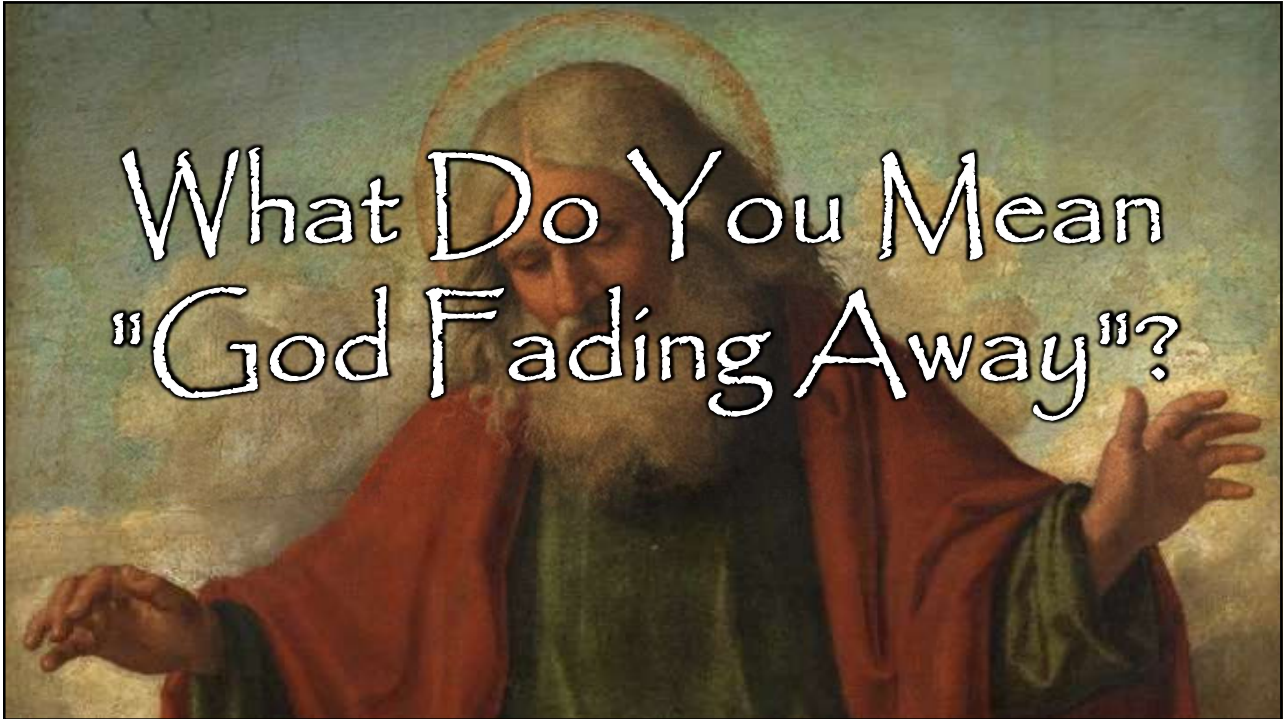


The two camps in the debate regarding the attributes of God are often labeled **Classical Theism** and **Theistic Personalism**.

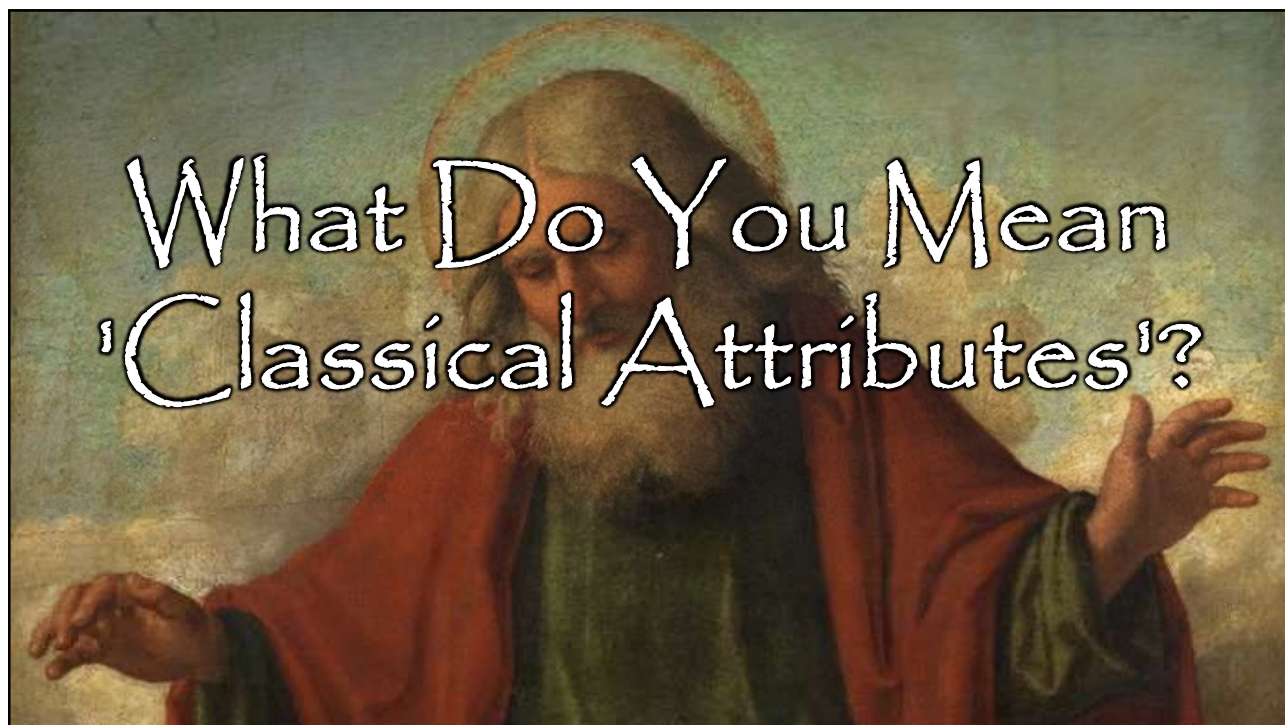
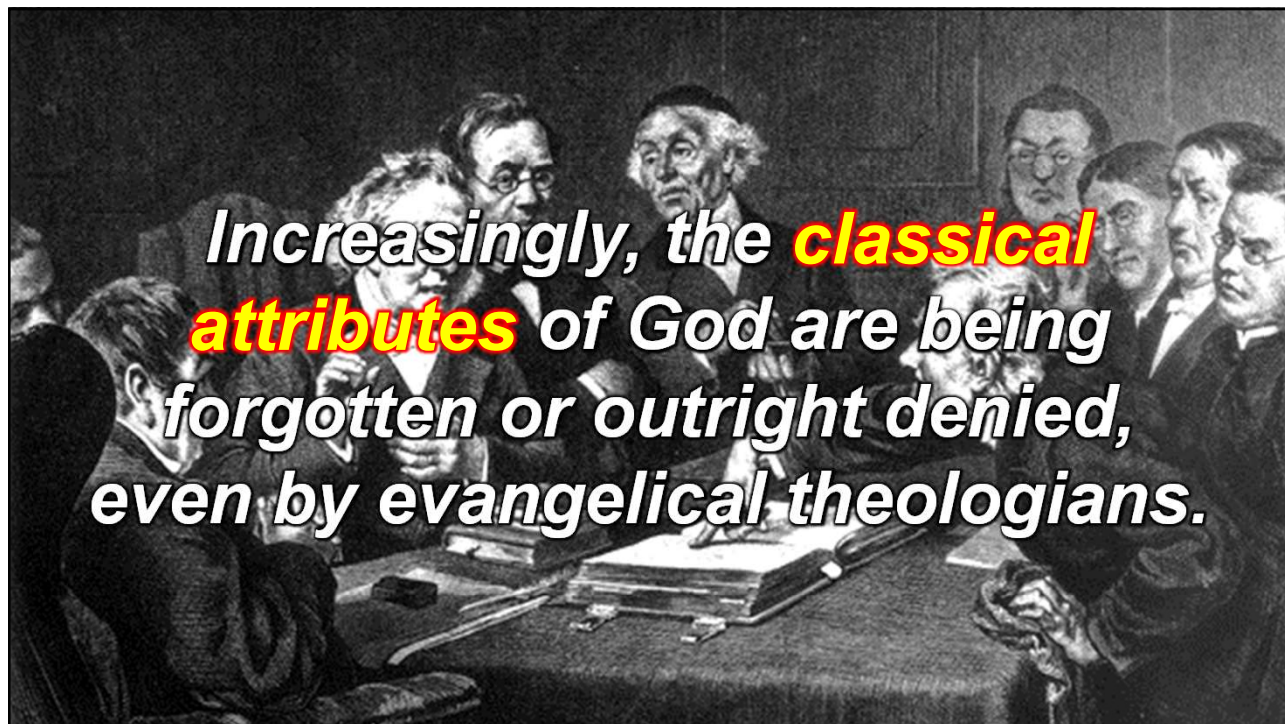
In a moment, I will comment on how the term 'classical' is used in the label "Classical Theism."

I must point out that the label "Theistic Personalism" was given to this camp by its detractors.

Perhaps some, if not many, that Classical Theists will label "Theistic Personalists" will not accept this title but also identify as "Classical" in their understanding of God's attributes.



What Do You Mean  
"God Fading Away"?

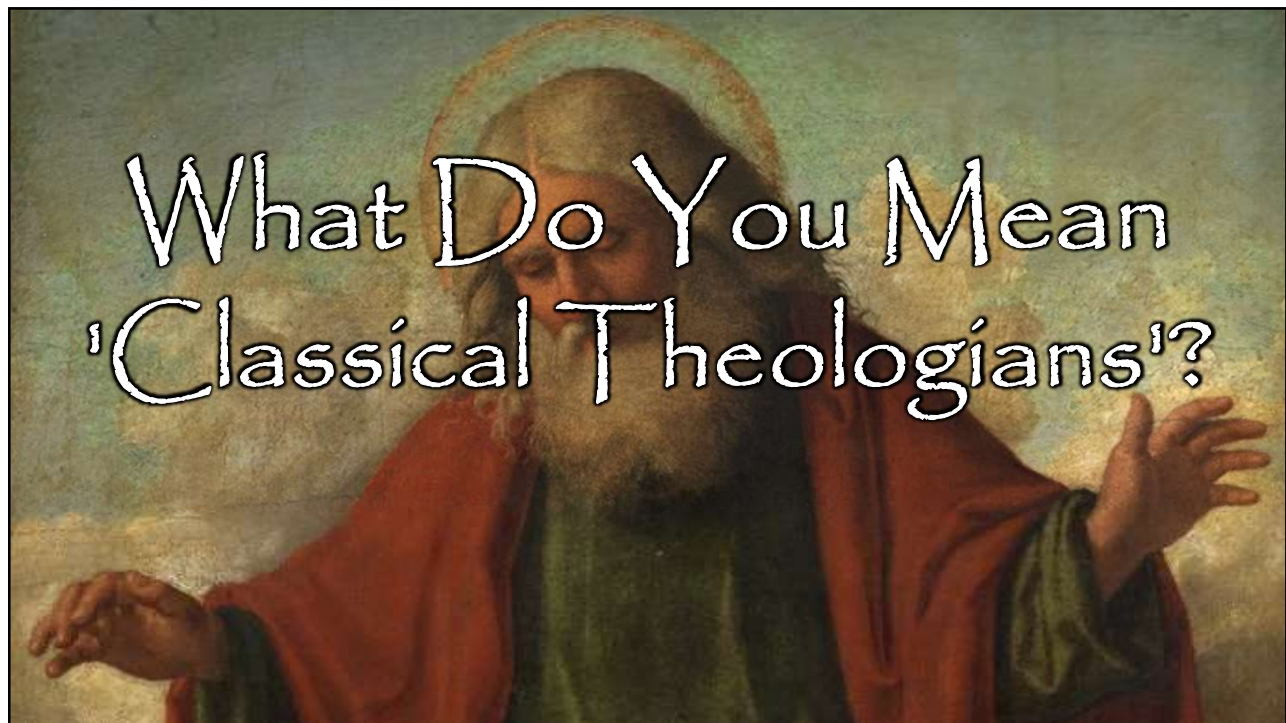


# classical attributes

*characteristics of God's nature and actions known from creation and God's Word understood along the contours of the categories of Western thinking arising from the ancient Greeks, the Christian Church Fathers, and the Medieval Scholastics*

