

*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 16/1-2 (2005): 1-20.*  
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## **The Quest for the Biblical Ontological Ground of Christian Theology**

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At the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Colorado Springs, a representative group of evangelical theologians expressed their opposition to open view theology by voting against it.<sup>1</sup> Does this vote mean that the open view of God is not a viable option for evangelical theologians? Is the conversation initiated by open view theologians over?

On one hand, it seems that open view theologians have been defeated. Obviously, they have failed to convince a sizable number of fellow evangelical theologians because of two important facts. First, in spite of open view efforts to replace foreknowledge with present knowledge and convince us that Scripture does not teach divine foreknowledge, the fact remains that Scripture unequivocally affirms that God knows the future free actions of humans.<sup>2</sup> And, since in evangelical theology no theological explanation should ignore or twist biblical data, open view theologians should not be surprised that their explanation cannot be accepted by a large sector of evangelical theologians. Second, in spite of the

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy C. Morgan, "Theologians Decry 'Narrow' Boundaries: 110 Evangelical Leaders Sign Joint Statement," *Christianity Today.com*, June 4, 2002; David Neff, "Scholars Vote: God Knows Future," *Christianity Today.com*, January 2, 2002; and, "Foreknowledge Debate Clouded by 'Political Agenda': Evangelical Theologians Differ Over Excluding Open Theists," *Christianity Today.com*, November 19, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> There are many ways to understand divine foreknowledge (John E. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* [Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998], 194-200). Yet, since open view theologians reinterpret divine foreknowledge in a way that denies God knows in advance the content of free human decisions, they are forced to deny clear statements of Scripture. For instance, Gregory Boyd argues that in Rom 8:29, Paul does not mean that God "foreknew" human beings before they existed and the contents of their free decisions, but that God "foreloved" the Church as future corporate entity. "There is no reason to think [explains Boyd] that Paul has information in mind when he speaks of God's foreknowledge, however. In customary Semitic fashion, Paul seems to be using the word know to mean 'intimately love'" (*The God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 48).

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efforts of open view theologians to assure us that their proposal entails only a minor adjustment of the larger traditional framework of evangelical theology, the fact remains that their proposal strikes at the systematic foundation on which evangelical theology has been built and has serious repercussions not only for the doctrines of divine foreknowledge and providence, but also for a broad range of related theological issues.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the open view of God has great appeal to many evangelical believers because it fits well with their reading of Scripture's revelation of God's working in history and their own spiritual experiences.

Like many evangelicals, I remain unsatisfied with both options, as they are incapable of properly accounting for all data of Scripture. Consequently, we need to move beyond both the classical evangelical and the open view ways as theological paradigms. Because our understanding of divine foreknowledge and providence ultimately rests on the way in which we understand God's being and action,<sup>4</sup> I have argued that the root cause of the controversy between classical

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<sup>3</sup> Clark Pinnock recognizes that he "did not for a moment imagine in 1994 that our book on the 'openness of God' would create such interest and provoke such controversy, particularly in the evangelical community" (*Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], ix). A few years later controversy had taught Pinnock that the open view was "challenging assumptions" (ibid.) with broad-reaching paradigmatic consequences. At the end of *Most Moved Mover* he correctly recognizes the far-reaching implications of the open view by affirming that "it is possible that theology has confused the God of biblical revelation with the god of the philosophers and has created an unsound synthesis. It is possible that conventional theism owes a debt to philosophical ideas stemming from the pagan heritage and that reform in the doctrine of God is called for. It is possible that God's nature is deserving of sounder theological reflection, worthy of greater intelligibility, and capable of better existential fit. The open view of God may be a timely reform." However, the open view of God has a long way to go in studying the doctrine of God before the question of divine foreknowledge and providence can be adequately addressed. The ontological question needs to be addressed ontologically from Scripture and not left dangling from a summary explanation of divine foreknowledge that better fits the biblical information about divine providence but does not properly account for the biblical facts on divine foreknowledge. To play one side of the question against the other is not a satisfactory theological methodology for evangelical believers attempting to understand the Bible as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> In the last decades of the twentieth century, a small group of evangelical theologians have advanced a fresh understanding of the manner in which God relates to human experience. Questions about the reality of intercessory prayer, freedom, personal responsibility, and evil prompted evangelical theologians to "open" God to human history. For many Christians the traditional understanding of God had become increasingly unable to account for biblical data dealing with concrete descriptions of divine activities and daily human experiences. To accommodate them, open view theologians "upgraded" the traditional notion of God from "closed" to human experience to "open" to it. To open the traditional notion of God to human history, open view theologians replaced divine foreknowledge of free human decisions (FK) with present knowledge (PK). This replacement in turn assumed a temporal notion of God and thus a shift from a timeless to a temporal notion of God's being and actions. As it stands today, however, arguments in favor of and against open view theology revolve around foreknowledge and its consequences for evangelical theology. Increased dialogue helped to clarify the points in conflict, but seems to have reached a plateau, bringing the par-

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and open view theologies can be traced back to the philosophical concepts involved in the interpretation of God's nature.<sup>5</sup> Traditional evangelical thinking, via Calvin, Luther, and Augustine, has been built on a Neoplatonic philosophical ground.<sup>6</sup> Open view theology, despite the claims of its proponents, stands on a process philosophy philosophical ground.

This paper explores the possibility of developing a different theological project by grounding evangelical theology on a biblically conceived approach to the philosophical notions necessarily involved in its construction. Is such an attempt possible? What does it take to build a new theological paradigm? What would such a project entail?

We will consider how philosophy came to be used in Christian theology and the role that it played in its construction. Next we will explore the question of being from which ontology is built, the ontology on which evangelical theology is built, and the ontological "divide" generated by postmodern philosophy. After this background we will explore the possibility of building the ontological foundations of Christian theology from Scripture.

#### Evangelicals and Philosophy

It is difficult to characterize with precision the relation that evangelicals have with philosophy because by and large they have little interest in it. Since their theology is biblical, most evangelicals think their thought and teachings have no relation to or contact with philosophy. The fact that philosophy—and particularly ontology—plays a grounding role in their theological beliefs is unknown by most evangelicals, even theologians, who live under the illusion of standing squarely on biblical ground. Very few evangelical theologians have

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ties to a theological impasse. Is an agreement possible, or should we recognize the existence of theological divisions at the foundation of our theological understanding?

