

Resolution on the Foreknowledge of God: Reasons & Rationale

Be it resolved that we...affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive; and, we also believe that the "Openness" view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience.

Prepared for the Annual Meetings of The Baptist General Conference and Bethel College & Seminary
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This document was prepared by John Piper and Justin Taylor in consultation with the Edgren Fellowship, with a special appendix by Professor Millard Erickson. © 2000 Bethlehem Baptist Church.

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MILLARD ERICKSON, former Dean of Bethel Theological Seminary and presently Professor of Theology at Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, brings his usual insight and fairness to numerous issues relating to this controversy in a lucid and penetrating essay in question and answer format on pages 29-39. We strongly encourage the delegates to page through Dr. Erickson's essay and read the parts that seem most relevant. His appendix is entitled,

**Foreknowledge, God, Bethel, and the BGC:
Questions and Answers**

by Millard J. Erickson

Our Prayer in Times of Controversy

Gracious Father, have mercy on your children in disputes. We are sorry for any root of pride or fear of man or lack of insight that influences our stance in the controversy before us. We confess that we are not pure in ourselves. Even as we strive to persuade one another, we stand in need of a merciful Advocate. We are sinners. We are finite and fallible.

On both sides of the matter at hand, we take refuge together in the glorious gospel of justification by faith alone through grace. We magnify Jesus Christ, our Savior and King for all he has done to make us his own. We are a thankful people even in our conflict. We are broken and humble to think that we would be loved and forgiven and accepted by an infinitely holy God.

Forbid, O Lord, that our spirit in this struggle would be one of hostility or ill will toward anyone. Deliver us from every form of debate that departs from love or diminishes truth. Grant, Father, as Francis Schaeffer pleaded in his last days, that our disagreements would prove to be golden opportunities to show the world how to love – not by avoiding conflicts, but by how we act in them.

Show us, O God, the relationship between doctrine and devotion, between truth and tenderness, between Biblical faithfulness and Biblical unity, between standing on the truth and standing together. Let none of us be unteachable, or beyond correction. May the outcome of our dispute be clearer vision of your glory and grace and truth and wisdom and power and knowledge.

By your Spirit, grant that the result of all our arguments be deeper humility, more dependence on mercy, sweeter fellowship with Jesus, stronger love in our common life, more radical obedience to the commands of our King, more authentic worship, and a greater readiness and eagerness to lay down our lives to finish the Great Commission.

In all this, Father, our passion is that you would be glorified through Jesus Christ. Amen.

How to Use This Booklet

The question and answer format is meant to make it easy for you to scan the pages looking for the issues that most concern you. Use the Table of Contents to get your bearings, and then search out the most pressing questions you have. We hope we have addressed most of them. To follow the discussion in the BGC on both sides of the issue, you may consult www.BGC.Bethel.edu/4know/4know.htm and www.edgren.org.

As we began with prayer (above), we pledge with you to continue in prayer. Let us think Biblically and pray without ceasing for the good hand of the Lord to be on us.

The Proposed Resolution

1. *What is the resolution that is being proposed?*

The proposed resolution to be brought to the BGC annual meeting is as follows:

Be it resolved that we, the delegates of the Baptist General Conference, affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive; and, we also believe that the "Openness" view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience.

A similar resolution will be brought to the Bethel annual meeting:

Be it resolved that we, the delegates of the Annual Meeting of Bethel College and Seminary, affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive; and, we also believe that the "Openness" view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience.

2. *Where does this wording come from?*

Except for the introductory phrase, the text of our resolution is taken straight from BGC President Bob Ricker's April 12th letter to Conference pastors. For the full text of this letter, see Appendix 6.

The Impetus for the Resolution

3. *Doesn't the BGC Affirmation of Faith already implicitly affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive? Isn't that what we believe as a Conference?*

Many of us thought so. We thought that the reference to “every divine perfection” (in paragraph two) and “perfect in . . . wisdom” (in paragraph three) implied God’s infallible foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass. We believe that this historic Biblical faith as expressed in our Affirmation has always included the persuasion of John Alexis Edgren that, "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures" (*Fundamentals of Faith* [Chicago: BGC Press, 1948], pp. 19-20).

4. *If the Affirmation of Faith has been sufficient for almost 50 years, why isn't it now?*

Because at no time in those 48 years did anyone propose what the framers of the Affirmation probably considered unthinkable. Nobody proposed that the Affirmation was meant to include the belief that God does not infallibly foreknow all that shall come to pass. We believe that the reason no explicit affirmation of God’s foreknowledge is in the Affirmation of Faith is that it was unthinkable to the framers that it would ever be denied by pastors and teachers in our fellowship. Only because the unthinkable has happened, is the Conference now compelled to make explicit what we have always believed, along with the entire Christian church of all ages.

5. *What is the theological error that caused this controversy?*

A seriously defective view of God, known as “openness theology,” is spreading among evangelicals. One element of this theology is the conviction that God does not infallibly foreknow all that shall come to pass. This view of God’s foreknowledge is presently espoused by at least one professor at Bethel College, Greg Boyd. He writes,

In the Christian view God knows all of reality – everything there is to know. But to assume He knows ahead of time how every person is going to freely act assumes that each person’s free activity is already there to know – even before he freely does it! But it’s not. If we have been given freedom, we create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don’t exist. Thus, in my view at least, there simply isn’t anything to know until we make it there to know. *So God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions* (*Letters from A Skeptic* [Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994], p. 30, italics added).

In his latest book, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), Boyd repeats the claim:

...the Bible depicts God as not knowing future free actions, on the one hand, while also depicting God as knowing all of reality, on the other. This entails that future free decisions do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them (p. 120).

6. *Is the openness view of God's foreknowledge unique to Dr. Boyd?*

No, it is typical of a cluster of theologians espousing “openness theology” (a term that Dr. Boyd uses of his own view, distinguishing it from Calvinism and Arminianism). One prominent spokesman for this view is Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario. He wrote in 1990,

Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known even by God. They are potential – yet to be realized but not yet actual. God can predict [but not foreknow *with certainty*] a great deal of what we will choose to do, but not all of it, because some of it remains hidden in the mystery of human freedom. . . . God too faces possibilities in the future, and not only certainties. God too moves into a future not wholly known (“From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in: *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. by Clark Pinnock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990], pp. 25-26).

Another open theist put it like this:

Indeed, to say that God is ignorant of future creaturely decisions is like saying that God is deaf to silence. It makes no sense, because before they exist such decisions are nothing for God to be ignorant of (Richard Rice, “Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism,” in Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, p. 129).

7. *Does the denial of God's exhaustive definite foreknowledge, as seen in openness theology, have any historical precedents?*

Yes, and to the best of our knowledge, they have all been rejected by the Christian church as unorthodox. For example, Dr. Boyd observes that “Until the time of the Socinians [named for the heretic, Socinus, 1539-1604], the belief that God's omniscience included all future events was not generally questioned” (*Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* [New York: Peter Long Publishing, Inc., 1992], p. 296-297). The view of God's foreknowledge espoused today by openness theology is similar to that espoused by Socinianism, even though not all of the unorthodox views of Socinianism are embraced by openness theology. In the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Jules Lequyer advocated a similar position, as well as the Methodists Lorenzo McCabe and Billy Hibbard.

Charles Hodge testifies also to the universal Christian affirmation of the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God with the primary exception of the Socinians:

The Church . . . in obedience to the Scriptures, has, almost with one voice, professed faith in God's foreknowledge of the free acts of his creatures. The Socinians, however, and some Remonstrants, unable to reconcile this foreknowledge with human liberty, deny that free acts can be foreknown. As the omnipotence of God is his ability to do whatever is possible, so his omniscience is his knowledge of everything knowable. But as free acts are in their nature uncertain, as they may or may not be, they cannot be known before they occur. Such is the argument of Socinus (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, orig. 1871-1873], pp. 400-401).

8. *Hasn't the universal church for 2,000 years – Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox – affirmed that God infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass?*

Yes. That is why C. S. Lewis, who never identified himself as Arminian or Calvinist, said, “Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: Collier Books, 1952], p. 148). Robert Strimple points out, concerning the denial of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge, “Here Christians face the denial not simply of one of the distinctives of Reformation theology but of a fundamental truth held in common by every historic branch of the Christian church” (“What Does God Know?” in: *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, ed. by John H. Armstrong [Chicago: Moody Press, 1996], p. 139).

When the amendment proposal failed in 1999, Greg Boyd responded, “I am not certain, but I believe that this is the first time any Christian denomination, or any evangelical college, has ever officially embraced Openness theology as a viable option....” (“A Response on the Vote From Greg Boyd: An Internet Exclusive,” [No longer available]).

9. *So are you saying we should believe what people have always believed? Are you making tradition an infallible guide?*

No. The Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and life. And it may overturn long-cherished, erroneous views. The point of stressing the 2000-year agreement of all orthodox Christian groups on the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God is to bring all the weight of the greatest orthodox minds of church history – all of them! – to the witness stand in this controversy. This unified historic witness of all the greatest orthodox thinkers, in all ages and all Christian communions, may not be true. But one can at least understand why some of us are more impressed with the testimony of such a large, diverse, and capable band of saints than we are with a revival of a very old error.

The Process of the Controversy

10. *Has Dr. Boyd's view been studied and assessed by duly appointed Bethel representatives?*

Yes. As part of Bethel's established procedures of assessment, a Committee for Theological Clarification and Assessment (CTCA) concluded unanimously that this theology "is within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel" (Quoted from a Communications Bulletin from the Office of Public Relations to Bethel College and Seminary Faculty, Staff, and Administration, May 19, 1998). The voting members of the committee were Jay Barnes, Clarence Bass, David Clark, Lee Eliason, Roger Olson, Al Glenn, LeRon Shults, and Bob Ricker. To our knowledge, none of these persons agrees with Boyd's view of God's foreknowledge.

11. *Have the trustees of Bethel taken a position on whether a faculty member may believe and teach that God does not infallibly foreknow all that shall come to pass?*

At the June, 1998 meeting, the Trustees received the report from the Committee for Theological Clarification and Assessment (see question #11) and, to the best of our knowledge, supported it.

12. *What efforts have been made to resolve this controversy before coming to the Annual Meeting with a resolution?*

In 1994, Greg Boyd's book, *Letters from a Skeptic*, was published containing the sentence, "God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people he creates until he creates these people, and they, in turn, create their decisions" (p. 30). Since the fall of 1995, various pastors have been in touch with the leaders of Bethel expressing concern that this view seems unbiblical, very important and outside the bounds of our historic beliefs as a Conference. Since the summer of 1996, BGC leaders have been informed of the concern. In December, 1996, concerned pastors were informed that the matter had been brought to the Executive Committee of the Bethel Trustees and that they "gave approval to a review process which is continuing." Since February, 1998, John Piper and Greg Boyd have been in personal contact, both face to face and by Email.

May, 1998, Bethel published the report of the Committee for Clarification and Assessment (made up of Jay Barnes, Clarence Bass, David Clark, Lee Eliason, Roger Olson, Al Glenn, LeRon Shults, and Bob Ricker, with two external, non-voting participants, Timothy George of Beeson Divinity School and Timothy Weber of Dean of Northern Baptist Seminary) saying that "Boyd's theology is within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel." On June 10, 1998, Greg Boyd and John Piper debated the issue of God's foreknowledge publicly in the Great Hall at Bethel College before about 500 people. The event was sponsored by the Minnesota Baptist Conference and moderated by Truett Lawson, District Executive Minister. Questions were allowed from the floor. In June, 1998, the Trustees of Bethel College and Seminary received the report of the Committee for Clarification and Assessment.

Last year an amendment was proposed at the 121st Annual Meeting of the BGC. The proposed amendment to the Affirmation of Faith was set forth under paragraph three concerning God the Father. The italicized and bold words in brackets were added to paragraph three.

3. *God the Father*

We believe in God, the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe [*that He foreknows infallibly all that shall come to pass,*] that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of each person, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ

This amendment was defeated on June 25, 1999 by a vote of 275 to 251 (52% to 48%).

13. *Have significant events transpired since last year's annual meeting?*

Yes, there have been several significant developments since that time. Shortly after the vote, Greg Boyd posted a statement on the website, www.opentheism.org, to the effect that the BGC had now become a "safe haven" for open theists:

As a result of [the Concerned Pastors'] attempt to silence the Open view, I have had the opportunity to share my reasons for being an Open Theist to everybody in the BGC. I know from personal correspondence that a good number of them have found the case for Open Theism convincing.

To Openness readers of this letter who are planning on going into ministry or teaching, let me just say, Be of good courage. We will suffer some losses, but we are also making great advances. At the very least you can know that there's one safe haven out there for you: my own denominational home, the BGC. ("A Response on the Vote From Greg Boyd: An Internet Exclusive," [No longer available]).

BGC and Bethel leadership did not agree with this assessment of the vote and asked to have the quote removed immediately. They wrote, "...we certainly do not believe we have provided a 'safe haven' for Open Theists in the Baptist General Conference or at Bethel College and Seminary" (Letter to Pastors from Bob Ricker and George Brushaber, September 30, 1999).

Boyd subsequently apologized for the wording of this post. He did not, however, agree with the leadership:

I confess that the phrase was poorly chosen, and apologize for any offense it created. But I believe that when the BGC delegates voted against the resolution, it meant that it was "safe" for me to hold my view within the BGC. I did not need to fear losing my job at Bethel or my credentials as a BGC minister. And if it was safe for me to hold this position, I thought it must be safe for others to hold this position as well. If this is not true, what was the vote last summer about? (*Clarion*, October 13, 1999).

Brushaber and Ricker went on to add the following points in their letter (see Appendix 5):

Bethel's observations and commitments regarding the foreknowledge issue are:

- No one on the President's Leadership Team at Bethel (executive vice presidents and vice presidents) espouses Boyd's position.
- No other member of the Biblical and Theological Studies Department at Bethel College holds Boyd's position.
- No Bethel Seminary professor holds to Boyd's position. . . .

- Bethel will not hire, either at the college or the seminary, other faculty members who hold the openness theology view.

President Brushaber has clarified in a June 9, 2000 letter, however, that he did not make this last point because of theological convictions: “I took the position because of my concern for the unity of the Conference and its relationship with Bethel, not because I had determined that a person who holds this view in the way that Dr. Boyd does is in conflict with the Affirmation of Faith.”

On April 12, 2000, President Ricker sent a letter (see Appendix 6) on behalf of the Executive Ministry Team. In this letter he made known the following recommendation:

2. We recommend to the Board of Trustees of Bethel College and Seminary that views contrary to God’s exhaustive foreknowledge not be taught by any Bethel professor or instructor who espouses such views.

President Brushaber has indicated in his June 9 letter that “It is not possible” for him to support this resolution given the issues of academic freedom (for our response, see question #39 and #40) and accreditation (for our response, see question #36).

