

Open Theism

Open theism became mainstream in evangelical theology through the book *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (1994), by David Basinger, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rise, and John Sanders. The work has caused an uproar in evangelical circles because it exposes the reality that many evangelical Christians are influenced more by the theology of John Calvin and Martin Luther. Most of these evangelicals do not identify themselves with a non-open, non-relational view of God.¹⁰³ However, evangelicals who find their theological roots in James Arminius and John Wesley, who reject divine predestination and support human freedom, resonate with open theism's approach to human agency.

Open theists have a variety of theological approaches, but hold to the following core values: (1) God's primary characteristic is love; (2) humans are genuinely free to make choices; (3) both creatures and God are relational beings; (4) God's experience changes, yet God's nature or essence is unchanging; (5) the future is open; it is not predetermined or fully known by God; and (6) expiation of Christ about the future are often partly dependent upon creaturely actions.¹⁰⁴

The "openness of God" was first posited by Richard Rice in *The Openness of God* (1994). Open theism is the belief that God does not exercise control of the universe but leaves it "open" for humans to make choices that impact their relationship with God and others. Since humans have free will and have the capacity to impact the future by their choices, God does not know the future. The future is depending on human agency. If God is ultimately in control of all things, then humans cannot fully exercise free will. Because God desires relationship with humans, God has given humans the freedom to respond relationally.

Another motivation for open theism is the issue of theodicy. Since humans are free agents, and God is not ultimately in control, God is not the author of evil. Since God is a God of love, and is in relationship with creation, God could not will human suffering. Human suffering exists because of the Fall of humanity, and God is not the author of evil or human suffering.

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—MARK A. MADDIX

THEOLOGY OF FATHERING

Theology of fathering includes (1) a normative discussion of God as the archetypal father and what God communicates to us regarding fathering and (2) practical application of this theology. Fathering, as God models it and communicates it, is integral in His kingdom. And because it is apparent in Western cultures, particularly the United States, that fathers are significantly absent (physically or relationally) from their children's lives, leaving deleterious effects in their wake (McLanahan and Booth 1989; Blankenhorn 1995), a theology of fathering is valuable in providing guidance in the local church and in training future leaders and Christian educators.

God as Father

So what is theologically normative as exemplified in God the Father, and what does He communicate regarding fathering? In emulating God the Father in view of His communicable attributes, we see that fathering is being intentional (Eph. 1:9; Rom. 8:29–30), holy (1 Pet. 1:16), righteous (Rev. 16:5), gracious, merciful (Ps. 86:15; James 5:11), nurturing (Ps. 91:4), rational (Isa. 1:18; Rom. 12:1–2), providing (Matt. 6:26; 1 Tim. 5:8), just (Rev. 16:7), forgiving, loving (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8), compassionate (Luke 15:20f.), and disciplining (Heb. 12:7–11; Rev. 3:19), to name a few characteristics (mothers are to emulate God in these areas as well).

What God Says about Fathering

A theology of fathering also necessitates theological discussion about children. Children, like all of humankind, are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26; James 3:9) and,

despite that image being marred in the Fall, share in that image (Hoekema 1986) having characteristics with God (intellect, volition, emotions, etc.; Grudem 1994), especially being spiritual relational beings (Moreland and Rae 2000). Being a relational spiritual being is to relate to and love God, thereby obeying Him and loving others on His behalf (Deut. 6; Matt. 22:37–38). Also, being in God's image functionally means man is representative of God's rule in the world, representing His virtues, values, and aims. Being in the image of God, then, children are, among other things, to emulate God (Eph. 5:1; 3 John 11), relate to, and love God as representatives of God's rule now, and parents are to nurture children to that end (Eph. 6:1; Prov. 22:6).

Fathers are specifically called by God to be the primary leaders within the family in the spiritual formation of their children (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13–14), though it cannot be overstated that fathers are not the sole leaders (mothers—Prov. 1:8, 6:20; the faith community—Deut. 6:1–15; 1 Tim. 5:19–20, etc.). And while this is discussed in greater detail elsewhere (e.g., Clark 2011; Hamilton 2010), both Old and New Testaments provide ample direction theologically for this aspect of fathering: God the Father has headship in the Triune Godhead (Gen. 1:1–2; John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; Grudem 1994); fathers' leadership is modeled in God's role for Adam (1 Tim. 2:13–14; 1 Cor. 11:3); and Abraham was specifically challenged to command his children and his household to keep the ways of the Lord (Gen. 18:19).

Further biblical insight comes from both testaments. Deuteronomy 6 places fathers in charge of their families, community, and nation, especially with respect to their relationship with God. Fathers are individually and specifically spoken to in leading their children. The "you" in Deuteronomy 6:7 is masculine singular (Hamilton 2010, 12), implying that Moses addressed individual fathers as accountable leaders, not the community, in training their children. In addition, a theological principle gleaned from Ephesians 5:21–6:4 is that fathers, as Christlike leaders, in contrast to cultural expectations, are to take responsibility in leadership in the home by sacrificially loving their wives and nourishing their children spiritually (Clark 2011, 152). Husbands are to lead the home, loving their wives sacrificially as Christ loved the church sacrificially (Eph. 5:25–30). And fathers are specifically singled out to lead in the discipline and instruction of their children in the Lord (Eph. 6:1–4), nourishing them in things of the Lord, being self-controlled, gentle, and patient educators, not exasperating or provoking their children.