<sup>5</sup> See my "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12/2 (Autumn 2001), 16–34.

<sup>6</sup> Richard A. Muller explains that Luther and Calvin rejected the explicit, not the implicit use of philosophy in the building of theological understanding. "Both Luther and Calvin were reluctant to develop metaphysical discussions of the divine essence and attributes—though neither disputed the truth of the traditional attribution to God of omnipresence, omniscience, eternity, infinity, simplicity, and so forth" (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 231). Luther's and Calvin's implicit use of philosophical concepts in shaping their understandings of God's nature and actions became the ground for a more explicit use during the protestant orthodoxy period. François Wendel reports Calvin's familiarity with and usage of Plato, Aristotle, Themistius, Cicero, John Chrysostom, Origen, and Augustine. However, Neoplatonism came to Calvin via his dependence on the Augustine's theological project (*Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963], 123-124).

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recognized the fact that evangelical theology stands on the same philosophical grounds on which Roman Catholic theology stands.<sup>7</sup>

Usually evangelicals are impacted by philosophical ideas via their acceptance of tradition.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, many evangelical beliefs stand on ideas one does not find in Scripture but in tradition. We label as “tradition” the instruction of ancient theological teachers we call the “fathers” of the church in order to distinguish them from the inspired writers of Scripture. As evangelicals discover that their beliefs are based on tradition and philosophy, their conviction that their beliefs are based on *sola Scriptura* is strongly challenged.<sup>9</sup> One way to answer this challenge is to adjust biblical teachings to the theological instructions originated in the writings of influential non-biblical authors in order to keep received definitions of evangelical beliefs without modification. Another way to answer this challenge is to adjust traditionally-received ideas originating in the writings of influential non-biblical authors to the teachings of Scripture, even if that may imply changing received definitions of evangelical faith. So far, implicitly or explicitly, most evangelical theologians have opted to follow the first way in order to avoid revising their traditionally originated teachings. In this way, unbeknown to most of them, they build on the philosophical notions used by the fathers of the church to build their doctrines.

This trend is “baptized” into evangelicalism by accepting the Roman Catholic notion of multiple sources of theology we find at the core of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral of sources. Once this conviction has been assumed and defended as beyond challenge, the role of philosophy in the construction of

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<sup>7</sup> Norman L. Geisler is a noteworthy exception to this general trend. He is among the few evangelicals willing to openly recognize the philosophical ground on which evangelical theology stands. Attempting to convince fellow believers of the great help Aquinas’ philosophy lends to evangelical theology, Geisler reminds them “that many of our great theistic apologists of the last two centuries—including, William Paley, Joseph Butler, F. R. Tennant, Robert Flint, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodges, and C. S. Lewis—are to a large degree indebted to Aquinas. Let us not forget the friendly theistic hand of the saintly doctor that has led us.” *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> That this is the case becomes clear, for instance, in the consensual theology Thomas Oden suggests for evangelical theology. See, for instance, his *The Living God: Systematic Theology I* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); and, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology III* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992). For an introduction to Oden’s methodology and the role he gives to tradition, see Kwabena Donkor, *Tradition as a Viable Option for Protestant Theology: The Vicentian Method of Thomas C. Oden* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001). Oden does not analyze the philosophical grounds of theology directly, that is to say philosophically, but indirectly via tradition.

<sup>9</sup> Though open view theologians challenge traditional views on God on the basis of Scripture, they do not accept the *sola Scriptura* principle either, thereby leaving the discussion of the ontological ground of theology open to changeable whims of philosophical trends. For instance, Pinnock unequivocally declares that “Scripture may be *prima* for theology but it is not *sola* because tradition plays a role in interpretation” (*Most Moved Mover*, 21). The question of multiplicity of sources needs to be carefully criticized by evangelical theology in order to clarify the role of Scripture in doctrine and in its interpretation.

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evangelical theology is formally and dogmatically accepted. Thus, millions of evangelicals live under the illusion that their beliefs are totally and solely grounded in Scripture. History and contemporary practice says otherwise. Because of this situation, evangelical theology cannot continue to assume a distant relationship with philosophy. The time has come for evangelical theologians to get as proficient in the generation and criticism of philosophical thought as they are supposed to be in biblical languages and exegesis.<sup>10</sup>

There are many historical causes of our present disconnect between the real role that philosophy plays in the construction of evangelical beliefs and theology and the systematic neglect of philosophical issues in the construction and formulation of evangelical beliefs and theology.<sup>11</sup> Among them we find the biblicism of the magisterial reformers and the development of the philosophical tradition in North America.

Luther and Calvin reformed a tradition where philosophy played a central role in belief formulation and theological construction. Because they chose to deconstruct the Roman Catholic tradition on the basis of Scripture and build their own alternative understanding also on the basis of Scripture, we find in their writings a profusion of biblical material uncommon in Christian theology. This profusion may produce the impression that their theologies were totally unrelated to philosophy and solely grounded in Scripture. This impression may be a reason why many evangelical theologians assume they are building their theologies only on Scripture as well. The fact is that the theology of the Protestant Reformation reformers assumed the general philosophical framework on which patristic and medieval theologies were constructed. We find the same dependence on philosophical notions in twentieth century evangelical theologies.

In North America, philosophy has developed along the empirical and analytical philosophical traditions which focus on the epistemological questions of philosophy and are critical of the philosophical foundations on which evangelical theology was built. The only influential development in the ontological front is process philosophy, whose neoclassical bipolar approach has fit neither evangelical theological tradition nor Scripture. Not surprisingly, evangelical theologians relate to philosophy mostly in dealing with reason as an instrument involved in the formulation of biblical beliefs, but not as its ontological ground.

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<sup>10</sup> For an introduction to the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” see Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); and Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> I am not suggesting there are no evangelical philosophers. The existence of the evangelical Philosophical Society testifies to the contrary. I am, however, suggesting that as far as I have been able to ascertain, philosophical knowledge in the evangelical tradition is used mostly for apologetical rather than constructive purposes. This fact becomes apparent as one reads both sides of the open view debate.

