth is not suggesting that each mode is a temporary manifestation of the unitary God but is “rather to point to the ways in which God *is* both in revelation and in Himself.”<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the exact meaning and use of *Seinsweisen*, Barth certainly emphasizes the oneness of God over the threeness.<sup>28</sup>

Critiques of the psychological analogy and its emphasis on oneness can vary, but the chief critique surrounds God’s nature as a loving being. The argument basically says that if God is truly a being of love, God must have another subject to love. If God has not, eternally, had other subjects to love then creation was necessary in order for God to be love, which is God’s nature. So, God needed the creation in order to be God. To put it another way, “if God is love and if love is a relationship

---

<sup>23</sup>Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 71-72.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 74. Brown quote is from Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (T. & T. Clark, 1936-), 1:1, 403.

<sup>25</sup>Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 97.

<sup>26</sup>Brown, *Karl Barth*, 75. This is Brown’s basic summary of modalism. However, because modalism was branded a heresy all of the modalists’ writings were destroyed and scholars are left to reconstruct the approach from the writings left by critics.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Along with Karl Barth, Karl Rahner emphasized trinitarian formulations which discounted the use of “persons” to describe God and instead favored “modes of subsistence.” For more on Rahner’s view, see Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

then, either the Godhead must consist of three divine Persons tied together by an eternal bond of love, as social Trinitarians claim, of God is dependent on finite created persons to whom he can relate in a bond of love, as Latin Trinitarians claim.”<sup>29</sup> It is this critique that has fueled the modern social analogy.

#### Persons over Essence: Social Analogy

While Augustine is the symbol of oneness thinking associated with the formative years of Christian theology, the Cappadocian fathers are the representatives of threeness thinking. The problem that the Cappadocians sought to work out was a way in which to define the difference between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and save *homoouios* theology. They used the analogy of universal and particular to explain how one God could be three persons. If we were to consider three persons, John, Peter, and Mary, we would note that each is a particular individual (*hypostasis*) but all three are also human beings, sharing a universal nature (*ousia*). We could point to any one of the three and note that he or she is at once both a particular individual and a human being. From this then, we can take note that Christ is the Son (*hypostasis*) and God (*ousia*). The Son is a different *hypostasis* from the Father but the same *ousia*.<sup>30</sup> What makes God three are the particular characteristics such as sonship, sanctifying power, ingenerateness, generateness, and mission.<sup>31</sup> Each of these is distinct with each person of the trinity. But the Cappadocians were also careful not to allow their theology to be misunderstood as tritheism. While humans share a nature, they are all different and distinct because they have separate wills, motivations, and goals. God is not distinct in this sense for part of God’s *ousia* is that the Godhead is in perfect accord.<sup>32</sup> There is no shifting of will or goal within the Godhead, only perfect unity. The Cappadocians had sought to find a way in which the oneness of God in no way disrupted the threeness of God and vice versa.

The key to the Cappadocians’ thinking was that the trinity was unified in relatedness. It could be said that following the Cappadocian line of thinking God is unified more in relationship than by substance. This is the direction trinitarian thinking took in the latter half of the twentieth-century. The substantialist metaphysics of the premodern era have been attacked and a metaphysic of relatedness

---

<sup>29</sup>Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 111.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>31</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 265.

<sup>32</sup>Placher, *A History of Christian Theology*, 78.

has been increasingly accepted.<sup>33</sup> But critiques of substantialism are not the heart of the social analogy. It is love as the authentic nature of God. While those who resonate with the psychological analogy do not deny that God is love, it is the proponents of social analogy who believe that this can only make sense when there are three distinct subjects. In the previous section the persons of the trinity were conceived of as “modes of being” but the social trinitarian defines the trinity such that “one divine Being eternally exists as three distinct centers of consciousness, wholly equal in nature, genuinely personal in relationships, and each mutually indwelling the other.”<sup>34</sup> These are not three distinct Gods, but three divine subjects which constitute one divine being. In short, “the trinity is understood to be one thing, even if it is a complex thing consisting of persons, essences, and relations.”<sup>35</sup>

Just as the critique against the psychological analogy is that it emphasizes unity to the point of modalism, the critique against the social analogy is that it promotes tritheism or even polytheism.<sup>36</sup> My concern, however, is not to discuss the merits or problems with either of these views. My concern is whether the concept of divine faith has a place in the doctrine of the trinity and whether conceptions of the trinity might be enhanced by considerations of divine faith. Because relational theists use the social analogy quite often and the analogy offers three distinct subjects (which are necessary for a faith relationship), I suggest the social analogy is where the discussion of divine faith in the trinity should begin.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>Substantialist metaphysics refer to “thingness” meaning that a being or thing is properly known and defined by that which exists of itself while all other properties are accidents or relations. In contrast, the relatedness metaphysic suggests a being can only be defined by its relation to some other. This would mean that God is not defined as a being in relationship but as internationality.

<sup>34</sup>J. Scott Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 3 (September 2004): 399.

<sup>35</sup>Cornelius Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Feenstra, Ronald Jay, and Plantinga, Cornelius (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 22; quoted in Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 100.

<sup>36</sup>Ward contends, “This is very much like a form of polytheism; indeed, a rather cosy and harmonious polytheism.” See Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 322.

<sup>37</sup>It should not be assumed that all relational theists who maintain a trinitarian approach subscribe to a social analogy. Keith Ward, for example, is very critical of the social analogy. In his book *Religion and Creation*, Ward is critical of those who suggest that each “person” of the trinity has their own “forms of awareness and action” (323). Ward quotes Rahner in the form of a rhetorical question asking if there exists in God only one power, one will, and one self presence (323). Ward continues by suggesting that if the three of the trinity are individually self-conscious then there needs to be a unifying principle which is superior to the three such as love (Pannenberg’s approach), or one is left with subordinationism with the Father having properties the other two do not (a charge he levels against Swineburn’s social analogy). Both are unsatisfactory for Ward (324-325). Ward argues that the trinity safeguards the doctrine of God from ideas of “self-centered or solitary individuality, but not by positing a society of similar divine souls” (325). Like Barth and Rahner before him, Ward speaks of “modes” suggesting that “God is love, not as three loving individuals, but as a unity of three coinherent

## The Triune Faith of God

In the first chapter of his book *Flame of Love*, Pinnock develops his version of the social analogy. Pinnock writes, “The picture is of a transcendent society or community of three personal entities. Father, Son and Spirit are the members of a divine community, unified by a common divinity and singleness of purpose. The Trinity portrays God as a community of love and mutuality.”<sup>38</sup> God is love, and as such, God loves those who are other than God. But on another level the trinity “refers to the inner life of God. God loves sinners in history because, prior to that, God loved the Son and the Spirit, and loves us in relation to them.”<sup>39</sup> The society of love, for Pinnock, loves the sinner, not as something new to God, but because love is something so thoroughly natural to God. God has loved eternally, and the love for the created other is a logical extension of the love that exists in the triunity of divine persons. Given Pinnock’s development of a social trinity being a community of love, is it too great a leap to suggest that this society also includes faith and even hope?

---

modes of action of one supreme being. That is to say, God does not contain within the divine unity a true otherness, a plurality of similar and relatively autonomous subjects” (325). Ward’s harshest critique comes when he states, “The view [social analogy] is indistinguishable from a more robust polytheism, and must be rejected by thoroughgoing monotheists, such as Christians are supposed to be.” See Ward, *Relational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 86. It is not surprising that Ward is critical of the social analogy which emphasizes the three persons of the one triune God given Ward’s critique of “God as person.” He writes that “God may be properly manifested in a person; that he may be truly thought of as a person; and that he may be related to as a person in prayer. Yet, God is far beyond being a person as the infinite is beyond the finite. And, in the Christian tradition, we may better say that God can be worshipped as Father, seen in the life of Jesus, and experienced as the power of the Spirit; so that the Divine being both includes and transcends these different personal forms in a reality which may best be described as supra-personal and utterly unique in kind.” See Keith Ward, “Is God a Person?,” in *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brümmer*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Bron, Marcel Sarot (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992), 265.

While not nearly as biting in his critique, relational theist Vincent Brümmer is also leery of the social analogy. He argues that the term “person” when applied to the doctrine of the trinity should not be used in the ordinary sense of an individual center of consciousness for this leads unavoidably to tritheism. Brümmer still wishes to speak of God as love but not as “three personal agents who eternally love each other.” Vincent Brümmer, *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), 419-420. Brümmer, also prefers the term “mode” when speaking of God but, in his book *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity*, he states that rather than speaking of “modes of being” (Barth) or “modes of subsistence” (Rahner) he prefers to speak of “modes of agency.” He believes this best fits the original meaning of “person” as understood in the Latin to mean roles an actor played. “The one divine Actor fulfills three roles in his dealings with us as humans” (108). In the end, Brümmer argues that speculations about the love of God having eternal objects of love is the wrong question, “rather the existential one whether his love is eternal in the sense of being always dependable” is the crucial issue. “Since God always remains faithful to his own loving character, we can indeed depend on his eternal love as the basis for our eternal happiness” (112).

<sup>38</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 30.



Just as the society of divine persons must love in order to safeguard the fact that God's nature is love, shouldn't we include faith within the precreation divine life given the fact that authentic love must trust if it is to be something other than sentimentality?

W. H. Vanstone argues that love, by its very nature, is unlimited, risky, vulnerable, and kenotic.<sup>40</sup> Vanstone argues that one who has authentic love can never wholly control that which is loved. This means that authentic love can be frustrated and thus love is always a risk.<sup>41</sup> I contend that a love which is risky and vulnerable is a love which is also trusting and hopeful for it is a love which gives of itself trusting and hoping that the other will receive the love offered and return love in kind. Sanders argues that "God desires a relationship of genuine love with us and this, according to the rules of the game God established, cannot be forced or controlled and so cannot be guaranteed."<sup>42</sup> But if this is authentic love should it not also be applied to the love that exists between the Godhead? Do the rules established by God not apply equally to God? Did God create or change the rules with the creation? Certainly, because of God's nature as love, the relationship of trust within the Godhead would be different than relationships of trust between humans, but difference is not the same as absence. If it is suggested that authentic love on God's part is risky and trusting because God becomes vulnerable in the act of loving, and likewise if it is also suggested that God's love is eternal for God is not God without the opportunity and expression of love, then perhaps this means that God, to some degree or another, has a relationship of trust within the Godhead. There might be a temptation to strip divine inner love of all that is reflected in God's authentic love for humans but if this approach is taken how can we speak of the love that exists within the persons of the trinity? Do we accept Rahner's rule that the immanent trinity is the economic trinity...except in the case of divine love? Do we render it mystery and allocate it to apophatic theology? This may be the solution, but I believe more needs to be said before such a conclusion is accepted.

Returning to Pinnock, he also suggests that the fact that there are three persons or subjects within the trinity means that God is not dependent upon the creation in order for God to be loving and personal. Having other subjects to love and be loved

---

<sup>40</sup>W.H. Vanstone, *The Risk of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>42</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 178.

by, God lacked nothing prior to the creation. If each person is a subject then each person of the trinity has its own experiences as a distinct member of the Godhead. This means that each person of the trinity can love the other as an other. God's triune love is not merely a self-love but is a love of self for and as an other.<sup>43</sup> "In the eternal being of God there exists the elements necessary for a fully personal life. This means that God, when he creates, creates freely, not out of necessity."<sup>44</sup> God's choice to create is free of necessity, according to Pinnock, because God always has opportunity to love another subject. But how different and distinct are these subjects? Certainly the more distinct each subject is the greater the place for a divine faith to exist between them. The more distinct two persons are the greater the need for trust. Of course if the persons are too distinct there is no guarantee of unity. That would speak of three Gods and not one. Yet, if the subjects are too nearly identical then the love that exists between them is little more than narcissism. A theology of divine faith might aid in this area to strengthen the notion of a unified society of God bound, not merely by love, but also by faith. It is love that unites the Godhead, but a dynamic relational love that includes faith.

Lastly, according to Pinnock, the divine nature is love, but more specifically, it is love in relationship. "The Trinity is a divine reality constituting three Persons in relationship. God is Father in the relation to the Son, and God is Son in relation to the Father. Father and Son are what they are because of the other one."<sup>45</sup> For Pinnock, then, relationality is not simply one attribute of divinity; it is the core of divinity. Relationality is a divine necessity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are only what or who they are because of their relationship to one another. Without any one member of the trinity, the other two would seemingly not be possible. Pinnock continues saying, "The Father is the father in relation to the generation and sending of the Son. The Son is the son in his obedience to the Father. The Spirit is the spirit as he glorifies the Father and the Son and the Son in the Father."<sup>46</sup> Here we may have the best opportunity to speak of divine faith within Pinnock's social analogy. Pinnock is suggesting that the relationship within the Godhead is not simply a relationship born out of substance (i.e. all three are divine) but out of mission. "The Father sends the

---

<sup>43</sup>Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 35. Pinnock does not develop the argument and its implications. This is my reading of Pinnock.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 31.

Son.” While this sending and going is done out of love, it is thoroughly an act of faith. The Father has faith in the Son to accomplish the mission. The Son has faith in the Father to be the source of power. The Spirit is entrusted to glorify the Father and Son as the Spirit unifies the church. As individual subjects with their own experiences the distinct tasks of each member of the society of love seem to elicit faith. This becomes most evident when the Son takes on the mission of redeemer. While Pinnock’s social analogy allows a place for the discussion of divine faith within the Godhead, Moltmann’s trinitarian theology necessitates the discussion.

“The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one.”<sup>47</sup> The perichoresis or co-indwelling of the three persons of the Godhead is very important in Moltmann’s theology for it reveals the relational love of God most dramatically and effectively. The unity of the Godhead cannot be understood as some general divine substance or a single consciousness that all three share for that would eliminate their difference. The unity, according to Moltmann, is founded in their circulatory divine life, “the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and exist in one another.”<sup>48</sup>

Moltmann does speak of the trinity being unified by love, but not in the way one might expect. While Pinnock used the social analogy to secure God’s transcendence and self-sufficiency, even though it means much more than this in his theology, Moltmann is more interested in supporting the notion of God’s love as passionate suffering. God’s suffering love, according to Moltmann, is not exclusive to the Son’s passion but is felt and experienced within the entire Godhead. In fact, for Moltmann, a self-loving God above all suffering is no better than Aristotle’s God of pure self-interest.<sup>49</sup> But if love is the nature of God and if love, as Moltmann maintains, is suffering and sacrificial, does this mean that evil is co-eternal with God?

---

<sup>47</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174-175.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 175. Moltmann seeks to eliminate subordinationism, for this cannot support the idea of a loving fellowship of inter-indwelling persons, but nonetheless seeks to retain the Father as the “starting point” and “origin” of the Godhead. There is, then, a “monarchy of the Father” but this only applies to the “constitution” of the trinity (176). I believe that Moltmann is challenging Rahner’s rule that the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and is suggesting that the Father acts as the monarch but that in the inner life of the trinity there is absolute equity. Moltmann later states that the Father is the “origin-without-origin” of the Godhead and that the Father forms the monarchical unity of the Godhead. However, “in respect to the Trinity’s inner life, the three Persons themselves from their unity, by virtue of the relation to one another and in the eternal perichoresis of their love” (177).

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 23.

Is there an eternal tension within God? Moltmann, states:

The evil which God suffers is the condition of his eternal bliss because it is the presupposition for his triumph...This means that God's eternal bliss is not bliss based on the absence of *suffering*. On the contrary, it is bliss that becomes bliss through suffering's acceptance and transformation. In the eternal joy of the Trinity, pain is not avoided; it is accepted and transmuted into glory. The eternity of the God who is love, suffering love, and self-sacrifice can only be the consummation of the very history of suffering.<sup>50</sup>

For Moltmann, God is not, and never has, been free from the danger of suffering. God's sacrificial love is eternal but this must never be construed as a deficiency in the being of God. Suffering love is what makes God almighty and not the ability to avoid pain or sacrifice. Moltmann's conception of the Godhead consisting of three persons unified by love, passionate suffering love, provides fertile ground for a trinitarian understanding of divine faith.<sup>51</sup>

As stated above, if authentic love is a risky, vulnerable, and giving love then it seems that this kind of love necessitates faith and hope. Moltmann's trinity which eternally lives a love of suffering and bliss should include faith for triumphs of love only come if those who love faithfully overcome adversity. Suffering for the sake of love anticipates, in hope and faith, that the suffering is not in vain. Moltmann's trinitarian theology of perichoresis is meant to "break up the theological 'unities' or 'dualities' that have paralyzed the dance. He then searches for ways of bringing the differentiated dancers back into the round that keeps opening up for ever-new partners and more complex dancing patterns of communication."<sup>52</sup> This is a poetic way of suggesting that Moltmann's theology is open to the dance pattern of divine faith. The triune God dances, not one but three dances: love, faith, and hope.

As noted above, Moltmann sees salvation as the throwing "open of the circulatory movement of the divine light and divine relationships, and to take men and

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 34. Moltmann, working from the works of C.E. Rolt, argues that God is not the creator of evil but that evil exists because God refused to create it. For Moltmann "non-existence has the power of nullity as whatever is shut out from God" (34).

<sup>51</sup>This understanding of the trinity is the key, not merely to a healthy doctrine of God, but to all theology according to Moltmann. The love and fellowship which binds the three persons of the trinity is the model for which all life is to be lived. For Moltmann, "the theology of the Trinity becomes more than one topic of theology alongside others. It is a particular way of thinking. *Thinking in a trinitarian way means thinking in terms of relationships on an equal footing*; it means considering all developments in their relationships, pursuing the way in which they are conditioned and their historicity. If we do that seriously, the practical and critical function of trinitarian theology is disclosed." Geiko Meüller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 2000), 147.