***To say that they have been the dominant view about God's nature and actions throughout church history is not in itself proof that they are true.***

*To say that they are understood along the contours of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks is not in itself proof that they are false.*



# Classical Theologians

*Christian theologians who, to greater or lesser degrees, defend the classical attributes of God*

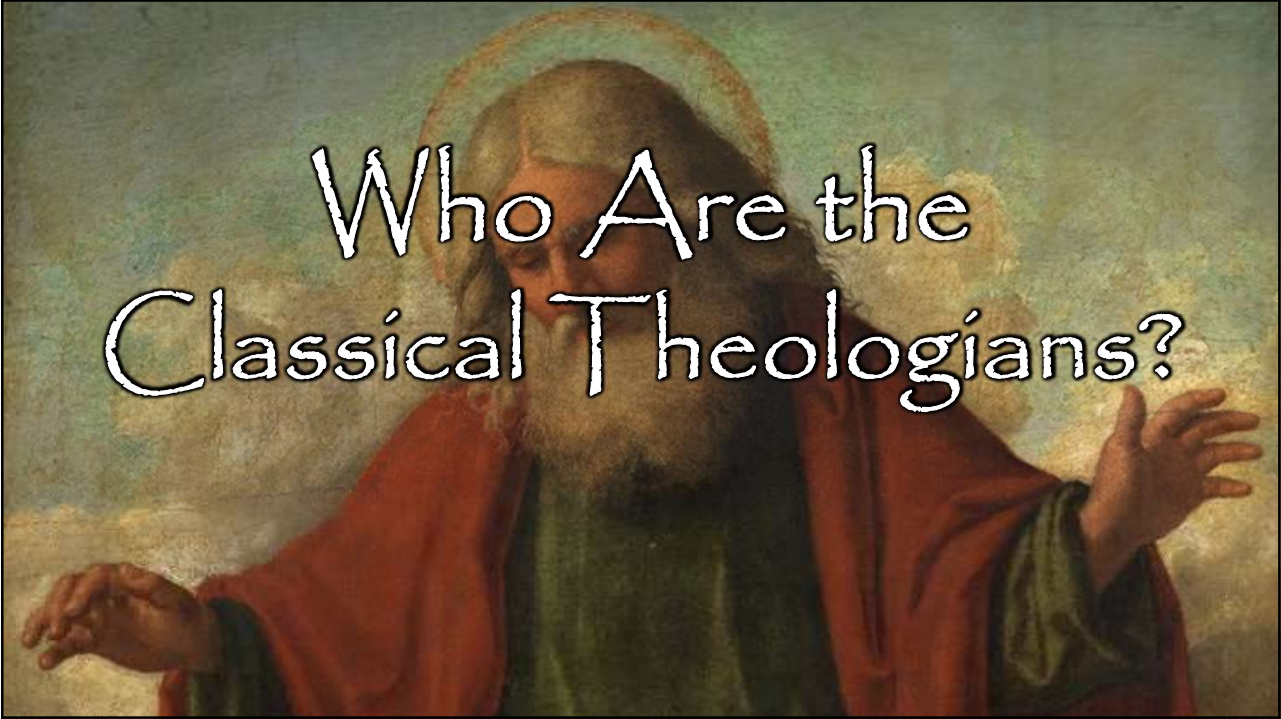
# Classical Theologians

*Not all classical theologians discuss every classical attribute.*

*Further, not all classical theologians defend every classical attribute.*

# Classical Theologians

*Admittedly, for the purposes of this presentation, the line can be blurry between who might be and who might not be counted as a classical theologian.*



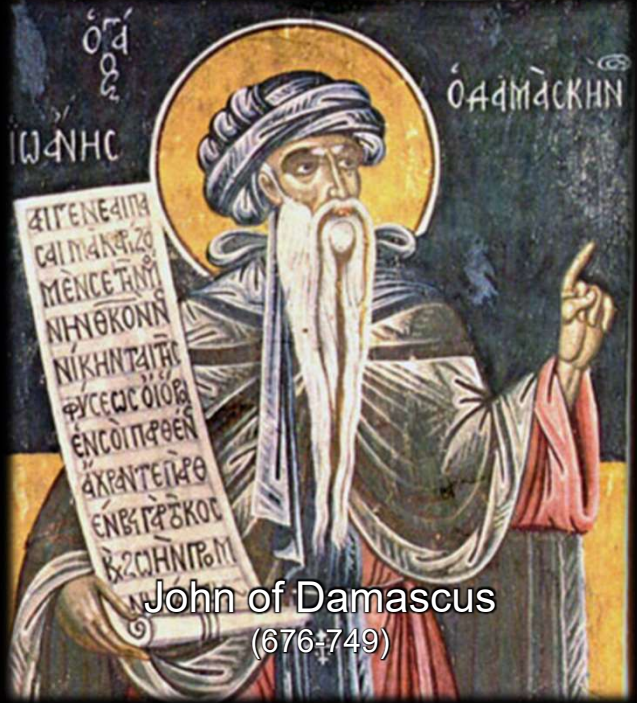
Who Are the  
Classical Theologians?



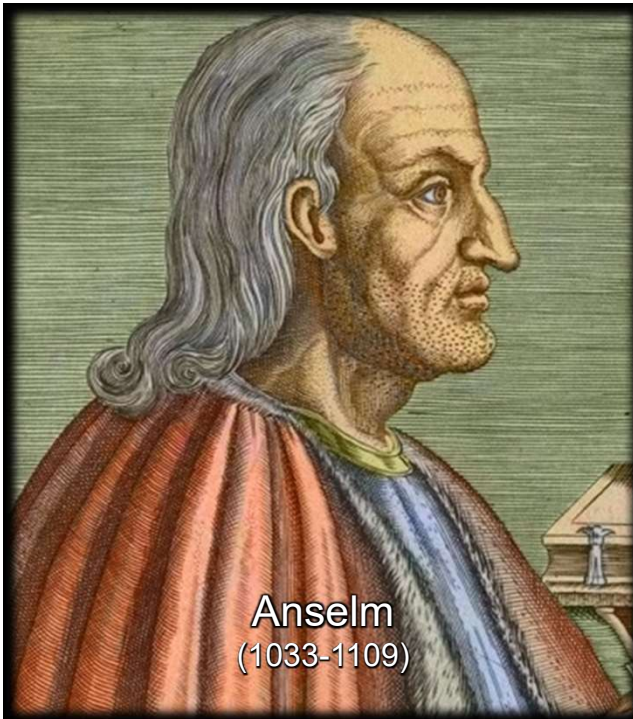




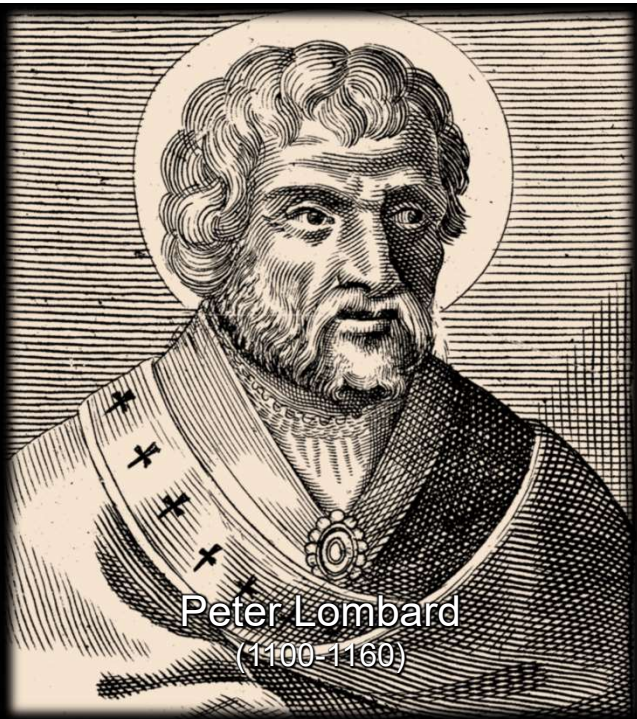
Boethius  
(d. 524)



John of Damascus  
(676-749)



Anselm  
(1033-1109)

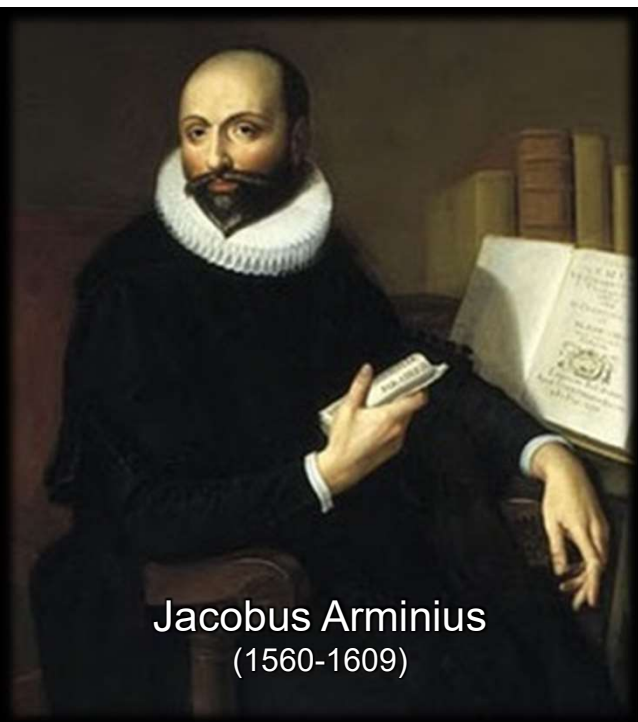


Peter Lombard  
(1100-1160)