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Deconstructive and constructive developments in the area of ontology taking place in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have not yet become influential in the construction of evangelical theology. Thus, though evangelical authors are aware of Martin Heidegger's ontological thought and the rise of philosophical hermeneutics, they have not yet faced the ontological issue itself and therefore cannot appreciate the challenges they raise for a theology that claims to move within a quadrilateral of sources.<sup>12</sup>

With the passing of time, the general conviction that evangelical theology can be formulated without the need to address the ontological question has set in the mind of evangelical believers and theologians. The dissemination of the charismatic movement throughout evangelical churches has not helped to change this situation. This background, however, helps us understand why not even open view theologians whose claims in regard to divine foreknowledge and predestination assume changes in the ontological realm raise the ontological

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<sup>12</sup> We find an example of this situation in the work of German theologians Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, who build their views on God's relation to time from the equivocal understanding of divine time taken from Karl Barth, who affirms that "Eternity is not, therefore, time, although time is certainly God's creation or more correctly, a form of His creation. Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present and future" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. 13 Volumes*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 13 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936], II/1:608). Pannenberg knows about Heidegger's notion of time and being, but does not recognize it as the postmodern ontological divide. On the contrary, it interprets from within the classical timeless understanding of God's being. Pannenberg uses Heidegger's temporal ontology only as a description of human time that parallels Augustine's analysis of time. Moreover, Pannenberg incorrectly neglects Heidegger's view that the notion of being determines our understanding of entities, and among them God (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 69). Heidegger, however, is correct in recognizing the logical order of cognitive presuppositions. "Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy can the essence of the divinity be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought and said what the word 'God' is to signify" ("Letter on Humanism," in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William Barret and Henry D. Aiken [New York: Random House, 1962], 3:294). Following Plotinus's interpretation of Plato's eternity, Pannenberg assumes the timeless understanding of divine eternity as the origin of time that is included within God's simultaneous view of the whole of reality (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 76-77). Following Boethius's and Aquinas' classical definition of timeless eternity as *totum simul* (simultaneous whole) (*Summa Theologica*, Ia., 10-4), Pannenberg defines the eternity of God timelessly by affirming that "the eternal God does not have ahead of him any future that is different from his present. For this reason that which has been is still present to him. God is eternal because he has no future outside himself. His future is that of himself and of all that is distinct from him. But to have no future outside oneself, to be one's own future, is perfect freedom. The eternal God as the absolute future, in the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit, is the free origin of himself and his creatures" (*Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 1:410). Working from the same understanding of being and divine eternity, Jürgen Moltmann describes the way in which human history looks from creation to new creation in *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 280-339. These authors apply the notion of time univocally to humans and equivocally to God. The analogical notion of temporal being I am proposing here is foreign to them.

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question philosophically or biblically. This context may also help us understand the naïve notion that an eclectic use of philosophical notions will exorcise the dangers of philosophy in theological thinking.<sup>13</sup>

### Ontology and Theology

Before considering how philosophy has shaped the construction of evangelical theology, we need to consider what philosophy is and how it relates to theology. Historically speaking, “philosophy” was the name used for more than twenty centuries to designate the rational enterprise that in the last two centuries we have come to label “science.” Though at its inception philosophy included within its reach all issues, with time several disciplines began to take shape and become independent from philosophy. Philosophy, in turn, became an umbrella designation for an ensemble of scholarly disciplines attempting to understand the first principles from which we know our world and ourselves. Among the various philosophical disciplines, ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology play the leading role, that is to say, their conclusions become principles of understanding of other philosophical sciences, like hermeneutics, philosophy of science, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of language, philosophy of right, philosophy of history, and the like. This order is determined by the relationship existing between the objects studied by each philosophical discipline. The broader or more inclusive the nature of an object, the more influential and decisive will be the conclusions of the science that studies it. The broadest of all issues philosophy studies is being; therefore, the most influential of all philosophical sciences is ontology. As we observed above, ontology is precisely the science neglected in the construction of evangelical thought.

But in what way does ontology influence theological thinking? To answer this question, we need to consider the object ontology studies. ontology studies the nature of what “is.” Since everything, in one way or another, “is,” ontology is said to study being. Briefly put, ontology studies the general characteristics of

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, while Pinnock identifies philosophy as the root of the theological notions he criticizes, he considers it useful. “For the purposes of theology,” Pinnock cautions, “not all philosophical systems are equally valid, so let us enter with care into dialogue with philosophy, ancient and modern, and make the best use of it that we can” (*Most Moved Mover*, 23). This timid warning does not help much to assure that the use of new philosophical categories will not again lead present theologians to distort biblical truth as they did in the past. It also opens the door to process philosophy as partner and guide in the task of interpreting and constructing evangelical theology. Richard Rice represents a large group of evangelical theologians who recognize the inherent dangers of using philosophy to “communicate” the gospel but have a positive view of natural theology that “forces” them to use it. Rice advises us to “handle philosophical resources with caution.” Specifically, he recommends that theologians should not (1) draw all their philosophical ideas from the same philosophical system, or, (2) allow philosophy to “determine the course of theological reflection” (*Reason and the Contours of Faith* [Riverside: La Sierra UP, 1991], 201). The notion that theologians should draw their ontological understanding not eclectically from a *mélange* of philosophical resources but by using reason to discover from Scripture—and by the light of Scripture—the ontological ideas we should use in Christian theology escapes Rice and the classical approach he represents.

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what is real. It can be divided into general and regional ontologies. While general ontology studies the notion of being, regional ontologies study the general characteristics of specific regions of reality, for instance God, human beings, and the world, assuming the general notion of being outlined by general ontology. Because of the all-embracing nature of its object (being), general ontology plays the macro hermeneutical role, guiding the construction of regional ontologies. Changes in general ontology, then, will necessarily elicit changes in regional ontologies.

Ontology influences exegesis and theology because it defines the nature of the referents of the language and concepts exegetes and theologians study.<sup>14</sup> Since Christian theology speaks about realities covered by general and regional ontologies, an unavoidable overlapping takes place between ontological and theological studies. To summarize, ontology studies the characteristics of realities Christian theology speaks about. Not surprisingly, theologians have discovered and used this disciplinary overlapping assuming that both theology and ontology are true and complementary. On this hermeneutical and methodological basis Christian theology was born and constructed.