<sup>52</sup>M. Douglas Meeks, "Jürgen Moltmann's Systematic Contributions to Theology," *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (April 1996): 96.

women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.”<sup>53</sup> If the trinity is the community of God that men and women along with the whole of creation are being invited to join, and if it is by faith that we join the dance, then it only seems logical to consider an eternal divine love which includes, among many things, faith. By faith we are invited to dance and it is by faith that we will dance. Faith is the relationship which makes the dance possible.

### Conclusion

The goals of this section were twofold. First was to introduce the trinity in order to move into discussions of the incarnation of the Son. I wanted to demonstrate a trinitarian approach before I suggest ways in which to incorporate divine faith into christology. Second was to suggest that divine faith may not be something new to God or something that will one day depart. Faith, like love or because of love, may be an eternal quality of the triune God. If it has been shown that God operates on a certain level of faith in creating and dealing with humanity, and if the economic trinity is the immanent trinity, then is it too much to suggest the eternal God of love is also the eternal God of faith and the eternal God of hope? And even if, as some commentators have argued, faith and hope will be done away with while love will remain, does this change the fact that God as a being of love has faith and hope today? Perhaps the triad of love, hope, and faith has something to offer in trinitarian discussions and, as will be shown, christological discussions as well.

My intention is not to offer a new theory of the trinity nor is it to have faith become a new model to the exclusion of others. And, even though I focus on the social analogy, I do not think a theology of divine faith is limited to this understanding. All trinitarian theology, across the spectrum, can be open to a doctrine of divine faith, especially if that trinitarian theology speaks of divine love. Where there is love there is faith. I will close this section on the trinity with Placher’s words which are focused and yet express flexibility when thinking about the trinity’s oneness and threeness. “When we think of the Three so united in purpose and activity, beyond all discord, when we think of one God so rich in love, the questions of whether these are three individuals or one melt away. Not three isolated individuals; not one without internal distinction. Each in full selfhood precisely in

---

<sup>53</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 178.

community; one most itself in its threeness.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Faith and the Incarnation**

The social analogy provides an avenue for discussion of a precreational divine faith. By suggesting that God was three distinct, yet fully unified, persons, there is room for the discussion of divine faith within the Godhead. But, just as the divine love which existed prior to creation is different from the love that God has poured out on creation, it would certainly be right to suggest that any sort of precreational faith which might have existed within the Godhead is distinct from that faith which God has in creation. The love within the Godhead would have had no need for grace, mercy, or forgiveness, whereas the love God has for creation is most manifested in these feelings and expressions. Likewise, any faith within the Godhead would seemingly have no place for hope, risk, or doubt while these make perfect sense in God’s faith and partnership with a fallible humanity. But just as God’s love evolved into something more magnificent with the act of creation, we can say that God’s faith changed as well to accommodate the situation. Certainly it could be argued that God’s love did not change, it did not become something altogether different, but merely found new opportunities and new modes of expression. Likewise, God’s faith did not change with the coming of creation but it too found new opportunities of expression. Whether God’s love and faith grew or were simply unleashed, it can be said that God’s love and faith took on new and dynamic forms when the creation of an “other” became real.

The incarnation of the Son, like the creation of the universe, provided God with new opportunities for love and faith within the Godhead. Just as some argue that in the incarnation and on the cross God experienced pain and suffering as both the Father and the Son, I will suggest that the faith of God was uniquely experienced and expressed in the incarnation and the cross. With the incarnation, the Son’s need to trust the Father as well as the Father’s need to trust the Son became fully actualized. Each had to believe the other would be true to their mission, love, and promises. In order to understand how the faith of God was manifested between the Father and Son, it is necessary to offer an incarnational model that can support such a notion. It is my contention that the kenotic model is the best for such a task.

---

<sup>54</sup>Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, 73.

## Incarnation

In beginning this chapter with a discussion of the trinity, I made it clear that I am working with an “incarnational christology.”<sup>55</sup> That is, I am affirming that the second person of the trinity, the preexistent Logos, became fully human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. My affirmation is in line with the Chalcedon creedal statement “Jesus Christ...truly God and truly man.” The question is what does it mean to say that the Logos became human? Likewise, what does it mean that Jesus was truly God? Many have wrestled with this affirmation with most emphasizing either the divinity or humanity of Christ. As with the doctrine of the trinity, my interest is not to formulate a new understanding of the incarnation but to work with a model already in place and explore that model from a perspective of divine faith. By working with one approach, it is not to suggest that this is the only viable option; I believe there may be many formulations of the incarnation that could be receptive to a theology of divine faith. I agree with Maurice Wiles, who summarized Chalcedon’s intent:

On the one hand was the conviction that a saviour must be fully divine; on the other was the conviction that what is not assumed is not healed. Or, to put the matter in other words, the source of salvation must be God; the locus of salvation must be humanity. It is quite clear that these two principles often pulled in opposite directions. The Council of Chalcedon was the church’s attempt to resolve, or perhaps rather agree to live with, that tension. Indeed, to accept both principles as strongly as did the early church is already to accept the Chalcedonian faith.<sup>56</sup>

Any discussion of the Christian doctrine of incarnation must, if it seeks to be biblical and traditional, live with tensions.

In discussions such as this, problems seem to fall in the extremes with advocates emphasizing either the unquestioned full humanity of Christ or an unquestioned full divinity, each to the detriment of the other. These extremes seek to remove all tensions or perceived contradictions. In fact, it might be more correct to speak of these extremes as speaking of the *mere* humanity and divinity of Jesus as opposed to the *full, true, or even sufficient* humanity and divinity, for the Chalcedonian affirmation is that he was truly human and divine but not merely either. Historically the extremist positions can be seen in the Gnostics who questioned

---

<sup>55</sup>Beginning my discussion with an affirmation of an incarnational, as opposed to an adoptionistic, christology should not be understood to suggest that I believe the authors of the four gospels are perfectly harmonious in their presentations of Jesus as the Christ. I do believe that each of the four gospels, and the NT as a whole, present theologies which support an incarnation. However, there is still room for debate concerning this issue, especially in the areas of higher criticism.

<sup>56</sup>Maurice Wiles quoted in McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 295. Source not given.

whether Christ as savior could be truly human, as well as in the adoptionists who questioned whether Christ could be truly divine.<sup>57</sup> In the modern debate these extremes each seem to emphasize a different form of *monophysitism*, the view that Christ had only one true nature.<sup>58</sup> One extreme is found in the later works of John Hick when he speaks of the incarnation as a mythical<sup>59</sup> or metaphorical<sup>60</sup> idea. By this, Hick means that there is nothing factual, historical, or literal about the claim that Jesus Christ was both truly God and truly human. Jesus was merely human, but an exceptionally God-conscious human, according to Hick. Process theology has produced similar understandings suggesting that the genuine issue of discussion is how “Jesus of Nazareth is a unique manifestation of God with us” and not how Jesus can be both human and divine.<sup>61</sup> Process approaches typically seek to emphasize Jesus as the revelation of the creative-love God has for all of creation. Cobb and Griffin, while emphasizing Jesus’ full humanity, do believe there is room to discuss Jesus somehow being more than merely human. “Today we believe that Jesus was in every sense fully human. But if we stop with that, we are in danger of losing the reason for our special attention to him.” In the end, they suggest that Jesus, as the incarnated Christ, is “one more example of discontinuity within continuity.”<sup>62</sup> This emphasis on the full (mere?) humanity of Jesus coupled with a rejection of any sort of preexistent Logos leaves Jesus of Nazareth principally understood as an example of a Godly life, a picture of what humanity might look like if totally devoted to God and only secondarily a revelation of God. What place this view has in contemporary Christianity is not the concern of this thesis, however. Given that the views of Hick and process theology remove all implications that Jesus was “fully God,” there is no need to discuss how the life of Jesus might be capable of demonstrating the faith of God as the incarnation of the second person of the triune Godhead. The faith of Jesus

---

<sup>57</sup>For a history of the early debates and doctrines concerning the divinity and humanity of Christ, see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, especially chapters 6, 11, and 12. For a more succinct treatment, see Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Believe*, chapter 10.

<sup>58</sup>McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 295.

<sup>59</sup>Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*. In this text, he emphatically argues that to suggest that the Jesus of Nazareth was also God is devoid of meaning and comparable to suggesting a square circle (178).

<sup>60</sup>Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*. In this work, Hick takes a somewhat softer approach than in his *Myth* work. He speaks of metaphor as being in contrast to literal (99) and concluded that Jesus should be understood as a “human being extraordinarily open to God’s influence and thus living to an extraordinary extent as God’s agent on earth” (12).

<sup>61</sup>Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 91-92.

<sup>62</sup>Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 106.



would merely be that of human faith while God's faith in the person of Jesus, even as an exceptionally God-conscious human, would be no different than God's faith in any other member of humanity.

The other extreme is in what might be termed "folk theology"<sup>63</sup> in which unreflective church-goers simply affirm and apply all the classical divine attributes of God to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. My experience is that most of these folk-theological understandings of Jesus depict him as "God in a bod," that is, the mind and power of God in the fleshly outer coverings of the human called Jesus of Nazareth. This approach is much in line with the fourth-century view called Apollinarianism. Apollinarius, a harsh critic of dualistic christologies, declared that the divine Logos filled the place for the human mind and will in Jesus. This was the only way to ensure that sin was avoided and salvation ensured.<sup>64</sup> Apollinarius also sought to avoid any notion that Jesus had both a divine and a human intellect that would result in a sort of schizophrenia. Thus, for Apollinarius, to speak of the unity of Jesus meant the claim that Jesus was both divine and human, that Jesus had a divine will and intellect to rightly bring about salvation. Jesus of Nazareth was simply the enfleshed Logos.<sup>65</sup> While Apollinarianism was ruled to be a heresy, it is alive and well in many churches.<sup>66</sup>

### Kenotic Christology

I certainly believe that "A Christology that goes beyond yet is faithful to

---

<sup>63</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 27-29. Grenz and Olson use this term to characterize theological beliefs which are held without question.

<sup>64</sup>Frederick Norris, "Christ, Christology," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 201.

<sup>65</sup>Richard A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 22-23. Monophysite thinking did not end with Apollinarianism being branded a heresy. Thomas Aquinas, while not necessarily giving approval to Apollinarianism did emphasize the divinity of Jesus to the detriment of his humanity. Donald Bloesch summarizes Aquinas' view, stating that "For Thomas, the person of the God-Man is completely perfected from the Virgin Birth onwards. In Christ there exists neither faith nor hope, since both are excluded by his perfect vision of God." Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 132.

<sup>66</sup>Olson agrees calling this "the popular default Christology of many untutored Christians." Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 236. Gordon Fee, as well, states that his experience over 25 years of teaching concerning the life of Jesus showed that "students do not want a true Incarnation, but an Apollinarian one." Fee notes that two of the more problematic ideas for students to grasp were that Jesus was genuinely tempted/tested in the wilderness and that Jesus' messianic self-consciousness was progressive meaning that "Jesus actually learned about himself through the work of the Holy Spirit." For more, see Gordon D. Fee, "The New Testament and Kenosis Christology," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25-27.

Chalcedon may legitimately speak of a 'kenotic unity' of God and humanity in Jesus Christ."<sup>67</sup> There is room to challenge and even disagree with the creeds and councils, but the first order is to seek ways to interpret these traditional teachings in ways faithful to scripture, experience, and reason. The approach I offer seeks to be faithful to the council while going beyond what the architects of this creed had in mind. Thus, I wish to echo the sentiments of C. Stephen Evans when he states, "I do not conceive of kenotic Christology as an alternative to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, but rather as one particular way of trying to make sense of the Incarnation and remain within the boundaries of orthodox Christian belief."<sup>68</sup> Likewise, the suggestions I will make concerning "orthodox" kenotic theories are not meant to suggest an alternative to kenotic theories but rather to offer what may be fruitful paths of reflection given a theology of divine faith.

Kenotic incarnation models are an alternative to the "two-natures" or "two-minds" model which argues that in the one person of Jesus you have two distinct natures: human and divine. According to the "two-minds" model, in Jesus can be found both human (although perfect) nature and divine nature. Also in this one person it can be said that there were

two distinct ranges of consciousness. There is the first that we call the eternal mind of God the Son with the distinctively divine consciousness, whatever that might be like, encompassing the full scope of omniscience. And in addition there is a distinctly earthly consciousness that came into existence and grew and developed as the boy Jesus grew and developed...The earthly range of consciousness...was thoroughly human, Jewish, and first-century Palestinian in nature.<sup>69</sup>

Since Jesus has two different and distinct natures, it must mean that he has two distinct minds. The point of "two-minds" christology is, in theory, to preserve not only the authentic humanity of Jesus but also divine attributes in Jesus such as omniscience. Jesus then was fully conscious of God the Father in the mind of the Logos but the human mind was limited and only had occasional access to the divine mind.<sup>70</sup> Gerald O'Collins affirms a two natures christology and suggests that in Jesus

---

<sup>67</sup>Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 181.

<sup>68</sup>C. Stephen Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Evans, C. Stephen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 195.

<sup>69</sup>Thomas Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 102-103, quoted in Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 49.

<sup>70</sup>Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, 103.

was both human and divine even if the human mind was only partly conscious of the divine. The human mind of Jesus was created and thought propositionally while the divine mind's "unlimited knowledge sets it apart from the limited knowledge of any human mind. There exists an infinite epistemological gap between the divine mind and any human mind, including that of Christ."<sup>71</sup>

The chief critique leveled against two-minds christologies is that they are no better than two-substances christologies.<sup>72</sup> The intent of two-minds christologies is to offer a solution to the impression that in Jesus was two persons, that the Logos did not unite with a second, human, person which would result in two egos or two centers of consciousness. Yet, it is hard for the two-minds advocates fully to escape this critique. My concern is that the two-minds approach may not fit well with relational theology, given that most two-minds advocates affirm the omniscience of the Son, and also that there is less opportunity to speak of Jesus, as human and divine, as a person of faith.

A kenotic approach to the incarnation may offer the best likelihood of reconciling tensions between preexistent Logos christology and higher biblical criticism concerning the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth. Modern biblical scholarship demonstrates that the synoptic Gospels reveal a Jesus who was thoroughly a first-century Palestinian Jew with a real human nature and with real human limitations.<sup>73</sup> As truly human Jesus experiences more than mere physical limitations he is limited intellectually (Jesus does not have complete knowledge, "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:26), limited in power (the Father could remove the cup, but Jesus had to submit his will to the Father's), "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." Mark 14:36), and even limited spiritually (Jesus regularly engaged in prayer at the most crucial times of his ministry. He is also said to have grown spiritually; "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." Luke 2:52).<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup>Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 246.

<sup>72</sup>Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 60.

<sup>73</sup>For more on the historical Jesus, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001).

<sup>74</sup>While emphasizing the synoptic Gospels, it should also be noted that the Gospel of John with its significant "high christology" still preserves the humanity of Jesus. John speaks of the Word becoming flesh (1:14), growing hungry (4:6), weeping (11:35), and dying (19:30). For more on the Gospel of John and kenosis, see Fee, "The New Testament and Kenosis Christology," 39-42.

“High christology” or discussions that place Jesus in the “divine sphere” are typically less problematic among Christians today.<sup>75</sup> This is certainly true of most relational theologies. With the exception of some process theologians, relational theists wholly affirm that Jesus Christ belongs in the “divine sphere.”<sup>76</sup> For the relational theist this is most often emphasized by identifying the suffering of Jesus as being the suffering of God.<sup>77</sup> For this study what is of most importance is that the kenotic approach seems to not only allow, but to necessitate, both the faith of the Son as revealed in the actions of the person of Jesus and the faith of the Father who trusts Jesus to be the Christ. By approaching the person of Jesus as the “empty God,” we can discuss the faith of the Son as the faith of God.

Kenotic theories typically begin with Phil. 2:7:

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>78</sup>

The issue of kenosis surrounds the Greek term ἐκένωσεν, which is most often translated as “emptied.” Many ask what it means for God to become empty. Empty of what? The kenotic advocates suggest that God, the Logos, had to give up the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence in order to be an authentic human. In fact, much of the debate and theologizing surrounding the kenosis concerns ways of understanding how Jesus Christ could be God and yet give up such abilities. Many of the essays in the book *Exploring Kenotic Christology* are devoted to just this question. For example, Stephan T. Davis works with the categories of *accidental* and *essential* properties of God.<sup>79</sup> In doing so he questions

---

<sup>75</sup>For a very helpful discussion of New Testament christology, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1988). For a wider discussion of christology, see O’Collins, *Christology*.

<sup>76</sup>This does not mean that all relational theists who affirm the divinity of Christ understand christology in exactly the same way.

<sup>77</sup>For example, Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 88; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, chapter 6; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 58; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 105-106.

<sup>78</sup>As Fee demonstrates in his article, “The New Testament and Kenosis Christology,” kenotic images are not limited to this passage.

<sup>79</sup>Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Evans, C. Stephen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 115-122.

whether it is essential that God be omnipotent or omniscient (as a human) concluding that Jesus can be *truly God* without being *divine simpliciter* (which is the notion of being divine without also being human).<sup>80</sup> This problem of seeking ways to conceive of Jesus being truly divine yet without certain abilities surrounding power or knowledge is not a problem for the relational theist. Relational theism had already challenged the idea of these properties being essential to divinity in arguing that God had given up certain abilities in the creation of free beings with whom God desired to enter into fellowship. Thus, for the relational theist a kenotic incarnation should not create a problem concerning the willing self-emptying of divine abilities of power and knowledge.

