

# Committee for Review of Dr. Gregory Boyd's View of God

## Bethel College and Seminary

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### *Boyd's View of God:*

God is the eternal Creator, the omnipotent and sovereign Lord of history. The divine will is to bring all things into the Kingdom for God's own pleasure and glory. Central to this will is God's desire to enter genuine, reciprocal love relationships with human creatures.

So that God may enjoy these love relationships with sinful humans, God has covenanted within the divine being to provide a way for human salvation. God willed to bring the Son to the cross as the means of offering salvation to sinners. Without God's empowering, all human persons are dead in sin, powerless to receive this offer or even to lift a finger to move toward God. Therefore, God acts to invite, empower, and persuade humans to receive the gift of salvation.

If this relationship is to be genuine, it cannot be forced by God. So God creates opportunity for human freedom. The great gift of salvation is God's work alone, and yet, as Scripture says, humans must actively receive that gift. God therefore freely chooses to give away part of the divine prerogative to decide all events of history. God gives to humans the privilege to respond to the divine offer of grace. Yet, while there is genuine human freedom that is uncontrolled by God, God is still sovereign over the course of history. God possesses the power and reserves the right to intervene in human history to bring the affairs of the human race to their intended conclusion.

### *Description of Specific Issues:*

In this contest, Boyd believes that the future is composed in part of possibilities.

1. What is Boyd's view regarding God's omniscience and future possibilities?
  - a. God is omniscient. God knows all things exactly as they are and reality exactly as it is real. Events that are certain, God knows as certain. God knows future possibilities as possibilities. Boyd holds God's omniscience without qualification.
  - b. *That* God is omniscient is *dogma* - an essential and defining element of Christian belief. It is heretical to deny that God is omniscient. But views on the nature of the reality that God omnisciently knows are *opinion* - not defining elements of Christian belief, but personal convictions about particular theories that define the specifics of God's omniscience.
  - c. God chooses to give human creatures power to make certain events definite, and those possibilities are indefinite until those creatures exercise their God-given power.

- d. Since God chose to make *much* of the future definite, that future is in large measure definite. Since God chose to leave *some* of the future indefinite, that future includes possibilities until creaturely choosing makes it definite.
  - e. Those future events that God declares from eternity do be definite will certainly occur, due to God's determination to ensure that they will occur. God can and does intervene miraculously, when necessary, to bring about the events he has determined will occur.
  - f. While some events are definite as to their occurring, the *means* by which they will certainly occur may be indefinite. Since God is fully resourceful, God can in any possible set of circumstances guarantee that any event that he has declared must occur, does actually occur. Indeed, this requires a more powerful and resourceful God than the God who sovereignly controls all events, for God chooses not to guarantee all events unilaterally, but must work with, through, and sometimes against the free actions of human beings to accomplish the divine will.
2. What is the rationale Boyd uses to support his view?
- a. Boyd holds his view of God's omniscience because he interprets the Bible as teaching it. The Bible speaks of God regretting things, changing his mind in response to historical events, and using conditional statements ("If you..., then I..."). Language of this sort makes sense only if God is in fact uncertain about the future. (E.g., how could God actually regret an event God has from eternity past fully known?)
  - b. The Bible speaks of some future events as definite and some as indefinite. When the Bible describes an event as definite, Boyd holds it as definite. When the Bible says the future is indefinite, Boyd does not interpret it anthropomorphically, but holds it as indefinite.
  - c. God's only *knowing* things that are definite is parallel to God's only *doing* things that are coherent. "God is almighty" means God can accomplish anything that is logically possible. God is almighty, yet God cannot accomplish what is logically incoherent (e.g., create square circles or uncreated creatures) because it is contrary to his own nature (as is sinning). Similarly, God could not know as definite that which is not yet definite.
  - d. The genuineness of creaturely responses requires that these acts actually have the power to determine certain elements of the historical process. It is incoherent to affirm that a future event could be both definite (and the object of certain and unalterable knowledge) and, at the same time, open and yet-to-be-determined by genuine creaturely freedom.
3. What does Boyd say about verses which show that the future was definite from all eternity?
- a. Some texts say that certain events are certain, but this need not imply that all the antecedent *means* leading up to those events are certain (so in eternity past, though the crucifixion would certainly happen and was therefore definite, not every detailed event that led to the crucifixion was always definite - Acts 2:23).