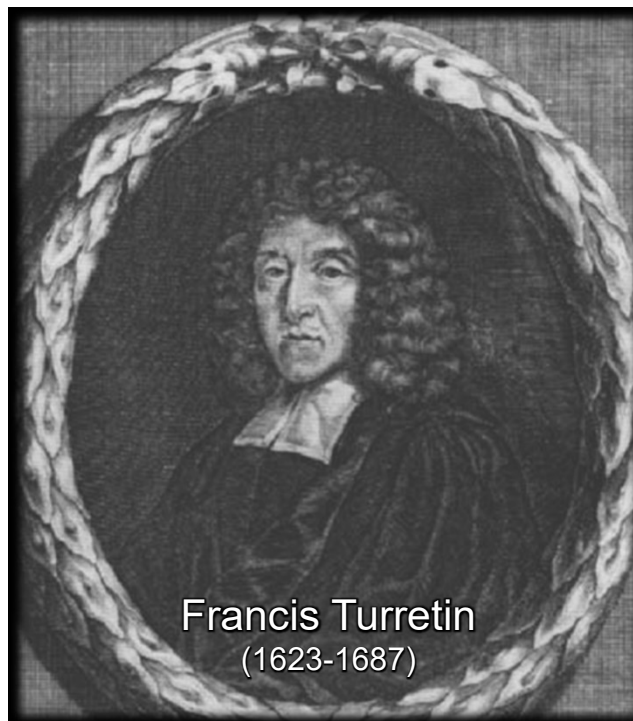




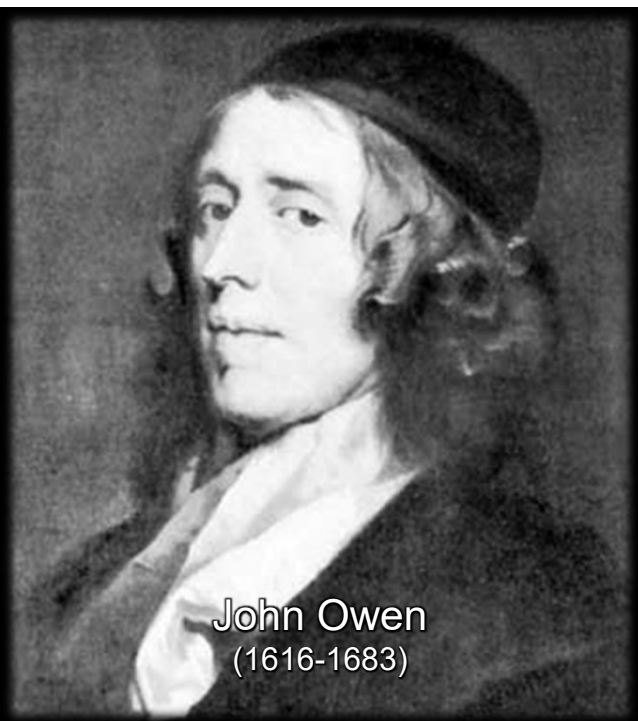
Domingo (Dominic) Báñez  
(1528-1604)



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)



Francis Turretin  
(1623-1687)

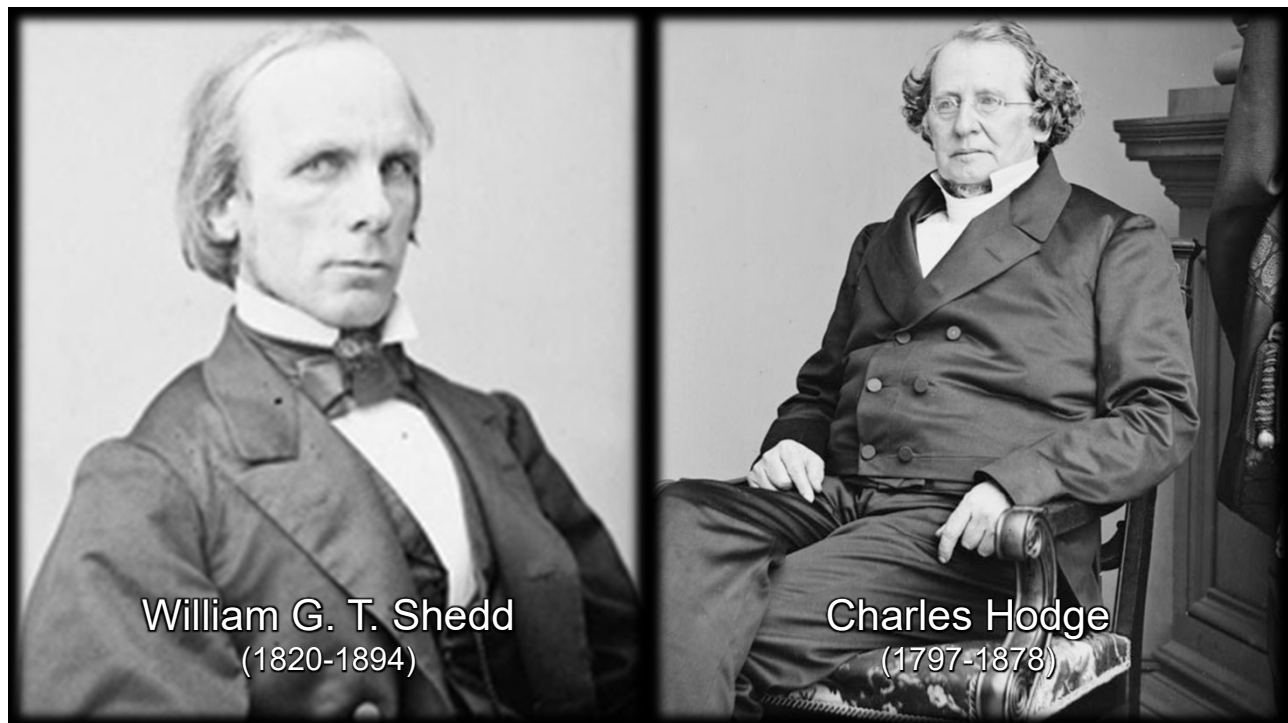


John Owen  
(1616-1683)



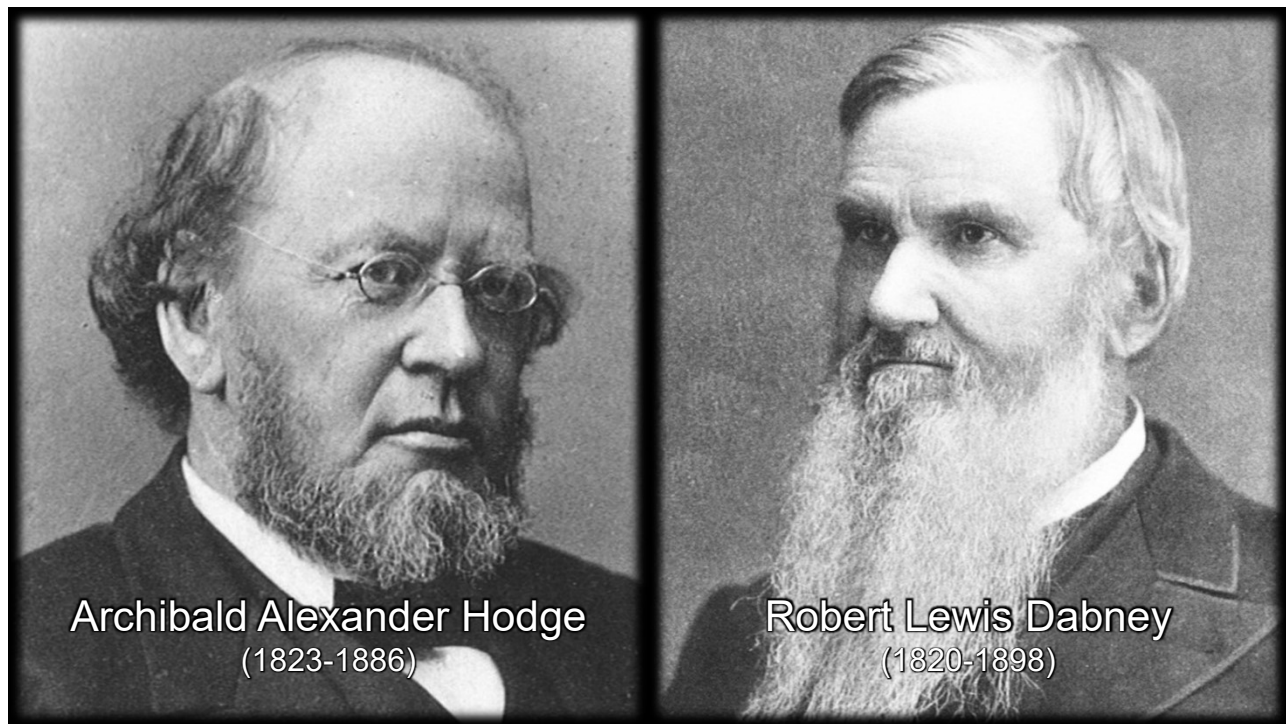
Stephen Charnock  
(1628-1680)

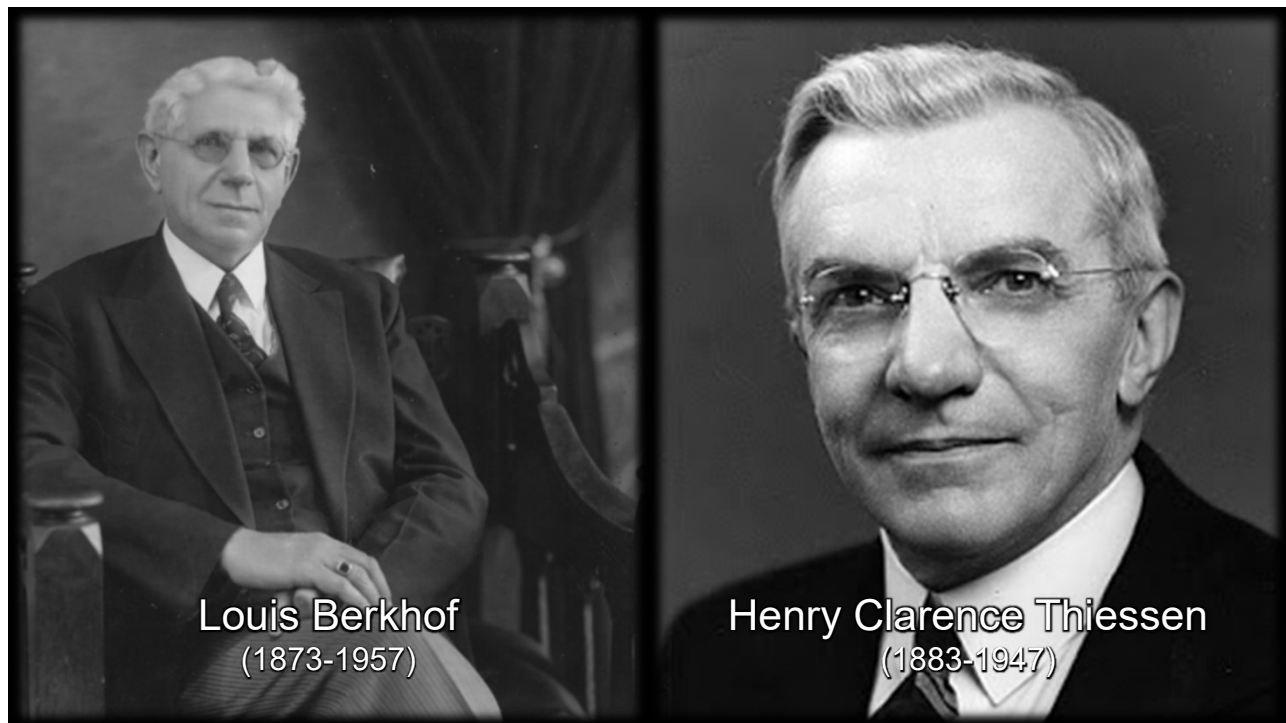
John Gill  
(1697-1771)