As suggested in chapter five, the kenosis of God did not begin with Christ but with the creation. When God chose to create a free “other” who could genuinely love but who also had the ability to rebel, God gave up any notions of total omniscience and omnipotence in the hope of authentic love. The kenosis of God in Jesus Christ is not then wholly unique. God has known limitation before Jesus. Yet, the kenosis of Christ is unique in that it is total and unlimited. As Donald Dawe writes, “Kenosis is not something that just happened once in Christ; it is something that has marked the whole history of God’s dealing with men. The kenosis in Christ is the ultimate expression of God’s kenotic love for man, but it is not an example isolated from the rest.”<sup>81</sup> God does not become *like* a human, or take the *appearance* of a human; God becomes empty of all that keeps God from being able to become human and in doing so becomes the man Jesus. The point of the incarnation is not for God to take on a second nature but to be fully emptied in becoming a human. It is this radical idea that needs to be addressed and explored from the point of divine faith. The deep-seated notion of God becoming human and not merely *like* a human is the heart of kenotic incarnational models, even though some hold back in their formulations. I believe that the total and complete emptying of God in the person of Jesus Christ further reveals a theology of divine faith. This act of God should be seen as an intense and risky act of faith in the life of God. Likewise, a theology of divine faith may also offer ways which help us understand how Jesus as the self-emptied God might be understood and proclaimed as God.

Before applying the metaphor of divine faith to the issue of kenosis, it needs to

---

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>81</sup>Donald G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 195.

be stated that I affirm a total emptying of God. Some who seem to avow the kenotic model seemingly discount the full emptying of divine attributes and instead argue that the divine abilities were “concealed in the weakness of human flesh. They were always available to our Lord, but either he did not generally choose to draw upon them, or he exercised them in a new way.”<sup>82</sup> This approach, however, may better fit with the notion of *krypsis* (hiding) in which God does not abdicate the divine abilities but hides them throughout God’s fleshly duration. This was also the approach taken by the Tübingen School in the nineteenth-century.<sup>83</sup> It is difficult to see how this in anyway can be linked to an authentic emptying on God’s part. To “hide” one’s power is not to become empty but merely to keep from using what one has. Others, while affirming the kenosis of God, make subtle qualifications that keep the model from suggesting that the fullness of God experienced self-humiliation. Karl Rahner, for example, takes a kenotic approach which suggests that God is a self-emptying God. “The primary phenomenon given by faith is precisely the self-emptying of God.”<sup>84</sup> Yet, Rahner also wishes to retain God’s immutability suggesting, “He who is not subject to change in himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*.”<sup>85</sup> Rahner’s kenotic discussion certainly emphasizes God’s self-emptying but holds back allowing for “traces of dualism” which seem to distance God from authentic or total emptying in the Christ event.<sup>86</sup> Incarnation models that seek ways for Jesus to retain yet hide the divine attributes or that advocate a dualism in God so God can remain unaffected by the incarnation cannot properly be put in the category of “kenotic” christology. Despite colloquialisms, emptiness is not something that can logically be partial or found in gradations. Emptiness and fullness are categorical states. It is certainly possible to speak of something being “nearly empty” but this does not mean that there are different kinds of emptiness. These are simply ways of speaking about something being something other than full or empty. Kenosis models must emphasize emptiness, complete and utter, and not hiddenness, dual natures, or a qualified emptying.

---

<sup>82</sup>Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 138.

<sup>83</sup>Ward, “Cosmos and Kenosis,” 155.

<sup>84</sup>Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 222.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>86</sup>Masao Abe, “Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata,” in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, Faith Meets Faith Series, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 14-16.

Trinitarian discussions either begin with the oneness of God and seek to explain the threeness or begin with the threeness and seek to explain the oneness. Similarly, incarnational christologies either assume the divinity of Christ and seek to explain his humanity or begin with the humanity and then seek to explain the divinity. I believe that, even though kenotic theories typically begin with the preincarnate Son, they are essentially means of explaining how the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, was truly God. By beginning with the affirmation that God is a being of faith, kenotic approaches to the incarnation can be made more coherent.<sup>87</sup> The humanness of Jesus is not an obstacle to the divinity of Jesus but is, in actuality, a prime means of manifesting the divinity of Jesus. That is, the fact that Jesus is human may most reveal God's essential nature. Relational theists, especially those who affirm the social analogy, emphasize God's love as being the greatest attribute of divinity. From a relational standpoint, God can logically give up many attributes or abilities. These are abilities or attributes that only a divine being can possess such as omniscience or omnipotence. Omnipotence and omniscience have been given up or set aside for the exclusive purpose of mutual fellowship with free creatures. This mutual fellowship is the love of God for humanity and the desire of God to be loved by humanity. It is the desire of God to partner with free beings in the shared mission of creating goods and virtues which otherwise might not have been created without such a partnership. Out of love and for the purposes of creative-love God limited the divine self for the creation of an other. And it can be said that God continually denies God's self for the continuing authenticity of that love. Love then is the necessary attribute by which God acts as well as the value or virtue that God desires from the creation. In the creation, power serves the essential attribute of love. God did not give up love to create but quite the opposite, God created out of and for the purposes of love.

The kenosis of God in the incarnation can likewise be understood as God acting in love and for love. God, as the Logos, emptied God's self of power and knowledge for these can logically be set aside, left behind, and God still continue to be God if God is essentially love. However, if love was the impetus and telos of the incarnation then love cannot have been given up in the incarnational act. God as love must have continued in the person of Jesus in order for Jesus to be fully or truly God. But, if Jesus is truly human does this mean that human love is the same as divine

---

<sup>87</sup>I am not suggesting that kenotic approaches to the incarnation are in dire straits. Even without the addition of a theology of divine faith, I believe kenotic christologies are the more coherent. However, there is still room for improvement and new articulations of this creative understanding of divine and human union.

love? Yes and no.

No in the sense that as a sinful race, separated from God, no human has the ability to fully love as God loves. God, being without sin, can and does love without equal but this does not mean that God originally created humans to love in ways that are deficient to the divine. Humans were certainly created with power and knowledge that was never equal to God, but the same cannot be said for love. God's desire is that humanity love as they have been loved, not in a lesser or incomplete manner. So, the sinful human, because of selfishness and deficient faith, can never love in a manner comparable with God.

But we can also say that yes, human love can be like that of divine love in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus as fully human and divine is the model of true humanity and divinity. This modeling is not done in power or knowledge but in love, service, and sacrifice. Jesus modeled who God is and what humans can be. This was done simultaneously in Jesus' selfless and sacrificial acts. Going to the cross was not an act of God alone but the act of a human as well. Jesus showed us how God loves while also showing us how humans can love. Is not this the meaning of Jesus saying, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"?<sup>88</sup> The NT continually commands followers of Jesus Christ to love God and love one another. To command is to assume ability. If all should love then all can love. Jesus' love for the Father and for humanity was both a truly divine love and a truly human love.

Jesus was the fullness of God and fully human in his love. That is, Jesus revealed who God is and who humanity shall become. This love is a vocation, a mission, and relationship for the salvation of humanity. God as love is not made up of a "substance" called love (in a metaphysical sense) and neither was Jesus. The love that is God should be understood as God's nature, which is God's desire and ability. God is relational love and humans, too, are created and called to be relational love. As has been said in this thesis, relational love must include the quality of faith. Otherwise it is merely sentimentality, good feelings, and well wishes. There is no need for relationality in a faithless love, it is love from afar. Relational love is risky and requires faith in the forms of trust and hope for a love that does not trust is either distant or foolish, and God is neither. It is in this loving and faithful relationship between the Father and the Son that Jesus can also be understood as fully divine.

---

<sup>88</sup>Mark 8:34, see also Matt. 16:24 and Luke 9:23.



Jesus is truly divine by his relationship to the Father. The Son can only be the Son by relation to the Father and likewise the Father is only Father by relation to the Son. Jesus, as the Son of God, is divine, not in substance, but through the nature of the willful act of faithful and obedient living as the Son of God. Moltmann seems to be emphasizing a relational incarnation or christology when he writes,

The Son does not exist in himself, but by virtue of his unselfish love entirely in the Father. The Father does not exist in himself, but by virtue of his unselfish love entirely in the Son. The Holy Spirit does not exist in itself, but entirely in the Father and the Son. So the three persons are by virtue of the essential surrendering different and yet entirely one.<sup>89</sup>

Jesus, as the Son, is divine by virtue of his loving and trusting relationship to the Father. If divinity is not a matter of substance then Jesus can be said to be divine by virtue of his relationship to the Father as the Son of God.<sup>90</sup> Because of the relationship between the Father and Son, we can still say that Jesus has the nature of God by being in full relation with God. If Moltmann is right that “divine kenosis is being as well as non-being” while it is “neither being nor non-being” then the divinity of Jesus can be affirmed by his love and faith in the Father.<sup>91</sup> The issue is not what sort of “stuff” it is that makes Jesus divine or human but what it means that Jesus is and represents divinity and humanity. It is what Jesus does that reveals his divinity and perhaps it is what Jesus does that makes him divine. This does not mean that Jesus was any less than fully God even if the fullness of his divinity is by virtue of being both the emptied Logos and the man Jesus in total and complete relationship to the Father.

It is in this relational sense that Jesus Christ as the incarnation is not only kenosis but also theosis. Jesus is the archetype of that “unity with or sharing in the

---

<sup>89</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, “God is Unselfish Love,” in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, Faith Meets Faith Series, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1990), 119.

<sup>90</sup>By “relational christology” or “relational incarnation” I am speaking of a divinity that consists of Jesus being God by virtue of his relationship to the Father. Jesus does not contain within his DNA or “soul” some kind of divine substance but is divine, as John Douglas Hall suggests, in his representation of God. Hall argues that it is in Jesus’ relation to God that he is the representation of God. While wishing to avoid the “murky waters of substantialist ontology” Hall argues that Jesus is a true representation of God and simultaneously the true representation of humanity. Hall does not apply this to any kind of adoptionism but simply speaks of Jesus’ relation to the Father as the way by which we might speak of Jesus being divine. See Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 126.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 120. Moltmann goes on to say that the divinity is “the unfathomable secret love, which one cannot comprehend, but rather only worship in amazement.”

divine life....which is the final purpose of God for creation.”<sup>92</sup> This is not a unity in which there is a loss of identity in uniting with the other but rather the realization of future or full identity by being in relation. In this relationship of faith and love, Jesus is fully God by virtue of being the Son in relation to the Father. Jesus is the perfect example of what is promised in 2 Pet. 1:4, “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.”<sup>93</sup> As the Son entering into kenosis, Jesus, mysteriously and marvelously, also reveals theosis. Not that humanity will become as God in the sense that the Son is God. But we will take on the divine nature of relational love and be the nature of God as Jesus is the nature of God on earth. This leads us to another point.

A critic might ask that if the kenosis of Logos was to be a full and radical emptying then should this not include love since that is the essential nature of God. While this critique seems suitable, it misses the paradoxical nature of the kenosis, and even love itself. It has been suggested that in the kenosis the Son willingly denied that which is divine. The Logos “set aside” attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience. If God is what God does and if faithful love is God’s absolute nature, and if love is self-denial, self-giving, and suffering—in short, self-emptying—then the kenosis is both an act of denial and an act of affirmation. The kenosis, the self-emptying of God, is a dismissing of divinity that, as it turns out, is a demonstration of pure divinity. God’s essential nature as self-sacrificing love, justice, and faith is revealed in the incarnation. The kenosis paradoxically reveals God’s nature by revealing that God willingly denies God’s own nature. In this sense, we can agree with Barth when he stated, “God is always God even in His humiliation.”<sup>94</sup> In fact, we might say God is always God, but is most God in God’s humiliation. In this, we can then affirm both that God was fully emptied in the person of Jesus (Phil. 2:7) while at the same time the fullness of God dwelt in Christ (Col. 2:9-10). The

---

<sup>92</sup>Ward, “Kenosis and Cosmos,” 164.

<sup>93</sup>In claiming theosis I am not suggesting that humanity will become divine in a sense equivalent to God’s divinity. But I am suggesting that when we are restored to our full humanity we will also share in God’s loving nature. Not that we will be human and divine but that we will share love and faith with God and relate to God in ways most divine.

<sup>94</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4:1, 202, quoted in Thomas R. Thomson, “Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Evans, C. Stephen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 108. Barth was not an advocate of a kenotic incarnation and actually stated these words in opposition.

emptying of God in Christ was at the same time a self-realization.<sup>95</sup>

In a like manner, just as the kenosis, the self-emptying and self-humiliation of God, reveals God's nature it could also be argued that God does not "set aside" God's power in becoming empty but displays God's power most radically in this act. It should not be said that God is so powerful that God cannot become weak or that God is so infinite that God cannot become finite. God's power is displayed in God's weakness. God's unlimited being is revealed in God's self-limitations. God is so powerful that God has the power or freedom to become that which God is not. "God limits himself, taking upon himself the incompleteness, brokenness, and sin that separate men from him. Free self-limitation is the characteristic of God's every act, of God's own person."<sup>96</sup> The self-emptying of God reveals not only God's love as the willing victim of sin and brokenness but also God's power in that God was free to become weak.

Is the kenosis of the Logos in the person of Jesus Christ an act of both love and faith? While the literature is abundant concerning God's love in the kenosis I have found no authors who make the suggestion that the kenosis was also an act of faith. However, I find it utterly incomprehensible that the self-emptying of God into a first-century Jewish man, for the purposes of a relational salvation can be understood as anything other than an act of faith. The thought of God becoming a powerless and dependent human who suffers physically, emotionally, and spiritually and who eventually dies should suggest images not merely of love, as beautiful of an image as this is, but also images of enormous faith. It is a faith that perhaps only God could have. In the act of becoming fully human, the Son became totally dependent upon the Father in ways never before experienced. Jesus, as a fully human being, had no guarantee of health, safety, or security. The mission was to become a ransom and to give up what little Jesus did have; his life. The kenosis is typically spoken of as an act of love and it is. But it is a love that is most completely demonstrated in faithful risk. God's faith is demonstrated in the Logos becoming something other than purely divine. The Logos is emptied in order to become a human. But the emptying did not stop at being human for Jesus was a slave who was obedient unto death. In the end, one's acceptance of the metaphor of God's faith depends on the degree to which one embraces a kenotic christology.

If Jesus was God while at the same time in the fullness of humanity then God

---

<sup>95</sup>Moltmann, "God is Unselfish Love," 118.

<sup>96</sup>Dawe, *The Form of a Servant*, 200.

had to trust those who were the caretakers of the infant Jesus. What kind of faith did it take for God to entrust Jesus to the care of a young Palestinian Jewish girl?<sup>97</sup> What kind of faith did God display in having Jesus grow and develop in such an unstable time in Israel's history? What kind of faith did God have in facing the unknown, not as God in power but as human in the person of Jesus? What kind of faith did God have to become that which could suffer and die? Perhaps this is the kind of faith that God wants to see in us. Perhaps this is the kind of faith Jesus called for in his disciples when he said that if they had the "faith of God" they could move a mountain into the sea.<sup>98</sup>

By offering a theology of divine faith we can approach the kenosis, not without mystery or paradox, a condition necessary with any incarnation theory, but relationally.<sup>99</sup> Faith, as a kind of relationship, a mutual fellowship or communion, offers a way to understand the divinity of Jesus without diminishing either his Godhood or humanity. Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, is divine, not merely because of a preincarnate history, but also because of a love and faith in and with the

---

<sup>97</sup>This statement makes most sense from either a Lukan or Matthean reading of the birth narratives. The idea of God entrusting Jesus to Mary is somewhat unsettling in the Markan depictions of Jesus' family as "outsiders" (3:31) who believe Jesus is "out of his mind" (3:21).

<sup>98</sup>Mark 11:22 has the curious statement *ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ* which is most often translated as "have faith in God." The issue is whether this should be read with God as the objective genitive ("have faith *in* God") or the subjective genitive, which allows the translation to read ("have the faith *of* God") even though no translations do so. Yet it is quite arresting that Jesus states that if they *ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ* they can tell the mountain to be thrown into the sea and it will be done. Certainly this event is only possible by the power of God, as is attested to in verse 23. Perhaps the use of the phrase is meant to be ambiguous, calling on the reader to wrestle with the idea that faith in God may include modeling the faith of God. Maybe the most dramatic of human faith is that which most resembles the faith of God. My intent is not to argue that the better translation of this passage is "faith of God." Yet, in spite of James Dunn saying that "no one would think to take the 'faith of God' other than objective genitive," I find it troubling that so many commentators do not even broach the subject of this being a possible reading. James D. G. Dunn "Appendix 1: Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 252. Eugene LaVerdiere is one of the few who reads this statement *ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ* to mean "have the faith of God." He argues that Mark's gospel uses the subjective genitive in other places when speaking of faith and we would not read these as meaning persons had faith in themselves (Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52). "I suggest the same may be true in this case, and that the genitive is subjective. Jesus would be telling Peter and others that this faith must equal the faith that God himself has." LaVerdiere does not read this to mean that God is dependent upon others but that this is an expression of divine confidence. This form of faith would enable the disciples to do what only God can do. Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*, vol. 2, Mark 8:22-16:20 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 160-161. For more on the translation of this passage, see Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 186-187.; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 448-449. For a clear argument against this text meaning "faith of God," see Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics*, vol. 4, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 106-108. Silva also references several others who argue against such a reading.

<sup>99</sup>Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?," 120.

Father. Jesus' sacrificial love for humanity and loving obedient faith in the Father makes Jesus one with the Father. I see no reason why this should be understood as a diminished sense of divinity. The argument that Jesus' divinity is found in a faith and love which makes him one with the Father is not meant to suggest that Jesus was not truly God. Love and faith was the relationship between the Father and Son before the incarnation and it is still the relationship in the incarnation. Jesus, then, is truly human while truly God by nature of the relationship between the two. The humanity of Jesus is not simply an appearance or shadow for Jesus was genuinely dependent upon the Father. The first-century person, Jesus of Nazareth, was a human limited, like all humans, in power, knowledge, and perhaps even self-awareness. Yet, there was no point in the person of Jesus in which the human and the divine were not perfectly harmonized. Is it Christ's love that unites these two natures into one? Or could it also be by faith that Jesus is most human and yet most divine?