In conclusion, we must say that there is an ontological ground of Christian theology because theologians speak of reality and therefore assume an interpretation of it. Methodologically, however, theologians have not traditionally addressed their prowess to dealing with the ontological question from a theological perspective, but have been contented with borrowing ontological views from philosophical ontology. How has the ontological ground been addressed in evangelical theology?

### **The Question of Being**

The ontological ground of theology can be better perceived when theologians speak about God's nature and acts—for instance, when they explain divine eternity. Creatures are not eternal because, being temporal, they pass away. God, on the other hand, is eternal because, being timeless, He does not pass away. Thus, eternity is understood as timelessness.<sup>15</sup> Systematic theologies quote some biblical texts as proof that divine timelessness is biblical.<sup>16</sup> Most Christians are

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<sup>14</sup> As biblical theologian G. Ernest Wright correctly observed, modern theologians interpret biblical reality from “a compound of conceptions derived from secular idealism, and not directly from the Bible” (*God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* [Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1952], 18). Of course, idealism is a modern ontological position that is no longer accepted among leading philosophers. We should also bear in mind that idealism is a modern modification of classical ontology which is no better suited to understand biblical thought. Wright's statement suggests that to understand Scripture, we need to take its ontological view seriously.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 110-112.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 168-173; c.f. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 274-275. This notion is not a recent development. In the seventeenth century



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attracted to divine timelessness because it explains to them why God is eternal and we are not. Not surprisingly, most believers relate divine timelessness with God's eternity but not with his being or actions. In practice evangelical believers and a majority of evangelical theologians understand God's eternity as timeless but his being and actions as temporal.<sup>17</sup>

This incoherence stems from the sources from which our notions of divine eternity and divine actions originated. While the temporality of divine being and activities clearly originate in Scriptural revelation, the timeless understanding of divine eternity is the remnant of an idea extrapolated to Christian theology from Greek philosophical thinking via tradition.

In Greek thinking, however, timelessness was not called to explain God's eternity as one of his attributes, but to describe the "ultimate" nature of all that is real. Parmenides articulated the notion of timelessness when he used it to qualify the nature of being.<sup>18</sup> Inspired by Parmenides, Plato developed a cosmology according to which there are two levels of reality. In the lower level reality was temporal and the duplication of the higher timeless level.<sup>19</sup> Later, Aristotle transformed Plato's dualistic cosmology into a dualistic ontology of matter (temporal) and form (timelessness). Aristotle further developed the notion of being to refer to the broadest, most inclusive notion of which human beings are capable

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Francis Turretin revealed its ongoing presence in protestant theology. "Pure eternity has been defined by the Scholastics to be 'the interminable possession of life—complete, perfect and at once.' Thus it excludes succession no less than end and ought to be conceived as a standing, but not a flowing, now" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. Musgrave, Giger, George, 3 vols. [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992], I:203).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, after clearly describing God's being as timeless and incorrectly arguing that His timelessness is present in a few proof texts in Scripture, Grudem proceeds to correctly affirm that "it is evident throughout Scripture that God acts within time and acts differently at different points in time" (*ibid.*, 172). Ontologically that is impossible, unless Grudem wants to side with process philosophy's bipolar notion of God, which I suspect is not the case. We are faced here with a momentous inconsistency at the very root of evangelical thinking.

<sup>18</sup> Parmenides, "Fragments," in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, "Fragmente der Vorsokratiker"* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), 7-8; Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), 76-114.

<sup>19</sup> Plato explains that the nature of the ideal world is eternal, while its image in our sensible world is temporal, the "moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus*, 37.d). Plato explains the eternal nature of ideal reality by saying that "there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to eternal beings, for we say that it 'was,' or 'is,' or 'will be,' but the truth is that 'is' alone is properly attributed to it, and that 'was' and 'will be' are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same forever cannot become older or younger by time, nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future, nor is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause" (*ibid.*, 37,d-38,b).

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of conceiving.<sup>20</sup> being is said in many ways,<sup>21</sup> but it always refer to what “is,” and, “is” always stands on the timeless side of reality (the form).

Martin Heidegger further explained the hermeneutical role that the interpretation of the notion of being (general ontology) plays in the formation of science.<sup>22</sup> Since theology as scholarly enterprise is a science, we should not be surprised to discover that the timelessness interpretation of being adopted by early Christian theologians came to shape their notion of God, and through it, the entire range of exegetical interpretations and theological constructions.<sup>23</sup> This view has been developed and preserved via the tradition of the church.

### The Ontological Ground of Evangelical Theology

Many evangelicals think that evangelical theology was born as a pristine reading of Scripture in which no cultural, philosophical, and scientific notions were involved. Such a paradisiacal view is far removed from reality.<sup>24</sup> Evangelical theology arose as a partial modification of Roman Catholic soteriology and ecclesiology and should be understood in this context. Modifications in these areas may be summed up in the application of the *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Scriptura* principles to Roman Catholic theology.

To understand evangelical theology, then, one has to recognize its origin in Roman Catholic theology. This theology arose and developed under the explicit

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<sup>20</sup> “There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals generally with being as being” (*Metaphysics*, IV; 1, 1003, a.22-23).

<sup>21</sup> *Metaphysics*, IV, 2; 1003, a.32).

<sup>22</sup> “The question of being,” explains Heidegger, “aims therefore at ascertaining the a priori conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations” (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper and Collins, 1962], Int., 3).

<sup>23</sup> John Macquarrie explains that “every inquiry has its presuppositions, and that is true of theological inquiry as of any other. These presuppositions delimit the field of the inquiry, determine its basic concepts, and give it direction. In some way they already determine the result of the inquiry—not the content of the result, but the kind of result that will be obtained. These presuppositions are ontological, that is to say, they consist in a preliminary understanding of the being of the entities into which the enquiry is being made” (John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann* [New York: Macmillan, 1955], 6–7).