14. Wasn’t this issue settled in the CTCA (Committee for Theological Clarification & Assessment) decision that Dr. Boyd’s theology is “within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel”?

To our surprise, it has come out that although this was the published conclusion, this does not reflect the question actually voted on by the committee. The CTCA was given two question on which to vote: “(1) Does Dr. Boyd give full allegiance to Bethel’s Affirmation of Faith as required for employment as a teacher?” “(2) Does Dr. Boyd hold any interpretation or view which would warrant his termination as a tenured faculty member?” (Letter to Pastors from George Brushaber, June 9, 2000).

The participants did *not* vote about whether or not open theism is “within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel.”

15. Were all of the members of the committee unanimous in this decision?

Yes. However, Timothy George, one of the external, non-voting participants of the CTCA, has said, “I do not want to give any support to open theism, or to the view that sees it within the bounds of tolerable evangelical diversity” (Phone conversation with John Piper, May 29, 2000; used with permission).

God and the Nature of the Future

16. *Is this controversy about the nature of God or the nature of the future?*

Both. To deny that it is about God is misleading. A God who is learning billions of new certainties every hour, and who is adjusting his plans continually to deal with these new certainties, is a different kind of God than one who knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be. Openness theologians believe that “*God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions*” (Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, p. 30). Therefore, among six billion humans, there are billions of such decisions being made every hour that “*God can’t foreknow*” as certain.

Dr. Boyd, in his latest publication, refers to his theology as the “openness of *God*” and claims that it is one of his attributes:

As I hope to show . . . far from being ‘beneath’ God, Scripture describes *the openness of God* to the future as *one of his attributes of greatness*. I will argue that a God who knows all possibilities, experiences novelty, and is willing to engage in an appropriate element of risk is more exalted than a God who faces an eternally settled future (*God of the Possible*, p. 15; emphasis added).

17. *But what about the nature of the future?*

For most people, the “future” is “what will come to pass” or “what will be.” Webster’s Dictionary says the future is “what is going to happen.” The day after tomorrow, certain things will have happened tomorrow. **The controversy before us is: Does God know, today, what those things will be?** And does this matter enough to be part of our doctrinal identity?

18. *What, then, do Dr. Boyd and the leaders of Bethel mean when they say that the controversy is over the nature of the future?*

Dr. Boyd writes, “...this debate about God’s knowledge...is not really about God’s knowledge at all. It is rather a debate about the nature of the future.... open theists could (and should) affirm that God knows the future perfectly. It’s just that they understand the future *as it is now* to include genuine possibilities” (*God of the Possible*, pp. 15, 16). Notice: this seems to raise the question of the “nature of the future.” But that is not really what is happening. Rather, Dr. Boyd virtually redefines the future as the present. He says, God knows “the future *as it is now*” (emphasis added). But “the future as it is now” is no longer the future. It is the present. But to know something that is NOW is not foreknowledge, but just knowledge. So what openness theology really claims is that God has exhaustive knowledge of the present, not the future.

Here’s the problem: In ordinary language “foreknowledge” does not mean “knowledge of what is now,” but rather “knowledge of what will come to pass.” The *nature* of what will come to pass is not the issue. The issue is: Whatever and however the future comes to pass, will God have known it infallibly before it happened.

19. *Isn't it enough that the leaders of Bethel say emphatically in their May 6, 1999 letter that they will not "defend the right of a teacher at Bethel to diminish God's eternal supremacy over time and his complete omniscience of all that exists"?*

The problem is that this pledge is weakened by the same linguistic fog we have seen in Dr. Boyd's position. "Omniscience of all that EXISTS" is not the same as Omniscience of all that WILL exist. God's perfect knowledge of all that exists is simply not the issue. Whether he knows infallibly all that SHALL come to pass is the issue.

20. *How about the argument that, just as omnipotence is not limited by God's inability to make a square circle, neither is omniscience limited by God inability to know future free choices?*

To quote Dr. Millard Erickson, "The comparison between doing illogical actions and knowing the future is not correct. The former, creating square circles, involves performing acts that are internally contradictory, and absurd. The latter [knowing future free choices] does not involve an internal contradiction. The contradiction is only between divine knowledge and libertarian or noncompatibilist view of human freedom. To assume the latter is to beg the question. A more appropriate analogy would be that God does not know or foreknow the existence of square circles" (personal correspondence, used with permission).

Calvinism and Arminianism

21. *Does this resolution oblige one to be a Calvinist or an Arminian?*

No. It does not oblige one to be either. To use the terms of a March 3, 1999 Bethel document, *How Do We Decide "Orthodoxy" in the BGC?*, this resolution states a "doctrine," (the doctrine of God's exhaustive and definite foreknowledge) and leaves room for various "theories" about how the doctrine can be explained. For example, the resolution intentionally leaves room for a person to defend the foreknowledge of God as an Arminian or a Calvinist who believes God is outside time; or an Arminian who believes God is in time; or various forms of Calvinism which affirm that God knows the future because he plans the future and which explain, in different ways, the compatibility of God's governance of all things and the full accountability of man.

22. *Are there contemporary Arminians that affirm the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God?*

Yes. Most of them do. That is the historic Arminian position. Jack W. Cottrell writes as a contemporary Arminian who does not believe in limited foreknowledge:

God has a true foreknowledge of future free-will choices without himself being the agent that causes them or renders them certain. . . . This is how God maintains sovereign control over the whole of his creation, despite the freedom he has given his creatures ("The Nature of Divine Sovereignty," in: *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, edited by Clark Pinnock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989], pp. 111-112).

23. *Does historic, classical Arminianism differ from openness theology, and affirm that God infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass?*

Yes. Jacobus Arminius affirmed, for example,

The fourth decree, to save certain particular persons and to damn others . . . rests upon the foreknowledge of God, by which he has known from eternity which persons should believe according to such an administration of the means serving to repentance and faith through his preceding grace and which should persevere through subsequent grace, and also who should not believe and persevere (Quoted in Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971], p. 352).

It should be noted that Greg Boyd himself classifies open theism as something distinct from Arminianism. In his words, it is a "third option" (*God of the Possible*, p. 23).

24. *Did the founders of Bethel and the BGC take an explicit stand on the issue of God's foreknowledge of human choices?*

Yes. John Alexis Edgren, the founder of Bethel wrote, "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures" (*Fundamentals of Faith*, [Chicago: BGC Press, 1948], pp. 19-20.). This is the issue at stake. Was this vision of God implicit in the Conference doctrinal identity from the beginning? We believe it was and that we should preserve this unifying vision.

25. *Did the founders of Bethel and the BGC believe that careful attention to doctrine matters and warn against incremental errors of doctrine?*

Yes. When Edgren was dean of the seminary, he gave a commencement address to a graduating class on this topic. The following quote is found in a section entitled, “Preserve soundness in living and doctrine”:

The Christlike life must, of course, be given the first place, but doctrines in conformity with the Bible are of greatest importance. Let us never think that anything that God has ordained, or given for our guidance should be treated with indifference. Besides this, doctrine is, to a great extent, the underlying structure for life itself. . . . Other deviations from the truth will perhaps first appear so insignificant that we discern their falseness with difficulty. Two trains may appear to be running alongside each other, on tracks which seem to be parallel. After a couple of hours, however, each will have lost sight of the other, and the tracks prove to lead to widely separate destinations. Brethren, see to it, that you are on the right train (L. J. Ahlstrom, *John Alexis Edgren: A Biography* [Chicago: Conference Press, 1938], p. 114).

26. *Can you boil down the convictions of The Edgren Fellowship with regard to God’s foreknowledge as it pertains to the BGC and Bethel?*

Yes. The question before us is this: **Do we regard the denial that God infallibly knows all that shall come to pass to be a part of who we are?**

Fifteen Reasons Why the Issue Is Important

27. *Why is the truth that “God’s knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive” so important that it deserves to be voted on as a resolution?*

We agree that not all truth has the same importance and weight. So the question is not only whether God knows infallibly all that shall come to pass but also whether this is important enough to be part of our doctrinal self-definition as a Conference. We believe it is for the following reasons:

Reason #1. **Giving legitimacy to the denial of historic Christian views of God’s foreknowledge erodes our common vision of the God we worship together.** Legitimizing the openness view of God undermines the biblical foundation of our unity and forces us to unite around less and less of a common view of God. For example, to say that we all worship an omniscient God will be evacuated of common meaning, because openness teaching and historic Christian teaching have radically different views of what is meant by “all-knowing.”

Reason #2. **Accepting the evangelical legitimacy of denying God’s exhaustive definite foreknowledge virtually undermines the unifying force of the Affirmation of Faith.** If our Affirmation of Faith can be made to embrace this false teaching, against its longstanding implicit embrace of the historic Christian view, it ceases to define our unity and is an ambiguous cloak for serious disunity. It is not the proposed resolution that threatens the unifying power of the Affirmation of Faith; that unifying power is threatened by the effort to force into the Affirmation a false doctrine that the Affirmation was never intended to embrace.

Reason #3. **Embracing the legitimacy of the openness view of God would put the Baptist General Conference seriously out of step with the entire unified history of the Christian church.** It would move toward the margins of orthodoxy. Every orthodox Christian communion for 2,000 years has affirmed the simple foreknowledge of God. Departures from this view have been assessed and rejected as unorthodox by every major branch of the Christian church. The presumption that our little group can go against 2,000 years of unified Christian witness is dangerous. It is also ironic that this would be done in the name of unity, when, actually, it would be putting us at odds with a unified vision of God’s foreknowledge that has served the unity of the church for twenty centuries.

Reason #4. **Protests to the contrary, the openness view of God really does imply that God makes mistakes, because of his uncertainty about the future.** For example, in Jeremiah 3:19b-20, God says, “I said, ‘You shall call Me, My Father, and not turn away from following Me. Surely, as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,’ declares the LORD.” Dr. Boyd says that God predicted one thing and that another came about: “He genuinely thought his people would behave differently.” He softens this with the words, “The Lord thinks one thing will most likely occur while it turns out that something else occurred.” And again, “The Lord, having a perfectly accurate assessment of all probabilities, *thought* his people would do the former when this situation came about,” but they did not do what he thought they would do. Dr. Boyd does not call this a “mistake,” because he does not believe it is a mistake when you mis-predict on the basis of the best knowledge available. But most people do call this a mistake. (Quotes here are from pages 12-14 of Dr. Boyd’s unpublished paper, “The Bible and the Open View of the Future,” quoted with permission.)

Reason #5. **The openness view of God imputes to him a massive ignorance and a continual process of learning and adapting to the unknowable future, which is unworthy of the biblical vision of God.** Since “*God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates*

these people and they, in turn, create their decisions” (Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, p. 30), therefore God is learning billions of new certainties every hour, and is adjusting his plans continually to deal with these new certainties. This is a very serious departure from the glorious, biblical vision of God who knows infallibly all that shall come to pass.

Reason #6. God’s foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass is viewed by Isaiah as evidence of God’s unique deity among all the gods. It is one of the “evidences of . . . [God’s] peculiar glory, greatly distinguishing him from all other beings” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957], p. 22). For example, Isaiah quotes God as saying, “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, *declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done*, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9-10). From this and many other texts in Isaiah, we conclude that the denial of God’s foreknowledge is an unwitting assault on the glory and deity of God.

Reason #7. Jesus teaches that his ability to predict the free acts of responsible people is an essential part of his divine glory, so that the denial of this foreknowledge is, whether intended or not, an undermining of the deity of Christ. For example, in John 6:64 Jesus says, “‘There are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.” Then in John 13:19, Jesus says at the Last Supper, “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that *I am*.” What does “I am” mean? It is the name of God in Exodus 3:14, and it is the designation Jesus uses in John 8:58 to describe his pre-existent deity, “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’” These are the words that God uses of himself in texts like Isaiah 43:10 (“‘You are My witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me, and understand that *I am*.’”). Therefore, the warrant Jesus gives for believing that he is divine is that he is predicting the human evil acts which he infallibly foreknows are going to befall him in the next hours, including the betrayal of Judas (see John 13:21-27 and Matthew 26:2), and the denials of Peter (Luke 22:31-34). Therefore, denying that Christ knew all that would befall him tends to undermine our confidence in the deity of Christ.

Reason #8. The denial that God foreknew the sinful volitions of responsible creatures tends to undermine confidence in the plan of redemption. The Bible teaches that God made provision for salvation from the effects of the Fall before the foundation of the world. Thus, he foreknew that there would be a Fall and that there would be effects of it that needed a plan of redemption. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul says that from all eternity God has planned to give us grace in Christ Jesus as our Savior. “[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” In other words, God not only foreknew in eternity the sinful choice that Adam would make (and Lucifer before him), but he also planned to give us grace through Jesus Christ in response to the misery and destruction and condemnation resulting from the Fall that he foreknew. Therefore to say that, “*God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions*” (Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, p. 30), is to imply that God could not infallibly see the Fall coming and plan for it the way Paul said God did.

Reason #9. The effort to make a Biblical defense of the denial that God foreknows all that shall come to pass is not successful. None of the passages of Scripture that is brought forth against the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God teaches that God does not have such foreknowledge. Rather this denial is *inferred* from circumstances that *seem* to require it. For example, reference is sometimes

made to texts where God changes his mind from what he said he would do (Isaiah 38:1,5; Jonah 3:4,10), is sorry for what he has done (Genesis 6:5-6; 1 Samuel 15:11), seems surprised (Jeremiah 26:1-3), says “perhaps” (Jeremiah 3:6-7), and puts people to the test (Genesis 22:9-12). In all these texts, the denial of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge is an *inference* that *seems* necessary to some interpreters. However, in the history of the church right up to our own day, plausible explanations have been given to each of these texts which cohere with the wider, more explicit teaching of Scripture that God foreknows all that shall come to pass (see Appendix Two).

Reason #10. The denial that God foreknows all that shall come to pass is practically and pastorally harmful. Bad theology hurts people. Sooner or later wrong thinking about God leads to wrong believing. And wrong believing leads to the weakening of moral and spiritual life, and finally to condemnation. Most Christians see intuitively that denying God’s foreknowledge of free human actions will tend to undermine the confidence of the church that God can guide persons and nations, that he can answer prayer concerning the hearts of the erring and lost, that he can predict the future, that he can be assured of final triumph, and that all things will work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Some generation will pay the price of this wrong thinking about God. And the closer the wrong thinking gets to the center of God and his personal perfections and his saving ways, the sooner and the more painful will be the payment. Eternal things are at stake in the denial of the exhaustive foreknowledge of God.

Reason #11. The alleged practical and pastoral gain from openness theology does not materialize. The hope of openness theology to lessen the crisis of faith in times of calamity is not realized. In both openness theology and historic Christian theology, God has the right and power to intervene to stop hurricanes, heal diseases, hold back floods, discharge devils, strike terrorists blind, or otherwise hinder someone on his way to murder. Why he does not intervene is not answered by openness theology. A heartbroken mother may still ask, “Why did God not intervene?” In all these cases, God saw calamity around the corner and did not intervene. The testimony of our people in pain and calamity is this: Believing God cannot see what is coming in my life is no comfort.