In the following two sections, I intend to show that the incarnation created a way for God to experience two kinds of divine faith. First, the man Jesus had faith in the Father. The Father was the object of Jesus' faith. While this is not often emphasized, Jesus' life and death should be understood as an example of radical faith in action. Second, God the Father had faith in the Son. Jesus was the object of God the Father's faith. Jesus, as a human, had his own will and freedom. This free will on Jesus' part must have included the ability to not only succeed but possibly to fail in this sacrificial mission. The Father, while empowering the Son, had to trust that the Son would do what the Father could not, die for the world.

#### The Son's Faith in the Father: Faith in the Life of Jesus

Theologically it is important to affirm the incarnation. Jesus is the *true* revelation of God even if he is not the *whole* revelation of God. When Jesus' love leads him to die the death of a martyr on the cross for the world, is this not also a demonstration of God's love? Most would affirm this conclusion. Jesus' love is not merely a representation of his humanity but also his divinity. Is the power that Jesus demonstrated over oppression, illness, and death a representation of God's power? Again, most would answer in the affirmative. Yet, if these are revelations of divine love and power can we then also suggest that the faith that leads Jesus to live and eventually die is also a revelation of divine faith? Is the faith of Jesus that empowers him to heal and do mighty works the very faith of God? Is the faith of Jesus, like the love and power of Jesus, a revelation of God's faith? I begin this section affirming

these questions. I see no reason to parse out the life of Jesus by suggesting that love and power are divine revelations while faith is simply human. Thus, I understand these accounts of Jesus' faith to be revelations of the God-man. The faith of Jesus is the faith of a man who is the true revelation of God. It is the faith of the kenotic God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The faith of Jesus, as the subject of theological and biblical study, has been relatively unexplored compared to other faith studies. As John Haughey says, "Christians have expended so much energy on what is entailed in having faith in Jesus that they have failed to ask whether Jesus himself had faith."<sup>100</sup> This may be due to a long history of understanding Jesus, in the fullness of his divinity, to have complete and utter knowledge of God the Father often called the "beatific vision." Thomas Aquinas, for example, argued that "from the first moment of his conception Christ had the full vision of God in his essence...therefore he could not have had faith."<sup>101</sup> Jesus, with a full and complete understanding of God through a perfect beatific vision, "lived by sight, not by faith."<sup>102</sup> Yet even with these stumbling blocks there have been a number of helpful studies of the faith of Jesus. The subject of Jesus' faith has been explored in narrative,<sup>103</sup> historical,<sup>104</sup> and theological studies.<sup>105</sup> In this section, I will focus on biblical arguments for the faith of Jesus and specifically on three events in the gospel of Mark.

---

<sup>100</sup>John C. Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire: The Challenge of Holiness* (Chicago, Ill.: Jesuit Way, 2002), 67. Haughey believes that the reason for the paucity of these sorts of studies is that people believe that the demonstration of Jesus as a person of faith would produce a sense of disenchantment in Jesus.

<sup>101</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3, q.7, a. 3, quoted in Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire*, 67.

<sup>102</sup>Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, "The Faith of Jesus," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 3 (September 1992): 407. O'Collins and Kendall, who appear to affirm a "two natures" christology, give six reasons why a complete beatific vision of Jesus is problematic. I will briefly summarize their list of difficulties as six questions: 1) How could Jesus have genuinely suffered if he knew God immediately? 2) How could Jesus have had a free operation of his human will? 3) How do we make sense of Jesus' obedience through his trials and temptations? 4) How do we reconcile a beatific vision (which seems to include, according to Aquinas, full understanding of human creatures) with Jesus' human knowledge of the world? 5) What about Synoptic Gospel passages that suggest limited knowledge? 6) What about the fact that a hypostatic union does not necessitate a unique beatific vision (407-408).

<sup>103</sup>Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002). Hays' study focuses upon Paul's thought and more specifically how to translate the expression Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Hays argues this should be read as a subjective genitive, "faith of Jesus" or "faithfulness of Jesus."

<sup>104</sup>James P. Mackey, "The Faith of the Historical Jesus," *Horizons* 3, no. 2 (fall 1976); Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, Society for New Testament Studies monograph series, no. 84 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>105</sup>O'Collins, "The Faith of Jesus"; O'Collins, *Christology*, 250-268; Christian D. Kettler, *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2005).

“Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandment of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). This is the only time the phrase “faith of Jesus” is used in scripture. While the “Faith of Jesus Christ,” and similar expressions are found eight times in Pauline literature (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16a, 16b, 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9), they are typically understood as objective genitive.<sup>106</sup> However, there are some who believe that these Pauline passages “must contain *some* reference to the faith of Christ himself.”<sup>107</sup> Ian Wallis, after an extensive study of Pauline uses of πίστις Χριστοῦ, concludes that “in each case Paul had Christ’s own faith in mind.” Furthermore, “faith is a characteristic of Christ’s inclusive humanity through which the power of sin is broken on the cross and all people are given a way of responding to God’s grace.”<sup>108</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews is also the source of fruitful discussions concerning the faith of Jesus.<sup>109</sup> Two passages are especially enlightening: “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5:8-9) and “Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (12:2). The first passage can be understood to mean that Jesus, through the experiences of his life, especially those times of testing and suffering, learned to be faithful, that is obedient, to God. James Mackey understands this text to be saying that as human beings “*learn* faith or obedience through what we suffer” so did Jesus. Moreover, Jesus’ “faith was perfected, and he was freed from the fear of death which makes us slaves, and he thus became the pioneer and perfecter of faith, the one we follow when we have faith like this.”<sup>110</sup> Hebrews 12:2 places Jesus at the end of a long list of OT faith heroes. By placing him at this point, Jesus is revealed as the perfect example of faith. “Jesus exhibited faith in the highest form. As the head of a great army of heroes and

---

<sup>106</sup>O’Collins, “The Faith of Jesus,” 411.

<sup>107</sup>Morna D. Hooker, “Pistis Christou,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989) 341, quoted in O’Collins, “The Faith of Jesus,” 412.

<sup>108</sup>Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, 124-125. Wallis also adds that deuteron-Pauline, most notably the Pastoral epistles, have a different focus. “Christ’s faith is not explicitly linked with his death nor the means by which salvation is wrought, but with the definition of faith itself, both in terms of orthodoxy and orthodoxy. As a result, it is not so much a matter of Christ’s faith securing the possibility of faith for others, but of faith which has Christ as its source, content and object” (143).

<sup>109</sup>Wallis suggests this letter provides the “most explicit reference to Jesus’ faith in the new Testament.” *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>110</sup>James Mackey, *Jesus the man and the Myth* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 169, quoted in O’Collins, “The Faith of Jesus,” 413.

heroines of faith, he carried faith” and brought it to perfection and triumph.<sup>111</sup>

O’Collins and Kendall argue that according to the author of Hebrews Jesus is more than our source of faith. He is also the pioneer, model, and exemplar of faith.<sup>112</sup> In Hebrews, Jesus is the archetype of the faithful. His “life of faith, evident in learning obedience, suffering and death, incarnates faith and constitutes a focus for inspiration and emulation.”<sup>113</sup>

To support the argument that Jesus was a person of faith I will focus on three events as found in the gospel of Mark. I believe these three events are key in Mark’s narrative, for they not only highlight Mark’s theme of faith, but they also demonstrate that Jesus’ earthly ministry is bookended by faith acts. The three events are Jesus’ wilderness testing (1:12-13), agony at Gethsemane (14:32-42), and exorcism of the demon-possessed boy (9:14-29). It is important to remember that these stories are not isolated events but are principal examples of the fuller life of Jesus. I believe Gordon Fee is correct when he emphatically states; “Jesus is portrayed not as acting out of a position of divine power, but as a truly human figure who is totally dependent on God his Father.”<sup>114</sup> Jesus’ whole life, and not a few moments here and there, reveal that Jesus relied on the Father at all times meaning Jesus lived a life of faith.

The ministry of Jesus, in the gospel of Mark, is bookended by two testing stories: testing in the wilderness and testing at Gethsemane. These two testing stories are also bookended by “baptism” stories, the first being Jesus’ water baptism by John and the second Jesus’ “baptism” by crucifixion.<sup>115</sup> Immediately after Jesus is baptized by John, the heavenly voice declares Jesus is Son and he is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to face forty days of testing by Satan. The testing of Jesus in the wilderness is reminiscent of the forty years of testing the Israelites faced after the exodus (Deut. 8:2, 16).<sup>116</sup> Even though neither Mark nor Deuteronomy use the word

---

<sup>111</sup>O’Collins, “The Faith of Jesus,” 413.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 414. This point is made even more forcefully when one notes that the Greek does not have the word “our” as a qualifier of the following word “faith.” Therefore, the passage could (should?) read that “Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Without the “our” it is no longer a passage directed only at Christ’s followers but to all who wish and seek to be in relationship with God the Father.

<sup>113</sup>Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, 159.

<sup>114</sup>Fee, “The New Testament and Kenosis Christology,” 38.

<sup>115</sup>Jesus refers to his crucifixion as a baptism in Mark 10:38-39.

<sup>116</sup>R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 85-86.



“faith,” the context clearly points to that conclusion.<sup>117</sup> Deut. 8:2 states that God led the Israelites for the forty years to humble them, “testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.” It was a test of obedience, an OT concept nearly synonymous with faith.<sup>118</sup> Just as the wilderness served as the backdrop of the testing of the Israelites’ faith, the wilderness is used by Mark to demonstrate that Jesus’ ministry begins with a similar testing of faith and obedience. The notation of this event is very quick and without any fanfare, but it seems very important for Mark, for whom faith is a central theme,<sup>119</sup> to begin Jesus’ ministry in a manner representative of Israel and the testing of obedience and faith.<sup>120</sup>

While other passages of Mark also speak of Jesus’ faith, the story of the demon-possessed boy is quite dramatic. The story begins with Jesus coming down from the mountain after the transfiguration and finding that his disciples could not cast out the demon and heal the boy. Jesus chastises them for being a “faithless generation” (9:19) and calls the boy and his father over. The father asks, “if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us” (22). Jesus replies, “If I am able! All things can be done for the one who believes” (23). After the father cries out “I believe, help my unbelief,” Jesus heals the boy and the story ends with Jesus’ statement, “This kind can come out only through prayer” (29). The question is by whose faith was it that the boy was healed? The disciples were the “faithless generation,” the father believed but still doubted, and the boy’s possible faith is never addressed. It is unlikely, then, to have been by the faith of any of these persons. Since it was Jesus who healed the boy after exclaiming that “all things can be done for the one who believes,” it makes most sense to attribute the healing faith to Jesus. Christopher Marshall suggests the story has several foci one of which is “the faith of Jesus himself.”<sup>121</sup> Marshall argues that in Mark, it can be understood that it is both the faith of the one who performs the miracle and the faith of the ones for whom the

---

<sup>117</sup>The psalmist links the wilderness event to the testing of Israel’s faith and trust when he writes “Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of rage; a fire was kindled against Jacob, his anger mounted against Israel, because they had no faith in God, and did not trust his saving power” (Ps. 78:21-22).

<sup>118</sup>See chapter 3.

<sup>119</sup>Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*. Even though Marshall unpacks faith as a theme in Mark’s gospel, including the faith of Jesus, he does not begin his treatment until after Jesus’ baptism and testing. I believe this is a glaring omission in an otherwise excellent work.

<sup>120</sup>Kettler, writes that “The story of the faith of Jesus in the Father is never portrayed apart from his obedience to the will of the Father in contrast to the rest of humanity.” See *The God Who Believes*, 29.

<sup>121</sup>Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, 111.

miracles are performed in which healing comes.<sup>122</sup> This story “discloses by implication the secret of Jesus’ great power, his complete confidence in God. The father is being implicitly called to emulate the faith of Jesus, and it is the faith of both parties that permits the success.”<sup>123</sup> Ronald Kernaghan agrees with Marshall saying, “the child was raised not because his father’s faith was perfect, but because Jesus believed all things were possible. Jesus helped the father’s unbelief by raising the boy.”<sup>124</sup> Jesus is portrayed as one who believes all things can be done. He is the exemplar of faith that has the power to heal and even move mountains (11:22-24). Jesus is not one who works in faith alone however, rather he calls others to faith and praises them for their faith. Jesus seeks to have faith with others and not merely for others. While Jesus’ faith is not the main theme of Mark’s narrative, it is nonetheless a strategic theme.

Finally, we come to the end of Jesus’ ministry and his prayer at Gethsemane. The wilderness testing of faith following baptism by John is symmetrical with the Gethsemane testing preceding the baptism of passion. The agony at Gethsemane, unlike the wilderness passage, is a more detailed account of Jesus’ grief, doubt, and ultimate faith. In 14:34 Jesus reveals to the disciples that he is “deeply grieved, even to death” a state that hardly depicts one who is above the need for faith.<sup>125</sup> While we are not told what it is that grieves Jesus, it certainly involves the painful death he is about to experience and quite possibly a sense of distance he is experiencing as God the Father begins to forsake him. Jesus’ doubt is revealed when he utters, “if it is possible...remove this cup from me” (14:35). Earlier in the gospel, Jesus says to the father of the possessed boy, “all things can be done for the one who believes” (9:23). Again, during the prophetic demonstration against the temple Jesus says, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (11:24). But this is not what Jesus does. He prays like the father of the possessed boy, “if it were possible.” However, in contradiction to what Jesus proclaims in chapters 9 and 11 Jesus does not get what he prays for! It is for this reason that Jesus’ faith is so dramatic here. Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer is not “a simple petition: ‘Give me strength

---

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 119-120.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>124</sup>Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 177. For arguments that it was the faith of the father which brought about the healing of the boy, see Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel*, 50-53; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 369.

<sup>125</sup>John’s gospel, with its high christology, has no agony in the garden. Jesus, seemingly, has no reservations about going to the cross. For more on John’s christology, see Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), chapter 6.

to drink this cup.’ Rather, he prayed: ‘Remove this cup from me.’”<sup>126</sup> Jesus is asking for the impossible to be made possible. Does this mean Jesus did not have faith? Was Jesus’ doubt so great that his prayer was ineffective?

I don’t believe Mark’s intent was to reveal Jesus’ doubt. In fact, I believe Mark’s intent was to show the obedience of Jesus and that just as the testing in the wilderness proved Jesus to be obedient at the outset of his ministry he was obedient even in the painful and doubtful close of his ministry. And yet, Jesus’ struggle between faith and doubt speaks loudly. Jesus prays intimately, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible...yet, not what I want, but what you want” (14:36).<sup>127</sup> In Jesus’ words we can hear the cry of the father, “I believe, help my unbelief.” Jesus is said to have prayed this not once but three times (14:39-41). The point is that Jesus truly sought this cup’s removal, but it was not to be. Jesus thus had to come to terms with a faith whose power is not in the healing of illnesses or the casting of mountains but rather in accepting the will of God when it is not our own will. As any reader of Mark’s gospel knows, Jesus had just such a faith.<sup>128</sup>

Just as the incarnation itself is a revelation of both true divinity and true humanity, the faith of Jesus reveals not merely a human faith but also a divine one. The faith of Jesus in the Father is paradigmatic for it shows us what it means to be truly faithful and full of faith. “Christians don’t just believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. We believe in trusting and obeying God the way Jesus trusted and obeyed God.”<sup>129</sup> This is not a demonstration of merely human faith any more than the cross is a demonstration of merely human love. The love of Jesus should not be parsed out and deemed human at some points and divine at others. A robust christology seeks to understand the love and truth of Christ as reflecting both humanity and divinity. The faith of Jesus should be understood no differently. Jesus’ faith, while unique in the way that it was lived out in relation to the Father, was nonetheless the faith of God. In his book *The God Who Believes* Christian Kettler works out a christology of vicarious faith. Jesus’ faith is more than an exemplar, it is a faith on our behalf, a faith that we

---

<sup>126</sup>E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), 324, quoted in Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 100.

<sup>127</sup>Prayer itself is also a sign or demonstration of faith. Prayer reveals a “deep sense of dependence and trust—in other words, a strong relationship of faith in God.” O’Collins, “The Faith of Jesus,” 417.

<sup>128</sup>While the focus of this section was Mark’s gospel, I believe both Matthew and Luke include examples of Jesus having faith.

<sup>129</sup>Art Ross, and Martha M. Stevenson, *Romans*, Interpretation Bible Studies (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 1999), 31.

may never experience. “The trust of Jesus...is not just an example of how to believe. No, the faith of Jesus is vicarious, on our behalf and in our place.”<sup>130</sup> For Kettler, the faith of Jesus is a faith for us, a faith when we cannot overcome our own doubts and fears. Jesus as the incarnation is the “God who believes.” Kettler understands that by affirming the incarnation and the faith of Jesus we must at the same time affirm the faith of God.

The God of the Bible is a God who can *believe*, dare we say it, just as much as he can create and sustain. This is what we find in the vicarious humanity of Christ...God provides the belief, the faith, the trust, as well as the revelation. This is the message of the incarnation, of a truly Chalcedonian Christology that takes seriously the full humanity as well as the full deity of Christ.<sup>131</sup>

Jesus is the kenotic God incarnate and therefore, the faith of Jesus is the faith of God. “The faith of Jesus reveals great truths about God...God loves the world so much, God is willing to become incarnate to suffer and die so that the world might know the greatness of God’s love.”<sup>132</sup> It is the incarnational faith of Jesus that brings about God’s faith in the power of the cross.

