



The Future of Open Theism *From Antecedents to Opportunities*

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Richard Rice (PhD, University of Chicago Divinity School) is professor of religion at Loma Linda University. He is the author of several books, including *Suffering and the Search for Meaning, Reason and the Contours of Faith*, and *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, and coauthor of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.

Recounting the Trajectory of Open Theism

What led to your interest in open theism and now to sharing about it?

Richard Rice: Since it was published by IVP in 1994, *The Openness of God* has attracted both admirers and critics and generated a great deal of serious reflection. After twenty-five years, enough time has gone by to review some of the major steps in its development and think about where it might go from here.

The purpose of this project is to provide a readable account of open theism that touches on its earlier expressions and the major criticisms they generated, as well as the various and varying views of both supporters and detractors. It also explores the potential implications of open theism for a range of important theological concerns.

What is your main thesis in *The Future of Open Theism*?

Richard: Open theism brings to expression themes in the Christian understanding of God that have strong biblical support but were largely neglected or ignored over the years by a good deal of theological and philosophical discussion.

Given the controversy that open theism has generated and the continuing misunderstanding of it that many people have, a clarification of its central concerns could be immensely helpful. And given the fact that, in the thinking of both open theists and some of its critics, it has yet to assume the proportions of a mature theological position—though some see it moving in that direction—the time is ripe for an account of its development to date and an exploration of its potential to stimulate further discussion and enrich theological reflection.

This discussion of open theism throughout expresses a distinctly personal perspective. As a contributor to the 1994 publication and the first person to employ the expression “the openness of God” in a systematic way, I have a keen interest in the discussions it has generated over the years. And I won’t pretend to be impartial. My perspective throughout is decidedly that of someone inside the movement, and I am not reluctant to identify what I like about the views of some open theists and don’t like about those of others. Part Two of the book in particular expresses a personal vision of how the open view of God connects with some of the central doctrines of the Christian faith. In the case of each doctrine, I selected which facets of open theism to bring into the conversation.

How does this book relate to your scholarly interests and your faith experience?

Richard: I was one of the contributors to the symposium volume, *The Openness of God* (1994) that gave its name to this concept of God, and the author of the first book to carry that title (1980), so I have a keen interest in this view of God. It has occupied a central place in my thinking over the years, and I have a keen interest in its potential to stimulate further theological reflection. I believe an exploration of the ideas involved in the openness understanding of God’s relation to the world could inform a wide range of readers regarding its ideas and stimulate further discussion.



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I am also enthusiastic about the contribution that the open view of God can make to practical religious experience. The idea that God interacts with us on an intimate, personal level, and that he knows and cares about every aspect of our lives, can make a real difference to us on a daily basis.

What do you hope your book contributes to the study of open theism?

Richard:

- *The arrival of open theism.* Although it was greeted by some as a novel view of God, open theism is not as novel as some believe. Not only has the relation between human freedom and divine sovereignty—in particular, God's will and knowledge—concerned theologians for centuries but the figures who have been associated with open theism for the past twenty or thirty years were not the first to find its basic ideas attractive. In the past two centuries, for example, a number of thinkers have promoted the idea that the future is undetermined from God's perspective.
- *The survival of open theism.* Open theism is alive and well. In spite of the vigorous, and sometimes harsh, criticism its proponents initially received, open theism has taken its place among well-known concepts of God and references to it appear regularly in books on theology and philosophy of religion.
- *The future of open theism.* Open theism is still a work in progress. For quite a while now, its supporters have been exploring its contours in greater depth and various versions of open theism have emerged.



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