Reason #12. The denial of God’s simple foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass is so serious that at least one well-known, responsible Arminian scholar regards it as heresy. Thomas Oden, a Methodist scholar who has become famous in recent years in part because of his turn from old-line liberalism to evangelicalism, knows theological liberalism and how a denomination gets there. Oden’s comments are all the more significant because he is not a Calvinist. Here is what Oden said of the view of God’s foreknowledge that Dr. Boyd, and other openness theologians, teach:

If “reformists” insist on keeping the boundaries of heresy open, however, then they must be resisted with charity. **The fantasy that God is ignorant of the future is a heresy that must be rejected on scriptural grounds** (“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come”; Isa. 46:10a; cf. Job 28; Ps. 90; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1), as it has been in the history of the exegesis of relevant passages. This issue was thoroughly discussed by patristic exegetes as early as Origen’s *Against Celsus*. Keeping the boundaries of faith undefined is a demonic temptation that evangelicals within the mainline have learned all too well and have been burned by all too painfully. (“The Real Reformers and the Traditionalists,” *Christianity Today*, Feb. 9, 1998, p. 46, emphasis added)

Reason #13. The importance that we put on the foreknowledge of God is not marginal or eccentric. It has broad historic precedent and many sober-minded contemporary representatives (see Appendix One). The errors of openness theology have been challenged, to take a small sampling, by:

- Origin's work in the third century (see Reason #12).
- Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century, *Summa Theological*, First Part, Question 14, Articles 8 and 13.
- Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, orig. 1682), pp. 417-469.
- John Howe, *The Works of the Rev. John Howe*, vol. II, *The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience of the Sins of Men, with the Wisdom and Sincerity of His Counsels, Exhortations, and Whatsoever Means He Uses to Prevent Them* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, orig. 1724), pp. 474-526.
- Robert W. Strimple, "What Does God Know?" in John Armstrong, ed. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), pp. 139-154.
- R. K. McGregor Wright, *What's Wrong with Freewill Theism?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
- Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God – Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1997).
- Millard Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), pp. 184-209.
- D. A. Carson, "God, the Bible and Spiritual Warfare: A Review Article," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 251-269.
- A. B. Caneday, "Putting God at Risk: A Critique of John Sanders' View of Providence," *Trinity Journal* 20 NS (1999): 131-163.

Reason #14. Evangelical denominations and educational institutions move away from orthodox Christian faith for lack of vigilance over incremental defections from Biblical truth. Each progressive deviation seems too small to justify a confrontation. It doesn't seem worth the controversy and tension. It seems like a distraction from the main message of the gospel and the mission of the church. Nevertheless, it is the very message and mission that are being undermined. This is why the apostle Paul gave himself not only to proclamation, but to "the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7). The Baptist General Conference and the leaders of Bethel College and Seminary would do well to heed the words of Keith and Gladys Hunt, in their history of InterVarsity. Their warning to InterVarsity applies to us.

Many organizations go off-track by the time they reach their fiftieth anniversary. Doctrinal statements are not enough; they need to be constantly checked and their finer points taught and emphasized. It is easy to 'get on with the mission' and belatedly discover that the faith that began the movement has eroded away. If history tells us anything, it's that theological drift occurs almost imperceptibly over long periods of time. One little change here, another there. (*For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A. 1940-1990* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991], p. 379)

Similarly, from the British perspective Pete Lowman describes the demise of the World Student Christian Federation:

In short, WSCF had virtually all the ingredients of an evangelical student movement of lasting effectiveness. What it lacked was a doctrinal concern that would have ensured that its voting members – and above all, its leaders – stayed loyal to a faith based unambiguously on the Word of God; and commitment like the apostle Paul's, that would have seen the maintenance of the

divinely-revealed gospel as more crucial than unity with all those who seemed religious. Only one weakness; but through that weakness the WSCF made shipwreck. IFES-linked groups have no cause to be complacent. There, too, but for the grace of God, we might be drifting. (*The Day of His Power: A History of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students* [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1983], p. 44)

Reason #15: **Ignoring the authorial intent of our Affirmation of Faith will logically open the door for other reinterpretations of the document apart from the intention of the framers of that statement.** For example, Article 12 of the Affirmation of Faith (“The Last Things”) affirms that “We believe in... the endless suffering of the wicked.” There seems to be nothing in place to prevent someone from arguing that academic freedom combined with “a firm commitment to the Bible as the source of theological truth” legitimate their conclusion that the suffering described is the suffering of non-existence (annihilationism) rather than the suffering of conscious existence (the historic view).

Defining Who We Are: The Affirmation of Faith

28. Isn't the BGC Affirmation of Faith sufficient to guide us in this controversy without doctrinal resolutions?

No, because there are essentials of our faith that are not explicit in the Affirmation. They seemed so obvious to the framers that they were taken for granted and left unexpressed. When these are denied, it becomes necessary to make them explicit. In other words, while some things were left out of the Affirmation of Faith because they are non-essential (like precise views of eschatology and spiritual gifts and church officers), other things were left out because they seemed so obviously essential that they did not need to be included.

For example, our Affirmation of Faith does not affirm the truthfulness of God. No one felt the need to say, "We believe that God is truthful in all his dealings and that he keeps all his promises." Similarly, the Affirmation of Faith does not explicitly affirm that God is just or good. It does not affirm that Satan or demons exist, or that they have any role in our lives. It does not affirm that the Bible consists only of the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon rather than including the Apocrypha. Nor does it affirm that Christ himself indwells his people by faith. The statement on Christian Conduct (VIII) does not affirm that marriage is between man and woman (as opposed to two men or two women), nor that stealing and murder and lying and adultery and coveting and polygamy are wrong.

Nevertheless we believe all these things, and regard them as essential to who we are. Teaching contrary to any of these things by one of our pastors or teachers at Bethel might require the Conference to make explicit in the Affirmation of Faith what has always been believed.

The pastors, leaders, and laypeople of *The Edgren Fellowship* believe that God's infallible foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass is among those essentials that were so obvious when the Affirmation was created that they did not need to be affirmed.

29. How does the BGC Affirmation of Faith serve unity and identity?

We do not believe that every part of the Affirmation of Faith must be believed in order to be saved. It was not designed to declare the minimum of saving truth, but to define a fellowship around shared convictions. Not all these convictions are of equal weight. But they were included out of the conviction that truth and piety and unity and mission are well served by communities of defined conviction. The Affirmation of Faith is a witness to the persuasion that Biblical doctrine stabilizes saints, strengthens the church, supports spiritual unity, safeguards against debilitating error, and serves the evangelistic mission of the movement.

The spirit of the Affirmation of Faith is not one of separation but self-identification. It is true that many devout and effective servants of Christ cannot affirm our Affirmation of Faith and thus cannot belong to or lead one of our churches. For example, there are godly men and women who do not share our convictions about believers' baptism and the importance of immersion (paragraph nine); there are those who believe in authority structures of the presbytery or the episcopate (paragraph ten), and those who are not persuaded that "church and state must be kept separate" (paragraph ten) and those who do not believe that the final state of the unbelieving is "endless suffering" (paragraph twelve). Our Affirmation of Faith is not designed to anathematize these brothers and sisters.

Instead the Affirmation of Faith is our testimony that the unity of the universal Church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of the fellowship, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries, rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders.

We do not believe that the Affirmation of Faith has the authority of the Bible. It is a human effort to be faithful in a specific historical and cultural setting. It is not final or unchangeable. There is hope that, as conversation and debate take place, from generation to generation, we will learn from each other (inside and outside the BGC), and that the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding into closer fellowship formerly disagreeing groups. It is similarly possible that persons and groups within the fellowship may move to doctrinal commitments that put them outside the defining commitments of our fellowship. The separation that this would involve would not have to be rancorous or mean-spirited or demeaning any more than we are rancorous or mean-spirited to other godly people to whom we humbly deny membership and leadership because of doctrinal disagreements like those listed above.

30. Will, then, the proposed resolution concerning God's foreknowledge significantly change the way the Affirmation of Faith functions in the cause of unity and identity?

No. The Affirmation of Faith has always been a Bible-believing, evangelistic, baptistic expression of evangelical consensus. It has not drawn the lines of self-identity between Arminians and Calvinists, between pre-, post-, or a-millennialists, between egalitarian and complementarian, between cessationists and charismatics; nor has it demanded unity on styles of worship or local church government. None of that is changing. Nor is the spirit of the Affirmation changing. There is nothing new in this resolution beyond what has been believed by the Conference as a whole during its entire existence. The resolution simply makes explicit an old and unifying belief that is now being denied by a few who are vocal and effective in spreading their new view.

31. How do you decide if a new view is orthodox and if it fits within the definition of who we are as a Conference?

Over time, the power of the Word of God, by the agency of the Spirit, through the renewed mind of the Body of Christ will bring forth corporate decisions that recognize the truth. In this process, careful exegesis, compelling logic, honest debate, humble teachability and respect for historic Christian teaching that has endured from age to age will have their part. The local church may, in the end, define itself as it is led. But to the degree that we regard the doctrinal unity of a fellowship of churches as valuable, we will continue to act as a body of messengers from those churches. We will come together, we pray, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, and in allegiance to the final authority of the Scriptures, define our doctrinal identity.

32. Some have suggested that if a new doctrinal view gives rigorous exegetical and logical effort to defend itself biblically and rationally, it thereby has a legitimate evangelical standing. Do you agree?

No. Because Arians, universalists, annihilationists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and those who deny inerrancy and other Christian truths also give rigorous exegetical and logical efforts to defend their views. The issue is not "rigorous" and "logical" but "compelling" and "valid." Who decides in the end? In the very end, God decides. In the meantime each fellowship of believers that wants to honor truth and strive for unity must decide through its duly appointed processes of coming to common convictions.

33. *What do you make of the warnings that the resolution is a movement toward unbaptistic creedalism?*

We think they are unfounded. We have made clear that the Affirmation of Faith does not have the final authority of Scripture and that it is not unchangeable and that it is mainly a statement of identity not separation. It seems to us, in fact, that those who resist changing the Affirmation of Faith are as vulnerable to the charge of “creedalism” as those who believe it is open to change with new historical circumstances.

34. *Do you agree with the criticism that this resolution will be an unnecessary cause of division?*

No. If there is division, which we pray God will mercifully prevent, it will not be the fault of those who call us to affirm the historic, unifying doctrine of God’s simple foreknowledge, but of those who press us to redefine ourselves to accept the legitimacy of its denial. How it can legitimately be called divisive to affirm something held by all Christian communions – Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox – for 2,000 years escapes us.

This question was raised last year as well. However, at the grassroots level this historic unity is being expressed in the 7 Conference districts which have already passed resolutions in favor of the historic view of God’s foreknowledge. (See appendix 2 for the resolutions passed by these districts.)

35. *Is there an analogy between the resolution to the Affirmation of Faith from 2 years ago and the resolution being proposed this year?*

Two years ago the Conference voted to change the language of the Affirmation of Faith to be gender-inclusive. There was manifest egalitarian influence behind the resolution. And there was significant unease over the changes proposed. Why did this not cause division in our Conference? The reason there was no significant, ongoing division is that those who opposed the resolution decided not to divide over it. They voted their conscience, and then went forward with their partnership in the Conference ministry. That is possible in the present controversy. Those who resist this resolution can make it a matter of division or not. The resolution need not be blamed for division any more than the resolution from 2 years ago might have been blamed for division if leaders had responded differently to a decision they disagreed with.

36. *Will the acceptance of this resolution “jeopardize Bethel’s accreditation or bring serious reprimands”?*

This is unlikely. Millard Erickson writes:

During the eight years I served as dean of Bethel Seminary, I served on several accreditation examination teams, representing the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada jointly with representatives of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Middle States Association, and the Southern Association. Never once did I hear a challenge to the right of a school or its sponsoring group to establish definite doctrinal tenets, to which faculty were expected to subscribe (“On Asking the Right Questions and Looking for the Right Answers”).

37. *Are the Trustees really able to exert any significant influence in this matter regarding openness theology?*

The Trustees have a very significant role and responsibility in this discussion. The bylaws of Bethel College and Seminary, Article V, Section A, clearly state:

The Board of Trustees shall be responsible to the Corporation for maintaining the integrity of both instruction and spiritual quality within the College and Seminary, such that *traditional, biblical and historic baptistic principles and doctrine observed by the churches affiliated with the corporation are not compromised* (1999 BGC / Bethel College and Seminary Annual; p. 237, emphasis added).

38. *Do you agree with the March 3, 1999 paper (sent to pastors by Bethel) that “God knows all” is a “doctrine” that is “essential,” but that whether God knows “all that shall come to pass” is a “theory” about the doctrine that is “peripheral”?*

No. The paper asserted, but did not give reasons, that the doctrine of God’s foreknowledge is a peripheral theory and not an essential doctrine. We do not embrace this peculiar use of the word “doctrine” as referring only to those things that are essential. We believe that there are doctrines that are essential and doctrines that are not essential. Therefore, in principle, we agree that not all truth has the same weight, and that a fellowship must decide what doctrines will rise to the level of its self-defining Affirmation of Faith.

If we were to concede to use the peculiar definitions of this paper, we would argue that God’s infallible foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass is indeed a “doctrine” (that is, essential to our Affirmation of Faith) and that the “theories” (embraced within our Conference) are the various forms of Calvinism and Arminianism that try to explain how God can foreknow all that shall come to pass (e.g., by being outside time, or by ordaining things, etc.)

Does the Baptist General Conference believe that “God infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass” is a “peripheral” theory about God’s omniscience? Or do we believe that this is essential to our doctrinal self-definition, and that diverse theories about how God knows the future will continue to be embraced among us?

Implications for Bethel If the Resolution Passes

39. Does the resolution infringe on academic freedom for Bethel professors?

Freedom to think and probe and discuss is precious. That is not questioned. Freedom to come to conclusions outside the defining vision of an institution is questioned. Academic freedom is not absolute on any campus in America. At Bethel, professors know that they do their scholarly work within the vision of God and the world defined by the Affirmation of Faith. Therefore the resolution is, in principle, no more contrary to academic freedom than the existence of the Affirmation of Faith.

Arthur Holmes wrote, "...Christian education implies commitment to the Word of God and responsibility to the church constituency a college serves. Liberty without loyalty is not Christian, but loyalty without the liberty to think for oneself is not education" (Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, rev. ed. [Eerdmans: 1975, 1987], p. 61). As Millard Erickson recently wrote, "I always felt that I was there to serve the churches of the denomination and that if a majority, or even a sizeable minority, no longer wanted me teaching there, I should not be there" ("On Asking the Right Questions and Looking for the Right Answers").