#### The Father’s Faith in the Son: Cross and the Mission of Christ

We understand Jesus to be the self-emptied Son of God, the divine Logos, who was tested and tempted, a person who ultimately had to submit his own will to the will of the Father. If Jesus was fully human and God has entered into relationships of faith and trust with humanity then we must also speak about the Father’s faith in the Son. The faith of Jesus, displayed in his obedience, reveals that God had to trust that Jesus would be faithful and obedient. It may seem like a difficult idea, maybe even more challenging than the faith of God in humanity, but if Jesus was the kenotic Logos and was “one who in every respect has been tested as we are” (Heb. 4:15) then we have to take seriously the Father’s faith in the Son. A faith which was vindicated for Jesus was that one “yet without sin.” While the NT affirms that Jesus was sinless (John 8:46; Heb. 7:26) and fully obedient (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8) this does not address whether Jesus could sin or be disobedient.

Thomas Oden affirms that Jesus’ temptations and testing were real. Oden

---

<sup>130</sup>Kettler, *The God Who Believes*, 140.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>132</sup>Ross, *Romans*, 31. Ross and Stevenson actually suggest the faith of Jesus reveals two great truths. The second truth is that “because of the revelation that occurs through Jesus, Christians believe that God’s love and God’s power are victorious over every power that seeks to defeat us, including self-centeredness of betrayal and denial, and death.

suggests that the testing of Jesus prior to his ministry was reminiscent of the testing of Moses, Elijah, and all Israel.<sup>133</sup> Jesus, like the rest of humanity, had the freedom to sin.

His temptations were real appeals to his real freedom. His resistance was a real act of freedom in saying no on behalf of a larger yes to his vocation....His temptation was real and required choice and effort to overcome. A faith that remained forever unchallenged would be a faith untested and inadequately experienced, hence unprepared for mediatorial work.<sup>134</sup>

Oden goes on to argue that Jesus' sinlessness was "inevitable but not necessary" meaning that "His sinlessness *is not necessitated because it is an act of freedom, but inevitable because it is the freedom of the eternal Son.*"<sup>135</sup> Yet, Oden still argues that the potential for sin had to be real.

Arguably, there could have been no genuine temptation of Jesus had he not been subject to some possibility of spiritual pride, fatigue of spirit, or inordinate desire. If he were in his human nature absolutely immune to any potential pride or sensuality, then what could the temptation have meant, and how could he then have been truly like us, sharing our infirmities?<sup>136</sup>

Stanley Grenz poses a key question: if Jesus emerged from the temptations unscathed could the temptations have been real? Grenz, while arguing that what Jesus experienced was significantly different from our own temptations due to the fact that Jesus has no evil desires (Jam. 1:14), nonetheless faced actual temptations. He even suggests that Jesus never faced a temptation he did not have to wrestle with because, unlike the rest of humanity who often give into temptation without a struggle, Jesus had to respond to and conquer every temptation. Thus the temptations for Jesus were greater than our own.<sup>137</sup>

If Jesus was fully human with the ability to freely enter into sin and disobedience then God had to trust that Jesus, in the fullness of his freedom and humanity, would not sin or be disobedient.<sup>138</sup> However it was that Jesus was able to

---

<sup>133</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 243.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 244-245.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>137</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 360-361. Grenz never in fact answers the question he raises concerning Jesus' ability to sin.

<sup>138</sup>Arguing against Jesus' ability to sin O'Collins states that Jesus was not able to sin *because* he was fully human. O'Collins argues that sin comes from being less than human and Jesus, as the representative of humanity, was fully human and not less than human. "Hence to allow for the

remain sinless, either by his own free will or by the strength of the Spirit, it seems that if he could sin then God, to some extent, was dependent upon the human Jesus. God had to trust that Jesus would be faithful and obedient. Discussions of Jesus being faithful should include God having faith in Jesus because Jesus was faithful, that is trustworthy, to the Father.

The cross of Christ presents us with a paradox no less than that found in the incarnation. In the cross we have both the faith of the Son and the faith of the Father. The Father's faith is demonstrated in empowering Jesus with the freedom to choose, giving Jesus the capacity to say, "not your will but my will." There was nothing outside of Jesus that compelled him to accept the way of the cross. This was a sacrifice freely chosen, a life freely given. If Jesus was compelled to die and "give" his life as a ransom then there is nothing loving or affirming about his death. In fact, if Jesus was compelled then this death is simply a tragedy. The sacrifice of Jesus is only a sacrifice of love if it is freely given. Love cannot be compelled. Jesus' act of sacrifice was a sacrifice out of love for the Father and for humanity.

God the Father knew that as the time of the cross grew nearer it would be more necessary to trust Jesus. Jesus seemed to feel more and more distant from the Father as the cross and his death approached. The agony at Gethsemane was evident as Jesus felt more and more distant from the Father. Moltmann writes, "On other occasions he had withdrawn from them, in order to be joined with God in the prayer of his heart. Here for the first time he does not want to be alone with his God, and seeks the protection of his friends."<sup>139</sup> Jesus prays three times that the cup might pass from him but God does not affirm his prayer. Jesus is not only feeling distant from the Father but is being betrayed and abandoned by his disciples. While he grieves, they sleep. The situation is ripe for Jesus to abandon his mission, to give up and flee. The testing of Jesus did not end in the wilderness, it only began there. Jesus' real testing is not in confrontation with Satan but in utter isolation. It is not a testing which is followed by angels ministering to him but by soldiers coming to arrest him. Gethsemane was not the end of his testing, for Jesus could have cursed the Father at any point. Perhaps like Job he knew that if he would curse God his torment would be

---

possibility of Christ sinning would be tantamount to allowing for the possibility of his being less than fully and perfectly human...It seems reasonable to hold that to be fully human is to be fully and in principle virtuous." O'Collins, *Christology*, 270. This is an especially strange argument coming from O'Collins who vehemently argues that Jesus displayed authentic faith.

<sup>139</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 166.

over. Yet during what may be the most intense moment of pain and agony, when Jesus cries out, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34) he does not abandon God even if God has abandoned him. Yet, there is a distance between Jesus and the Father for Jesus does not cry out to his Abba but to Eloi. Jesus calls out to God for his Father as given him up on the cross. In this event God surely must have known how difficult this was going to be for Jesus. It does not take an omniscient being to know the agony felt as one feels abandoned and alone.

God’s faith in Jesus is demonstrated, ironically, by his willingness to abandon and forsake Jesus. God’s unwillingness to remove Jesus’ cup of suffering is the sign of God’s faith in the Son. To remove the cross would have been a sign, not of Jesus’ triumph but, of utter failure. The fact that Jesus experienced the agony, suffering, and God-forsakenness and not a supernatural sense of power and vision reveals God’s faith in Jesus. A supernatural power or vision would have eliminated both risk and faith. God recognizes Jesus’ continued faith even among the doubts and replies to Jesus’ faith with divine faith. Jesus never stops praying even in his isolation. When he cries out from the cross he shows he has not given up on God even if he is struggling with feelings that God has given up on him. “Jesus, like his Old Testament predecessors, exhibits an element of faith as he cries out to his Abba, the God of the covenant community, and expects to be heard and answered. Jesus is still speaking to God, and he has not lost his faith.”<sup>140</sup>

The faith of God and Jesus in the cross event is monumental. It is a faith shared between them. God’s love is shown in the abandonment of the Son for this was a love that could trust. Likewise, the Son loved the Father enough to trust the Spirit, which not only led him to the wilderness for testing but to Gethsemane and the cross. The faith of God in the cross does not end with Jesus’ death. No, this is where God’s faith in the cross only begins. God’s faith in the power and efficacy of the cross and resurrection is where I will complete this chapter.

#### God’s Faith in the Efficacy of the Cross.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus there is something absolute and objective that happens. “Jesus Christ is savior” is an affirmation of all Christians and this affirmation is directly tied to what God accomplished in Jesus by the cross and resurrection. Understanding what it means to say that Jesus Christ is savior and how

---

<sup>140</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 106.

salvation is imparted has been the subject of many theories of atonement. Generally these views have fallen under the titles of “Christus Victor,” “Satisfaction,” and “Moral Exemplar.”<sup>141</sup> There can be great agreement and great diversity between these various models of atonement and to some extent each includes elements of objectivity and subjectivity. Objective salvation is the understanding that “in the cross event something is actually achieved on behalf of humanity by God in Christ.”<sup>142</sup> Subjective salvation means “that the cross makes possible or enables a necessary response within the human person needing salvation and that the actual benefit of Christ’s death is in that response.”<sup>143</sup> There are also several biblical motifs of salvation including justification, sacrifice, redemption, and reconciliation.

In this final section, I am not arguing for any one model or motif of atonement nor am I championing subjective salvation over the objective. While some motifs may make more sense given the acceptance of other metaphors and models, no one metaphor should be given precedence over the others. All of these ideas and concepts have a place and should be heard in the great theological conversation. Pinnock and Brow rightly understand the need to include all motifs when they write:

The truth about Christ’s work is many-faceted, and each of these interpretations has value, both as biblical interpretation and as possible explanation that we can use today. There is no reason to suppose one of them is true to the exclusion of the others and every reason to suspect each is true in some way together with the other. Each of the models says something important. God delivers us from powers of oppression, God frees us from the burden of our sins, and God strips us of our destructive illusions.<sup>144</sup>

With this said, there is a realistic qualification however. As one approaching theology through the framework of relational theism it will be relationship that I use as a guiding metaphor. In a relational model the problem that is being dealt with on the cross is not a legal problem but a relational one. The cross and resurrection are the means and hope of healing a broken relationship.<sup>145</sup>

Pinnock and Brow suggest a relational approach to the theologies of sin and

---

<sup>141</sup>Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Herbert (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1969).

<sup>142</sup>Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 256.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid. Olson puts atonement in this category suggesting that “atonement itself happens outside of the individual human subject even if it remains to be realized and appropriated by him or her.” I believe it is better to suggest that atonement be placed equally within the objective and subjective categories.

<sup>144</sup>Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 101.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 99.



salvation in their book *Unbounded Love*. In this they argue that sin is not primarily a legal infraction but is relational for at the heart it is the refusal to accept God's love. According to Pinnock and Brow, "sin tries to deny the relationship with God that we were created for and to hide our need for divine grace. Sin says no to the call of God." Secondly, "sin distorts proper social relationships among us" and lastly, "sin refuses our destiny in its refusal to be open to God's coming kingdom."<sup>146</sup> Sin, in a relational understanding, denies an authentic and mutually loving relationship with God. It is an act of mistrust, which gives birth to rebellion, pride, and to the harm and destruction of other relationships. From a relational approach, the cross and resurrection are about the healing of the relationship and re-establishment of the broken trust. If sin is primarily damage to the divine-human relationship and the heart of salvation is the restoration of broken relationships, the first and foremost being the relationship between God and humanity, then the cross is a means of repairing the relational damage done.

Because salvation is primarily about the restoration of a broken relationship, there is a deeply subjective aspect to salvation. Salvation, i.e. the healing of a broken relationship, cannot be accomplished by God alone but requires a response and willingness from the other in the relationship. This is why salvation is both objective and subjective. Objectively Christ becomes sacrifice and God justifies the sinner. But even with the objective effects of Christ's sacrifice, there is still a necessary subjective element, which is the desire and willingness to respond to the death and resurrection positively, and affirming God's love and submitting to God's will. The sinner is called to return to relationship with the Father, affirming the objective work of the cross. Restoration is possible only by the objective aspect of salvation via the cross and resurrection. Subjectivity, that is, giving individuals the power to decide their own future concerning being in relationship with God, is risky.<sup>147</sup> There is the possibility of failure in that there are those who might ultimately reject God and the divine sacrifice. Yet, if God is truly to restore relationship, God must trust humanity for God is unable to establish relationships of mutual fellowship unilaterally. Salvation began with love (cross) and was manifested in power (resurrection) but now

---

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>147</sup>Even though I am using the terms objective and subjective in relation to salvation and atonement, I agree with Macquarrie that there can be neither a purely objective nor purely subjective salvation. Macquarrie suggests that salvation and atonement ideas transcend the subjective-objective distinction and that thus "there could be no satisfactory view of the atonement that was purely objective, any more than there could be an acceptable subjective view." See Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 316-317.

God must demonstrate the third component of salvation, divine faith.

If salvation is to be understood as atonement and reconciliation then it is necessary to briefly discuss the relational nature of these ideas as well as the necessity of divine faith. I will suggest that both atonement and reconciliation make little sense without the notion of relationship, and relationships, by nature, are about faith. Also, if the cross is to be understood as an act of divine risk then the cross was also an act of divine faith.

### ***Atonement***

“Atonement” is an English word coined in the early sixteenth-century by Matthew Tyndale.<sup>148</sup> While the word is used often in English translations of the OT, the NT makes little use of the actual term.<sup>149</sup> However, the concept certainly extends beyond the word’s use. At the heart of idea of atonement is “at-one-ment,” the reconciliation and restoration of a damaged relationship.<sup>150</sup> While there is certainly more to atonement than reconciliation it is nonetheless a prominent concept in the word and may be, according to some scholars, “the best way of understanding the atonement.”<sup>151</sup> Reconciliation, like atonement, is found in only a few places in the NT. These include Rom. 5: 10-11, “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” And 2 Cor. 5:18-19, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

Reconciliation conveys the idea that a friendship has been restored or that two (or more) persons have made up after a quarrel.<sup>152</sup> While reconciliation need not always be couched in personal relational terms that is typically the idea being

---

<sup>148</sup>González, *Essential Theological Terms*, 20.

<sup>149</sup>NIV uses “atonement” in Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 2:17; 9:5. In the NRSV it is found only in Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 2:17. The KJV uses the word only once in Rom. 5:11 and the NAS does not use the term at all. There are two basic Greek words used in these passages. Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 9:5 use the word *hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον) while Heb. 2:17 uses *hilaskomai* (ἱλάσκομαι). Rom. 5:11 uses the word *katallagē* (καταλλαγή).

<sup>150</sup>It is often stated that the development of the English word “atonement” began as “at-one-ment” but this may be “entirely fanciful.” See *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, 44.

<sup>151</sup>Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 132.

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*

conveyed.<sup>153</sup> John Stott argues that reconciliation, unlike other images, is about experiences of home and family.<sup>154</sup> Stott, as one of those scholars who believe that reconciliation is the meaning of atonement, seems to suggest that reconciliation may be the prime image of salvation. Other images like justification and redemption are not ends in themselves but are meant to transpire in hope of reconciliation.<sup>155</sup> Pinnock and Brow also develop salvation and atonement under the idea of relational reconciliation. They argue that salvation, and theology as a whole, should move out of the imagery of “courtroom” and into the “family room.” “God primarily seeks a restored relationship with sinners not a legal settlement.”<sup>156</sup> The issue of reconciliation is not settled when the “debt is paid” for there is no restored relationship at that moment. While the cross makes possible the restoration of relationship it does not guarantee it.

***Reconciliation: A Two-Party Affair.***

Appeasement, satisfaction, and justification may all take place in the life of God but without a human response there is no reconciliation. God has been impacted by the cross, no doubt, for at the cross God experienced the agony of death and alienation as well as the experience of being the Father of an abused and murdered child. These are two objective effects of the cross upon the life of God. Yet, even in God’s pain and loss there is no reconciliation until the human returns to God. The relationship cannot be healed and restored until humans freely return to God with cries of mercy and prayers of repentance. Reconciliation therefore requires a response. For “just as it takes two to quarrel it takes two to make a reconciliation.”<sup>157</sup> God has done all the work, there is nothing that a person must do to receive God’s love and forgiveness other than receive it. We are not wholly sure how or why God chose to act in the person of Christ and die on the cross. Somehow death and sin are dealt with by God through Christ on our behalf. In one sense it should not be our

---

<sup>153</sup>For example, Macquarrie defines reconciliation in nonrelational terms suggesting that what is meant is “the activity whereby the disorders of existence are healed, its imbalances redressed, its alienations bridged over.” See Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 268.

<sup>154</sup>John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 168. Stott suggests that there are three additional images of salvation along with reconciliation which include “propitiation” which is linked to rituals at the shrine, “redemption” which brings to mind images of the market-place, and “justification” which is linked to law-court imagery. For more information on how Stott understands these images, see pages 168-203.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 193. Stott also believes that other images not generally associated with atonement also speak of reconciliation that includes “adoption” and “access.” Stott develops this on pages 192-194.

<sup>156</sup>Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 9.

<sup>157</sup>Morris, *The Atonement*, 144.

worry how God brought about the death of sin, guilt, and death, our concern should be that they have been dealt with and that by the love of God reconciliation and healing await, if we are willing to receive it.

Atonement requires that humans freely respond to God's love.<sup>158</sup> This is the subject of Brümmer's discussion of "Atonement as Reconciliation" in his book *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity*. Brümmer begins with a discussion of estrangement for this is what reconciliation overcomes. And while God has been wronged and is owed a great debt, God has, instead, chosen to forgive. God acts to reconcile us to God's self demonstrating that God believes the evil of a broken fellowship is greater than the injury and wrong inflicted on God. God, in choosing to forgive, has adopted our interests as God's own.<sup>159</sup> Forgiveness is costly however, for "the one who forgives suffers."<sup>160</sup> This is why forgiveness is different from condoning. One is not harmed when one condones a behavior for nothing is risked. Condoning says no harm was done and no further action is required. Forgiveness, however, does not excuse but puts aside the harm done for the sake of the relationship.