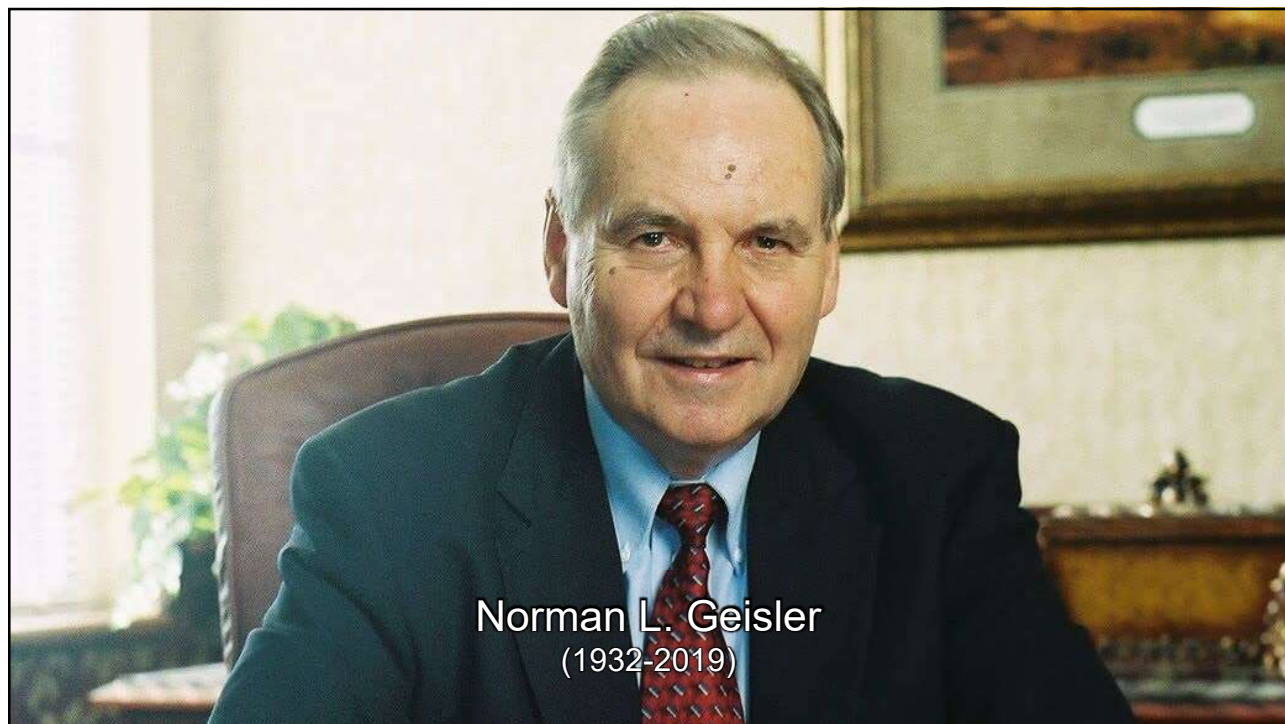


William G. T. Shedd  
(1820-1894)

Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)







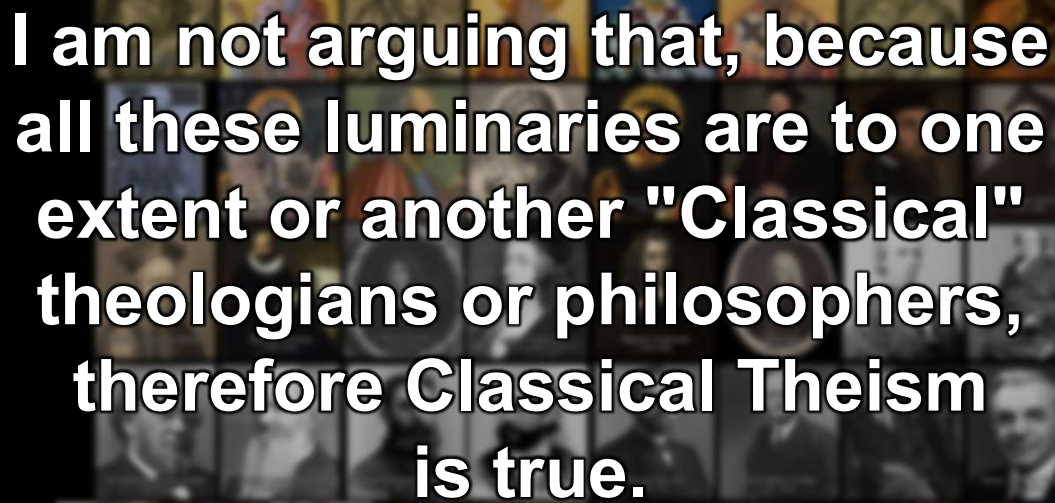
Norman L. Geisler  
(1932-2019)



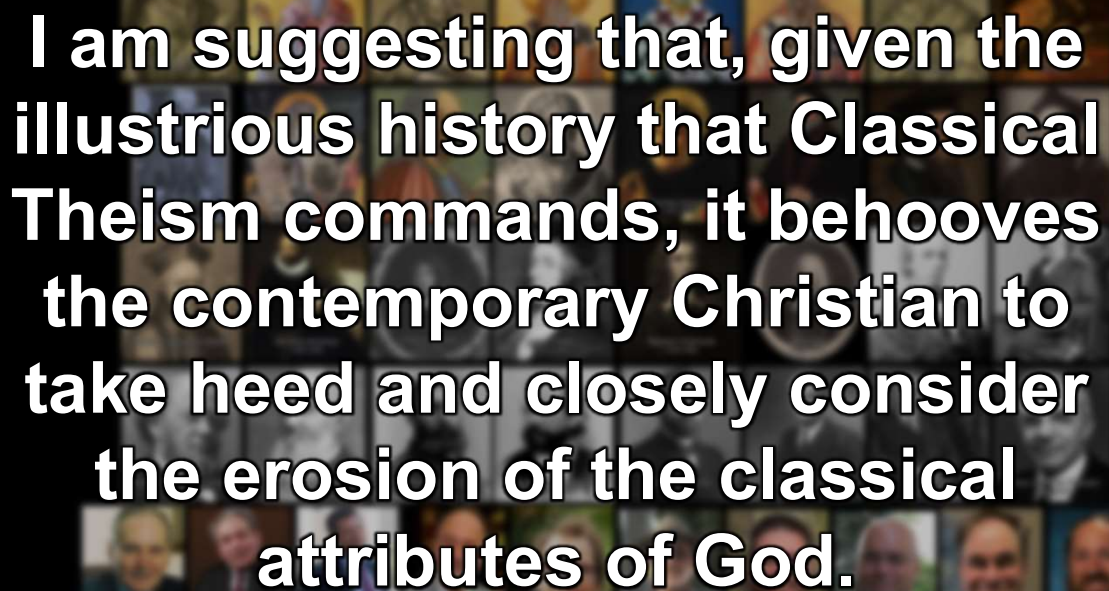
R. C. Sproul  
(1939-2017)







**I am not arguing that, because all these luminaries are to one extent or another "Classical" theologians or philosophers, therefore Classical Theism is true.**