<sup>24</sup> Consider for instance that while Luther, the great magisterial reformer, “was confessedly a passionate opponent of Scholasticism, as well as of Aristotle,” he “had purposed a thorough course of Scholastic study, making himself familiar particularly with the Lombard, Occam, D’ailli, and Biel. This schooling is often apparent in the earlier period (e.g., W.1. 367 ff.). But the influence of these studies was a permanent one. He had imbibed the outline and organization of the theological ideas of Scholasticism, and they remained as the points of connection in his theological thinking. In the most of his definitions, the form of construction can be understood only if we bear this fact in mind” (Reinhold Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], 223).

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hermeneutical and methodological guidance of Greek ontology.<sup>25</sup> The guiding hermeneutical role of Greek philosophy has remained unchanged.<sup>26</sup> Many theologians have contributed to developing the amazingly coherent and complex system of Roman Catholic theology. Notable among them are Augustine and Aquinas, who developed their separate but closely related theological systems under the macro hermeneutical guidance derived directly from Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies, respectively. Contemporary Roman Catholic theology is still shaped after the general guidelines of the Thomistic approach to theology.

Following the lead of Alexandrian theology, Augustine shaped the notion God's being and actions (not just his eternity) in the light of Greek timeless ontology.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther<sup>28</sup> and John Calvin, the magisterial

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<sup>25</sup> Adolf Harnack describes the origin of Christian theology as a momentous paradigm shift from a biblically-shaped mode of thought to a mode of thinking shaped by the general ontological structure of Greek philosophy. "We meet with a religious mode of thought in the Gospel and the early Christian writings, which so far as it is at all dependent on an earlier mode of thought, is determined by the spirit of the Old Testament (Psalms and Prophets) and of Judaism. But it is already otherwise with the earliest Gentile Christian writings. The mode of thought here is so thoroughly determined by the Hellenic spirit that we seem to have entered a new world when we pass from the synoptists, Paul and John, to Clement, Barnabas, Justin or Valentinus" (*History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. [New York: Dover, 1961], I:42, note 1). Jaroslav Pelikan further explains that "whether theologians found Platonic speculation compatible with the gospel or incompatible with it, they were agreed that the Christian understanding of the relation between Creator and creature required 'the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality'—a concept that came into Christian doctrine from Greek Philosophy" (*The Christian Tradition*, I:53). While the Roman Catholic tradition has openly and consistently recognized and justified building Christian theology on this ideological basis, protestant and evangelical theologies have lived under the illusion that such a paradigmatic shift never took place.

<sup>26</sup> This historical fact becomes clear when we learn that "the first edition of John Calvin's *Institutes* in 1536 referred to election in Christ before the creation of the world, along with redemption and reconciliation as the foundation of the 'architecture of Christian doctrine'" (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971–1989], IV:217–218). But Calvin's dependence on the Augustinian theology of election is based on Augustine's notion of God's will within the context of Greek timeless ontology. Augustine explicitly applied timeless ontology to the will of God, on which predestination and the gospel are based, in the following words: "Will you claim that those things are false which Truth with a strong voice speaks into my inner ear concerning the true eternity of the creator, that his substance is in no wise changed in time, and his will is not outside his substance. For this reason, he does not will now this, now that, but once, and all at once, and forever he wills all that he wills. It is not again and again, now these things, now those. He does not will later on what he once willed against, nor does he will against what he previously willed to do. Such a will is mutable and no mutable thing is eternal. But our God is eternal" (*Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan [Garden City: Image, 1960], XII, 15.18).

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps more than any other theologian, Augustine should be credited with constructing Christian theology on the timeless understanding of being derived from Neoplatonic ontology (*Confessions*, XI–XII).

<sup>28</sup> Luther's fight is not against Greek ontology but against philosophy as used in medieval theology (Harnack, *History of Dogma*, VII:173).

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theologians of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies, built their views on the same ontological assumptions.<sup>29</sup>

Evangelical theology, as constructed by Luther and Calvin, criticized Roman Catholic theology from the authority of Scripture but constructed its theological understandings following hermeneutical and doctrinal guidelines drawn from Augustine. In so doing, evangelical theology did not depart from Roman Catholic macro hermeneutics and its dependence on Greek ontology. In fact, it implicitly carried over the ontological macro hermeneutical guidance of Platonic ontology via its adoption of key notions from Augustinian theology.

To describe in detail the ontological foundations of Roman Catholic and evangelical theologies falls far beyond the limited purpose of this article. We need only show the basic idea on which Greek ontology, and therefore, the macro hermeneutics of Christian theologies were constructed.

Arguably, ontology originated with Parmenides, who spoke about “being” perhaps for the first time. Among several characteristics he adjudicated to “being” he included its timelessness.<sup>30</sup> Around the same time, but with less precise

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<sup>29</sup> That Aquinas constructed his theological project on a Greek ontological ground is clear. He was not only a theologian but a philosopher. As a philosopher, he adjusted Aristotelian ontology for Christian use. We find a brief outline of his ontological understanding in his *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Garden City Press Co-Operative, 1949). He used this adjusted version of Aristotelian ontology to construct his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), and his *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947). That Luther and Calvin built their views on the same basis via Augustine is less visible because they built their views from Scripture. However, they never explicitly rejected, but rather implicitly assumed the basic structure of Greek Neoplatonic ontology. This explains how during the period of protestant orthodoxy that followed, scholastic and philosophical notions became more explicitly used and were not considered as hindrances but helpers in the construction of the protestant system of theology. Richard Muller explains that “reformed orthodox theology is certainly more open to the use of reason than the theology of either Luther or Calvin. Nevertheless, this openness not only had roots in the Reformation itself, but it also carefully retained the Reformer’s sense of the independence of theology from philosophical or metaphysical speculation. The Protestant scholastic use of reason derives not from a desire to create a synthesis of theology and philosophy but rather from a clearly perceived and enunciated need to use the tools of reason in the construction of theological system” (*Postreformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 248). Thus, protestant and evangelical theologies continued to be constructed from the ground of Greek ontology. The independence from Greek ontology was never achieved. That is why authors like Norman Geisler explicitly defends it and calls on the evangelical community to recognize and use it (*Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991]).