40. But in practice, does not the resolution put undue limits on the faculty's freedom to believe and teach what they think is true?

There are two issues here. One is whether the truth that God foreknows infallibly all that shall come to pass is unduly restrictive. We do not think so. The church universal has believed this for 2,000 years and the greatest Christian thinkers at the greatest universities and seminaries and colleges have flourished for centuries within this faith. How such a universal Christian doctrine can be viewed as constrictive or divisive is not plain to us.

The other issue is whether there would be legal problems in asking a faculty member to subscribe to a resolution that was not explicit in the Affirmation of Faith under which he or she was hired. We believe that the leaders of Bethel and the affected faculty would, in such a case, be able to work patiently toward a mutually acceptable resolution. Members of The Edgren Fellowship have the long view and are concerned mainly for the generations to come, not a particular short-term timeline. We hope that the leaders of Bethel will see the long-term wisdom of dealing with crucial doctrine on its own terms, in spite of the challenges of pragmatic and legal matters.

Personal Issues

41. *Why do you ignore the great good that Greg Boyd is doing for students and the wider cause of Christ?*

We do not ignore it, but affirm it and give thanks for it. Greg Boyd is a winsome, effective communicator. His passion for Christ is contagious. Those of us who have had personal dealings with Greg find him an energetic delight to be around. His speaking has been used by God to win people to Christ and to awaken many to the reality of spiritual things. He is an effective and popular teacher. More widely, his writings have, in many ways, served the church well. *Trinity and Process* delivers significant criticisms to process theology. *Cynic, Sage or Son of God?* and *Jesus Under Siege* help establish the historical reliability of the portrait of Christ that we have in the Gospels. *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* protects the church from a “Jesus only” view that can sweep many into destructive heresy. *Letters from a Skeptic* has much wisdom and grace in it that leads toward Christ and his great salvation. It has become a bestseller and has led many to a saving knowledge of Christ. *God At War* highlights the reality of spiritual warfare and the necessity of a worldview that takes Satan and demons seriously. All this we gladly affirm.

42. *Then why do you continue to press for a resolution that may well push him out of the Baptist General Conference?*

We are not eager for Dr. Boyd to leave Bethel or the BGC. We are eager for him to affirm and teach the Biblical truth of God’s foreknowledge. The issue before us is not whether God has used Dr. Boyd or whether all that he teaches is true and helpful. The issue is whether the denial that God knows all that shall come to pass is Biblical or unbiblical, and whether it is important enough to be a part of our defining Affirmation of Faith.

43. *But if you believe that God is using Dr. Boyd, how can you oppose the servant of the Lord?*

We are not opposing a person, but a teaching. Would it be fair to accuse the BGC of opposing the true ministry effectiveness of all who cannot sign our Affirmation of Faith (Presbyterians, Anglican, Methodist, etc.)? Most of these people are excluded from our fellowship on matters less vital than whether God is the kind of God who foreknows all that shall come to pass.

44. *So are you saying that false teaching can come from a godly person whom God is using?*

Yes. Harmful false teaching does not generally originate in people who are unqualified to teach and lead people to Christ. In Acts 20:30 Paul reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus that “Even **from your own number** men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” Even someone as great and godly as the apostle Peter needed to be rebuked by Paul in Galatians 2:14, “I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’” Serious and damaging error generally starts in the teaching of an otherwise sound and helpful leader.

The story of churches and schools that have left their founding Biblical vision points to the shortsightedness of putting personality above truth. The history of such defection is a strong historical warning not to put piety and effectiveness above simple conformity to Scripture when a particular truth is in question. It is a remarkable and wonderful thing for all of us that God will use us in all our imperfections and mistakes. We would be hopeless without this grace. But God’s willingness to use

millions of Christians who cannot sign our Affirmation of Faith is no sign that God endorses all their teaching. Nor should we conclude that the Affirmation of Faith should be as inclusive as God's willingness to turn evil for good.

It is not our concern to minimize the effectiveness of Dr. Boyd. Our concern is: Does God foreknow infallibly all that shall come to pass? Is this truth important enough to be part of what defines us? We believe it is. And we believe that the very strengths that make Dr. Boyd so effective now, will also serve to spread his error, which, in the long run, will undo much of the good he has done.

Conclusion

We end where we began, with prayer. We know that those who disagree with us are also men and women of prayer. Our hope is that God, in his great mercy, will sort through our petitions and work his good and gracious will for the Baptist General Conference.

Our plea is that we keep focused on the issue and not be distracted into matters of personality or politics or procedures, and that we not be overwhelmed or confused by the subtle distinctions behind the issue of God's foreknowledge. This kind of careful, detailed and subtle reasoning is necessary in the explanation and defense of all crucial doctrines – from creation to incarnation to atonement to justification to inspiration. But, the good news is that the conclusions of such complex reasonings can be, and should be, stated in simple ways. Thus we say that “there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons.” And we say, “We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.” These are massive statements that have been confuted and debated for centuries, with abstruse and subtle distinctions being made. But happily, we have the distilled Biblical wisdom of the church in simple and understandable statements.

So it is with the doctrine of God's foreknowledge. There are many problems that have been debated over the centuries. There are many views in the church as to *how* God can know all that shall come to pass. But we may be thankful that, as with all other major doctrines, we have the distilled Biblical wisdom of the church in the simple and straightforward conclusion that God foreknows infallibly all that shall come to pass. May God give us the grace and wisdom and courage to keep the main issue before our eyes: Is it a biblical truth that *God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive?* And is it true that *the “Openness” view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience?* We believe the answer to both questions is yes.

*Be it resolved that we . . .
affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive;
and, we also believe that the “Openness” view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to
our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience.*

Appendix One

God, Foreknowledge, Bethel, and the BGC: Questions and Answers

by Millard J. Erickson

In disputes such as the one before us, it is exceedingly important that we investigate relevant and significant questions. It is also important that we look in the right places for the answers, and that we consult all of the relevant data. I have recently spent a considerable amount of time reading the extensive literature that has grown up in the Baptist General Conference on the topic of divine foreknowledge.

I want to make clear initially that my approach to historical research is the traditional one of attempting to determine what actually happened or was the case. I do not subscribe to the methodology that William Dean has entitled, “History Making History,” in which history is (re)written from the present, much as was described in the novel, *1984*. Nor can it be done in a priori fashion, where presuppositions about certain individuals or movements are used to construct abstractly an understanding of what must have happened in the past, rather than investigating what actually did happen. In this respect, historical research is like exegesis of the Scripture, where we attempt to get back to the meaning of the text in its original setting, rather than a reader-response approach, which deals with the text in terms of what it “says to me” in the present.

With this preliminary clarification, I want to point out several topics where I believe the discussion is in need of supplementation. It is worth heeding Bernard Baruch’s statement: “Everyone is entitled to his opinion; no one has a right to be wrong on the facts.”

1. Would John Alexis Edgren have insisted on agreement with his view of foreknowledge?

One recent allegation is that Edgren, founder of Bethel Seminary, as a pietist was not concerned about agreement on doctrines. His own view on foreknowledge is by now well known:

God is omniscient. To God all things in the past, present and future are at all times fully known. God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures.

However, in the document, “Trusting God’s Word, Serving Christ’s Mission,” the conclusion drawn that Edgren did not require others to believe as he believed, and would therefore allow divergence on this matter of foreknowledge, does not follow logically from the quotations advanced. For example, the quotation in the cover letter is from Edgren’s statement on the extent of the atonement, which has no essential bearing on the issue of foreknowledge. He certainly believed that there were some doctrines on which latitude was not permissible. The issue is which doctrines these were. As to the broader question of his tolerance of doctrinal indifference, another passage that is not cited in that document is instructive.

It is taken from a commencement address Edgren gave to a graduating class at the Seminary of which he was dean, and is in a section entitled, "Preserve soundness in living and doctrine":

The Christlike life must, of course, be given the first place, but doctrines in conformity with the Bible are of greatest importance. Let us never think that anything that God has ordained, or given for our guidance should be treated with indifference. Besides this, doctrine is, to a great extent, the underlying structure for life itself. What is the cause of the life we see in the Catholic church, with all its superstition, its enmity against and unreceptivity toward the saving truth? The explanation lies, for the greater part, in its false doctrines. There are also other large denominations that suffer greatly by reason of unbiblical doctrines. In our own churches, how much do we not need to guard against unsound views of the atonement so common in our time. We must continue to work against Judaizing tendencies. Other deviations from the truth will perhaps first appear so insignificant that we discern their falseness with difficulty. Two trains may appear to be running alongside each other, on tracks which seem to be parallel. After a couple of hours, however, each will have lost sight of the other, and the tracks prove to lead to widely separate destinations. Brethren, see to it, that you are on the right train (L. J. Ahlstrom, *John Alexis Edgren: A Biography* [Chicago: Conference Press, 1938], p. 114).

It is also helpful to see how Edgren actually dealt with doctrinal differences. The most instructive instance came while the seminary was located in Stromsburg, Nebraska. The pastor there, E. P. Ekman, held a view of the atonement that Edgren judged to be the Waldenströmian view, a type of moral influence view. Edgren had counseled Ekman privately about what he believed to be his erroneous doctrine. Then on one cold November morning, at the close of a sermon on the atonement, Edgren rose, offered some comments on the sermon, and invited those present to the seminary for a lecture on the atonement. The eventual outcome was a split of the congregation.

2. Have Conference Baptists historically been concerned about doctrinal agreement?

The argument offered by the Committed Pastors and their supporters seems to be that pietists, being primarily concerned about personal piety, do not worry about exact doctrinal formulation. Since Conference Baptists are pietists, they have allowed considerable latitude in doctrinal definition.

Actually, the problem is considerably more complex than this. There are several varieties of pietism. Some pietists do not think belief important, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, who said that "it [religion] resigns, at once, all claims on anything that belongs either to science [doctrine] or morality" (*On Religion*, p. 35). On the other hand, many pietists held that correct belief was not sufficient, but did not reject its necessity. A. C. McGiffert, in his classic work, even includes Jonathan Edwards among the pietists: "He remained an Evangelical to the end, and his piety, suffused and transfigured though it was by his loftier genius, was in essence that of Spener and Wesley, and all true Pietists" (*Protestant Thought Before Kant*, p. 185).

Further, most pietists are not pure pietists. Most of them are influenced by more than one factor. My doctoral mentor, William Hordern, used to say that early fundamentalism (of about 1910, roughly equivalent to what we today call evangelicalism) was a blend of four factors: pietism, orthodoxy, Puritanism, and revivalism. Initially I disagreed, but have since come to conclude that twentieth century American evangelicalism is a blend of these four factors (and others), in varying proportions.

The question then is, What has the actual history of the Conference shown this group to be? Has doctrinal definition been rather unimportant, so long as one had a personal experience with Christ? If this were the case, how do we explain the following incidents?

- Edgren, in the previously mentioned incident, took strong issue publicly with his pastor's view of the atonement.
- Conference churches strongly resisted the attempted introduction of Seventh Day Adventist doctrine into the churches.
- There was strong controversy early in the twentieth century in a number of Conference churches (especially in the Chicago area) over Pentecostal doctrine and practice. In the membership record of the church I served, there are several members and even two pastors, where the comment on the member's separation from the church in those years is "utesluten" (roughly, in Swedish, "excluded").
- In 1944, the churches of the then Swedish Baptist Conference voted to begin their own foreign mission program rather than continuing to send their missionaries out under the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Adolf Olson writes,

Two main reasons were advanced in favor of an independent foreign mission project. In the first place, the churches and the Conference had for several years been greatly disturbed and much grieved over the practice by the Board of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society of the so-called "Evangelical Policy" inclusively interpreted and applied. The Conference Baptist people wanted to be sure they were supporting only missionaries who were true to the Word of God, and who were under the direction of a Board that was faithful to the Bible (*A Centenary History as Related to the Baptist General Conference of America* [Chicago: Baptist Conference Press, 1952], p. 536).

- On one occasion, Nels Ferré, a graduate of Bethel Academy who had gone on to become a leading American theologian, was invited to speak at Bethel chapel. In his message, he made a statement that he also makes in his book, *Christ and the Christian*, that Jesus was probably the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier. President Henry Wingblade decreed that Ferré was never to speak at Bethel again. Ferré, by the way, was a notable pietist (see his book, *Strengthening the Spiritual Life*).
- An ordination council called by the Central Baptist Church of Saint Paul, Minnesota voted not to recommend Robert Otto, a former Bethel philosophy instructor, for ordination, because of his beliefs. I have read the minutes.
- The World Mission Board of the Baptist General Conference, under the leadership of its Executive Secretary, Virgil Olson, had to deal with problems regarding charismatic doctrine and practice, especially on the Philippine field. It formulated the following policy: "Because of the beliefs as outlined and because of the missionary's responsibilities, should the Holy Spirit grant the gift of glossalalia, this gift should be used only in private for personal development and not be practiced or promoted in inter-personal relationships or publicly."

- In 1964, a new church in the Midwest Conference attempted to call as its mission pastor a Conference pastor who did not subscribe to biblical inerrancy. The Home Missions department, led by its Executive Secretary, Gordon Anderson, refused to grant financial support to the church for that pastor.

Does this sound like a group made up of pietists for whom defined doctrinal belief is unimportant? In the words of a notable Baptist General Conference pietist, Virgil A. Olson,

Controversies may sometimes turn out for the furtherance of the Gospel. Some of Paul's greatest epistles were written because of controversies in the churches. The great doctrinal controversies within the Christian church in the third and fourth centuries "compelled Christians to examine well the foundations of their faith, to study the Bible and systematize its teachings" (*Seventy-five Years: A History of Bethel Theological Seminary*, with Adolf Olson [Chicago: Conference Press, 1946], p. 25).

3. Is this a question of Calvinism versus Arminianism?

One assertion frequently made by the Committed Pastors and their supporters is that this is an issue of Calvinism versus Arminianism. Since the Conference has always allowed both groups to coexist within it, there should be room both for Greg Boyd and John Piper.

Actually, traditional Arminians and Calvinists have generally agreed that God knows the future exhaustively, including free human actions. They differ as to the basis of that knowledge, i. e., as to whether he knows what will happen because he has rendered it certain, or whether he knows that because humans render it certain. Note the views of a few Arminians on foreknowledge:

H. Orton Wiley: "(3) Both the Arminian and Calvinistic theologians hold to the *scientia necessaria*, or the knowledge that God has of Himself, and *scientia libera*, or the free knowledge which God has of persons and things outside of Himself. However, they differ as to the ground of this foreknowledge, the Arminians generally maintaining that God has a knowledge of pure contingency, while the Calvinistic theologians connect it with the decrees which God has purposed in Himself."