Forgiveness is also risky for it requires the one who committed the harm to be penitent and contrite. The relationship is not reconciled if only one is willing. "Loving fellowship is a two-way affair that cannot be one-sidedly established, maintained or restored."<sup>161</sup> Reconciliation requires forgiveness and a penitent change of heart. This is the risk for forgiveness cannot be conditional. Authentic forgiveness on God's part does not come after repentance but is made available before. God extends forgiveness, risking greater vulnerability, and waits to see who might respond in order to enter into fellowship. Forgiveness is thus freely given, unconditionally, and not on condition of a right response. God risks that the costly forgiveness extended might be refused and rejected. But on faith God still extends the forgiveness

---

<sup>158</sup>It is not my intention to suggest that there is a specific or single right way that God requires all to respond in order to receive reconciliation and salvation. Some argue that there are necessary rites and rituals while others maintain that right theology and understanding are the gateway. My intent is to show that the cross, as a symbol of God's uncommon love and a means to reconciliation, was and is a risky act. It might be that God's love is demonstrated in ways other than the cross, such as natural theology or that some are exposed to the cross after death. It might also be that God simply requires faith and not right theology. Regardless, the point of this chapter is that the cross serves both objectively and subjectively to affect salvation.

<sup>159</sup>Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity*, 41.

<sup>160</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *Full Surrender* (Edinburgh, 1951), 22 quoted in Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity*, 41.

<sup>161</sup>Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity*, 41.

believing and hoping that it will not return empty. And while forgiveness is freely and unconditionally given it is only effective in restoring fellowship when a repentant partner seeks to return to God. “It takes two to repair personal fellowship just as it takes two to establish it in the first place.”<sup>162</sup>

Restored fellowship and love cannot be forced. God must give love and forgiveness in the hope and faith that humanity will respond. God cannot demand that persons freely repent and offer contrite hearts. Any understanding of salvation that is one-sided, which does not require the will of both parties is not a salvation involving God’s faith or human faith. Such an understanding, known as “irresistible grace,” is an act of “loving” an individual even if they have no desire for that love. Sanders equates this to “divine rape” “because it involves nonconsensual control; the will of one is forced on the will of the other.”<sup>163</sup> Sanders is right that because it is God who is forcing the love it is a beneficent love, “but it is rape nonetheless. Love cannot be forced because it involves the consent of persons.”<sup>164</sup> A forced love cannot restore an estranged relationship. Forced love, no matter how beneficial, cannot establish mutual fellowship. God can only offer forgiveness and love and then wait. God must trust that the love shown on the cross will affect the hearts of humankind.

It should also be noted that the problem of reconciliation does not lie with God but with humanity. Willingness to extend faith and enter into relationship is not something God refuses until satisfaction has been met. That is not forgiveness. Humans are the ones in need of reconciliation and are the ones who need to extend faith and receive God’s faith and love. Stott is typical when he writes that it is God’s enmity that is dealt with on the cross. This is the objective aspect of salvation, that God’s wrath has been satisfied and now that God “has been reconciled himself to us; we must now be reconciled to him.”<sup>165</sup> Brunner, as well, speaks of God’s need for reconciliation, even though it is God alone who reconciles Christ and humans to God’s self.<sup>166</sup> Likewise, Carl Henry argued that “God is reconciled to man” and that “God’s enmity towards sinners is not merely a passive attitude but one of active

---

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>163</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 240.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 198.

<sup>166</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934), 519.

hostility.”<sup>167</sup> Henry maintains that this does not eliminate God’s love for it was by love that God was willing to die and become the object of God’s own hostility.

It is difficult to harmonize the concept of God needing to be reconciled to humanity with God’s love being the catalyst of the cross. If God requires sacrifice and appeasement before being willing to love then love is merely a by-product of the cross and not its motive. The cross awakens or frees God’s love but it is not an act of love if God requires appeasement before love and reconciliation. Pinnock and Brow, however, argue that God in fact needs no reconciliation, no appeasement.

When it comes to salvation, we must not see God as the problem. God is committed to saving us and does not need to be coaxed—even by Jesus—into loving sinners. The only problem is how to repair the broken relationship with humanity. Obviously, if God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, God does not need to be reconciled to us—it is we who need to be reconciled to him. The problem is how to get sinners to repent and turn from sin, to come back home and follow the new path of love.<sup>168</sup>

They go on to argue that a God who requires payment prior to reconciliation creates problems for the concept of costly forgiveness. “What place is there for forgiveness if Christ paid the price?”<sup>169</sup>

We must realize that Jesus did not die in order to change God's attitude toward us but to change our attitude to God. God, who took the initiative of reconciling the world, does not need reconciling. It is in us that the decisive change is needed. The cross was not a sacrifice without which God could not love or forgive us; it was a sacrifice without which we would not have been able to accept forgiveness. The problem lies with us, not with God. He requires no sacrifice except a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:16-17).<sup>170</sup>

This is what makes the cross so risky and faith affirming. If God was the only one in need of reconciliation then there is pain and suffering on the cross but no peril. There is no question whether God will be “satisfied” in the death of Christ. The peril is in the fact that as free persons we may not respond to the sacrifice of Christ. The risk of the cross comes from the fact that God does not know, according to relational theology, whether the cross will be effective in winning the hearts of humankind.

In a very odd bit of wisdom, God takes the way of the cross to win humanity. This was a very risky plan for the cross was a sign of curse and God forsakenness.

---

<sup>167</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority: Volume VI: God Who Stands and Stays Part Two* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 358.

<sup>168</sup>Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 101.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

And yet God uses what seems so anti-divine to demonstrate what is most divine, God's love and costly forgiveness. Macquarrie argues, "Man needs some concrete manifestation of God's activity, some manifestation that can seize him and bring him to an attitude of faith."<sup>171</sup> Is this what the cross is? We, after two thousand years of sermons, hymns, and artistry, have lost sight of what foolishness the cross was. In 1 Cor. 1:18-31 Paul speaks about the foolishness of the cross for he knew that the cross was not a symbol of love and forgiveness but of rejection and wrath. Indeed, God chose this as a symbol of love and mercy? It is this torture device and executioner's tool that God chose to reveal "some concrete manifestation of God's activity"? Yet, this is what the cross is. The wisdom of God is not found by analyzing the cross but by receiving its power of reconciliation. Its wisdom is found in God's love. The cross, because it is a stumbling block and foolishness, is God's great act of faith. God trusted, not in the wisdom that appeals to humanity, not in the power that seduces us, but in the cross, and image of suffering and humiliation. Only the faith of God could trust in something so foolish.

#### ***God's Faith in Humanity's Response***

If the cross is to be understood as a risk then it is also an act of faith. God's agony, suffering, and loss on the cross were not a risk if there was no doubt in the mind of God that all whom God desired to be saved would be. That is, if God either foreknew or foreordained all who would respond and seek reconciliation then the cross was a painful event, and even a loving act, but not a risky tactic. If God foreknew all those who would respond to this outpouring of love then God took no chance with the cross. It was merely a difficult step in the process of reconciling those whom God knew would respond.<sup>172</sup> Likewise, if God foreordained those who would be reconciled the cross again was a pointless, even cruel, event, for there is no chance of reconciliation for those God has not chosen. The cross is cruel for both Jesus, whose death affected nothing that was not already decided, and for a world of people who have a hope of salvation but will never taste it because God, in an act of divine mystery, has chosen to reject them. These are the ways of a cross without risk,

---

<sup>171</sup>Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 270.

<sup>172</sup>It might be argued that if God infallibly knew, from the beginning of time, who would positively respond to the cross and be reconciled to God then the entire process of creation and redemption were superfluous. If God knew the entirety of all free acts then the cross was unnecessary for God could (should?) have simply created the final state. The entire history of the world is pointless for God is merely "going through the motions" to get to what is and always has been inevitable. For more on this, see Sanders, "The Uselessness of Simple Foreknowledge for Providence" in *The God Who Risks*, 200-207.

a cross without faith.

However, there are many who speak of the cross as a risk for God. Sanders writes concerning the risk of the cross, “It remains, however, a way of vulnerability and risk, not of overwhelming might and guaranteed results.”<sup>173</sup> The cross is a risk for there are no guarantees of success. In the cross God becomes most vulnerable, not simply in dying but in the threat of being rejected. The cross is a risk for it does not guarantee reconciliation and mutual loving fellowship. God, in Christ, dies on the cross in full knowledge that there might be those who fully and finally reject God. This then would make the cross foolishness on the grandest scale, for if the creator of the universe chose to die for sinners in order to reconcile them to God, and they all rejected God, this would make God the chief fool. But this is the risk God chose out of supreme love and divine faith.

If the cross was a risk for God then the cross is an act of faith. Risk implies faith, for risk, without faith, is recklessness and God is wise, not reckless. The cross was not an act of desperation, but neither was it a cold calculated act. The cross was a strategic act of love. “Will this strategy of being resourceful, receptive and responsive succeed? Will the disciples come to trust God’s way? Will their lives be turned around? Will other people come to trust God through Jesus? Will reconciliation come about? Is God crazy to take this path?”<sup>174</sup> God’s insight of the cross is a risk God believes will work. Otherwise God would not have engaged in such an act. The fact that God died to reconcile a sinful world means that God believes the cross will be effective. God trusts that humans will respond to this act. God hopes that all will participate in Christ’s resurrection. And yet, we still see God has doubts about the final and complete victory. Biblical teachings which speak of death, perishing, and destruction in hell mean that God is unsure if all will ultimately seek reconciliation and mutual loving fellowship with God. Biblical teachings on hell are testimony to the fact that God trusts that persons will freely respond to God’s faith with faith of their own but that God will compel no one.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 106.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid.

<sup>175</sup>Hell need not be understood as eternal conscious torment. Many have conceived of hell as a place of ultimate and final destruction for those who finally do not wish to participate in God’s faith and love. For explorations into hell as annihilation or conditional immortality, see Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Verdict Publications, 1982); Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Clark Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William V. Crockett (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 135-166.



Others believe that God's act of love and empowering might actually be universally successful. Ward suggests that we can hold out hope that in the end God's act of love will be effective in winning the whole world. Ward believes that the message of God's love will have the power to effect reconciliation. Ward, while speaking of God's "hope of turning perpetrators of evil to penitence" writes that, "Even though God will not compel free creatures to love, it might seem unnatural for anyone truly to experience the destructive effects of self-regard and then to encounter such self-giving, empowering, fulfilling love and reject it."<sup>176</sup> Ward is right to hold out such hope for I see God hoping for nothing less. Yet, even with Ward's confession of belief and hope in a universal salvation he does reveal the tension this hope has with the reality that love cannot be compelled.

If God is omnipotent love, therefore, the divine purpose can be frustrated in many particulars, since divine love will not compel. But it cannot be frustrated in its final outcome, since God's power in its ultimately irresistible attraction, will not suffer love to be defeated. One cannot positively guarantee that this will happen. Yet it is an outcome one can rightly hope for and pray for, if God's universal love indeed wills the salvation of all created beings.<sup>177</sup>

Ward recognizes that even with God's power and universal love, salvation is still a hope on many levels. This is a hope we share with God, a hope that none will perish but all will come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

The resurrection of Jesus is God's victory over the powers of sin, alienation, and death. The resurrection means that the cross was not merely a sad ending to a noble attempt. It is the sign that God's love is not powerless but that it has the authority to make things new, including relationships. However, the resurrection does not mean that the cross was without risk. Because God raised Jesus from the grave to glory does not mean that the final victory has come or that the risk of the cross is over. The resurrection, like the cross, has an objective and a subjective side. Objectively the resurrection reveals that Jesus conquered the power of death and the alienating forces of sin. Yet subjectively the resurrection is a beacon of God's effective love just as the cross is a beacon of God's sacrificial love. The resurrection shows what God has planned for those who hope and trust in God. The resurrection awaits those who wish to deny themselves and enter into mutual loving fellowship of love and faith with God. But this is still the free choice of humanity. God's life in

---

<sup>176</sup>Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 264.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 265.

Jesus cannot compel us to relationship anymore than God's death in Jesus. The reconciliation of the breached relationship requires that we respond to the love of God (cross) and the power of God (resurrection). God has acted in faith for faith and hopes and trusts that we will respond by faith. Vanstone writes that the triumph or tragedy of God's love is dependent upon the response it receives. "The vulnerability of God means that the issue of His love as triumph or tragedy depends upon His creation. There is given to the creation the power to determine the love of God as either triumphant or tragic love. This power may be called 'power of response': upon the response of the creation the love of God depends for its triumph or tragedy."<sup>178</sup> Can a love, which allows creation to decide whether it is triumphant or tragic, be understood as anything other than a love given in faith?

### Conclusion

God's faith and hope in the efficacy of the cross is not idle. Just as God's strength and love are at work reconciling the world to God's self, God's faith and hope are at work as well. "It is God's faith in us and God's love towards us that creates the gift Paul describes as *justification*. The conviction that we are justified by God's faith in us and God's love towards us creates peace with God."<sup>179</sup> God's faith in us, whether we recognize it as faith or not, is calling us to love and trust in God. God's love and faith are efficacious in bringing about justification, reconciliation, and mutual fellowship. Just as God's love sparks a love within us, God's faith is the means of our own faith.

True faith depends not at all upon itself, nor upon its own system of piety, but rather upon the Lord alone and his faithfulness. It knows that our faith in God is only a reflection of God's faith in us. For our Father does believe in us; He *faithed* us into existence in the first place, and he continues day by day "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). To have faith is to have trust in the faithfulness of our God, knowing that faithfulness is first and foremost not a human but a divine attribute. All we human beings can do is to become empty, in order that God's character of perfect faithfulness may flow into us. Genuine faith is not the faith to *do* anything at all, except to fall to the ground and die.<sup>180</sup>

The risk God took in the incarnation and the cross demonstrates that God does not love from a distance but has the faith to become that which God hopes to save.

---

<sup>178</sup>Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 67.

<sup>179</sup>Ross, *Romans*, 37.

<sup>180</sup>Mason, *The Gospel According to Job*, 69-70.

Salvation is the restoring of broken fellowship and the healing of human sin, but it is also the healing of divine hurt. If God is truly hurt by human sin and if salvation is the restoring of broken fellowship, can we speak about God being healed, that is “saved,” by faith? Is Jesus more than our Christ but also God’s Christ? Jesus is not to be *a* savior but is *the* savior, for human and divine, albeit in radically different ways.

Human salvation as healing is one of the many metaphors for salvation in the history of theology. Sanctification, justification, liberation, and forgiveness are deep metaphors in the language of salvation and are extremely important with a richness and depth of meaning for the humans who are saved. However, these are often individualized concepts that do not necessarily have to speak in terms of relationality. Healing, in many instances, may also have the sense of personal and individual healing. Biblically, the idea of salvation as healing, quite common with the Greek term  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ , is used to speak of both physical healing and eschatological healing.<sup>181</sup> Paul even connects the concepts of reconciliation and healing when he writes, “For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, we will be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). Here the idea of reconciliation, that is the restoring of broken fellowship, is tied to the idea of healing. We are saved, that is, the relationship has been restored.

In theological terms, Bruce Reichenbach argues that salvation should be understood in terms primarily, although not exclusively, of healing. For him salvation is about restoration of the person, a perfecting and maturing. Sin is a form of spiritual sickness; God is the healer, Jesus the physician.<sup>182</sup>

The healing is *curative* in that it deals with our fundamental human predicament of sin, removing our sin from us. It is *restorative* because it returns us to wholeness: to the wholeness of our relation to God from whom we have been cut off because of sin in rejecting his covenant and his forgiving attempts to reconcile us, to the wholeness of our person from which sickness have been removed, and to the wholeness of God’s community from which we were ostracized.<sup>183</sup>

According to Reichenbach, the healing is not simply a removal of sin or a curing of the individual but a restoration of the whole person, which includes reconciling and

---

<sup>181</sup>Perhaps the most interesting example is found in Acts 4:9 and 12 in which the same word is used to speak of both physical and eschatological healing.

<sup>182</sup>Bruce R. Reichenbach, “Healing View,” in *The Nature of Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 117-142.

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

restoring the person to God. Salvation heals the relationship and the damages caused by sin. But as we know, humans are not the only ones hurt by sin nor are humans the only ones affected by the estrangement. God, too, is hurt and estranged by human sin and rebellion. One of the most significant tenets of relational theology is the rejection of the classical doctrine of impassability, the idea that God can never suffer. One of the foremost ideas of relational theology is that God does suffer, both willingly and unwillingly. God not only suffers in and with Jesus on the cross but God suffers the ill affects of sin before the cross. It is the suffering of humanity and divinity that leads to the cross. God suffers the ill affects of a love rejected. This is one reason why God must act in faith and love in hope of restoring the relationship. God acts in faith in order to reconcile humanity to God's self, heal the breach in the relationship, and experience peace with creation. God's faith, the willingness to suffer in order to end suffering, is also healing for God. God's hope is that by reaching out in faith and love that God, as well as humanity, will be saved, that is healed.

The faith of God in the advent of Christ is the most dramatic act of faith ever displayed. Our faith is in one who is faithful. God's faith is often risky for it is often a faith in a faithless humanity. Jesus' faith in the Father, while having to face the threat of God forsakenness, was a faith that was rewarded by his glorification. The Father's faith in the Son was a faith in the true human, a human with an autonomous will. The Father's faith was rewarded when Jesus effected the atonement with his death and resurrection. The final effects of God's faith in humanity's subjection to the cross are yet to be seen. Certainly there have been many men and women who have come to God with repentant hearts seeking God's will for their lives. But there are others who we cannot be sure about. For those we are not sure of we can only follow Ward's advice and hope and pray that God's willful salvation for the entire world will not fail. This is not merely a human hope but a divine one as well



## CONCLUSION

Faith is an idea that cannot be reduced to a single conception. It is multifaceted in that it includes the attributes of belief, trust, hope, and even risk. With these attributes in mind it functions as noun and verb, theoretical and experiential, complex and simple, of the mind and the body. Faith has a value all its own and is also a means to its own end, suggesting that the purpose of faith is to generate faith. Faith, like love, is not something that will one day run its course and cease to be useful or necessary, for as long as there are free beings there will need to be faith. As long as there are relationships of mutual fellowship and communion between the divine and the human there will be faith.