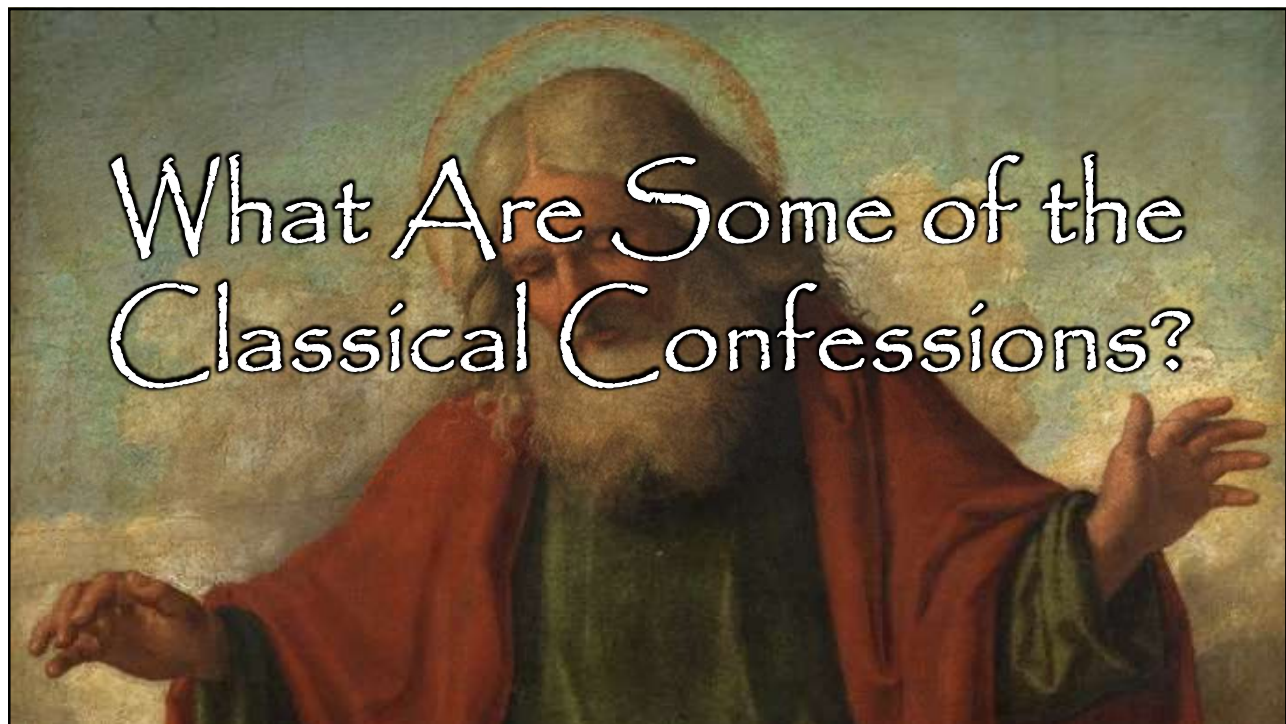


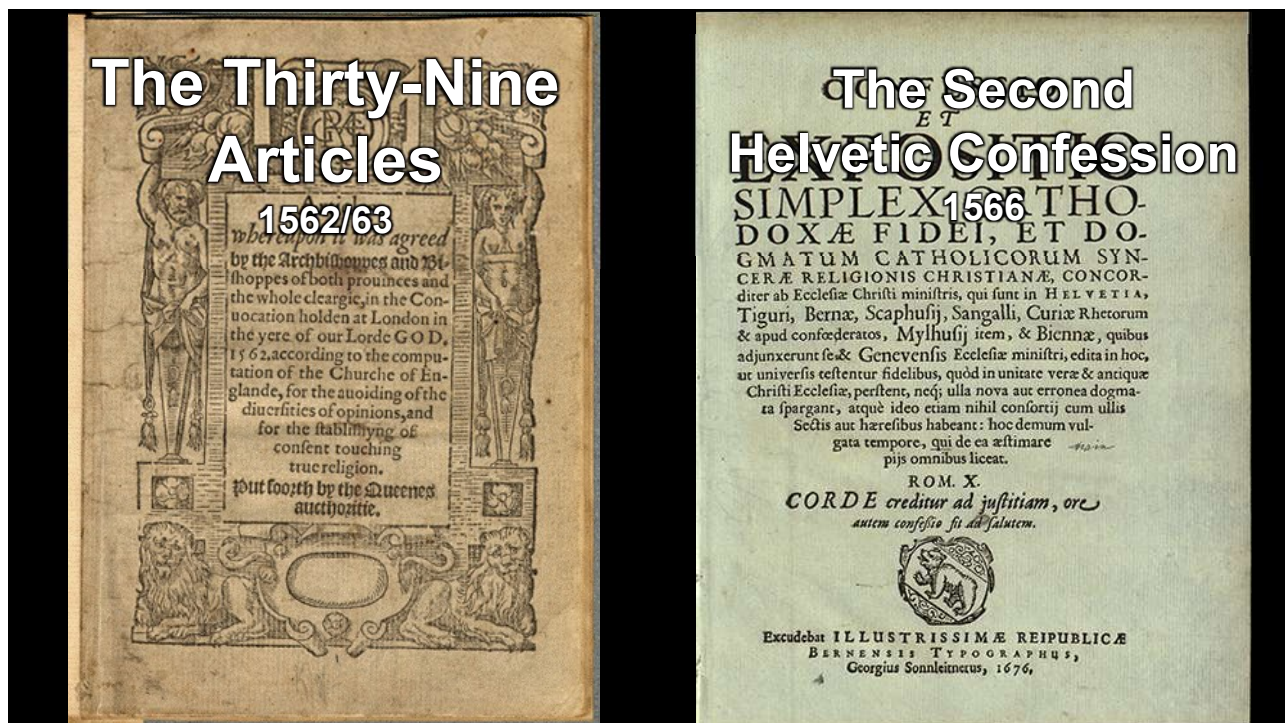
**I am suggesting that, given the illustrious history that Classical Theism commands, it behooves the contemporary Christian to take heed and closely consider the erosion of the classical attributes of God.**

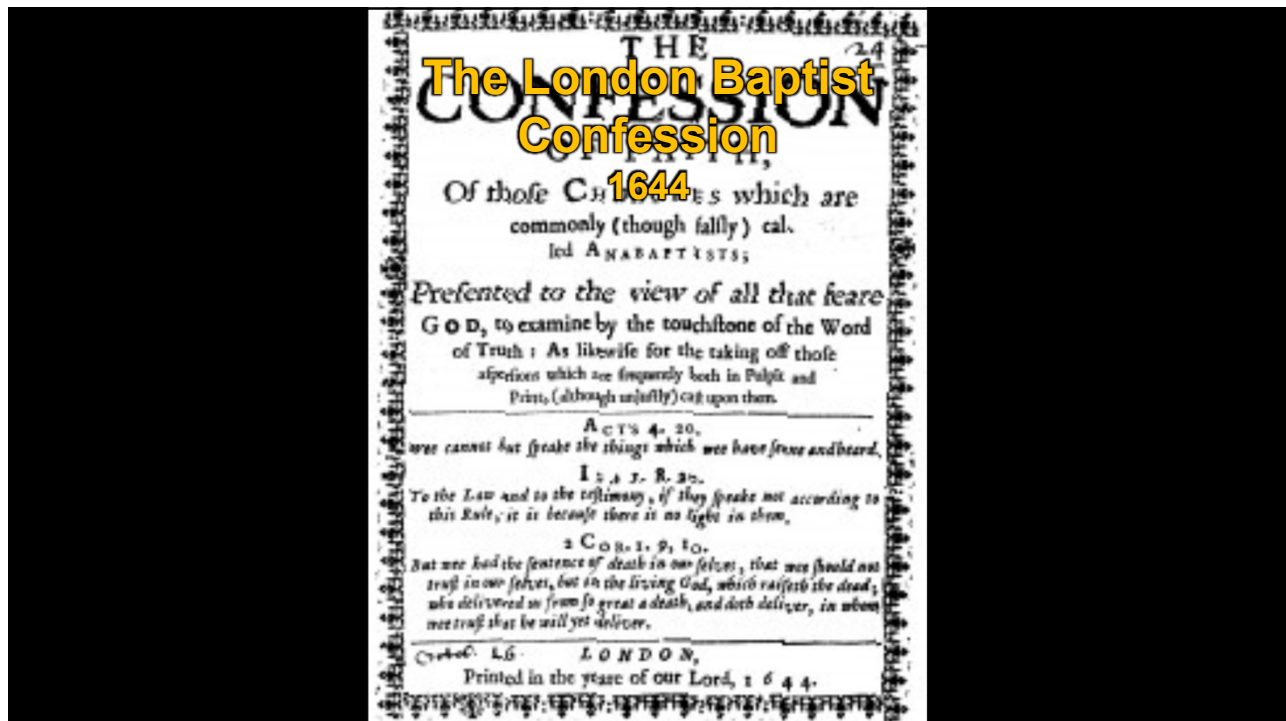


# Classical Confessions

*The same observations and qualifications, mutatis mutandis, will apply to the various confessions cited throughout.*









# The Westminster Confession of Faith

1646

**The Savoy Declaration**  
1658

DECLARATION  
FAITH ORDER  
Owned and practised in the  
Congregational Churches  
IN  
ENGLAND;  
*Agreed upon and consented unto*  
By their  
ELDERS and MESSENGERS  
IN  
Their Meeting at the SAVOY,  
Octob. 12. 1658.

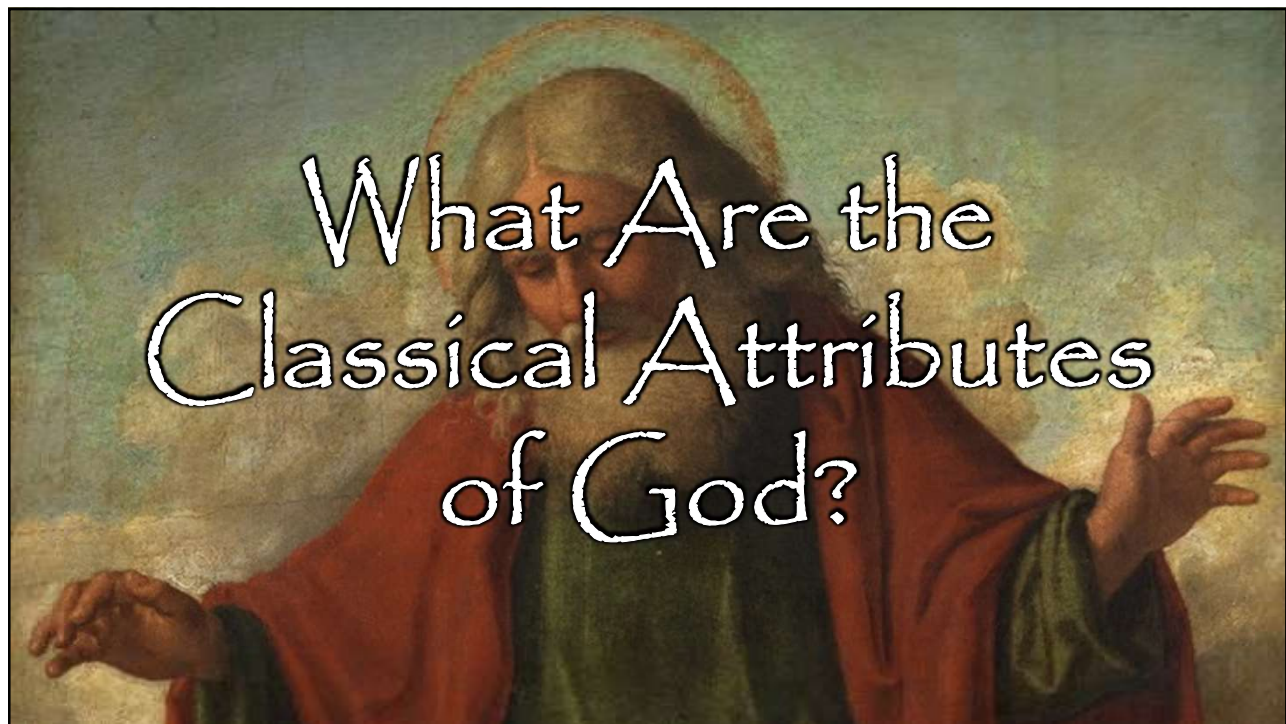
LONDON  
Printed for D.L. And are to be sold in Paul's Church-yard, Fleet-  
Street, and Westminster-Hall, 1659.]

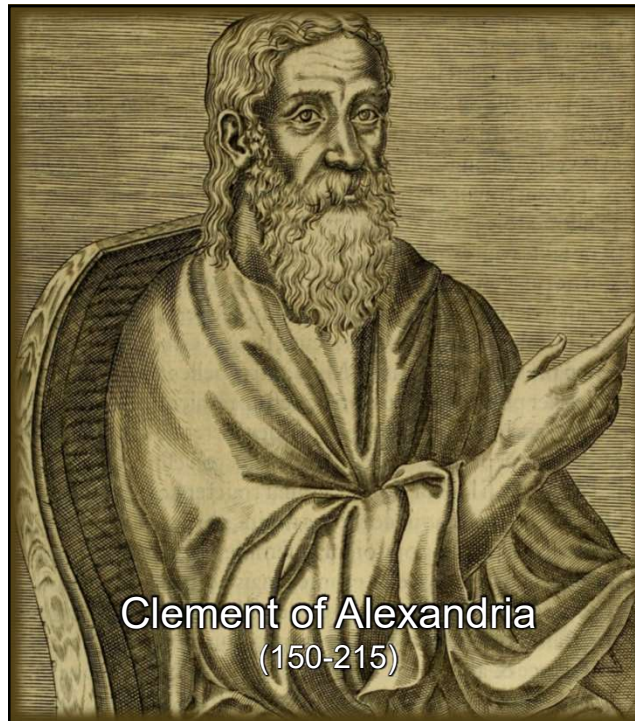
**The London Baptist Confession**  
1677

CONFESSION  
OF  
FAITH  
OF MANY  
ELDERS and BRETHREN  
CONGREGATIONS  
OF  
Christians (baptized upon Profession of  
their Faith) in London and the Coun-  
try.