<sup>30</sup> The meaning of timelessness cannot be understood in a single concept or proposition. That is why Parmenides uses several signs in order to speak about it. “There is only one other description of the way remaining, (namely) that (What is) Is. To this way there are very many signposts: that being has no coming-into-being and no destruction, for it is whole of limb, without motion, and without end. And it never Was, nor Will Be, because it Is now, a Whole all together, One, continuous; for what creation of it will you look for? How, whence (could it have) sprung” (Parmenides, Fragment 7). Even though Parmenides did not speak explicitly about the ground of being or about timelessness; he makes it apparent that his “way of truth” was grounded in the meaning of being and that his understanding of being was grounded in timelessness.

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language, Heraclitus built his ontology assuming that reality was temporal. By adopting Parmenides' view that being is timeless as macro hermeneutical guide, Plato developed his influential cosmology and Aristotle his no less leading ontology and thereby tied the destiny and shape of western philosophy and Christian theology to the notion of timelessness. Heraclitus' option was considered flawed and summarily discarded as nonviable.

Thus we come to uncover the ontological ground of evangelical theology as tied to the notion that ultimate reality is timeless. This ground has not been derived from Scripture, but borrowed from Greek ontology via Augustine and the tradition of the church.

#### **The Postmodern Ontological Divide**

So far evangelical theologians have not consistently applied the *sola Scriptura* principle. Instead, many implicitly or explicitly construct their theologies on the assumption that there are multiple theological sources conceptually integrated in the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Methodologically speaking, the present understanding of the ontological ground of evangelical theology stands on the basis of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral rather than on the *sola Scriptura* principle. The Quadrilateral justifies the use of "selected" philosophical ideas in the construction of evangelical theology by minimizing their role in the construction of Christian theology. Reason and philosophy, we are told, only help us to better "express" and "communicate" the gospel and biblical truths.<sup>31</sup> Among these few and "insignificant" ideas we find the timeless understanding of ontology.

Should evangelical theology continue to build on the ground borrowed from Greek ontology via Augustinian tradition? Two important facts indicate that a paradigmatic change in the ontological ground of evangelical theology may be possible and even necessary. These facts are the postmodern ontological divide and the biblical notion of being.

Ever since Locke and Hume formulated their empiricist epistemologies, a slow but strong criticism of Greek timeless ontology has taken place in the history of western philosophy. This self-critical process of classical ontological foundations was spearheaded by the epistemology of modernity and has produced the hermeneutical revolution of postmodernity. It has also produced a new constructive approach to ontology masterfully conceived by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In his epoch-making *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues

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<sup>31</sup> To accomplish this task, Stanley Grenz calls not on reason but on "the thought-forms of contemporary culture," which philosophically speaking take place within the postmodern ontological divide and therefore do not have room for the classical timeless ontology on which the evangelical theological synthesis has been conceived (*Theology for the Community of God* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994], 19–20). Yet, he still builds on a timeless understanding of God's being (91–92), which he probably derives from "'classic' statements of theological truth . . . which have a special relevance for every age" contained in the tradition of the church (18).

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that being is time, thereby presenting anew Heraclitus' alternative that being is temporal.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the bulk of Heidegger's voluminous writings, which are in the process of being translated and published in English, develops the notion that being is temporal and examines the ontological consequences of this in a variety of ways, directions, and contexts. One of the many differences that exists between Heraclitus and Heidegger is that the latter stands at the end of a long and merciless process through which classical timeless ontology has been deconstructed, while the former stood at the beginning, when timelessness was still undeveloped as interpretative option.

The existence of a foundational ontological option between Parmenides' timeless and Heidegger's temporal understandings of being in postmodernity is reminiscent of the epistemological option between Aristotle's timeless intellectualism and Kant's spatiotemporal transcendentalism in modernity.<sup>33</sup> As the latter divided Christianity across denominational lines during the twentieth century, the former has the potential to divide Christianity even further and in unforeseen ways. The existence of an alternative ontology that directly opposes traditional ontology at the foundational level of general ontology calls into question the present timeless ontological ground on which both Christian and evangelical theologies have been built. It also questions the viability of the multiple sources of the theology methodological conviction embraced by the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

Which interpretation of being should evangelical theologians use in their theologies? So far theologians, explicitly or implicitly, have assumed that philosophy presented them with a unified timeless interpretation of being. They choose ideas from divergent ontological views produced by classical and modern philosophers who built on the common assumption that real reality is timeless. A neoplatonic cosmological dualism between the timeless realm of heavenly and spiritual realities and the spatiotemporal realm of humans became accepted as factual. On these ontological and cosmological bases, theologians have constructed their exegesis, systems, and practices. They presume neoplatonic

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger makes clear that being is to be understood as time by saying that "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (*Being and Time*, prologue). Later he explained that this was the "reason the treatise which sought to point the way back into the ground of metaphysics did not bear the title 'Existence and Time,' nor 'Consciousness and Time,' but *Being and Time*. Nor can this title be understood as if it were parallel to the customary juxtapositions of Being and Becoming, Being and Seeming, Being and Thinking, or Being and Ought. For in all these cases Being is limited, as if Becoming, Seeming, Thinking, and Ought did not belong to Being. In *Being and Time*, Being is not something other than Time: 'Time' is called the first name of the truth of Being, and this truth is the presence of Being and this Being itself" ("The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William Barret and Henry D. Aiken [New York: Random House, 1962], 207–18).

<sup>33</sup> See Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970–1975), 3:309–315).

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cosmological dualism properly describes the nature of the realities Scripture speaks about without taking time to explain it in detail. Postmodernity, however, has forever ended the ontological illusion on which Christian theology as we know it was constructed. Philosophy not only has strongly and convincingly criticized the ontological ground on which Christian theology stands, but has produced a viable alternative system of ontological interpretation based on the radical idea that reality is not timeless but temporal. I cannot imagine a more radical or deeper paradigm shift in philosophical and theological thinking. The two alternatives currently available in the philosophical supermarket from which evangelicals are supposed to draw the philosophical ground for their theology are diametrically opposed to each other.

