

Trends in Theology evident in Evangelical Churches

Written by Calvin Fox

Tuesday, 19 April 2011 18:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 April 2011 08:29

Many conservative Reformed Christians have serious problems with Contemporary Christian Music and Worship. Their main objection is that such music and worship is characterized by "neo-gnosticism" or what is more commonly known as "Pietism (a relationship with God or "piety" that is individualized, private, subjective and romanticized) There is good reason for this concern, but I believe a more important concern is the influence on contemporary Worship is the influence of Open Theism. It is evident in Messages and books like The Shack, as well as in song lyrics.

Open Theism is characterized in several ways, all of which give human beings pre-eminence over God. I am more important than God. God exists for me, Even the Cross was all about me. The following 8 Concepts (printed in bold type) are a short outline of the tenets of Open Theism.

<http://www.challies.com/articles/challenges-to-the-church-open-theism>

We must recognize the Concepts and reject sermons, books or song lyrics that promote them. In this Essay, the comments before and after each Concept are my responses and rebuttal to them.

Misunderstandings about God contribute to "Open Theism"

God is Sovereign and omnipotent That does not mean that God causes or controls every detail of everything that happens in life.

God is omniscient That does not mean that God knows all that has not yet happened, but only that he knows all that has happened, all that is now and all that could happen [if this, then that] in the future

God is immutable That does not mean nothing about Him ever changes, that He is always the same in every aspect

Trends in Theology evident in Evangelical Churches

Written by Calvin Fox

Tuesday, 19 April 2011 18:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 April 2011 08:29

God is said to be impassive That does not mean that God has no emotions, feels no pain and does not suffer

God is self sufficient That does not mean that God is untouched by contingencies or is indifferent to what happens in the world (or the prayers of His people)

God is eternal and transcendent That does not mean that He does not act in Time or is not immanent, too

The 8 Concepts of Open Theism

1. God's greatest attribute is love. □ God's love overshadows His other characteristics

This, too, is a very serious misunderstanding about God. God is a non-corporeal spirit Being, a Person who is self-sufficient, complete, unchangeable, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, and simple. He is omniscient, wise, truthful and good. His goodness is Love and that includes grace, mercy and patience toward us. God is also holy and righteous, decreeing and upholding the highest standards of morality and justice. And God is sovereign in His will and purposes, as well as in His power.

All of this together describes the essential nature of God. God does not exist apart from His attributes. Nor do His attributes exist apart from Him. They were not added to God and they are not parts of God. He is not the sum of His attributes; He is essentially, equally, all His attributes together. God is One, a Unity. The attributes are "separated out" only for the purpose of discussion as in this article.

In practice, God is always all that He is everywhere, at all times and in all places. This is why we can not say God is Love. Love is only one of many attributes of God. God is God and, among many other things, it is the nature or character of God to love. God loves, but it is not correct to say that the nature or essence of God is Love or is primarily Love. When we do that, we are ignoring, or even denying, all that God is. That, in effect is denying God. He is all or He is nothing. He can not be a "part" of Himself. One attribute of Him can not be all of Him. His character or nature or essence is one.

(cont.) God's love so overshadows His other characteristics that He could never allow or condone evil or suffering to befall mankind.

There are angels and demons (especially Satan) that cause things to happen, as well as other Spiritual Powers. They are beings created by God, but they have their own will and may rebel against Him. Indeed, Satan is the Adversary of God and opposes Him at every turn. Although accountable to God, the Powers that rebel are not under God's control and what they do does not have His approval. They cause Evil. God does not!