*With the Heart man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the  
Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation, Rom. 10. 10.  
Search the Scriptures, John 5: 39.*

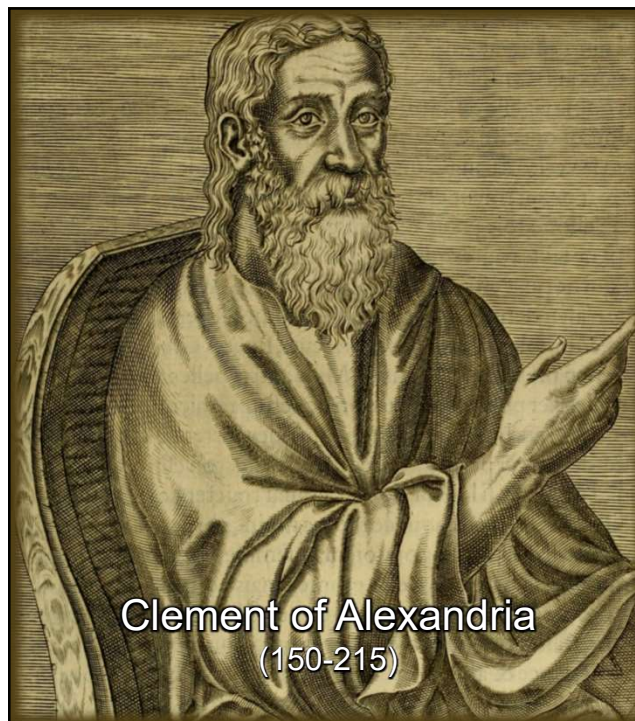
London, Printed for Benjamin Harris, and are to be Sold at  
his Shop at the Stationers Arms in Sweetings Rents, in  
Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1677.





Clement of Alexandria  
(150-215)

***"God is both invisible and ineffable ... It is therefore particularly hard to describe the first and original cause, which is the source of the existence of everything else which is or has been. For how is one to speak about that which is neither a genus nor a differentia nor a species nor an individuality nor a number—***



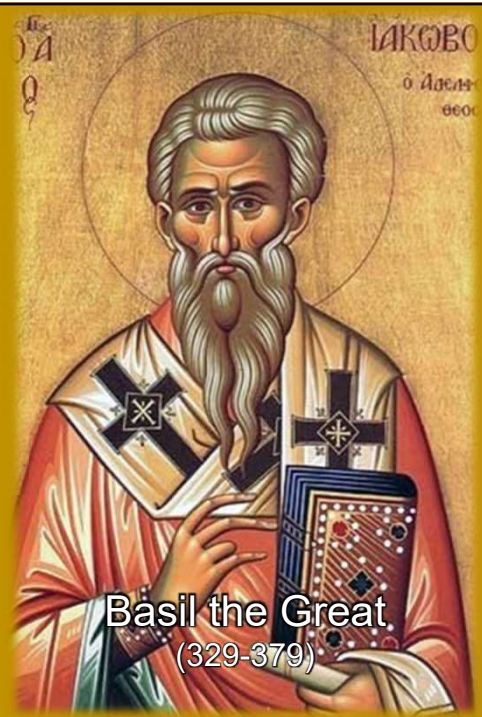
Clement of Alexandria  
(150-215)

***"in other words which is neither any kind of accidental property nor the subject of any accidental property? ... Nor can one speak of him as having parts."***

[Miscellanies 5, xii, 78-82, in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. Documents in Early Christian Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4.6]

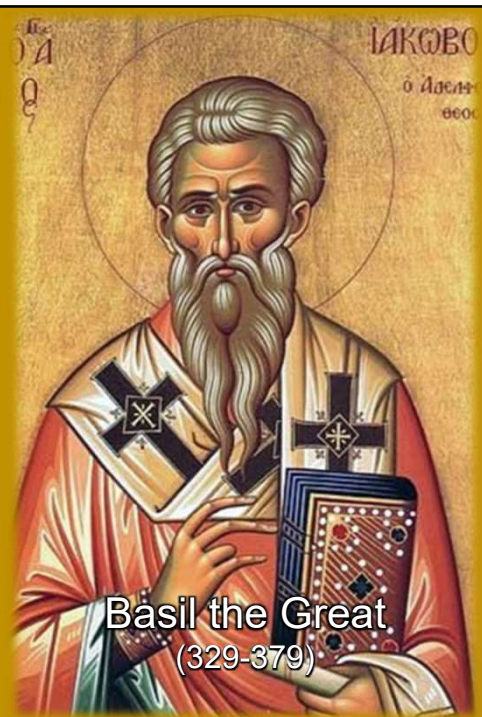
***"The word 'to know' has a variety of meanings. For what we say we know is God's greatness, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providential care for us, and the justice of his judgment; but not his actual essence. ...***

[Letter 234 in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 10, 11]

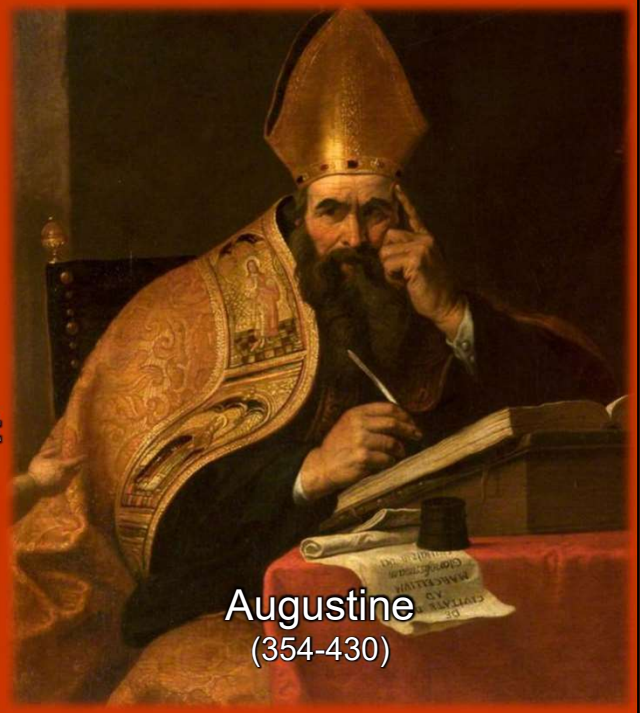


***"To deny that one knows the essence of God is not to admit that one has no knowledge of him. The many attributes that we have just enumerated provide a basis on which we form our conception of God. ... His attributes are various, but his essence is simple."***

[Letter 234 in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 10, 11]



- ✓ Aseity
- ✓ Absolute
- ✓ Supreme Being Itself
- ✓ Uncreated
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Omnipresent
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Timeless
- ✓ Transcendent

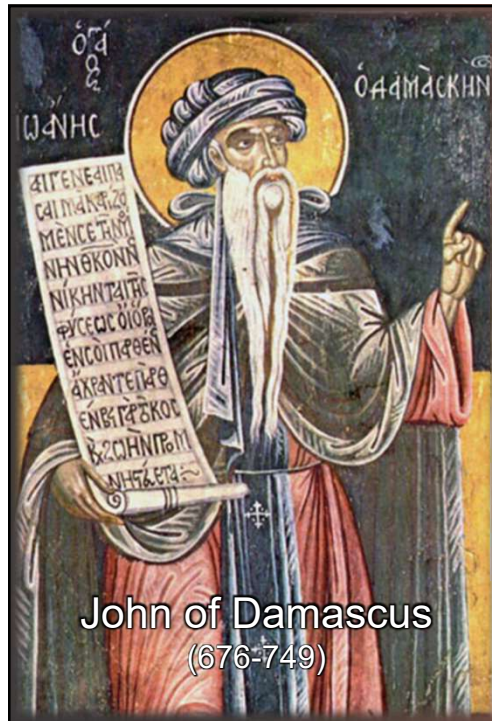


Augustine  
(354-430)



John of Damascus  
(676-749)

*"We believe, then, in One God, one beginning , having no beginning, uncreated, unbegotten, imperishable and immortal, everlasting, infinite, uncircumscribed, boundless, of infinite power, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, without flux, passionless, unchangeable, unalterable, unseen, the fountain of goodness and justice, the light of the mind, inaccessible; a power known by no measure, measurable only by His own will alone (for all things that He wills He can ), creator of all created things, seen or unseen, of all the maintainer and preserver, for all the provider, master and lord and king over all, with an endless and immortal kingdom:*



John of Damascus  
(676-749)

*"having no contrary, filling all, by nothing encompassed, but rather Himself the encompasser and maintainer and original possessor of the universe, occupying all essences intact and extending beyond all things, and being separate from all essence as being super-essential and above all things and absolute God, absolute goodness, and absolute fullness : determining all sovereignties and ranks, being placed above all sovereignty and rank, above essence and life and word and thought: being Himself very light and goodness and life and essence,*



John of Damascus  
(676-749)

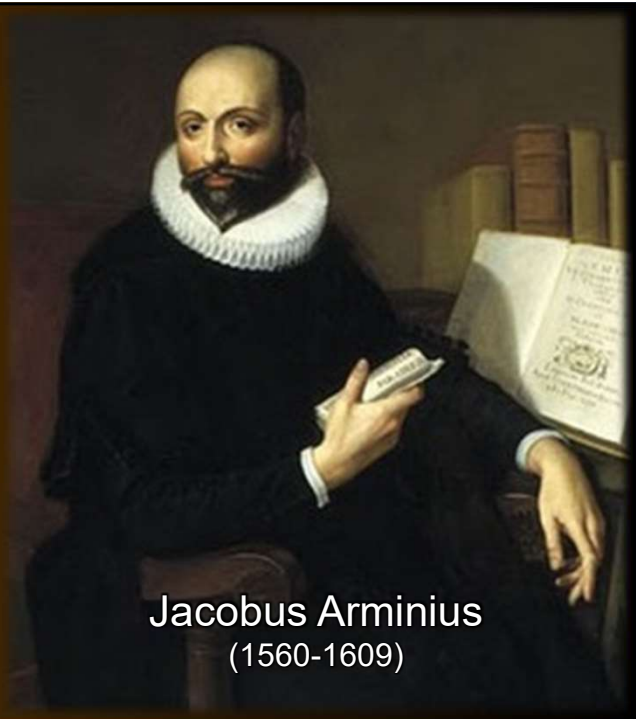
*"inasmuch as He does not derive His being from another, that is to say, of those things that exist: but being Himself the fountain of being to all that is, of life to the living, of reason to those that have reason; to all the cause of all good: perceiving all things even before they have become: one essence, one divinity, one power, one will, one energy, one beginning, one authority, one dominion, one sovereignty, made known in three perfect subsistences and adored with one adoration, believed in and ministered to by all rational creation , united without confusion and divided without separation (which indeed transcends thought)."*

[An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith, chap. 8; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33041.htm>]]

✓ Simple	✓ True	
✓ Perfect	✓ Living	
✓ Good	✓ Personal	
✓ Infinite	✓ Loving	
✓ Immutable	✓ Just	
✓ Eternal	✓ Merciful	
✓ One	✓ Providential	
✓ Omniscient	✓ Omnipresent	
<p>Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)</p>		