One of the reasons for faith's irreducibility is that it has many attributes. Faith has the attribute of belief, the intellectual activity of affirming the possible truth or factualness of an idea that is outside the range of knowledge. Faith, logically, begins with a mental assertion that makes the action side of faith more than simple habit. A second attribute of faith is trust. Trust, unlike belief, is primarily an action or event. Faith's trust attribute is living out the intellectual affirmation of one's belief. It is when the belief is tested. Faith also has the attribute of hope, a quality that is future-facing, anticipating and longing for a desired result. Hope lived out both intellectually and bodily plans and works towards a desired future. Faith, however, is not faith without the elements of risk and doubt for there is no need of faith, trust, or hope if nothing is risked. Without risk, faith has no real value. It is simply guesswork, a means to living with unknowns. But faith seeks values and goods, beauty and creativity, beyond the assuredness of security. Faith not only presupposes risk, but risk often generates faith, forcing a person to act on faith. Without risk we live without concern, but where there is freedom and purpose, there is risk. And where there is risk there is doubt. Not necessarily debilitating doubt but questions and hesitations that require faith all the more in order to triumph. Doubt, at times the destroyer of faith, is at other times the ground from which faith must grow. Where there is no doubt, hesitation, or question there is no need for faith.

As stated above, faith is ultimately for the fostering of relationships. In fact,

faith should be understood as a particular kind of relationship, a relationship which love or trust alone could never produce. Faith is a kind of relationship that joins love and trust so there can be a mutual fellowship and communion. Love and trust produce a relationship of faith where there is guidance without control, care without smothering, and freedom without apathy. As any parent knows, it is difficult to work out a healthy balance of love that seeks to protect and a trust that allows for freedom and maturity. But in many ways this is the kind of faith a parent has in a child, a faith that can be typified as a careful balance of love and trust. I am not suggesting that faith should supersede the ideas of love or trust. I am merely approaching the idea of faith from a relational perspective, seeking ways in which the concepts of love and trust might be enriched and expanded.

As a school of thought, relational theism is fairly new to Christian theology. Less than a hundred years old, it has nonetheless produced theological innovations while calling for theologians to reread the scriptures and traditions in light of this new approach. The focus of relational theology is a God in relation that means that God cannot have absolute control over all facets of creation. God is responsive to the real and free choices of creatures. The purpose of relational theism is to understand and articulate God as this divine being in relation. As has been shown, relational theism is not a movement in which there is complete unanimity, for there are often great differences of opinion concerning everything from God's power and abilities to God's trinity to God's being in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, while there is not unanimity there is unity in the conceptualization of God as a being who *reacts* and *responds* for God genuinely *relates*.

The relational conceptualization of God has generally included the notions that God is self-limited for the purposes of relationship.<sup>1</sup> The relationships that God desires, according to relational theists, are relationships of genuine love which produce goods and values, many of which God alone could never achieve. For the sake of love and immeasurable values, God becomes limited in giving humans the ability to freely enter into relationship with God and likewise the ability to disregard relationship with God. For the sake of authentic give and take, genuine relationship, God created a universe with potential and novelty that God could not control at each step of its unfolding history. It is a universe in which God cannot foreknow all that

---

<sup>1</sup>It is here that a major disagreement among relational theists can be found. The process theologian will argue that God is necessarily limited by a reality independent of God while other relational theologians will typically argue that God has imposed these limitations upon God's self. I approach in a manner that is more in accord with open theism than process.

will transpire for creatures have real freedom, and foreknowledge and freedom cannot mix. God, for the sake of freedom and the purposes of love, has chosen to enter into relationship with humanity.

Given that faith is relationship-centered and that relational theism seeks to understand and explain God in terms of loving relationship, is there any reason not to add faith to God's attributes? This work suggests that given the nature of faith and the relational conception of God it makes most sense to speak of God as a being of faith. Thus, faith should be included among God's attributes. Like love, faith is not a weakness but a divine strength that does not limit God, rather, it enables God to work within God's limits. Faith is a necessary attribute of genuine relationship. If God is limited in power and knowledge, and if God has chosen to partner with humanity to produce values and beauties which God alone cannot produce, then faith is not only an attribute, it is an essential attribute of God along with love and justice.

God is often spoken of as being first and foremost love. God acts out of, and for, the purposes of love. Yet the idea of love alone may not fully illuminate God's being and actions. Certainly it should be said that God is also power, for love without power is helpless. God is justice for God seeks to make right all wrongs. And God is faith for God has empowered humans to make their own choices. God is a being who shares power. While this can rightly be seen as an act of love, it is no less an act of faith, for God is not compelled to share this power and has no absolute need to do so and yet God does. God shares power with a limited and fallible creature. It has been said that God's love is shown in the sharing of power, but the sharing of power out of love is no less than an act of faith.

The faith of God has been shown to have been a decisive factor in two of God's most significant acts: creation and the advent of Christ. God acted in faith to create that which is other. God became limited in the act of creation by becoming one of many beings whereas prior to creation God was the pantheistic all. Out of divine freedom God created a free world in which God instilled the purposes of relationship and communion. This is a risky venture for there is no guarantee that free creatures will do what is hard and sacrificial. But this is what God trusts will happen. God's faith made creation possible, for even though God had the power to create and the loving desire to create without the faith to act, creation would merely be a divine idea. God's ability and desire were not enough, faith allowed God to put love and power to work. Creation is a work of love but it is no less a work of faith.

The creation and continuation of the universe is an act of faith but it may pale

in comparison to the faith that God displayed in the advent of Christ. In the act of creation God became other, a fellow being, but in the advent of Christ God became human. God was not simply another fellow being, God became other to God. Christ as the God-man came in faith for faith. God became that with which God desired to be in relation. Certainly this display of power is a display of love, but it is no less a display of divine faith. In the incarnation, God became human and lived by faith in a new and novel way that God had never before experienced. In the incarnation God reveals what it means to be human as well as the nature of divinity. Jesus reveals what humans can be and what God is. This is not a revelation of unqualified power nor is it simply a revelation of utter love. In Jesus we see a man who had first and foremost extraordinary faith. Jesus lived the life of a person of faith, trusting the Father with his very life revealing both human potential and divine actuality. Jesus did not become less divine when he loved and showed faith; on the contrary, Jesus was revealing his divinity in these acts of loving faith and trust.

The faith demonstrated in the advent of Christ was not merely Christ's faith in the Father, but the Father's faith in Jesus. The Father had to trust that Jesus would take the cross and fulfill his messianic mission. God trusted that Jesus would remain faithful and trustworthy, even when forsaken. Even though God gave up Jesus, God never gave up on Jesus. God's faith is most clear in Jesus' prayer that his cup of suffering be removed. God trusted Jesus with that cup even when Jesus himself had doubts. In the advent of Christ we see not only the Father's faith in Christ but also the Father's faith through Christ.

Jesus' faith was not only in the Father but in the disciples as well. Jesus taught the disciples to follow his way. He empowered them to do great works and entrusted the church with the Spirit of God to be a light of God's love and truth. These acts are not to be taken lightly for the empowering of the Church is a risky act that can and has failed. God has entrusted the Church to be the body of Christ.

God's faith in the Church leads to a theology of divine faith. God's faith is not simply a theoretical notion but has real and practical implications. 1 John 4:19 says that "We love because he first loved us." We know love and can give love because of the example and revelation of God's love. But the same could be said for hope, trust, and faith. Just as we learn love by Christ's example, we also should turn to Christ to learn faith. We risk because God risked. We will for what God has willed. We hope for what God hopes. We trust as God trusts. We doubt what God doubts. We hate what God hates. We become angry at what angers God. And we



should have faith as God has faith in us. This is the prayer, this is the goal, and this is maturity. This is the story of scripture. “The stories of scripture are not only a story of our faith in God. They are also magnificent, tear-inducing stories of God’s faith in us. We learn to trust as we realize we are being trusted. We become responsible as we understand we are being handed responsibility as a gift.”<sup>2</sup> We have faith as we understand God has faith in us.

The love of God is a call for us to trust God. Our faith in God will not be in vain for God loves us and desires our best. God also desires our love and has become vulnerable, risking God’s well-being in the hope of being loved. This is an act of faith born out of love. The scriptures have been called a love story but they are no less a faith story. God has acted in faith for faith. God’s hope is that we will respond to faith with faith. It is the relational aspect of God that necessitates faith. God does love and desire love, but without a longing for fellowship and communion, faith is unnecessary. Yet this is what relational theology is seeking to bring to the forefront of theology, a God who desires and values fellowship. God’s desire for fellowship is so great that God has become limited for authentic fellowship. God has become a being of faith for faithful fellowship.

As stated in the introduction, the history of the concept is sparse. The faith of God is not a wholly new idea. Authors have alluded to God’s faith, as noted throughout this work, and have even made use of the statements such as “God’s faith.” Authors have spoken about God’s risking, trusting, and hoping. In 1919 Frederick Shannon produced the text, *God’s Faith in Man: And Other Sermons* in which he discusses the creation of humans as an act of divine faith.<sup>3</sup> In this work, Shannon argued that the creation of humans in the image of God was an act of divine faith. The fact that God gave humans a purpose is also evidence of God’s faith. Shannon also makes mention of biblical heroes such as Moses and David being the object of God’s faith but states the twelve apostles are the “supreme illustration” of God’s faith.

Noiseless as a sunrise, yet the calling of those twelve men by Jesus is big with the promise of new heavens and a new earth. Your government, your home, your democracy, your art, your science, your ethics—everything you have and

---

<sup>2</sup>John W. Wimberly Jr., “God’s Faith in Us,” *Living Pulpit* 6, no. 1 (Jan/Mar 1997): 19.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick F. Shannon, *God’s Faith in Man: And Other Sermons* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1919), 9-25. The sermon is interesting given that its date of publication is 1919, after World War I, yet the sermon reads as if it were written in the heyday of Idealism. If the sermon is post WWI it is a remarkable statement of hopefulness.

everything you hope to have that is worth having—all of these streams flow down from that mountain up into which He went, “and calleth unto Him whom He Himself would.” The Will that can bind or loose the bands of Orion chose twelve frail human wills to inaugurate the Kingdom of God among men. Unlettered, without social prestige, devoid of political power, lacking the emoluments of wealth, yet these twelve men—bigoted, selfish, sinful—are sent forth to conquer the world. Many times they were without faith in themselves, in man, or God. Apparently doing everything in their power to make it impossible for even God to trust them, yet the Lord Christ goes on believing in them, inspiring them, strengthening them, loving them unto the end, and on across the beckoning frontiers of “the Land of Beginning Again.”<sup>4</sup>

Shannon ends his sermon with a call to those who have lost faith in themselves (and perhaps God as well) to remember God’s faith in them. “God's faith in man is indeed a strong and vital truth, at once subduing and heartening. Have we lost faith in ourselves? Let us be wise men, go to Bethlehem, and witness the epiphany of God in the flesh.”<sup>5</sup> The sermon, while not a deeply developed theological argument, nonetheless calls us to consider God’s trust and faith in humanity.

Moltmann also makes a dramatic statement concerning divine faith in an article entitled “Control is Good—Trust is Better.” While the main thrust of the article is human trust, its nature and development, the piece ends with a statement of God’s trust in humans. “Trust is always a mutual affair, and this is true of trust in God too: We trust in God because God trusts in us. That is the heart of the biblical stories and message: God trusts in us, God believes in us, God hopes in us and awaits us. People who understand this become God’s trusted and familiar friends.”<sup>6</sup> While this thesis is not the first to discuss or suggest God’s faith, it is the first full development of a theology of divine faith. I hope it will not be the last.

This work is experimental, born out of my own experiences and reasoning, but at the same time it is a work which seeks to be faithful to the biblical witness. It has sought to treat relational theism critically, yet honestly, revealing its strengths and problems in light of a theology of God’s faith. My intent has been to humbly make these offerings. I could have quite easily ended as many of these sentences with a question mark as with a period. I have not explored all that can and should be considered regarding a theology of God’s faith. More needs to be said concerning God’s faith and eschatology, soteriology, and theodicy. This is why I wish to end the

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>6</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, “Control is Good—Trust is Better: Freedom and Security in a ‘Free World,’” *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (2006): 473.

work not with a conclusion but with a call. Sanders ends his book *The God Who Risks* with an invitation for “others to join in the development of this [relational] model.”<sup>7</sup> I, too, invite others to begin discussing the concept of divine faith and the implications of God as a being of faith.

---

<sup>7</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 282.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abe, Masao. "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata." In *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Faith Meets Faith Series. Edited by John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Alfred Jules Ayer. *Logical Positivism*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959.
- Alston, William P. *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999.
- Aulén, Gustaf. *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. Translated by A.G. Herbert. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1969.
- Baker, James Austin. "Biblical Views of Nature." In *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*. Edited by Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990. Book online. Available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2312>; Internet.
- Barbour, Ian G. *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God's Power: A Process View." In *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Edited by John Polkinghorne. London: SPCK, 2001.
- Barr, James. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Barrett, C. K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Harper's New Testament Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Barth, Karl. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963.
- Basinger, David. *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Practical Implications." In *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Beilby, James K., and Paul R. Eddy. *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

- Bergmann, Gustav. "Logical Positivism, Language, and the Reconstruction of Metaphysics." In *The Linguistic Turn*. Edited by Richard Rorty. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Beverly Wildung Harrison. *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Bloesch, Donald G. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Volume 1 God, Authority, & Salvation*. Christian Foundations. Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press, 1999.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Bonting, Sjoerd L. *Creation and Double Chaos: Science and Theology in Discussion*. Theology and the sciences. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Borg, Marcus J. *The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.
- Borgman, Paul. *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Boring, M. Eugene, and Fred B. Craddock. *The People's New Testament Commentary*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Boyd, Gregory A. "An Open-Theism Response." In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Open-Theism View." In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000.
- Boyd, Gregory A. "The Self-Sufficient Sociality of God: A Trinitarian Revision of Hartshorne's Metaphysics." In *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*. Edited by Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- Bracken, Joseph A., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- Brown, Colin. *Karl Barth and the Christian Message*. London: Tyndale Press, 1967.
- Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- Brown, Robert McAfee. *Is Faith Obsolete?* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974.

- Brueggemann, Walter. "Covenant as a Subversive Paradigm." *Christian Century*, no. 36 (November 1980): 1094-1098.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Genesis*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Science and Theology: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Brümmer, Vincent. *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*. Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Brunner, Emil. *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*. Translated by Olive Wyon. Dogmatics, vol. 2. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1934.
- Buber, Martin. *Two Types of Faith*. Translated by Norman P. Goldhawk. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.
- Bultmann, Rudolph. "Πιστεύω." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 9 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964-1974.
- Buttrick, David. *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Calvin, John. *Institute of the Christian Religion, 2 Volumes--Library of Christian Classics*. Edited by John McNeil. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.
- Caputo, John D. *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Carasik, Michael. "The Limits of Omniscience." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 2 (summer 2000): 221-232.
- Case-Winters, Anna. *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1990.
- Childs, Brevard. *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970.

- Clark, David K., and John S. Feinberg. *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Foundations of Evangelical theology. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2003.
- Clines, David J. A. *Job 1-20*. Word Biblical Commentary Volume 17. Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989.
- Cobb, John B., Jr. *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965. Book on-line. Available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1085&C=1118>; Internet.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Process Theology," Religion-Online. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1489>.
- Cobb, John, Jr., and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.
- Cooper, John W. *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Copan, Paul. "Is Creatio Ex Nihilo A Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal." *Trinity Journal* 17, no. 1 spring 1996: 77-93 [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article\\_exnihilo\\_copan.html](http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article_exnihilo_copan.html); Internet; accessed 28 August 2007.
- Copan, Paul, and William Lane Craig. *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy: Vol. I Greece and Rome*. Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1962.
- Cousins, Ewert H. "Process Models in Culture, Philosophy, and Theology." In *Process Theology: Basic Writings by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*. Edited by Ewert H. Cousins. New York: Newman Press, 1971.
- Craig, William Lane. "Creatio Ex Nihilo." In *Process Theology*. Edited by Ronald H. Nash. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Middle-Knowledge View." In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Davies, Paul. *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Davis, Stephen T. "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by Evans, C. Stephen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Dawe, Donald G. *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.