Human beings also were created by God but have their own will and are able oppose Him. Those who do that also cause evil. Consequent violence and suffering in their lives and in the world is not from God

Trends in Theology evident in Evangelical Churches

Written by Calvin Fox

Tuesday, 19 April 2011 18:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 April 2011 08:29

Evil caused by these fallen beings is to be opposed and never accepted. Christians are not called to passivity in the presence of evil (this includes Disease, as well as all forms of Injustice), let alone rationalizing it as somehow God's will and for our good. There is a Cosmic War going on, particularly between Christ and Satan. The Church is in the middle. Christ calls us to be militant, not acquiescent, in this Conflict. However, God's actions to rein in evil and bring it to an end are for His glory and our good and we may have to patiently suffer and passively endure the hardship which that may bring upon us. These are important distinctions.

2. Man has libertarian free will. Man's will has not been so effected by the Fall that he is unable to make a choice to follow God.

This is absolutely not Biblical. Left to [himself] no man can or will make a choice to "follow God" or to accept Christ as Savior. [Man's] will is in bondage to his fallen nature. However, given that, a man can chose any number of self-serving actions.

God respects man's freedom of choice and would not infringe upon it.

Allowing the reality of so-called free will, both for the spiritual powers and all human beings, and all the possible consequences of their consequent choices and actions means God can only know, in regards to the future, all that might possibly happen. The issue here is not about God's ability, as God, to know all, but rather about what is available for Him to know.

3. God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future. Indeed, He cannot know certain future events because the future exists only as possibility. God is unable to see what depends on the choices of free will agents simply because this future does not yet exist so it is unknowable. In this way open theists attempt to reconcile this doctrine with God's omniscience.

Human beings also were created by God but have their own will and are able oppose Him. Those who do that also cause evil. Consequent violence and suffering in their lives and in the world is not from God.

Because God is the ultimate and rightful Ruler of All with supreme authority and power over all, He imposes limits upon these rebellious powers and human beings. They will be brought to judgment. How and when is determined by Him, although much of that will happen within time and history and will involve human, natural agencies.

Evil caused by these fallen beings is to be opposed and never accepted. Christians are not called to passivity in the presence of evil (this includes Disease, as well as all forms of Injustice), let alone rationalizing it as somehow God's will and for our good. There is a Cosmic War going on, particularly between Christ and Satan. The Church is in the middle. Christ calls us to be militant, not acquiescent, in this Conflict. However, God's actions to rein in evil and bring it to an end are for His glory and our good and we may have to patiently suffer and passively endure the hardship which that may bring upon us. These are important distinctions.

Trends in Theology evident in Evangelical Churches

Written by Calvin Fox

Tuesday, 19 April 2011 18:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 April 2011 08:29

4. God takes risks. Because God cannot know the future, He takes risks in many ways -creating people, giving them gifts and abilities, and so on. Where possibilities exist, so does risk.

5. God learns. Because God does not know the future exhaustively, He learns, just as we do.

6. God is reactive. Because He is learning, God is constantly reacting to the decisions we make.

The most cursory reading of Scripture demonstrates that God has emotions and experiences feelings, including compassion and suffering, as well as anger. This is certainly true of God the Father and God the Son on the occasion of the latter's crucifixion and all that involved. The Doctrine of Impassivity is best understood as saying God is not controlled by His emotions or feelings.

7. God makes mistakes. Because He is learning and reacting, always dealing with limited information, God can and does make errors in judgment which later require re-evaluation.

There is ample evidence in the Biblical narrative to demonstrate the God is very much aware of, and involved in, the affairs of the world. He acts in History. He is present in Time, often transforming *chronos* [the routine passing of minutes and hours] into *kairos* [awesome moments of Encountering His Presence]. He certainly responds to the suffering and cries of His People again and again. God is Available and Accessible in our world. And it is because He remains Eternal and Transcendent as He does this, there is hope for us all.

8. God can change His mind. When God realizes He has made an error in judgment or that things did not unfold as He supposed, He can change His mind.

The Nature and Attributes of God never change. He, as God, is the same always. His purposes never change. His will for History, ultimately uniting all things in Christ, never will change. What can change, and often has, is how God responds to the choices and actions of Men and Nations in order to carry out His unchangeable purposes for them.