Will evangelical theology recognize the situation facing it? Sooner or later this paradigmatic ontological change will have to be faced by theologians. This is a shift of monumental proportions, so radical that it shakes the foundations of classical, evangelical, and modern theologies. If taken seriously, these schools of theology will be radically altered. Rather by chance than by design, open view theologians stumbled on the notion of divine temporality without realizing the ontological implications of their affirmation. Explicitly or implicitly influenced by the bipolar view of God advanced by process philosophy, they build their views on an upgraded version of neoplatonic dualism adjusted to contemporary evolutionary thought. Unbeknown to them, they still stand on the classical Greek timeless ground they explicitly reject in their view of divine foreknowledge but include by using the classical view of divine predestination.

Classical, modern, and evangelical theologians feel that because Scripture does not address ontological issues, we are forced to gain information about the nature of the realities Scripture speaks about from extra-biblical sources. Is this conviction deeply ingrained in Christian collective consciousness correct? Is Scripture silent about ontological issues?

**Biblical Ontology**

A disconnect exists between the timeless ontology Christian theology adopted and the temporal view of reality that pervades biblical thinking. The classical way to deal with this disconnect is to consider the biblical temporal understanding of reality naïve, anthropomorphic, and designed to let us understand at our limited level the eternal truths deriving from the timeless side of reality. This view, however, is no longer mandatory because philosophy has produced a temporal understanding of being. If human philosophical reason can conceive of reality as temporal and simultaneously as timeless, what are we supposed to do? Reason produces alternative and contradictory interpretations of reality, but is incapable of helping us decide between them. Reason unavoidably leads us to irreconcilable views that may divide the church beyond repair. Instead of helping us understand and communicate biblical truths in a clearer way, our reason confuses us. We should attempt to face the postmodern ontological

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divide the evangelical way—that is, by searching the ontological ground of evangelical theology not in the supermarket of philosophical ideas but in the biblical revelation of God.

The evangelical way is to build theology on biblical thinking. While it is true that Scripture does not address the question of ontology in the technical style of academic circles, it certainly has a lot to say about issues such as God, human beings, the world, and knowledge. Why then are we so reticent to build our ontological convictions from Scripture and in harmony with its guidelines? Probably because we are conditioned by the inertia of a tradition built on the assumption that real or ultimate reality is timeless.

What does Scripture say about ultimate reality? Does Scripture teach that God is timeless? The answer to this question is no. Scripture does not teach that God is timeless. In a groundbreaking study, Oscar Cullmann clearly and correctly recognized “the fact that far and wide the Christian Church and Christian theology distinguish time and eternity in the Platonic-Greek-manner.”<sup>34</sup> He also knew that “for Plato eternity is not endlessly extended time, but something quite different; it is timelessness.”<sup>35</sup> Instead, arguing from the data of Scripture, Cullmann correctly understood that God’s eternity can and must be expressed in “terms of endless time.”<sup>36</sup> According to the New Testament, continues Cullmann, “this time quality is not in its essence something human, which first emerged in the fallen creation. It is, moreover, not bound to the creation.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, eternity, “which is possible only as an attribute of God, is time, or, to put it better, what we call ‘time’ is nothing but a part, defined and delimited by God, of this same unending duration of God’s time.” It is important to notice that when Scripture speaks of God’s eternity, it is simultaneously speaking about his being. Because Cullmann was an exegete, he was able to avoid philosophical categories.<sup>38</sup> He also understood that the New Testament’s conviction about God’s temporal eternity opened the door for the systematic theologian to ask “the question of the relation of God’s redemptive-historical activity and his eternity, in a manner beyond that in which the New Testament asked it. He must not be hindered in his investigating the compatibility of God’s being with the way in which the New Testament speaks of his revelation.”<sup>39</sup>

Independently from Cullmann, I have probed in Scripture the notion of divine temporality from an ontological perspective. When Exodus 3:14 is questioned from this perspective, it reveals that God’s being is not timeless but temporal in the sense that it is compatible with the future, present, and past flux of

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<sup>34</sup> *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



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time.<sup>40</sup> Would evangelical systematic theologians dare to think about ontology while being faithful to the *sola Scriptura* principle? That is to say, would we dare to think about being solely by the light of Scripture? Due to the postmodern ontological divide, I find no other viable option for evangelical theology. As I say this, I recognize that serious constructive thinking from Scripture must be done to biblically understand the most influential notion of God's being.<sup>41</sup> In this way, Biblical exegesis is not the end but the beginning and the light by which biblical ontological reflections should be attempted.

#### The Analogical View of Divine Time

As we find in Scripture the notion of divine temporality, at least two questions come to mind. How should we understand divine temporality? And what is the importance of this notion in the search for a biblical ontology?

The first thing that comes to mind when we say God is temporal is the limitation of God to the parameters of human finitude. From the background and inspiration gained from process philosophy, open view theologians have understood divine temporality in this sense. They use divine temporality to ground their claim that God cannot know future free decisions. Thus, God is shaped in the image of man.<sup>42</sup> Here is where neither classical nor open view theologians have thought through the issue of divine ontology from Scripture. Timelessness is not in Scripture, but neither does one find in Scripture the univocal understanding of divine temporality assumed by process and open view theologians.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See my *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 10 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), chapter 3.

<sup>41</sup> Philosophers and systematic theologians are of the general conviction that Scripture does not address ontological issues ontologically because they approach the text assuming Greek timeless ontology that is not present in Scripture. The conclusion, then, is that Scripture does not have an ontology. However, Scripture does speak about the being of God and therefore has ontological teachings. This fact is testified by biblical theologians. For instance, Brevard S. Childs remarks that "central to the Old Testament's understanding is its witness to the *reality of God*. To speak of 'the living God' is not metaphorical (cf. Barth *CD* II/1, 263). The God of the Old Testament has made *his reality* known. He is not a projection of human consciousness, but God has entered actively and fully into Israel's life as an exercise of strength, not weakness. *God's being* is not a static substance to which action is subsequently added. Rather *God's being* is known in his creative actions and defined by communion of love" (*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 358, emphasis mine).

<sup>42</sup> Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997). However, those who understand God as timeless also make him in the image of human beings. The difference is that while in classical theology the image is made on a timeless canvas, in the open view project it is made on a temporal one.