Thomas Oden: "Only God knows creation omnisciently, without limitation or qualification. . . . "A special perplexity of the divine omniscience is the relation between human freedom of the will and divine foreknowing. God foreknows the use of free will, yet this foreknowledge does not determine events. Rather, what God foreknows is determined by what happens, part of which is affected by free will. God knows what will happen, but does not unilaterally determine each and every event immediately, so as not to respect human freedom and the reliability of secondary causes. God fully understands and knows all these specific secondary determining causes that are at work in the natural order, but that does not imply that merely by fiat God constantly acts so as to overrule or circumvent these causes. God's merely foreknowing these causes does not negate or damage their causal reality."

James Arminius: "I. The understanding of God is that faculty of his life which is first in nature and order, and by which the living God distinctly understands all things and every one, which, in

what manner so ever, either have, will have, have had, can have, or might hypothetically have, a being of any kind. . . .

IV. . . . (2.) He knows what things from the creatures, whether they will come into existence or not, can exist by his conservation, motion, assistance, concurrence, and permission. (3.) He knows what things He can do about the acts of the creatures [convenienter] consistently with himself or with these acts.”

Actually, Gregory Boyd, in the book that the Committed Pastors and Lay Leaders distributed to all Conference pastors, says that Calvinists and traditional Arminians agree on foreknowledge (although his initial characterization of the two views is inaccurate), and that open theism is a third option, disagreeing with both those groups-on this topic (*God of the Possible*, pp. 22-24).

4. Is the classic view of exhaustive divine foreknowledge based upon philosophical rather than biblical considerations?

It has become fairly common for open theists to contend that their view is the truly biblical one, and that they do not base it upon philosophy. The reason, according to open theists, that the Christian church has for so long failed to see what they consider to be the plain teaching of Scripture is that early in its history it became captive to Greek philosophy, which held that God was unchanging, immovable, timeless, etc. It therefore was unable to take at face value the passages that speak of God changing his mind. Several observations need to be made.

- The Greek picture of God, or as it is often put, the Thomistic view, is a package, involving more than foreknowledge. God does not change, he is outside of time, he is not emotionally affected by anything that happens, etc. In reality, the picture of God held by recent evangelicals (who hold the traditional view of God) departs from this total package at a number of points. The traditional understanding of impassibility is rejected by any number of the recent evangelical systematic theologies, such as those by Grudem, Lewis and Demarest, Garrett, Erickson, and Grenz. Further, not all who hold the traditional view of God are committed to his timelessness. Both Ronald Nash and Thomas Morris declare themselves unable to decide on this issue.
- Thomas Aquinas developed his theology using Aristotle’s philosophy. Aristotle held that the future is undetermined, and hence cannot be known, yet Thomas held the traditional view. Here was a case of Thomas clearly departing from the philosophical influence that was predominant in his thought.
- A similarity of ideas does not necessarily mean influence. Plato, although he was not a Christian, was not therefore necessarily wrong in all his beliefs. Anyone who is familiar with his metaphor of the divided line in the Republic, for example, will see a parallel to Paul’s statement in 2 Cor. 4:17-18. That does not indicate an influence of the former on the latter, however.
- The idea that there is a strong contrast between Greek thought and “distinctive biblical mentality,” or Hebraic thought, has come under severe criticism and in many circles has been seriously modified or abandoned. Brevard Childs, for example, says of James Barr’s criticism of the conception in *Semantics of Biblical Language*: “Seldom has one book brought down so much superstructure with such effectiveness” (*Biblical Theology in Crisis*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], p. 72). One may attempt to rebut Barr’s argument, but it has been so influential that it cannot be ignored without being 40 years out of date.

On the other hand, we need to take a close look at open theists' biblical methodology, which they claim is not influenced by philosophy, but simply reports what the Bible says. Actually, all of us have philosophical preconceptions that we bring to the exegetical task, whether we realize it or not, and failure to acknowledge and wrestle with this problem is naïve. Current forms of the classical view of God often are based on what I term orthodox realism, of either the common sense or critical variety. I submit that the philosophical influence on open theism can be seen at several points:

- The view of human freedom is at the very center of the open theist view. If what I am going to do is knowable, it is certain, and if it is certain, I cannot do otherwise, and therefore am not free. This is the noncompatibilist or incompatibilist view. Those who hold that God knows what we are going to do and yet believe that we do it freely hold what is called a compatibilist view. Open theists often do not argue for the former view; they just assume it. In some cases, they picture the classical view with caricatures, such as a puppeteer controlling his puppets.
- Anecdotes, such as that about the young woman who felt called to missions in Taiwan and entered a marriage that ended tragically, are used to conclude to a certain view of divine foreknowledge. This, however, is a psychological argument.
- Greg Boyd assumes, without argumentation, what philosophers call the A-theory of time (and a particular version of it), and argues from it. That this view is correct, rather than the B-theory, and that the conclusions he draws must follow from the A-theory, are highly debatable among philosophers (See, e. g., William Lane Craig, "Divine Knowledge and Future Contingency," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], pp. 98-103).
- Open theists frequently protest that their view is not process theology. I am not aware of anyone accusing open theists of being process theologians, in the sense of the doctrinal systems of John Cobb, James Ford, David Ray Griffin, etc. That does not mean, however, that they may not be using process philosophy, or process metaphysics. This is not the same as quantum mechanics; it is one interpretation of quantum mechanics. I have suggested that the open theists are working with a semi-process view of reality (*God the Father Almighty* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], p. 84). I base this on Richard Rice's statement that open theism shares with process thought the idea that God's relationship to the world is "a succession of concrete experiences, rather than a single timeless perception," and the idea that God's nature is dipolar--that is, it has both a changing and unchanging element (*God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985], p. 33). Clark Pinnock also places his view between the classic view and that of process theology, pointing out certain affinities between his view and process ("Between Classical and Process Theism," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash, pp. 316-17). Pinnock readily admits that he first had a philosophical difficulty with the traditional understanding of foreknowledge before being convinced scripturally. This caused him to ask, "Can this conjecture be scriptural? When I went to the Scriptures with this question in mind, I found more support than I had expected (p. 25)." Pinnock says this view is what "logic required and I believed Scripture permitted me to make..." (pp. 18-19, emphasis added) ("From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Zondervan: 1990; Bethany House: 1995]).

In an interview, Professor Boyd was asked, "To what extent do you think this new trend [open theism] in evangelical thinking is indebted to process theology?" He replied, "None. Despite uninformed protests to the contrary, the two movements have next to nothing in common. They both affirm that the future partly consists in possibilities, and that is it." (*Modern Reformation*,

November/December, 1999 issue). No mention is made of the common acceptance of the A-theory of time.

This is surprising, in light of what Boyd wrote eight years earlier, in *Trinity and Process*:

This work is, in essence, an attempt to work out a trinitarian-process metaphysic which overcomes this impasse. It is our conviction that the fundamental vision of the process world view, especially as espoused by Charles Hartshorne, is correct. But it is our conviction as well that the scriptural and traditional understanding of God as triune and antecedently actual within Godself is true, and is, in fact, a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. But, we contend, these two views, when understood within a proper framework, do not conflict.

Indeed, it shall be our contention that Hartshorne's a priori process metaphysics, when corrected of certain misconstrued elements, actually requires something like a trinitarian understanding of God to make it consistent and complete! What results, we trust, is the outline of a metaphysical system which establishes, on an a priori basis, a process view of the world which requires a trinitarian God for its completion.

. . . My warmest appreciation must also be expressed to Charles Hartshorne. Though I disagree with him on a great many points, he has influenced my own thinking more than any other single philosopher." (*Trinity and Process*, [New York: Peter Lang, 1992], preface, emphasis added).

I would ordinarily understand this to say that he is trying to work out a trinitarian theology using process categories. Although he now reportedly says that he was attempting to refute process thought in that book, a close reading will reveal that he is at least as critical of the classical view as he is of the neo-classical or process view. Contrary to the assertion about uninformed protests, some of us have read *Trinity and Process* in its entirety. It is difficult to know how to relate these two statements to one another. It may be that the later statement represents a change from the earlier thesis, but if so, Dr. Boyd should be prepared to repudiate his statements in *Trinity and Process*. Again, observe that we are not charging any openness theologian with being a process theologian. We are, however, suggesting that those who claim that an alternative view is affected by philosophical presuppositions should acknowledge their own philosophical presuppositions.

5. Is this a question of the nature of the future, rather than of the attributes of God?

To some extent, the assertion that the difference between the classical view of foreknowledge and that of open theism is a difference of understanding of the nature of the future is true. Open theism is distinguished by what is often called in philosophical circles, an unrealistic view of the future, that is, that the future has no ontological status until the events that make it up occur. Note, however, that this is a philosophical conception, not a biblical one.

The further question, however, is this: If the future is of the nature that open theism says it is, is God of such a nature that he cannot know it? In this respect, the question is something like the paradox of the stone: Can God create a stone so large he cannot lift it? Part of the issue here is how God knows. The open theist holds that God does not know the future directly or intuitively, but rather knows it by inference from present facts.

This distinction is a significant one, and definitely relates to God's nature. There are two ways I might know how many persons are in a room at a particular time. One is by looking into the room, carefully inspecting it throughout, and counting three people. The other would be if I examined the room carefully, finding that it had only one entrance or exit, and there were no persons in the room. From outside, I then keep that door under continuous surveillance. I observe that five persons enter the room. While continuing to watch the door, I then see two and only two persons leave the room, and no others enter. I then know that there are three persons in the room, but the basis of my knowledge would be quite different from the basis of the knowledge in the former case.

This is the issue with respect to how God knows the future. It can also be seen with respect to the past. We know the past by reconstructing it from historical evidence. God does not have to do that, for he has direct and immediate knowledge of the past.

Note that what is meant by the statement, "The future does not exist," is not defined (see the earlier statement about A- and B-theories of time). In one sense, of course, it does not exist, but neither does much of the past, for it is no longer occurring. To say that God does not know the future just as he does not know that there is a monkey sitting next to me, when there is no such monkey there, is a misleading comparison. The latter is an untrue statement. A more appropriate comparison would be to say that God does not now know that there will be a monkey sitting next to me tomorrow, if indeed there will be no monkey there tomorrow. In other words, God does not know false statements, whether past, present, or future.

6. Should any view that can offer biblical support be an acceptable option in the Baptist General Conference?

I frequently hear that open theism should be considered a viable option to be held within the Baptist General Conference, because open theists can support their view with Scripture. What evangelicals usually teach regarding biblical interpretation is that it is not sufficient to have a plausible interpretation of a passage. The real issue is whether this is the best and most defensible position. If we simply say that any position that can give Scriptures to support it should be allowed, we cannot exclude a view like Arianism, which denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. The Arians were able to cite texts such as Prov. 8:22; Acts 2:36; Col. 1:15; Heb. 3:2; John 17:3; John 14:28; Mark 13:32; and Luke 2:52. Anyone who has had a visit from their current representatives, the Jehovah's Witnesses, knows how frequently they cite the Scriptures. What we must ask is which view is better supported by the Scriptures as a whole. Please note that this is not an attempt at "guilt by association." It is an indication of the inadequacy of the principle cited at the beginning of this paragraph.

It is not my purpose to undertake a complete discussion of open theism's biblical methodology here. Ardel Caneday has done a masterful task of that in his papers posted on this web site. I do want to point out, however, that if one takes as literal some of the passages traditionally regarded as anthropomorphisms (such as God changing his mind, discovering things he did not know, etc.), then one must apply that hermeneutic consistently. The criteria that open theists use to distinguish anthropomorphisms, namely, that they are in poetic passages, or would be ridiculous if taken literally, do not apply to the following cases. One must then conclude that God not only does not know some of the future, he does not have exhaustive knowledge of the past (Gen. 3:11) and the present (Gen. 3:9), he actually is mistaken about some matters (Jer. 3:7), he is not omnipresent (Gen. 18:21), he literally hates people (Mal. 1:3, Rom. 9:13), etc.

7. Is the Edgren Fellowship trying to move the Baptist General Conference toward creedalism?

I also note several expressions of fear that the Baptist General Conference is in danger of becoming creedalistic. I have served 38 different Conference churches in some official pastoral capacity and have spoken in literally hundreds of Conference churches. I have never once heard the Affirmation of Faith recited as part of a worship service, although some of them used to have the Affirmation pasted inside the back cover of their hymnals. I have heard the Apostle's Creed recited in several Reformed, Christian Reformed, and Lutheran churches, which are creedal. I have never heard a candidate for ordination in the Baptist General Conference have to recite and express agreement with the Affirmation of Faith.

Those who speak against the danger of creedalism may be confusing it with confessionalism. Confessionalism is the holding of a statement of faith as an expression of what a group of persons believe in common. That is why the Affirmation was adopted, so that those considering joining the Baptist General Conference would know what were those beliefs held in common, and where the boundaries are. One would hope that if persons did not agree with the understanding of the Affirmation, or came to abandon it as an expression of their belief, they would instead seek a group where they did fit. If I, for example, came to the conclusion that believers' baptism by immersion was not a requirement of discipleship to Christ, and for church membership, I would leave and join an Evangelical Free Church. This is not creedalism; this is confessionalism with integrity.

8. Would excluding the advocacy of open theism at Bethel College and Seminary restrict academic freedom?

Of course it would. The real question, however, is whether it is an appropriate restriction, because all institutions of higher education have some restrictions, written or unwritten. There is no such thing as absolute academic freedom, just as there is no such thing as absolute freedom of speech (for example, it does not permit slanderous statements, or shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater). Suppose a professor of medicine in the medical school of the University of Minnesota stood before a class and announced that as a result of studying with a witch doctor in Africa, he had learned some excellent methods of alternative medicine, and proceeded persistently and aggressively to teach such methods. How long would he retain his position, even though there is probably no official document at that university prohibiting teaching such views? Numerous other examples could be given.

At Bethel Seminary, tenured faculty are reevaluated and voted on by delegates to the Baptist General Conference for renewal of tenure every five years. That meant that I underwent that review process four times during my service there. I never resented that process. I always felt that I was there to serve the churches of the denomination and that if a majority, or even a sizeable minority, no longer wanted me teaching there, I should not be there.

As Arthur Holmes wrote, "...Christian education implies commitment to the Word of God and responsibility to the church constituency a college serves. Liberty without loyalty is not Christian, but loyalty without the liberty to think for oneself is not education" (Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, rev. ed. [Eerdmans: 1975, 1987], p. 61).

Eighty years ago, J. Gresham Machen pointed out that this is not a matter of freedom of speech. A person has a right to rent a hall, announce a meeting, and advocate any view he wants to, so long as it is not an illegal proposal. What he does not have an ethical right to do, however, is to accept a salary for teaching, and use his appointment to undermine what the sponsoring group wants taught.

9. Would prohibiting the advocacy of open theism at Bethel College and Seminary jeopardize the school’s accreditation?

During the eight years I served as dean of Bethel Seminary, I served on several accreditation examination teams, representing the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada jointly with representatives of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Middle States Association, and the Southern Association. Never once did I hear a challenge to the right of a school or its sponsoring group to establish definite doctrinal tenets, to which faculty were expected to subscribe. I only heard concern over failure to follow due process.