- Decrees of the First Vatican Council, Chapter 3 “On faith.”  
<http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum20.htm#Chapter%203%20On%20faith>  
 (accessed March 2, 2007).
- Donfried, Karl Paul. “Faith.” In *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Dulles, Avery. *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Dunn, James D. G. “Appendix 1: Once More, ΠΙΕΤΙΕ ΧΡΙΕΤΟΥ.” In *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Durand, Jaap. “When Theology Became Metaphor.” *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, no. 111 (November 2001): 12-16.
- The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Allen C. Myers. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Dyrness, William. *Themes in Old Testament Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983.
- Edwards, Denis. *The God of Evolution: a Trinitarian Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004.
- Edwards, Rem B. “How Process Theology Can Affirm Creation Ex Nihilo.” *Process Studies* 29, no. 1 Spring-Summer 2000: 96 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3000>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2007.
- Eichrodt, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume 1*. Translated by J. A. Baker. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume 2*. Translated by J. A. Baker. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963.
- “Faith.” In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. Edited by E. A. Livingstone, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Evangelical Theological Society, “ETS Constitution,”  
<http://www.etsjets.org/?q=about/constitution> (accessed May 5, 2007).
- Evans, Craig A. *Mark 8:27-16:20*. Word Biblical Commentary, 34B. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.
- Fedler, Kyle D. *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Fee, Gordon D. “The New Testament and Kenosis Christology.” In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by C. Stephen Evans. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Feinberg, John. "Doubt, Religious." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God Ordains All Things." In *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*. Edited by David Basinger and Randall Basinger. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Ferré, Frederick. *Language, Logic and God*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by George Eliot. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989.
- Fiddes, Paul. "Creation Out of Love." In *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Edited by John Polkinghorne. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Creative Suffering of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Fox, James J. "Anthropomorphism, Anthropomorphites," *New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia*. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01558c.htm>.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Franke, John R. *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to its Nature, Task, and Purpose*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Firmage, Edwin. "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 82 (March 1999).
- Fischer, John Martin. "Introduction." In *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*. Stanford Series in Philosophy. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Anchor Bible, vol. 28a. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.
- Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Frame, John M. *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2001.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *Exodus*. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God, Abraham, and the Abuse of Isaac." *Word & World* XV, no. 1 (winter 1995): 49-57.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?" *Word & World* 14, no. 2 (spring 1992): 144-153.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Fritz, Maureen. "A Midrash: The Self-Limitation of God." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 4 (fall 1985): 703-714.
- Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*. Fallbrook, Calif.: Verdict Publications, 1982.
- Fudge, Edward William, and Robert A. Peterson. *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Furnish, Victor Paul. *Theology and Ethics in Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.
- Ganssle, Gregory E. "Introduction: Thinking about God and Time." In *God & Time: Four Views*. Edited by Gregory E. Ganssle. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Garrett, Leroy. "The Nature of Biblical Faith." In *Christian Doctrine: The Faith Once Delivered*. Edited by William J. Richardson. Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Publishing Company, 1983.
- Giere, Ronald N. and Alan W. Richardson. *Origins of Logical Empiricism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Geisler, Norman L. *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New "Open" View of God--Neotheism's Dangerous Drift*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God Knows All Things." In *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*. Edited by David Basinger and Randall Basinger. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Gilkey, Langdon. *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation in Light of Modern Knowledge*. Anchor Books. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Theology in Process: Schubert Ogden's Developing Theology." *Interpretations* 21 (1967): 447-459.
- González, Justo L. *Essential Theological Terms*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Govier, Trudy. *Dilemmas of Trust*. Montreal: Queen's University Press, McGill, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Social Trust and Human Communities*. Montreal: Queen's University Press, McGill, 1997.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology for the Community of God*. Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2000.

- Grenz, Stanley J., and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Grenz, Stanley J., and Roger E. Olson. *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Griffin, David Ray. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976; New York: University Press of America, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Process Theology and the Christian Good News: A Response to Classical Free Will Theism." In *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*. Edited by Pinnock, Clark H., and Cobb, John B., Jr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Gutherie, Donald. *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndal New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Habel, Norman C. *The Book of Job*. Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Haers, Jacques. "Defensor Vinculi et Conversationis: Connectedness and Conversation as a Challenge to Theology." In *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*. Edited by J. Haers and P. De May. Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2003.
- Hagner, Donald A. *Hebrews: New International Biblical Commentary*. New Testament Series. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew 14-28*. Vol. 33b, Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Books, 1995.
- Hall, Christopher A., and John Sanders. *Does God Have a Future?: A Debate on Divine Providence*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Hall, John Douglas. *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Sacra Pagina, vol. 1. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991.
- Hartley, John E. *The Book of Job*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Hartshorne, Charles. "The Development of Process Philosophy." In *Process Theology: Basic Writings by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*. Edited by Ewert H. Cousins. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*. Albany: State University of New York, 1984.
- Hasker, William. *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God Limits His Knowledge." In *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Philosophical Perspective." In *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Yes, God Has Beliefs!" *Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (1988): 385-394.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Haughey, John C. *Housing Heaven's Fire: The Challenge of Holiness*. Chicago, Ill.: Jesuit Way, 2002.
- Haight, John F. *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Response to 101 Questions on God and Evolution*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Hays, Richard B. *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Heim, S. Mark. *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Helm, Paul. *Faith with Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *Frontiers in Modern Theology: A Critique of Current Theological Trends*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God, Revelation, and Authority: Volume VI: God Who Stands and Stays Part Two*. Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1976.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Nashville: Nelson Reference, 1997.
- Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets: I & II*. New York: Prince Press, 1962.
- Hick, John. *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Faith." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Volumes 3 and 4*. Edited by Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan, 1967.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Faith and Knowledge*, 2d ed. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977.
- Hillers, Delbert R. *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.
- Horrell, J. Scott. "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 3 (September 2004): 399-421.
- Howell, Nancy R. "Openness and Process Theism: Respecting the Integrity of the Two Views." In *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*. Edited by John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, the Posthumous Essays, Of the Immortality of the Soul, and Of Suicide, from An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding of Miracles*. Edited by Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1998.
- Immink, F. Gerrit. *Faith: a Practical Theological Reconstruction*. Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Jacobs, Louis. *A Jewish Theology*. New York: Behrman House, 1973.
- Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job*. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *Rediscovering the Parables*. Scribner Lyceum Library Editions. New York: Scribner, 1966.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. The New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Jonsen, A. R. "Faith: Patristic Tradition." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume V*. Edited by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America. New York: Hill, McGraw, 1967-79.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. *The Problem of God*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Theology as Imaginative Construction." *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 1 (March 1982): 73-79.

- Keener, Craig S. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978.
- Kenneson, Philip D. "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too." In *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*. Edited by Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Kenny, Anthony. *The God of the Philosophers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Kernaghan, Ronald J. *Mark*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Kettler, Christian D. *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ*. Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2005.
- King, Robert H. *The Meaning of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973.
- Koester, Craig R. *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, vol 36 The Anchor Bible*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- König, Adrio. *Here Am I: A Believer's Reflection on God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Küng, Hans. *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*. Translated by Edward Quinn. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Lamm, Norman. *Faith and Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought*. New York: Ktav, 1971.
- LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*. Vol. 2, Mark 8:22-16:20. Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999.
- Lawhead, William F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy: The Contemporary Voyage 1900-*, 2d ed. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2002.
- Lewis, G. R. "Attributes of God." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984.
- Lindsay, Dennis R. "The Roots and Development of the πιστ- Word Group as Faith Terminology." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 49 (March 1993): 103-118.
- Livingston, James C., and Francis S. Fiorenza. *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 2d ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

- Logical Empiricism - Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Paolo Parrini, Wesley C. Salmon, and Merrilee H. Salmon. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003.
- Longmon, T., III. "Anthropomorphism." In *New Dictionary of Theology: A Concise and Authoritative Resource*. Edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J.I. Packer. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Longnecker, Richard N. "The 'Faith of Abraham' Theme in Paul, James and Hebrews: A Study in the Circumstantial Nature of New Testament Teaching." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 3 (September 1977): 230-212.
- Loomer, Bernard M. "The Size of God." In *The Size of God: The Theology of Bernard Loomer in Context*. Edited by Dean, William, and Axel, Larry E. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987.
- Lührmann, Dieter. "Faith." In *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 2 D-G*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. Translated by Frank Witt Hughes. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Mackey, James P. "The Faith of the Historical Jesus." *Horizons* 3, no. 2 (fall 1976): 155-174.
- Macquarrie, John. *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach*. New York: Crossroad, 1982; reprint, Eugene Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Principles of Christian Theology*, second ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Marshall, Christopher D. *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*. Monograph Series / Society for New Testament Studies, no. 64. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Ill.: Eerdmans, 1978.
- Matera, Frank J. *New Testament Christology*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Martin, Ralph P. *James: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 48*. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988.
- Mason, Mike. *The Gospel According to Job*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1994.

- Mathews, Kenneth. *Genesis 1-11:26*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 1, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.
- Matson, David Lertis, and Warren S. Brown. "Tuning the Faith: The Cornelius Story in Resonance Perspective." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33, no. 4 (winter 2006): 449-466.
- May, Gerhard. *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation Out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*. Translated by A. S. Worrall. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.
- McFague, Sallie. "Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence." In *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Edited by William C. Placher. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3d ed. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- McKenzie, Steven L. *Covenant*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000.
- Meeks, M. Douglas. "Jürgen Moltmann's Systematic Contributions to Theology." *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (April 1996): 95-105.
- Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. 3 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001.
- Mesle, C. Robert. *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1993.
- Meüller-Fahrenheit, Geiko. *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 2000.
- Michel, O. "Faith." In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Miller, Patrick D. "The Omniscience of God and Human Freedom." In *And God Saw It Was Good: Essays on Creation and God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim*. Saint Paul, Minn.: Word & World [Supplement Series, 5], April, 2006.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. "Control is Good—Trust is Better: Freedom and Security in a 'Free World.'" *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (2006): 465-483.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden.



- Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993; New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God is Unselfish Love." In *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Faith Meets Faith Series. Edited by John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World." In *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Edited by John Polkinghorne. London: SPCK, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Science and Wisdom*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. Translated by James W. Leitch. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991; New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Moltz, Howard. "God and Abraham in the Binding of Isaac." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 96 (December 2001): 59-69.
- Moreland, J. P. "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 77-88.
- Morris, Leon. *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Faith." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Nash, Ronald H. *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Process Theology and Classical Theism." In *Process Theology*. Edited by Ronald H. Nash. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume 1 Human Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941; reprint 1964.
- Norris, Frederick. "Christ, Christology." In *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. Edited by Everett Ferguson. New York: Garland Publishing, 1990.
- Norris, Richard A. *The Christological Controversy*. Translated and edited by Richard A. Norris. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- O'Collins, Gerald. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- O'Collins, Gerald, and Daniel Kendall. "The Faith of Jesus." *Theological Studies* 53, no. 3 (September 1992): 403-423.

- Oden, Thomas C. *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006.
- Olson, Roger E., and Christopher A. Hall. *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Packer, J. I. "Faith." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Anthropology in the Theological Perspective*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985.
- Parse, Rosemarie Rizzo. *Hope: An International Human Becoming Perspective*. Sudbury, Mass.: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1999.
- Peacocke, Arthur. "The Cost of New Life." In *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Edited by John Polkinghorne. London: SPCK, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming, Natural and Divine*. Signposts in Theology. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Penelhum, Terence. *Reason and Religious Faith*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995.
- Peters, Ted. *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God-the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Pickar, C. H. "Faith: In the New Testament." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume V*. Edited by Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967-79.
- Pinnock, Clark, and et al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Pinnock, Clark, "Between Process and Classical Theism." In *Process Theology*. Edited by Ronald H. Nash. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Conditional View." In *Four Views on Hell*. Edited by William V. Crockett. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Systematic Theology." In *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

- Pinnock, Clark H., and Robert C. Brow. *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Pinnock, Clark H., and John B. Cobb Jr. "Introduction." In *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Placher, William C. *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 28. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1902.
- Polkinghorne, John. *Living with Hope: A Scientist Looks at Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Polkinghorne, John, ed. *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Pope, Marvin H. *Job*, 3d ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973.
- Prestige, G. L. *God in Patristic Thought*. London: S.P.C.K., 1952.
- Provan, Iain. *1 and 2 Kings*. New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series, vol. 7. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.
- Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by William V. Dych. New York: Seabury Press, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- Reading, Anthony. *Hope & Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Reichenbach, Bruce R. "Healing View." In *The Nature of Atonement: Four Views*. Edited by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006.
- Reiner, David J. "An Overlooked Term in Old Testament Theology: Perhaps." In *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E.W. Nicholson*. Edited by Mayes, A.D.H., and Salters, R.B. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Rice, Richard. *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reason & the Contours of Faith*. Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1991.

- Richardson, Alan. *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*. London: SCM Press, 1958.
- Rogers, L. Edna. "The Meaning of Relationship in Relational Communication." In *The Meaning of "Relationship" in Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Richard L. Conville and Lilian Edna Rogers. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1998.
- Rorty, Richard. "Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Language." In *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. Edited by Richard Rorty. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Ross, Art, and Martha M. Stevenson. *Romans*. Interpretation Bible Studies. Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 1999.
- Roy, Steven C. *How Much Does God Foreknow?: A Comprehensive Biblical Study*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006.
- Russell, Robert John. "Cosmology: Evidence for God or Partner for Theology?" *Evidence of Purpose: Scientists Discover the Creator*. Edited by John Marks Templeton. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Russell, Robert John, and Kirk Wegter-McNelly. "Natural Law and Divine Action." In *Bridging Science and Religion*. Theology and the Sciences. London: SCM, 2002.
- Sanders, John. *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Historical Considerations." In *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Schreiner, Thomas R., and Bruce A. Ware. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000.
- Scott, Bernard Brandon. *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Sessions, William Lad. *The Concept of Faith: A Philosophical Investigation*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Shannon, Frederick F. *God's Faith in Man: And Other Sermons*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1919.
- Shapiro, Gerald. *Bad Jews and Other Stories*. Cambridge: Zoland Books, 1999.
- Sheriffs, D. C. T. "Faith." In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Sherlock, Charles. *The Doctrine of Humanity: Contours of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Shrader, Hal. *Freedom Versus Security in the Theology of Dorothee Soelle*. M.A. thesis, Pepperdine University, 1998.

- Silva, Moisés. *God, Language, and Scripture Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics*. Vol. 4, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1990.
- Sire, James W. "On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody: Logocentricity and Postmodernity." In *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*. Edited by Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Smart, J. J. C. "Time." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Volumes 7 and 8*. Edited by Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- Smick, Elmer B. "Job." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 4*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelien. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992.
- Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, Second ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Smith, Mont W. *What the Bible Says About Covenant*. Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1981.
- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Faith and Belief*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning and End of Relation*. New York: McMillan, 1962; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Soelle, Dorothee. *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Sponheim, Paul R. *Faith and Process: The Significance of Process Thought for Christian Faith*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Faith and the Other: A Relational Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Pulse of Creation: God and the Transformation of the World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Speaking of God: Relational Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Stein, Robert H. *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.
- Stiver, Dan R. *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol & Story*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Stokes, Walter E. "A Whiteheadian Reflection on God's Relation to the World." In *Process Theology: Basic Writings*. Edited by Ewert H. Cousins. New York: Newman Press, 1971.
- Stone, Howard W., and James O. Duke. *How Too Think Theologically*, 2d ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

- Stott, John R.W. *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*. New Revised; New York: Crossroad, 1989.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Faith and Reason*, 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Taliaferro, Charles. "Unknowable Truths and Omniscience: A Reply to Kvanvig." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (fall 1993).
- Taylor, Daniel. *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian & the Risk of Commitment*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- TeSelle, Sallie McFague. *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Volume I*. Edited by R. Laird Harris. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.
- The Center for Process Studies. "Process Thought and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity," <http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/Biblio/Thematic/Trinity.html>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What is Process Thought?," <http://www.ctr4process.org/about/process/>.
- Thielicke, Helmut. *How the World Began: Man in the First Chapters of the Bible*. Translated by John W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus*. Translated by John W. Doberstein. New York: Harper, 1959.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Thomson, Fred P., Jr. "The Word of God." In *Christian Doctrine: The Faith Once Delivered*. Edited by William J. Richardson. Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Publishing Company, 1983.
- Thomson, Thomas R. "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology." In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by Evans, C. Stephen. "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God." In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by Evans, C. Stephen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63.
- Towner, W. Sibley. "Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible." *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (October 2005): 341-369.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.

- Vanstone, W.H. *The Risk of Love*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Van Till, Howard J. "The Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped." *Theology Today* 55, no. 3 (October 1998).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Science & Christian Theology as Partners in Theorizing." In *Science & Christianity: Four Views*. Edited by Richard F. Carlson. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with Topical Index*. Edited by W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1996.
- von Dehsen, Christian D. "The Imago Dei in Genesis 1:26-27." *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 259-270.
- von Rad, Gerhard. *Old Testament Theology: Volumes I & II*. Translated by D.M.G. Stalker. The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions. Single Volume; Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press, 2005.
- Wainwright, William J. "Wilfred Cantwell Smith on Faith and Belief." *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1984): 353-366.
- Wallis, Ian G. *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*. Society for New Testament Studies monograph series, no. 84. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Ward, Keith. *Concepts of God: Images of the Divine in Five Religious Traditions*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Cosmos and Kenosis." In *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Edited by Polkinghorne, John. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God, Chance & Necessity*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God, Faith & the New Millennium: Christian Belief in an Age of Science*. Boston, Mass.: Oneworld Publications, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Is God a Person?" In *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brümmer*. Edited by Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Bron, Marcel Sarot. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Religion and Creation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Ware, Bruce A. *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.
- Weinandy, Thomas G. *Does God Suffer?* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

- Welker, Michael. *Creation and Reality*. Translated by John F. Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987.
- Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*. Translated by David E. Green. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lectures, 1927-1928 (New York: Macmillan, 1929); ed. David Griffin and Donald Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York, Free Press, 1978).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Religion in the Making*. The Macmillan Company, 1926; New York: Meridian Books, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Science and the Modern World*. Lowell Lectures. The Macmillan Company, 1925; New York: The Free Press, 1967.
- Williams, Daniel Day. "God and Man." In *Process Theology: Basic Writing by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*. New York: Newman Press, 1971.
- Wimberly, John W., Jr. "God's Faith in Us." *Living Pulpit* 6, no. 1 (Jan/Mar 1997): 18-19.
- Wood, Forrest, Jr. *Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for a Philosophy of Religion*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1986. Book on-line. Available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2736&C=2476>; Internet.
- Wood, W. Jay. *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Anthropomorphism in Hellenism and in Judaism." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127, no. 507 (July-Sept. 1970).
- Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000.