Practical Prescription

Practical application of this theology follows from who God is as Father and what He says about fathering. It nec-

essarily transcends cultures, is normative for all situations, and yet is sensitively conveyed to the fatherless individuals and communities where a concept of father is minimal, or even nonexistent to the extent that it seems irrelevant. However, the individual or cultural fatherless plight does not justify shirking the responsibility or aspiration toward God's ideal. Fathers, like God (who is intentional and the initiator of all relationships), need to be intentional, particularly in the spiritual formation of their children and their leadership therein. Leaders within Christian education and the church need to employ means to disciple fathers and come along the fatherless. Effective fathering is a learned skill, with competencies that can improve. Fathers need to be encouraged and equipped to meet not only the physical needs of their children, but also their emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs. Fathers need to be taught a proper theology of the spiritual nature of their children, how to accordingly better interact with them spiritually, and that father-mother, father-mother-God relationships significantly model relational spirituality to their children. Ministries to the fatherless (orphans, children with imprisoned fathers, foster children, single mothers, etc.) are ways to be fathers to the fatherless.

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—STEVEN R. CLARK

THEOSIS AS CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

Overview

In Christian theology, *theosis* is the process of divinization that takes place when people are united with Jesus Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It means becoming like God.

Though rooted in biblical concepts and verses (e.g., 2 Pet. 1:4), the term *theosis* was coined by Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century. Pseudo-Dionysius in the sixth century provided the first concise definition: "Divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God."¹⁰⁵ His definition raises the question of just how much *is* possible. Here most Orthodox theologians have followed Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), stating that humanity can partake in God's energies, but not God's essence. This distinction between energy and essence safeguards against pantheism. Some earlier theologians such as Irenaeus did not make this distinction, but avoided pantheism by other means.

Theosis has always been a central motif in Orthodox theology. In the 20th century, it became a popular topic for ecumenical dialogue, with scholars finding support for the concept in the writings of Western theologians such as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

Theosis becomes pertinent to Christian education when people discuss either education's process or its ultimate purpose. Regarding process, the line of logic may run like this: the Holy Spirit is the Teacher and the anointing of the Spirit resides within people (John 16:13, 1 John 2:27), so the human activity of teaching becomes a subset of participation in the divine life, another name for which is *theosis*. So, too, if one believes that the ultimate purpose of education is imitating God's perfection (Matt. 5:48, Eph. 5:1), or becoming totally transformed (Rom. 12:2, Eph. 4:24), or being completely conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18), then all these aims also point directly to the concept of *theosis*.

Biblical Basis

There have been charges that the concept owes too much to Platonic or Stoic ideas of divinization, or worse, to popular Hellenistic notions of emperors and heroes becoming gods. In response, theologians have argued for

its grounding in the Old and New Testaments. In general, these arguments maintain that wherever there is real contact or relationship between God and humanity, there is the potential for human participation in the life of God, which opens the door to *theosis*.

The first striking example is in Genesis, the creation of humankind in God's image and likeness. Then, in the wake of human transgression, God draws people into covenants that are wrapped in language of adoption and of paternal-filial relationship. Meanwhile, Wisdom literature portrays true learning as proceeding from a reverence that opens the mind to divine instruction. Insofar as *theosis* entails being filled with wisdom and knowledge that come from God, this divinizing learning process can eventually take on cosmic proportions: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:28, "When all things are subjected to him, then . . . God may be all in all").

The basis for *theosis* in the New Testament is the birth of Jesus. In answering the question of why God became human, many early theologians gave a similar answer, which was stated most succinctly and memorably by Athanasius: God became human in order that humans could become gods. Only the Son has the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father, but people can become God's children, God's adopted offspring, and in this sense "gods" (Ps. 82:6, John 10:34). The Incarnation and language of adoption undergird *theosis*, but further biblical support is found in Pentecost and all language that speaks of people being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, as well as in baptism and all language that speaks of being united with Christ.

Practical and Ecumenical Implications

Theosis defines the goal of Orthodox education. For Catholic educators, it casts a vision of sacramental life as participation in the divine life, with Jesus Christ being the primordial sacrament. For Reformed educators, it puts sanctification into grander and more relational terms. Relationality is a critical dimension of *theosis* for Reformed theologians like T. F. Torrance, who stresses that *theosis* cannot mean a mixture of human and divine being; rather, it denotes a *koinonia* or fellowship between God and humanity. For Methodists and other Pietist or Holiness traditions, the concept of *theosis* converges with the goals of dying to sin and becoming perfected in love. For Pentecostals and others who emphasize the priority of the Holy Spirit in teaching, *theosis* could be a way to talk about the total transformation that education hopes to achieve. Finally, for those who want to put liberationist education into conversation with traditional theological

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