It should be noted that several institutions have elaborated upon their doctrinal statements, or had unwritten rules, without serious accreditation ramifications. Wheaton College added an addendum to its doctrinal statement. There was an unwritten rule at Wheaton that although a professor could hold a Pentecostal or charismatic view of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he/she was not to advocate that belief. Two Assemblies of God Bible professors had no difficulty accepting that restriction. The Southern Baptist seminaries have recently added to their doctrinal statements, without accreditation problems. At the time of the shift of leadership several years ago, some of their schools were placed on probation, but that action related more to process than to doctrine, and the probations were soon removed.

10. Should we get on with ministry, rather than debating this subject?

I have heard concern that all of this debate is drawing us away from doing the work of evangelism and church growth. Sometimes this is stated as saying that what unites the Baptist General Conference is mission, not doctrine. I am strongly concerned about evangelizing the world and building up the body of Christ. I am, however, concerned about the long term developments in these areas. Here it is helpful to note the change in number of missionaries under appointment by two groupings of mission boards, from 1972 to 1988. Statistics after the latter date are not applicable because of the movement from long term to short term missionary appointments:

Sending Board	Missionaries under appointment in	
	1972	1988
American Baptist Churches	262	179
Episcopal Church	165	72
United Church of Christ	244	214
United Methodist Church	951	416
United Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.	604	435
Totals	2,226	1,316

Evangelical Foreign Missions Association	7,074		9,000+
Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association	6,130		8,000+
Wycliffe Bible Translators	2,200		2,269
Southern Baptist Convention	2,507	3,839	
Totals	17,911		23,108

What is the difference between the two clusters of mission agencies? Donald McGavran, founder of the modern church growth movement, said that the major difference was theology. The number of missionaries under appointment is only one measure of spiritual vitality, but other statistics, such as church membership, attendance, and giving, support this evidence.

In 1944, the Baptist General Conference began its own foreign mission program because it was concerned about theological trends in the American Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Where do we as a denomination want to be fifty years from now?

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Appendix Two

Various Theologians on Omniscience and Foreknowledge

JOHN ALEXIS EDGREN

God is omniscient. To God all things in the past, present and future are at all times fully known. God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures.

John Alexis Edgren, *Fundamentals of Faith* (Chicago: BGC Press, 1948), pp. 19-20.

AUGUSTUS HOPKINS STRONG

Omniscience. By this we mean God's perfect and eternal knowledge of all things which are objects of knowledge, whether they be actual or possible, past, present, or future.

Of men's future free acts: Is. 44:28—"that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure." Of men's future evil acts: Acts 2:23—"him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

Since God knows things as they are, he knows the necessary sequences of his creation as necessary, the free acts of his creatures as free, the ideally possible as ideally possible.

The fact that there is nothing in the present condition of things from which the future actions of free creatures necessarily follow by natural law does not prevent God from foreseeing such actions, since his knowledge is not mediate, but immediate. He not only foreknows the motives which will occasion men's acts, but he directly foreknows the acts themselves. The possibility of such direct knowledge without assignable grounds of knowledge is apparent if we admit that time is a form of finite thought to which the divine mind is not subject.

Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1963), pp. 282-85.

DONALD BLOESCH

God's omnipotence includes his omniscience, by which he knows all things – even before they happen. Theologians as well as philosophers have had difficulty reconciling God's foreknowledge and foreordination with the incontestable fact that history includes the emergence of genuinely new things – new experiences and new outcomes.

It is important to emphasize (as did Calvin in his time and Barth in more recent times) that human freedom and divine providence are by no means mutually exclusive. Our freedom comes from God, and it is realized as God works with us and in us. The paradox is that the more the human will submits to God, the more free it becomes. Human freedom is upheld and fulfilled by divine providence, not annulled.

God's knowledge encompasses the past, the present and the future, but he does not experience the future until it actually occurs.

Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).

JAMES ARMINIUS

The understanding of God is that faculty of his life which is first in nature and order, and by which the living God distinctly understands all things and every one, which, in what manner soever, either have, will have, have had, can have, or might hypothetically have, a being of any kind. . . .

He knows what things from the creatures, whether they will come into existence or not, can exist by his conservation, motion, assistance, concurrence, and permission. He knows what things He can do about the acts of the creatures [convenienter] consistently with himself or with these acts.

Omniscience. By omniscience is meant the perfect knowledge which God has of Himself and of all things. It is the infinite perfection of that which in us we call knowledge. Consequently we read that His understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5). God understands and knows the hearts of men. Nothing is hidden from him.

James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), private disputation XVII, vol. 2, p. 341.

H. ORTON WILEY

Both the Arminian and Calvinistic theologians hold to the *scientia necessaria*, or the knowledge that God has of Himself, and *scientia libera*, or the free knowledge which God has of persons and things outside of Himself. However, they differ as to the ground of this foreknowledge, the Arminians generally maintaining that God has a knowledge of pure contingency, while the Calvinistic theologians connect it with the decrees which God has purposed in Himself.

H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 354 - 356.

STANLEY GRENZ

Second, we declare that God is omniscient (all-knowing). The medieval theologians generally viewed this attribute in the abstract. For this reason, they debated whether God not only knew all actual but also all possible events. We have concluded, however, that the attributes are relational terms. Consequently, in declaring "God is omniscient" we are not intending to make a claim concerning God's theoretical knowledge, but to affirm his perfect cognition of the world. God is cognizant of all things precisely because they are present to him immediately and as themselves. The divine mind perceives the entire temporal sequence – all events – simultaneously in one act of cognition.

Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), pp. 120-21.

WAYNE GRUDEM

Another difficulty that arises in this connection is the question of the relationship between God's knowledge of everything that will happen in the future and the reality and degree of freedom we have in our actions. If God knows everything that will happen, how can our choices be at all "free"? In fact, this difficulty has loomed so large that some theologians have concluded that God does not know all of the future. They have said that God does not know things that cannot (in their opinion) be known, such as the free acts of people that have not yet occurred (sometimes the phrase used is the "contingent acts of free moral agents," where "contingent" means "possible but not certain"). But such a position is unsatisfactory because it essentially denies God's knowledge of the future of human history at any point in time and thus is inconsistent with the passages cited above about God's knowledge of the future and with dozens of other Old Testament prophetic passages where God predicts the future far in advance and in great detail.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 192.

GORDON LEWIS and BRUCE DEMAREST

God has unerring knowledge of the future, a knowledge that embraces his own actions (Exod. 9:18-20) and the free choices of human agents. God also knows the future of human beings in a way that does not destroy their freedom or responsibility.

Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 221, 231-32.

THOMAS ODEN

Only God knows creation omnisciently, without limitation or qualification. A special perplexity of the divine omniscience is the relation between human freedom of the will and divine foreknowing. God foreknows the use of free will, yet this foreknowledge does not determine events. Rather, what God foreknows is determined by what happens, part of which is affected by free will. God knows what will happen, but does not unilaterally determine each and every event immediately, so as not to respect human freedom and the reliability of secondary causes. God fully understands and knows all these specific, secondary, determining causes that are at work in the natural order, but that does not imply that merely by fiat God constantly acts so as to overrule or circumvent these causes. God's merely foreknowing these causes does not negate or damage their causal reality.

Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 69, 71-72.

KARL BARTH

We now take a further step and say of the divine knowledge first that it possesses the character of foreknowledge, *praescientia*, in relation to all its objects, with the exception of God Himself in His knowledge of Himself. . . . Finally it is worthwhile noting at this point that among the *res creatae* are also the created wills of angels and men. If we say of them that they, too, have their cause in the divine foreknowledge and are its effect, this cannot mean that they are not real as wills (as created wills), that they do not have freedom of choice and therefore contingency (even if a created freedom and contingency).

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), pp. 558, 560.

EMIL BRUNNER

He [God] knows of an action of the creature which is not His own action. He knows above all about the free activity of that creature to which He has granted the freedom to decide for himself. . . . The future can only be known by us insofar as it is contained in the present, as it necessarily follows from that which now is. The freedom of the Other is the border-line of our knowledge. For God this limitation does not exist. His knowledge of the future is not a knowledge based upon something that exists already in the present, but it is a knowledge which lies outside the boundaries of temporal limitations. . . . God knows that which takes place in freedom in the future as something which happens in freedom.

Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), p. 262.

Appendix Three

Answering Some of the Key Texts Used by Greg Boyd in Support of His “Open” View of Foreknowledge

1. Hezekiah’s Repentance and 15 Added Years

Isaiah 38:1-5

In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’” 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 and said, “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, 5 “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.’”

Observations:

1. All agree that God did not *express* an exception when he said, “You shall die and not live” (verse 1).
2. All agree that there was an *implicit* exception, perhaps: “You shall die, unless you repent and pray.”
3. Boyd denies that God knew whether Hezekiah would fulfill the implicit exception.
4. Historic Christian exegesis affirms that God knew that Hezekiah would fulfill the implicit exception.
5. Boyd says that it would have been disingenuous of God to say that Hezekiah was going to die if he knew that he would not die, but live 15 more years.
6. But Boyd’s own view also seems to make God disingenuous. Is God telling the truth when he says, “You shall die, and not live,” when he really means, “You might die, but only if you don’t repent.” Boyd’s criticism of historic Christian exegesis applies to himself at this point.
7. But it is not true that one must always express explicitly the exceptions to the threats one gives or the predictions one makes in order to be honest. One reason for this is that there can be a general understanding in a family or group of people that certain kinds of threats or warnings always imply that genuine repentance will be met with mercy.

For example, in 1 John 4:8: “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” And 1 John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.” These could be taken in isolation to mean there is no exception or escape for any failure to love. But we don’t take the implicit threat that way, because a general understanding exists in John’s community that this refers to unconfessed and persistent refusal to love. 1 John 1:8-9 makes this clear: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is

not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Therefore, we do not need to jump to the conclusion that every exception to every warning needs to be expressed, especially where there is an understanding that genuine repentance and confession will be met with mercy. Hezekiah’s earnest prayer for mercy seems to indicate that he did not assume there was no escape clause, even though none was expressed. He seemed to assume that mercy might well be given if he repented.

8. What about the sincerity of God in making warnings when he knows that the warning will be heeded and the threatened punishment averted? We deal with that in the case of Jonah and the Ninevites.

2. Jonah and the Repentant Ninevites

Jonah 3:4

Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Jonah 3:10

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Observations:

1. Both Boyd and historic Christian exegesis assume that there is an implicit condition, and that if the Ninevites meet it, they will be spared,
2. Boyd believes that, if God knew with certainty that Nineveh would repent, the prophecy of impending destruction was insincere.
3. But the accusation of insincerity is warranted only if the threat or the condition of repentance was not true. That is, if God would *not* have overthrown Nineveh had they not repented, or if he *would* have overthrown Nineveh even if they did repent, then his threat would have been insincere. He would have been lying. But the threat and the condition were true. God would have indeed destroyed them had they not repented, and he did not destroy them when they did repent.

Boyd seems to rule out the possibility that a God who knows all that will come to pass can sincerely warn against consequences that he knows will not come about (e.g., “Nineveh will be overthrown if you don’t repent”). But in fact in God’s mind, the warning may be one of the crucial means he is using to see to it that his foreknown future will come about, namely, that Nineveh will repent. God is not insincere in giving this warning. Had they not repented they would have perished.

3. When God Changes His Plan

Jeremiah 18:7-8

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; 8 if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent [= repent] concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.

Observations:

1. It is entirely possible to see the “plan” of God here to be the thought or intention of his mind that went something like this: “I will bring calamity against a people which is this evil and unrepentant.” This is true and sincere. In other words, God’s “plan” or “intention” or “thought” or “mind” may simply be such a fixed resolve in his mind. His resolve to punish correlates with the evil presently in the people when he expresses the resolve. If the people repent, God’s resolve or “plan” or intention toward that people changes; that is what is meant by his “relenting” or “repenting.” This does not necessarily mean he has not foreknown this change in his “plan.” In fact, the expression of his resolve to punish the kind of people he sees may be the means he uses to bring about the change in them that he foreknows, so that his own change of resolve will accord with their new condition.

2. Boyd says that people have tried to evade the meaning of these texts by saying that God is speaking “anthropomorphically.” Moreover, the only reason one would argue this way, he says, is that one brings to the text a philosophical presupposition that God cannot literally change his mind.

3. But we do not argue this way. We say that there is a real change in God’s mind, but that this does not imply a lack of foreknowledge. God can express an intention or a resolve toward a people that accords with what is true now, all the while knowing that this condition will not be true in the future, and that his resolve will also be different when their condition is different. That a future-knowing God speaks this way is owing to the fact that he really means for his word to be the means of bringing about changes in people to which he himself responds in a way that he knows he will.

4. The kind of change of mind Boyd wants to see, namely, a change owing to unforeseen future developments, is resisted not out of philosophical presuppositions but out of exegetical insights from other relevant texts which make us hesitant to affirm that God changes his mind without qualification. See below on 1 Samuel 15 and the issue of God’s repenting that he made Saul king.

4. God’s Repenting That He Made Saul King and God’s Repenting That He Created Man

1 Samuel 15:11

God says, “I repent that I have made Saul king; for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments.”

1 Samuel 15:28-29

And Samuel said to [Saul], “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent.”

Observations:

1. A natural reading of 1 Samuel 15 would seem to imply that there is a way that God does “repent” and a way that he does not. That is what we are arguing in the texts that Boyd puts forward. He insists that God repents in a way that implies lack of foreknowledge of what is coming. We think this is the kind of “repentance” that would fall under Samuel’s criticism: “God is not a man that he should repent.”
2. In other words, God does not have the human limitations of knowledge that would involve him in repenting *that way*. Rather, his repentance is an expression of a resolve or an attitude that is fitting in view of new circumstances. That God is ignorant of what will call for that new resolve or attitude is not necessarily implied in the change.
3. So the repentance over Saul means *not* that he did not know what Saul would be like, but that he disapproves of what Saul has become, and that he feels sorrow at this evil in his anointed king, and that he looks back on his making him king with the same sorrow that he experienced at that moment when he made him king, foreknowing all the sorrow that would come.

For God to say, “I feel sorrow that I made Saul king,” is not the same as saying, “I would not make him king if I had it to do over, knowing what I know now.” God is able to feel sorrow for an act that he does in view of foreknown evil and pain, and yet go ahead and will to do it for wise reasons. And so later when he looks back on the act he can feel the sorrow for the act that was leading to the sad conditions, such as Saul’s disobedience.

Genesis 6:5-6

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Observations:

1. In view of the warning in 1 Samuel 15:29 that, “The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; he is not a man, that he should repent,” we are slow to attribute human-like repentance to God.
2. Rather, it is plausible to find a “strange” repentance that is unlike anything we experience, namely, that God regrets what he foreknew – that the human race would fall into sin and be in need of a Savior.
3. We are led to believe that God did foreknow this, because in 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul says, “God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” If the grace we needed in Christ was foreknown (even planned) from eternity, then the fall and the misery of man was known too.