	✓ Eternal	✓ Just
	✓ Self-Existent	✓ True
	✓ Simple	✓ Righteous
	✓ Compassionate	✓ Holy
	✓ Good	✓ One
	✓ Merciful	✓ Incorporeal
<p>John Calvin (1509-1564)</p>		

- ✓ Simplicity
- ✓ Infinity
- ✓ Eternity
- ✓ Immensity
- ✓ Impassibility
- ✓ Immutability
- ✓ Incorruptibility
- ✓ Unity
- ✓ Good
- ✓ Life
- ✓ Omniscient

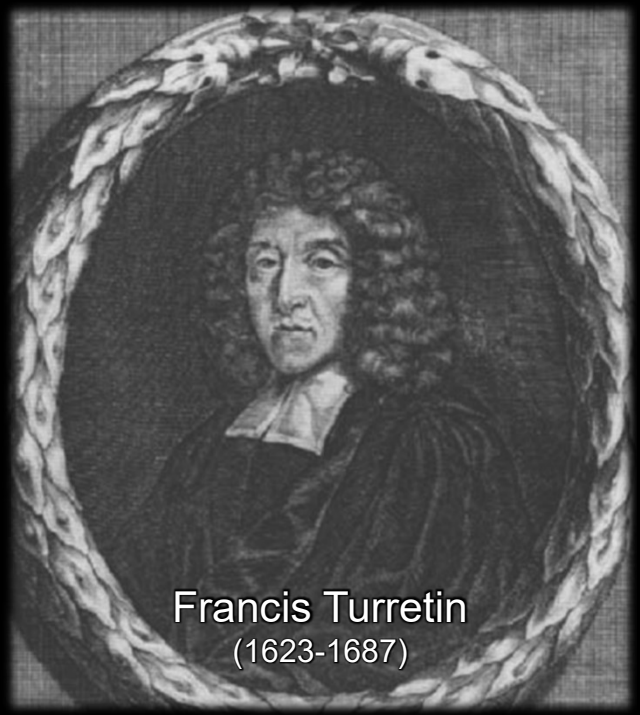


Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)



John Owen  
(1616-1683)

- ✓ One
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Omnipresent
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Good
- ✓ Perfect
- ✓ Loving
- ✓ Gracious
- ✓ Merciful
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Sovereign



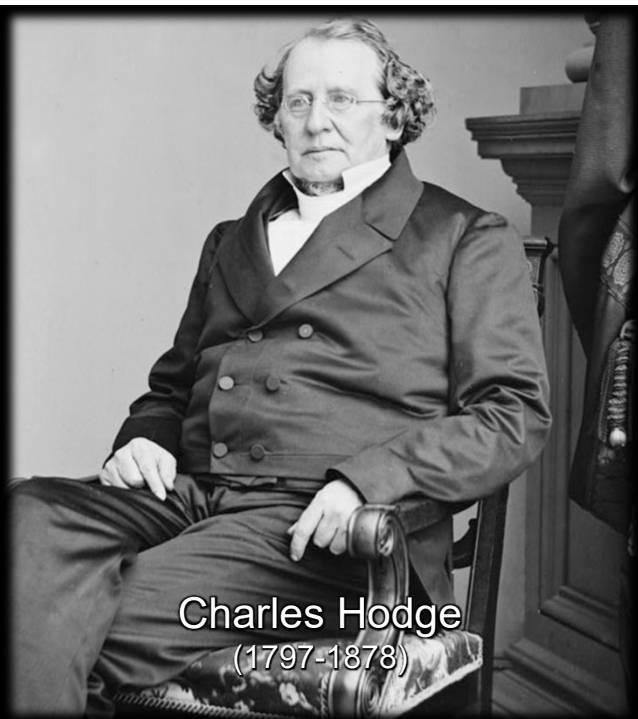
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Perfect
- ✓ Good
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Omnipresent
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ One
- ✓ True
- ✓ Living
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Merciful
- ✓ Loving
- ✓ Providential

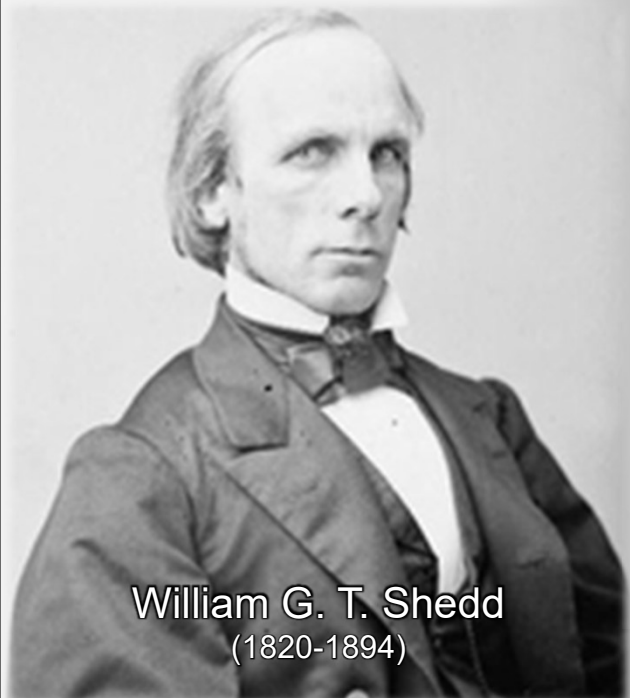


- ✓ Spirit
- ✓ Immaterial
- ✓ Incomprehensible
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Omnipresent
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Living
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Wise
- ✓ Provident
- ✓ Loving
- ✓ Gracious
- ✓ Merciful
- ✓ Good
- ✓ Wrathful
- ✓ Holy
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Truthful
- ✓ Faithful
- ✓ Perfect
- ✓ One



- ✓ Spirit
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Personal
- ✓ Intelligent
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Holy
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Good
- ✓ True
- ✓ Sovereign



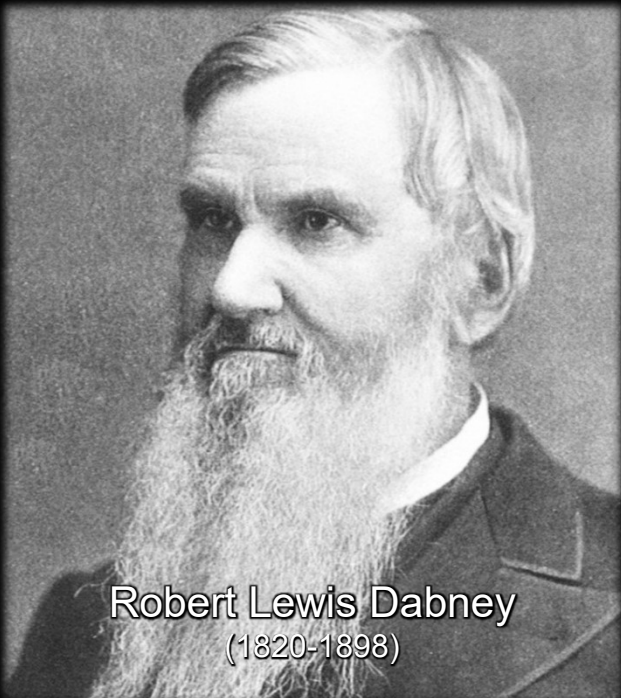


William G. T. Shedd  
(1820-1894)

- ✓ Self-Existence
- ✓ Simplicity
- ✓ Infinity
- ✓ Eternity
- ✓ Immutability
- ✓ Omnipotence
- ✓ Omniscience
- ✓ Omnipresence
- ✓ Truth
- ✓ Goodness
- ✓ Holiness
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Mercy
- ✓ Wise

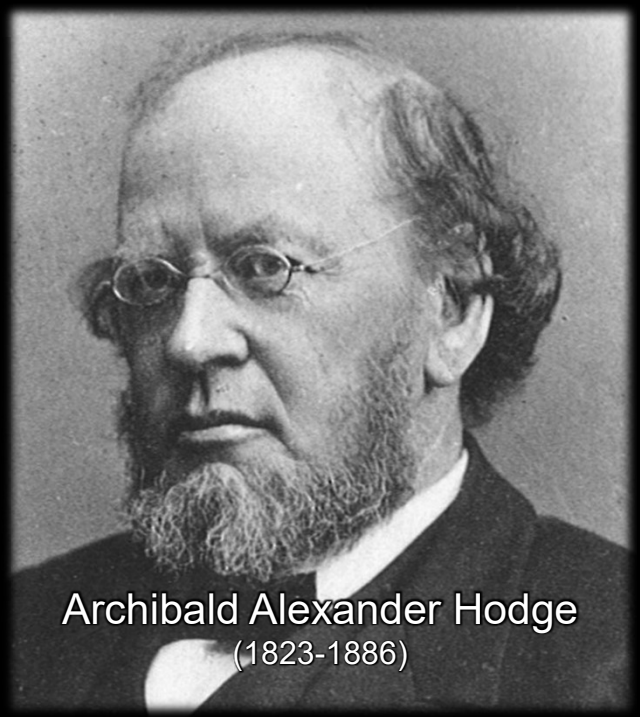
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ One
- ✓ Spirit
- ✓ Immense
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Good
- ! Simplicity**

**(Lectures in Systematic Theology, pp. 43-44)**

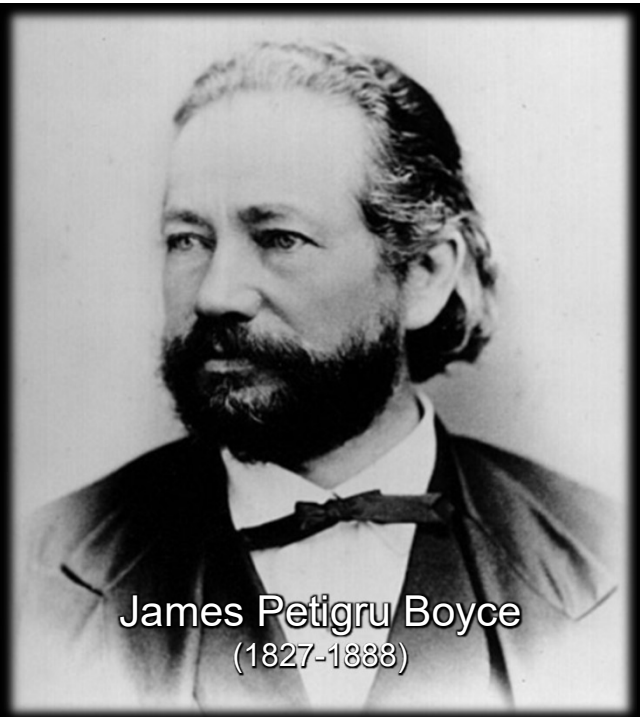


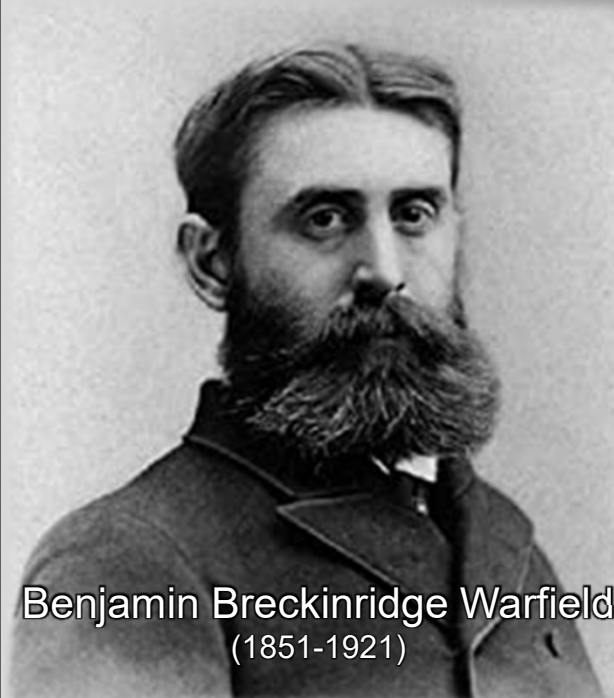
Robert Lewis Dabney  
(1820-1898)