- b. Some texts involve conditional prophecies that do not occur in the end (e.g., the prediction that Hezekiah would die even though he is given many more years of life - Isaiah 38:1).
  - c. Some texts involve prophecies about events that involve human decisions, yet the antecedent conditions are so entirely known by God, that God can predict with accuracy what will occur (e.g., Peter's three denials - Matthew 26:75).
4. What are the concerns that constituents have raised about Boyd's view?
- a. If part of the future is composed of possibilities so that God cannot know the entire future as definite, one dishonors God, insults the divine being, because this view diminishes God's almightiness.

*Boyd's response:* A genuinely responsive God is closer to the biblical portrait and preferable to other pictures of God, being able to enter genuine relationships of love with humans. In addition, in such a picture, God is in some ways more exalted. God does not unilaterally make all events definite. God actually allows human freedom to operate within certain limited ranges and still brings about (by working with, through, and at times against that freedom) exactly those events that God determined will definitely occur.

- b. If part of the future is composed of possibilities so that God cannot know the entire future as definite, then one holds an unbiblical view. Numerous texts indicate that God does indeed know future events with definiteness.

*Boyd's response:* Though the Bible teaches that God knows with definiteness *some* future events, this does not entail that the whole of the future is definite. Insofar as the future exists as possibility, God perfectly knows it as possibility. (See Jeremiah 18: Isaiah 31:1-4).

- c. If part of the future is composed of possibilities so that God cannot know the entire future as definite, then God cannot plan or perform certain events, including especially the crucifixion. If and only if God can ordain all the events leading up to the crucifixion, then can God ordain the crucifixion itself. Thus, the gospel of salvation depends on God's ordaining all events.

*Boyd's response:* As an omniresourceful being, God can make any event come to pass by working with, through, and sometimes against human freedom whenever God so wills. Further, this critique cuts equally against classical Arminianism as against the form off Arminianism which says that some events in the future are not yet definite.

- d. If part of the future is composed of possibilities so that God cannot know the entire future as definite, then one's position incorporates elements of process theology, a clearly heretical view of God.

*Boyd's response:* The God of process theology is necessarily (not freely) related to the world, limited in power, unable to override creaturely freedom, unable to perform miracles, not genuinely sovereign, and unable to conquer evil. For biblical reasons first and foremost, every one of these claims advanced by process theology is false.

Along with many contemporary theologians, Boyd believes that a metaphysics of substance (associated with Aristotle and some interpreters of Newton) is not viable in light of recent science. He also thinks Plato's view that the future is a timelessly completed whole is defective. He agrees with a few technical points made by some process metaphysicians. But a person's agreement with some points of untenable position does not show the person adopts that position. While the Bible shares with the Koran the teaching that there is one God, it does not follow that Christians are Muslims.

#### *Concluding Observations:*

It appears that the details of the view of God defended by Boyd are an outworking of a certain form of an Arminian view of God. This view is the work of a professional theologian spelling out the specifics of his world view as part of a scholarly calling. This form of Arminianism is, in some ways, more straightforwardly biblical than certain evangelical alternatives. It does not use anthropomorphism to offset the literal sense of certain biblical statements. Rather it takes almost all the relevant biblical descriptions as literally true. Boyd accepts at face value those texts which indicate that God changes his mind in response to historical events, regrets certain things that happen, and uses conditional prophesies and statements. Boyd's view of God is a biblically-oriented, contemporary form of Arminianism.

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