4. In 1 Chronicles 29:18, David prays for the people, after they have so willingly given to build the temple: “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in *the intentions of the heart* of Thy people, and direct their heart to Thee.” This phrase (“intentions of the heart”) is the same as the one in Genesis 6:5, but here it seems as if David assumes that God can govern what “intents of the heart” we have. If so, we should not assume too quickly that God can’t know what they are in the future.

5. We propose that God created the world already feeling both the joy of this final salvation and the grief of the intervening fall and misery. When the Fall and misery reach a height in Genesis 6:6, it is not unfitting for God to express this sorrow the way he does.

5. When God Says, “Perhaps”

Jeremiah 26:1-3

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, 2 “Thus says the LORD, ‘Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the LORD’s house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! 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.’”

Observations:

1. The word “perhaps” may be spoken here by God not to express that he is unsure what they will do, but to express that *from a human vantage point* the people may or may not listen to him. But if they do, he will have mercy and not bring calamity.

2. Are there any clues in Jeremiah that we should be hesitant to say God does not know what will come to pass in the future? Jeremiah 10:23 causes us to be hesitant: “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.” On the face of it, this text seems to say that ultimately man is not the one who governs his steps. If so, then man does not have the kind of self-determining power that Boyd attributes to man. This means that man is not in a position to “create” out of nothing choices that surprise God. Rather, man’s steps are finally governed by something outside him, and God would be able to know what these influences are and thus know the future.

3. Therefore, we should be slow to jump to the conclusion that when God says “perhaps” something will come to pass, he is expressing his own uncertainty rather than the perspective of man who cannot know ahead of time.

6. Does God Make Wrong Predictions and Get Surprised?

Jeremiah 3:6-7

Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, “Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. 7 I

thought [literally: I said], “After she has done all these things she will return to Me”; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

Observations:

1. Boyd says that God really thought that the people would turn to him. But I do not see how he can evade the problem that this involves God in a mistake. God thought a something would be true that turned out not to be true.
2. He says that God had a “perfectly accurate assessment of all probabilities” and, given that assessment, he thought that the people would repent. But, he says that “self-determining creatures opted for the more improbable course of action.”
3. This implies two important things: one is that the only way that God cannot be mistaken here is if his statement (they will turn) included the implicit qualification: “given the ordinary expectations under these conditions.” This is what we think God meant. The difference between us and Boyd is that we believe God knew what the people would really do, when he implied that ordinary human probabilities would seem to lead to repentance. But Boyd believes that God did not know what they would do.
4. The other implication is that this text shows how vulnerable God would be if Boyd’s view is right. God would do his very best in predicting on the basis of infinite knowledge of the present, and would miscalculate, because of human self-determination. The implications of this are huge. It means that all talk of God’s managing the world on the basis of known human influences is not very encouraging, because it is the essence of human self-determination that the most utterly unexpected choices can arise from the human will and surprise God.

7. The Testing of Abraham’s Fear of God

Genesis 22:9-12

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12 He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Observations:

1. Boyd says that God did not know if Abraham would remain faithful and that the words “now I know” are disingenuous if this were not so. The test would be a charade if God already knew the outcome.
2. There is another way to think about God’s knowing here. If God knows what will come to pass, does that mean that all testings in history are pointless? We don’t think so. God has not created the world simply so that it might have been foreknown. He created the world to be actualized in history. That is, he wills not just to *foreknow*, but also to *know* by observation and experience. That is the point of creating a real world, rather than just knowing one that might be. Therefore, may not God truly know what

Abraham is going to do, and yet also want to externalize that reality in a test that enables him to know it by observation, not just prognostication? “Now I know,” thus may mean, “Now I see . . . now I experience by observation of your real action.”

3. A problem with Boyd’s view is that God cannot really be sure it is true when he says, “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son.” The knife had not been put into the boy’s chest and this is the moment when the will may well rebel and say, “No.” We have seen from Jeremiah 3:7 that, from Boyd’s way of seeing things, God’s predictions can be “mistaken.” God cannot be sure that Abraham would have killed his son, because the volition had not yet been created for God to know. But perhaps this is not significant, since, even if Abraham had killed his son, God could still not be sure Abraham would not in the next moment rebel against God because he had forced him into such a test. In Boyd’s view of the human will, no text can assure God that we will fear him five minutes after the test.

8. Which Signs of Moses Does God Expect to Be Believed?

Exodus 4:7-9

Then He said, “Put your hand into your bosom again.” So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8 “If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. 9 “But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

Observations:

1. Can a God who knows what will come to pass with certainty say meaningfully, “Such and such may come to pass. If it doesn’t, then do this.” Yes. Because he may merely be saying that he chooses not to reveal what will, in fact, come to pass. He will only *reveal* possibilities and how to respond to them. He is not saying that he only *knows* possibilities. God may have his reasons for sometimes wanting to communicate to us possibilities about the future, and other times, certainties.

2. Boyd would say that it is disingenuous of God to say they may believe on the basis of the first or second miracle when he knows exactly how many it will take to persuade them. But there is at least one clue that God intended for Moses to do all the signs, namely, Exodus 4:17 where God says to Moses, “You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.” God seems to know that more than one will be needed.

3. There are passages in the Pentateuch that show that there is a disconnect between the way that God *talks about* knowing, and the way he *actually knows*. For example, in Genesis 18:21 God says, “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” This text portrays God as if he were too far away in heaven to know for sure what is happening in Sodom. Neither Boyd nor historic exegesis thinks God’s distance from an event hinders his knowledge. Rather there are reasons for this way of speaking. For example, it stresses God’s condescension to be involved with his creatures and his intimate dealing with them and his knowledge of them. Similarly, we assume God has his reasons for speaking in Exodus 4:8 as if he did not know whether the elders would believe.

Appendix Four

BGC District Resolutions on the Foreknowledge of God

The Board of Trustees shall be responsible to the Corporation for maintaining the integrity of both instruction and spiritual quality within the College and Seminary, such that *traditional, biblical and historic baptistic principles and doctrine observed by the churches affiliated with the corporation are not compromised*" (The Bylaws of Bethel College and Seminary, Article V, Section A).

GREAT LAKES BAPTIST CONFERENCE

Annual Meeting
October 15-16, 1999

Whereas, throughout Christian history those committed to the authority of the Scriptures have faithfully confessed and proclaimed this biblical message concerning the nature of God, and,

Whereas, in recent days, because of the discussion concerning the foreknowledge of God, there has arisen some confusion and misunderstanding regarding the position of the Great Lakes Baptist Conference,

Therefore, be it resolved that the delegates to the Great Lakes Baptist Annual Meeting at Good News Church in Mosinee, October 15-16, 1999 affirm the Biblical truth captured by John Alexis Edgren that:

"God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance (as actual) all the free acts of all free creatures." (*Fundamentals of Faith* [Chicago: BGC Press, 1948] pp 19-20

Be it also resolved that we affirm that the Baptist General Conference's Affirmation of faith as a trustworthy expression of biblical doctrine.

Be it further resolved that all of the churches of the Great Lakes Baptist Conference, as well as the leadership of the Baptist General Conference and Bethel College and Seminary be informed by a letter from the District Executive Minister of the results of this resolution.

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MIDWEST BAPTIST CONFERENCE

Annual Meeting
October 21, 1999

WHEREAS, the Bible clearly teaches God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power and possesses complete knowledge of all that was, is and will be

WHEREAS, throughout Christian history those committed to the authority of the Scriptures have faithfully confessed and proclaimed this Biblical message concerning the nature of God ...

WHEREAS, in our Baptist General Conference history, the founder of our Bethel Theological Seminary, John Alexis Edgren, clearly stated this biblical doctrine when he wrote, "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures." (*Fundamentals of Faith* [Chicago: Baptist General Conference, 1948] pp. 19,20.

WHEREAS, the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith, declares these Biblical truths with precise clarity when it states "we believe in God the Father, an infinite personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love ..."

WHEREAS, the Midwest Baptist Conference, one of the oldest districts of the Baptist General Conference demonstrated its adherence to the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith by incorporating it into its constitution...

WHEREAS, in recent days, because of the discussion concerning the foreknowledge of God there has arisen some confusion, misunderstanding, even false accusations regarding the position of the Midwest Baptist Conference on this issue...

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the delegates to the Midwest Baptist Conference Annual Meeting, at the Elim Baptist Church, Chicago, October 20-21, 1999 affirm the truth of the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God as stated in the first clause of this resolution, i.e., God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power and possesses complete knowledge of all that was, is and will be...

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the delegates confirm once again the Midwest Baptist Conference's unequivocal conviction that the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith is a trustworthy expression of Biblical doctrine...

THEREFORE, be it resolved that a copy of this resolution be sent to the churches of the Midwest Baptist Conference, the Baptist General Conference Board of Overseers and the President of Bethel College and Seminary.

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FLORIDA / CARIBBEAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE
Conference Annual Meeting
November 20, 1999

WHEREAS, the Bible clearly teaches God is omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power and possesses comprehensive knowledge of all that was, and is and shall be, "all that is actual and all that is possible." (John Alexis Edgren)

WHEREAS, throughout Christian history those committed to the authority of the Scripture has faithfully confessed and proclaimed this biblical message concerning the nature of God....

WHEREAS, the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith declares these biblical truths with precise clarity when it states "we believe in God the Father, an infinite personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love....."

WHEREAS, the Florida/Caribbean Baptist Conference demonstrated its adherence to the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith by incorporating it into its constitution....

WHEREAS, in recent days, because of the discussion concerning the foreknowledge of God there has arisen some confusion and misunderstanding regarding the position of the Florida/Caribbean Baptist Conference....

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the delegates to the Florida/Caribbean Baptist Conference Annual Meeting, at Trinity Baptist Church, Sun City Center, November 20, 1999, affirm the truth of the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God as stated in the first clause of this resolution and that it be further resolved that the delegates confirm once again the Florida/Caribbean Baptist Conference's unequivocal conviction that the Baptist General Conference's Affirmation of Faith is a trustworthy expression of biblical doctrine.

Be it further resolved that all of the churches of the Florida/Caribbean Baptist Conference received copies of the resolution.

* * *

MICHIGAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE
Annual Meeting
May 5-6, 2000

Whereas, throughout Christian history those committed to the authority of the Scriptures have faithfully confessed and proclaimed this biblical message concerning the nature of God and,

Whereas, in recent days, because of the discussion concerning the foreknowledge of God, there has arisen some confusion and misunderstanding regarding the position of the Michigan Baptist General Conference,

Therefore, be it resolved that we the delegates of the Michigan Baptist General Conference affirm the biblical truth that God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures.

Be it also further resolved that we affirm that the Baptist General Conference's Affirmation of Faith is a trustworthy expression of biblical doctrine.

Be it further resolved that all of the churches of the Michigan Baptist General Conference make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

* * *

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BAPTIST CONFERENCE

Annual Meeting

April 29, 2000

WHEREAS, the Bible clearly teaches God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power, and possesses complete knowledge of all that was, is, and will be; and...

WHEREAS throughout Christian history those committed to the authority of the Scriptures have faithfully confessed and proclaimed this biblical message concerning the nature of God; and...

WHEREAS our own denomination and its seminary was founded by men who forthrightly proclaimed this understanding of the character of God, "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore, God knows in advance (as actual) all the free acts of all free creatures." (John Alexis Edgren, *Fundamentals of Faith* [Chicago: BGC Press, 1948], pp. 19-20).

WHEREAS the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith declares these biblical truths with precise clarity when it states, "we believe in God the Father, an infinite personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love...."; and

WHEREAS, recent discussions and decisions within the Baptist General Conference concerning the foreknowledge of God have caused the necessity for the Northern California Baptist Conference to clarify its position on this issue;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the delegates of the Northern California Baptist Conference meeting at the First Baptist Church of Paso Robles, California, affirm the truth of the Doctrine of the foreknowledge of God as stated in the first clause of this resolution, i.e., God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power and possesses complete knowledge of all that was, is and will be; and...

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the delegates affirm that this is the proper understanding of the Baptist General Conference's Affirmation of Faith, and as such it is a trustworthy expression of biblical doctrine, and a necessary understanding of all who would profess agreement with the BGC Affirmation of Faith itself, and...

THEREFORE, be it resolved that a copy of this resolution be sent to the churches of the Northern California Baptist Conference, the Baptist General Conference Board of Overseers, and the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of Bethel College and Seminary.

* * *

NEW ENGLAND BAPTIST CONFERENCE

Annual Meeting

May 20, 2000

Since we believe in every divine perfection, namely that the Bible clearly teaches that God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite in power and possesses comprehensive knowledge of all that was, is and shall be;

And in light of the conference-wide discussion regarding one of the divine perfections, namely the omniscience of God;

Therefore we, the delegates of the NBC affirm that "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore God knows in advance (as actual) all the free acts of all free creatures." *

* John Alexis Edgren, founder of Bethel Seminary and Psalm 139

* * *

ROCKY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

October 20, 1999

Dear Bob and George:

We, the Board of Overseers of the Rocky Mountain Baptist Conference, greet you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. We have received your letter dated 30 September 1999 and appreciate your wisdom and sensitivity toward the matters that are before us. We are also glad for the clarification of your standing on the issues.

We write to you out of interest for our shared denominational heritage and unity in light of recent developments regarding the doctrine of God's foreknowledge debate. We feel the pull of our dual responsibility to endeavor to keep the unity that binds us together in His love (Eph. 4:3, 15) along with another obligation to watch closely our doctrine (I Tim. 4:16) and contend for the faith once delivered to all the saints (Jude 3). Our hope is that these twin gravitational pulls will mature into a healthy expression without pitting one against the other.

Since it is our desire to supportively engage in the mission of the BGC we believe that we can best demonstrate that support by reporting to you concerns articulated to us by our constituent churches. Since the Annual Meeting last summer we have received inquiries and comments prompting recent actions on our part. We decided to do a little "digging" in order to identify how the churches in the RMBC are responding to current developments regarding the vote on the proposed Amendment and more largely on the issue itself. All but six of our churches (out of 43) gave us verbal responses.

The short answer is this: it is the consensus in the overwhelming majority of our churches surveyed (84%) that God infallibly knows all that will come to pass.¹ Obviously the consensus of our District is contrary to Dr. Boyd's published position. Furthermore it seems contrary to the apparent support given for his position by the Committee for Theological Clarification and Assessment which stated that Dr. Boyd's theological position "is within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel."²

We desired to ascertain the level of concern in our churches by asking the pastors to assign a numerical evaluation that best represented their concern. We found their concern to be quite high. We asked them to give a numeric rating using a scale from one (no concern) to ten (very high concern). Fifty one percent rated their concerns as falling on the high end (between 8 to 10 points) of the scale.