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The notion of temporality should not be taken from human temporality and extrapolated to God's being in a univocal sense.<sup>44</sup> We should not start by assuming we know what time is and then proceed to apply our understanding to God by making him fit in the box we have prepared for him. Rather, we should focus on the way Scripture reveals his being and actions and from this starting point attempt to partially understand his being, his temporality, and his relation to our time. This procedure leads us to rethink our preconception of the meaning of time as it relates to God. As we think through this issue from Scripture, an analogical notion of divine temporality comes to view<sup>45</sup> and helps us understand not so much the mystery of divine being but the reality of his historical redemptive actions in the history of salvation that began in the garden of Eden with the promise of salvation (*protevangelium*) (Genesis 3:15).<sup>46</sup>

The analogical understanding of divine temporality makes the biblical assertion that he knows the end from the beginning possible in a sense different than the traditional Augustinian Calvinistic interpretation based on a timeless

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<sup>44</sup> The issue of temporality has come to prominence. William J. Hill summarizes the main ways in which the notion of time and God have been related by Christian theologians in his *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 80–91. See also Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989); Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991); Don Lodzinski, "Empty Time and the Eternality of God. (St. Augustine's Concept of Time)," *Religious Studies* 31/2 (June 1995): 187; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> For instance, in 2 Chronicles we are told that God can dwell in the Sanctuary Solomon built for Him to dwell in, but simultaneously, it affirms that not even the heavens of the heavens can contain Him. This idea points to a God who while being capable of acting within the past, present, and future flux of time and space, is not limited by it. God is not finite but infinite. God is temporal in a sense analogical with our created time because he is the infinite creator. God's being is the highest expression of life and therefore the highest expression of time. While not limited to our time and space, God's being experiences in itself the flow of past, present, and future, and, therefore, is able to experience the limited way in which we experience this flow of life as creatures created in the image of his being. The notion sketched here requires ontological elaboration from and in the light of Scripture before we use it as an assumption to understand God's salvific and providential activities.

<sup>46</sup> When Clark Pinnock addresses this issue, he visualizes from afar the analogical notion of God without realizing the implications it has for divine foreknowledge. In other words, while arguing the open view of God assuming a univocal notion of divine temporality retrieved from process philosophy, Pinnock begins to perceive the biblical analogical view of divine temporality which he does not use when thinking about divine foreknowledge. Here I find in Pinnock's writings a disconnection between the biblical analogical notion of divine temporality and the univocal notion of divine temporality he assumes, along with open view theologians, in denying divine foreknowledge. If God's analogical temporality does not confine him to the limited way in which creatures experience time whose fullness can only be experienced by God, why should Pinnock and open view theologians continue to assume that God is limited by the future as we are and is not able to know what is not yet there to be known?

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understanding of his being. In short, when we think of divine ontology from and in the light of Scripture, the analogical temporality of God's being comes to view.

The second aspect that comes to mind when we encounter for the first time the notion of divine temporality in Scripture is the role it plays in our understanding of God's being. When most of us discover the timelessness-temporality debate, we side with one of the options presented to us and incorporate it into our overall theological purview as an incidental help in understanding the "attribute" of divine eternity. We do not see how these notions determine our understanding of the ontological ground on which the entire edifice of Christian theology builds. However, whoever becomes familiar with the origin and development of philosophical ontology discovers that timelessness and time are directly and primarily connected as main notions in the understanding of the most inclusive and influential philosophical idea, namely, the notion of being. The timeless or temporal interpretation of the most general idea of being determines philosophical interpretations of regional ontologies. This was how, for instance, Plato created his own epoch-making cosmology and Heidegger his equally epoch-making anthropology and metaphysical sketches.

In the same way, biblically-minded theologians should use the notion of the analogical temporality of God's being as a horizon from which to understand the biblical revelation of his Trinitarian being and salvific actions. From the same horizon we should interpret biblical revelations about other regional ontologies, as for instance human nature and the nature of the world (cosmology).

### **Conclusion**

Evangelical theology was created when the magisterial theologians of the protestant reformation defied tradition from the authority of biblical ideas. However, they did not defy the ontological ground on which the tradition they defied was built. What we call evangelical theology, then, does not flow from the *sola Scriptura* principle but from the quadrilateral of sources that justifies the use of philosophical ontological teachings as ground to define the referent of biblical thought and doctrines. From these sources tradition has drawn several lines of philosophical teachings, of which ontology was the most inclusive and influential.

Christian and evangelical theologies were constructed assuming a neoplatonic worldview built on Parmenides' timeless notion of ultimate reality. Augustine became instrumental in using the neoplatonic ontological framework to interpret God's being and his salvific acts.

By assuming against tradition that God's knowledge is not timeless but temporal, open view theologians unknowingly and indirectly disturbed the traditional interpretation of the ontological ground of evangelical theology. However, they did not derive their understanding of God's temporality from Scripture, but they implicitly assumed a univocal understanding of time from classical and

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neoclassical ontological traditions. The failure of classical and open view approaches to properly account for all biblical data suggests the need to move beyond them by considering the ontological question hidden behind them in a critical and biblical way. This may open the door for a new alternative theological project that might better account for all the data of Scripture and uncover their inner coherence from a biblical ontological foundation.

The advent of the modern epistemological and postmodern ontological divides has shown the limitations of the multiple sources method of doing theology. Reason has produced coherent, convincing, and mutually contradictory ontological proposals based on the timeless and temporal notions of the ultimate nature of reality and God. Yet, reason is not able to choose between them. The postmodern ontological divide forces Christian theologians to deliberately choose between the options philosophical scholarship presents to them.

How should evangelical theology choose its ontological foundation? Neither philosophy nor reason can make the choice. However, a way better than reason is open to evangelical theologians. They may decide to build their theology not from a multiplicity of sources but from the *sola, tota, and prima Scriptura* principle. By revealing the analogical understanding of divine being and the historical nature of ultimate reality, this less explored way has the advantage of building from divine revelation and not from the speculations of the human mind. It may also help us overcome the modern epistemological and postmodern ontological divides.

These findings lead us to the conclusion that the construction of a new theological project providing an alternative to the already existent classical and modern projects is possible by grounding Christian theology on Biblical teachings on being, God, human nature, worldview and knowledge. As theologians wrestle with the ontological foundation required for constructing Christian theology in postmodern times, they should consider giving a chance to the ontological teachings of Scripture as guides from which to define the macro hermeneutical principles of Christian theology.

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