We discovered that a few churches (six) have taken official action by either formally stating a position, writing a letter to denomination and/or school leadership, or adding a clarifying amendment to their own Statements of Faith. Five additional churches indicated they are thinking about adopting a formal response in the future.

We learned early on from the leadership of at least two churches that they would be inclined to withdraw from our BGC fellowship if "openness theology" continued to be taught in our schools as an alternative to traditionally held BGC beliefs. So we drafted a fourth question asking our churches to describe what kind of response would be acceptable from denominational and/or college leadership that might avert such a decision. The overwhelming request is for two things. First, that further regional discussions be conducted based on the theological merits of the doctrine and its consequences.³ The second and strongest expectation was that "Bethel College and Seminary will not allow 'Openness theology' to be taught as an acceptable interpretation of biblical truth."⁴ (We understand that discussion of unorthodox or non-Christian teachings will take place in the classroom as part of curricula that sharpen the theological and biblical skills of students. This puts "Openness" into the category of a "doctrine out there" as one pastor put it, "that will confront" believers in the future).

In session on the 15th of October we unanimously clarified three observations:

1. It is the belief of the RMBC Board of Overseers that Dr. Boyd's position is inconsistent with historic Bethel Seminary and BGC roots as stated by the founder Alexis Edgren: "God knows everything that ever was, everything that now is, and everything that is to be; all that is actual and all that is possible. Therefore, God knows in advance all the free acts of all free creatures."⁵
2. There is continual and increasing distress in a high percentage of our churches over this issue and especially the meaning behind the inconclusive vote on the proposed amendment. While the decision in Florida may uphold "[t]he irenic spirit upon which this denomination was founded"⁶ the notion that the

¹ Of the pastors who responded: 31 of 37 churches affirmed the statement; 2 church leaders did not share this consensus, 2 church leaders did not know the consensus in their church, while the remaining 8 gave no response.

² From the "Internal Communications Bulletin" (office of Public Relations of Bethel College and Seminary) 19 May 1998.

³ That is 15 out of 37 churches or 41%. (Some churches had more than one response to this question.)

⁴ That is 22 out of 37 churches or 59%.

⁵ From the *Fundamentals of Faith* (Chicago: BGC Press, 1948), pp. 19-20.

⁶ Dr. Brushaber's letter to BGC pastors dated 30 Sept. 1999.

two positions are theologically compatible does not align with the general consensus of our pastors and the people in the pews of our churches.

3. There is confusion surrounding the gravity of the issue. As one pastor put it, "if we don't draw the line on this issue, where do we?" Clearly, the Florida vote failed to resolve larger issues. We ask BGC leadership to give some direction that will clarify where we go from here.

The sphere of the issue for us is decidedly theological. Concerns about the teaching position of particular professor being "on the line"⁷ reduce the magnitude of the discussion, completely missing the theological point. The importance of this theological clarification validates our identity: the dismissal—or retention—of a particular professor will then merely be the consequence of who we are.

While we would agree that we must act graciously toward those who believe differently, we must also graciously uphold the truths of what we have believed denominationally. Our shared beliefs about the character of God are essential non-negotiables around which we move forward together in mission.

While the pastors and churches of our district are not of unanimous consent about all these matters it does seem that in light of the above findings some clarifying response is warranted. We have enclosed a copy of the statistical findings of our questionnaire for your information.

Thank you for listening to our concerns. We look forward to hearing your response to the issues we have raised. We know that you have a very difficult leadership position in these matters and so we have committed ourselves to pray for you. God's wisdom and guidance is surely our greatest hope and comfort in times like these. May he bless you, keep you and cause his grace to strengthen you for the tasks ahead!

On behalf of the Rocky Mtn Baptist Conference Board of Overseers.

Pastor Rick Anderson, Chairman

⁷ Taken from BGC communication "OnLine."

Appendix Five

Full Text of Letter From Letter from President Robert Ricker and President George Brushaber September 30, 1999

Dear Pastor,

It has been more than three months since the Annual Meeting in St. Petersburg, and it is apparent by the letters we have received from both sides of the foreknowledge issue that the debate is continuing in many areas of the country. Rather than try to address each of your concerns separately, we have identified recurring questions and issues and will attempt to respond.

First, we appreciate the grace with which most have handled this issue. The irenic spirit upon which this denomination was founded has permeated even the most heated theological discussions of the past. It is our continuing prayer that this spirit will mark our denomination into the distant future. Most individuals see that there is more that unites us than divides us. We agree. There is probably no fellowship of churches in the world any of us would agree with in every way.

This spirit in no way minimizes the importance of correct theology. In some denominational circles there is an intentional minimizing of the centrality and significance of theology. That will not be true of us - neither within the BGC nor at Bethel College and Seminary. Paul said to Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16). We are unabashedly evangelical!

Prior to the Annual Meeting you received many mailings of materials about the proposed foreknowledge amendment to our Affirmation of Faith. The BGC web page carries extensive information and has had thousands of hits.

We will not repeat the central issues of the debate. You know that the amendment to change the Affirmation of Faith was defeated 52% to 48%. What does this vote mean? An excerpt from our combined statement is:

The delegates' action expressed support for the adequacy of the existing Affirmation of Faith as a basis for service and fellowship within the denomination. The action was not an endorsement of the specific theological view that had been disputed. The theological issues are important, and discussion and debate will continue among persons fully committed to the final authority of Scripture and to the existing Affirmation of Faith."

Our opinion is that the vast majority who voted disagree with Greg Boyd's view of foreknowledge. They were voting against amending our Affirmation of Faith, that has served us well for nearly a half century. Some feared that this amendment could set in motion a pattern of revisions that would not be helpful to the future life and ministry of the Baptist General Conference and Bethel. In addition, some felt that Dr. Boyd's view, though out of the mainstream of evangelical thought, did not warrant his potential dismissal from the faculty of Bethel College or from his pastoral ministry at Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul.

As we reflect upon what happened, we want to speak to the impression that this vote is moving the BGC in a dangerous direction. We emphatically state that we do not believe we are on a slippery slope theologically. We do not see Boyd's view of foreknowledge as a new trend in the BGC. The vote did not mean we embrace or endorse this other view of God's foreknowledge.

We want to be clear where the BGC and Bethel's leadership stand on the issue. Many of us have heard Greg Boyd's explanation several times, and do not agree with him. We affirm him for his passion for winning lost people, his strong defense of the Scriptures, the deity and resurrection of Christ, and such key doctrines as the Trinity and creation ex nihilo. Neither of us, nor any member of the BGC Executive Ministry Team (President and all Vice Presidents), nor any member of the Bethel President's Leadership Team espouses Boyd's position. Further, we certainly do not believe we have provided a "safe haven" for Open Theists in the Baptist General Conference or at Bethel College and Seminary.

Bethel's observations and commitments regarding the foreknowledge issue are:

- No one on the President's Leadership Team at Bethel (executive vice presidents and vice presidents) espouses Boyd's position.
- No other member of the Biblical and Theological Studies Department at Bethel College holds Boyd's position.
- No Bethel Seminary professor holds to Boyd's position. In fact, two of our systematic theology faculty have read papers at the Evangelical Theology Society critiquing his position.
- Bethel will not hire, either at the college or the seminary, other faculty members who hold the openness theology view.

The BGC is a privileged group of churches with which to partner to fulfill our part of Christ's global mission. Our pietistic roots have made us a group characterized by joining together with one another around our common passion for serving Christ and serving others in His name. We seek to balance both the clear center and the boundaries of our Affirmation of Faith.

As a denomination we are experiencing the blessing of God in outstanding ways. In the August/September issue of the Standard you will find the startling and wonderful statistics showing God's hand on our fellowship during the '90s, such as 240 new U.S. churches with 93% of them viable and growing after five years - when the national average is 40%. The prayer ministry, the new level of pastoral care, the advance among our women's ministry, entry-point ministries in nine nations, new medical ministries in four nations, entering six new nations in missions, penetrating a good number of unreached people groups, the doubling of the Hispanic Bible School and helping many of our churches in revitalization.

God's blessing is also evident at Bethel. There is strong spiritual vitality at both the college and seminary. Student passion over prayer, missions and service has never been higher. Participation in Bible study and covenant groups pervades the campus and enthusiastic student attendance at voluntary worship experiences in both chapel and vespers services is at record levels. The faculty's deep commitment to the integration of evangelical Christian faith with mentoring and with classroom teaching is without question.

God is at work! We walk by faith. Our eyes are on Him. And we are seeking to be used of God to make something that is so good even better.

We believe that a helpful perspective came through the BGC web site, which just received a letter from a pastor of another Baptist fellowship of churches. It read in part:

"I am impressed with the fact that the BGC can openly express their differences and do it with love and humility toward one another. I am very much ashamed of [my denomination] right now. There is so much discord over the minor issues and doctrines these days. And it's just plain disgusting to me. We now have almost become a creedal denomination. There is now no latitude and no academic freedom in our seminaries these days ... In [my] denomination, one must 'parrot the party line' on every issue or be considered an outsider ... Would to God that some of these current leaders would work in a spirit of love with the rest of us so that we can get on with the business of preaching Christ to the lost world. I think we can learn a lot from the way you guys handle controversy. You (the BGC) at least allow a degree of latitude with love toward those who disagree on the minor doctrines of the faith. With us, there's a blatant attitude without latitude on much of anything. And it makes me both sick and ashamed of [my denomination] ... It's a long story and I'm sure you already know most of it, but I'm sick and tired of all this fighting in [my denomination]. I wish we could have the same spirit you guys have and get back to agreeing to disagree on the minor issues of faith while working together on the major issues, which is doing the Great Commission."

While we do not consider the present controversy a minor issue, we believe we can handle it in a God-honoring way. God has spared us from the turmoil and politicking of many denominations and schools. We are not immune, however. Keep this in your prayer.

We do not believe in peace at any price. But unity is part of maturity. Ephesians 4:3 says "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." It gets down to this question: How big is the tent? In an evangelical Christian academic setting where we are committed to honoring God with our minds and preparing students to challenge the faulty thinking of the world, we wrestle with how to present fairly varying points of view within our classrooms. This has been a question for a long time and it continues. It is basic to the issue before us.

Along with this, we are deeply saddened by the casualties developing because of the foreknowledge issue. A few people are saying inaccurate things and some are making unwise decisions. And this issue isn't over. A 52% to 48% vote left no winners.

We want to express our deepest appreciation to many who have shown their concern for theological correctness in the BGC and at Bethel. We value your continued concern and comments and want to assure you that we will continue to do our best to deal with this debate. We have already given untold amounts of time to this. We ask for your prayers for wisdom and grace for all of us. We are deeply concerned. Please join us in prayer that Christ will be glorified as the truth of His Word ultimately prevails.

Yours in Christ,

Robert S. Ricker
President, Baptist General Conference

George K. Brushaber
President, Bethel College and Seminary

Appendix Six

Full Text of Letter From President Robert Ricker and the EMT Team April 12, 2000

Dear Pastor,

I extend to you greetings from the Executive Ministry Team of the Baptist General Conference. The major part of my report to the Board of Overseers last week concerned our need to make very clear our position on the foreknowledge of God. I presented the following Affirmations and Recommendations on behalf of the Executive Ministry Team (BGC vice presidents and myself).

Statement and Recommendations Regarding the Foreknowledge Controversy

In 1951, the Baptist General Conference adopted an *Affirmation of Faith* to serve as a common statement of faith and practice.

We affirm and value the freedom we celebrate as autonomous churches in matters of faith and practice, within the parameters of our *Affirmation of Faith*.

We affirm that our theology and our language will always be inadequate to fully express the mysteries of our Creator in the fullness of his perfections; making the ongoing study of God and his nature a necessary and healthy process for Bethel College and Seminary, our local churches and the BGC as a whole; and, that conclusions developed out of such theological exploration must be tested against Scripture and evaluated as to their consistency with our *Affirmation of Faith*.

We affirm the value of a constructive process for the ongoing discussion and consideration of both classical positions and new ideas that surface in the realm of theological study.

We recognize that our unity and theological integrity as a fellowship of churches is being threatened by the current controversy regarding the nature of God's foreknowledge.

We personally affirm the historic view of the Baptist General Conference that God's knowledge of all past, present and future events is exhaustive; and, we also believe that the "Openness" view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience as expressed in the BGC *Affirmation of Faith*.

Therefore, we make the following two recommendations:

1. We recommend to the Board of Overseers that a formal process be established for discussing and considering future theological disputes related to our *Affirmation of Faith*.

In response to this first recommendation, the Board of Overseers voted without dissent to endorse the affirmations and responded with the following:

“We approve the recommendation that, by the June Board meeting, the Executive Ministry Team

(EMT) be authorized to take steps to establish a formal process for discussing and considering future theological disputes related to our Affirmation of Faith."

I brought this recommendation to the Board of Overseers because we do not have a good way of dealing with theological controversy. We need a place where people on either side of a controversy can be heard, information gathered and helpful insight can be given. Because we are Baptists, this will not be an entity with authority. It will be a carefully selected group that can help us navigate biblically through teachings that are in question.

A few years ago we used a task force to help us when there was question about the requirement of baptism by immersion for church membership. This task force worked through the issue and brought to the Conference a statement agreed upon by representatives of both sides of this dispute. This statement put to rest the controversy and strengthened our position of requiring baptism by immersion for church membership.

As in the early church ... and I am thinking of Acts 15 ... there will be differing opinions on doctrine. We will be well served by having a carefully selected group of people who will establish a way for ideas to be brought, discussed, researched and recommendations extended. Such a servant group would have made a major difference in our present situation. In June, the Executive Ministry Team will bring to the Board of Overseers a charter and recommended names for this group.

The second recommendation, which was also a part of my presentation to the Board of Overseers, is one that I did not believe the Board of Overseers should vote on. It is my recommendation to the members of the Board of Trustees of Bethel College and Seminary. It is also based on the above list of affirmations. President Brushaber is a member of the Board of Overseers and has been aware of the formation of this recommendation.

2. We recommend to the Board of Trustees of Bethel College and Seminary that views contrary to God's exhaustive foreknowledge not be taught by any Bethel professor or instructor who espouses such views.

The Board of Overseers did not vote on this recommendation, but as an encouragement to the EMT, voted without dissent, **"We affirm and stand with the EMT in their efforts in resolving the foreknowledge controversy."** I appreciate the Board of Overseers wrestling with this theological issue.

Let us rejoice together, and give God glory, that while there are difficult things to deal with, we are experiencing an incredible work of God in many of our mission fields around the world, in many places in America and at Bethel College and Seminary. We applaud George Brushaber for his valued leadership. God is good to us and his hand is clearly upon many of our ministries. We are enjoying rich blessings from the Lord while we seek to deal with some difficult issues by his grace and through his Spirit.

Please keep us in your prayers as we continue to deal with this, and other issues in a way that brings honor to the Lord.

In Christ,

Bob Ricker