- ✓ One
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Absolute
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Self-existent
- ✓ Spirit
- ✓ Necessary
- ✓ Immense
- ✓ Free
- ✓ Intelligent
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Sovereign
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Righteous
- ✓ Good
- ✓ True
- ✓ Faithful
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Holy



- ✓ Simplicity
- ✓ Infinity
- ✓ Eternity
- ✓ Immensity
- ✓ Omnipresence
- ✓ Immutability
- ✓ Omnipotence
- ✓ Omniscience
- ✓ Holiness
- ✓ Goodness
- ✓ Love
- ✓ Truth
- ✓ Justice





Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield  
(1851-1921)

- ✓ Self-existence
- ✓ Independence
- ✓ Unity
- ✓ Uniqueness
- ✓ Unchangeableness
- ✓ Omnipresence
- ✓ Infinite knowledge
- ✓ Infinite wisdom
- ✓ infinite freedom
- ✓ infinite power
- ✓ infinite truth
- ✓ righteousness
- ✓ holiness
- ✓ goodness

- ✓ Personal
- ✓ Omniscient
- ✓ Omnipotent
- ✓ Holy
- ✓ Just
- ✓ Loving
- ✓ Good
- ✓ True
- ✓ Free
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ One
- ✓ Infinite
- ✓ Eternal
- ✓ Immutable
- ✓ Omnipresent
- ✓ Sovereign



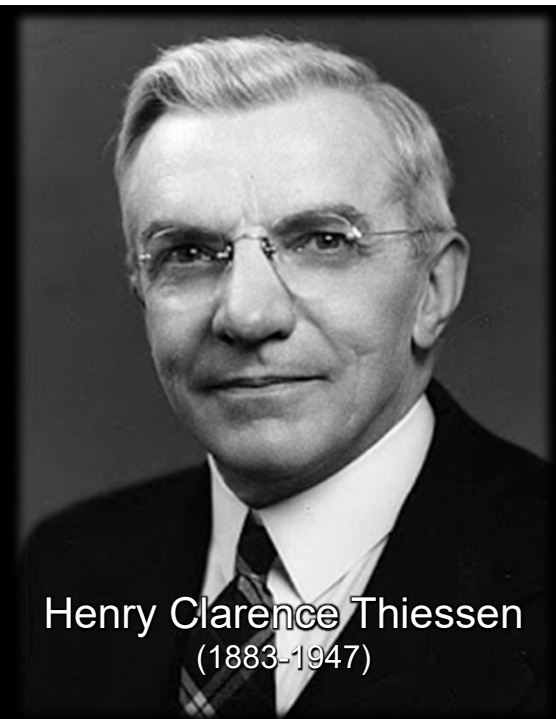
Lewis Sperry Chafer  
(1871-1952)

✓ Self-Existent	✓ Omniscient
✓ Immutable	✓ True
✓ Infinite	✓ Good
✓ One	✓ Holy
✓ Spirit	✓ Righteous
✓ Eternal	✓ Sovereign
✓ Omnipresent	✓ Free

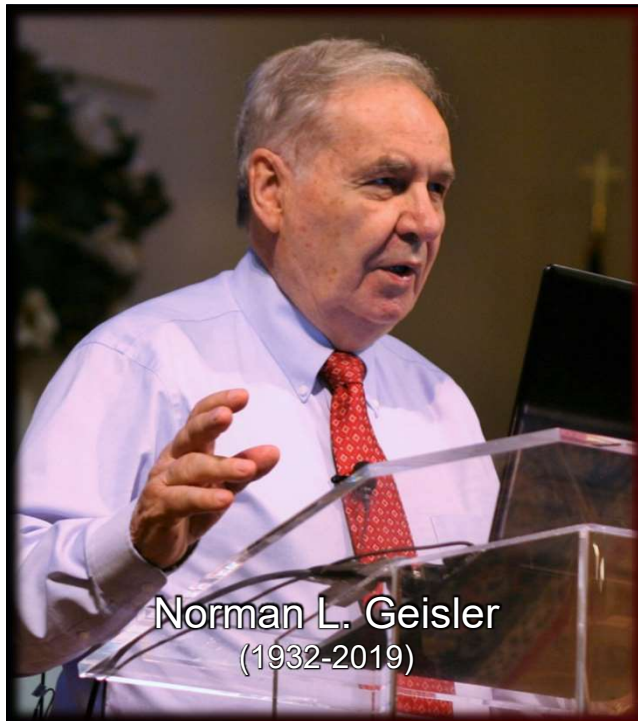


Louis Berkhof  
(1873-1957)

✓ Spiritual	✓ Eternal
✓ Immaterial	✓ Omnipresent
✓ Incorporeal	✓ Omniscient
✓ Invisible	✓ Omnipotent
✓ Living	✓ Immutable
✓ Personal	✓ Holy
✓ Self-existent	✓ Righteous
✓ Immense	✓ Good



Henry Clarence Thiessen  
(1883-1947)



Norman L. Geisler  
(1932-2019)

- ✓ Pure Actuality
- ✓ Simplicity
- ✓ Aseity
- ✓ Necessity
- ✓ Immutability
- ✓ Eternality
- ✓ Impassibility
- ✓ Infinity
- ✓ Immateriality
- ✓ Immensity
- ✓ Omnipotence
- ✓ Omnipresence
- ✓ Omniscience
- ✓ Wisdom
- ✓ Light
- ✓ Majesty
- ✓ Beauty
- ✓ Ineffability
- ✓ Life
- ✓ Immortality
- ✓ Unity
- ✓ Holiness
- ✓ Righteousness
- ✓ Truthfulness
- ✓ Goodness
- ✓ Mercy



## Fourth Lateran Council 1215

***"We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God, eternal and immense, omnipotent, unchangeable, incomprehensible, and ineffable, ... absolutely simple; ... always without beginning and end ... Creator of all things invisible and visible, spiritual and corporeal, who from the beginning of time and by His omnipotent power made from nothing creatures both spiritual and corporeal, angelic, namely, and mundane, and then human, as it were, common, composed of spirit and body."***

[Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV, Canon 1, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>, accessed 07/05/22]

## The Belgic Confession 1561

***"Art. I: We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good."***

## The Thirty-Nine Articles

1562/63

*"Art. I: There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible."*

## The Second Helvetic Confession

1566

*"Chap. 3: God is one in essence or nature, subsisting by Himself, all sufficient in Himself, invisible, without a body, infinite, eternal, ... the chief good, living, quickening, and preserver of all things. Almighty, and exceeding wise, gentle or merciful, just and true."*

## The Irish Articles 1615

*"§8. There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible."*

## The London Baptist Confession 1644

*"II. God is of Himself ... that is, neither from another, nor of another, nor by another, nor for another: But is a Spirit ... who as His being is of Himself ... so He gives being, moving, and preservation to all other things, being in Himself eternal, most holy, every way infinite in greatness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, truth."*

# The Westminster Confession of Faith

1646

*II, 1. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.*

# The Westminster Confession of Faith

1646

*II, 2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*

## The Savoy Declaration

1658

*"Chap. II. There is but one only living and true God who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth ...*

## The Savoy Declaration

1658

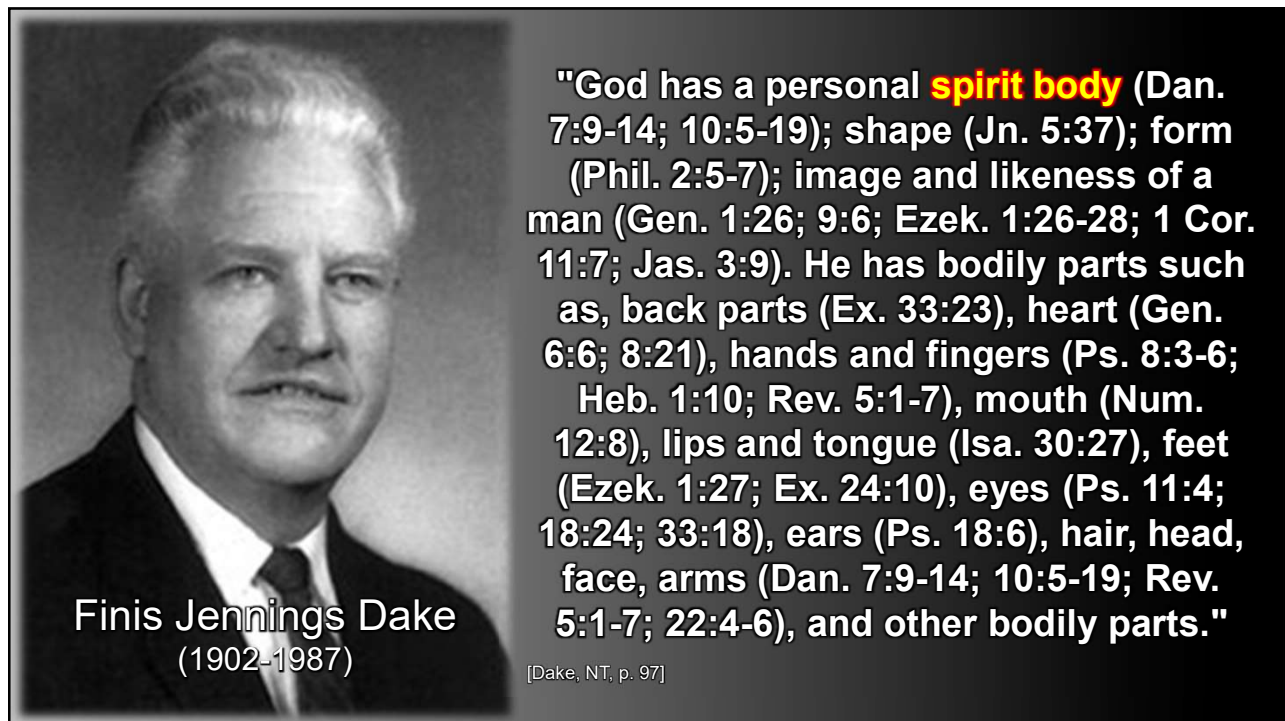
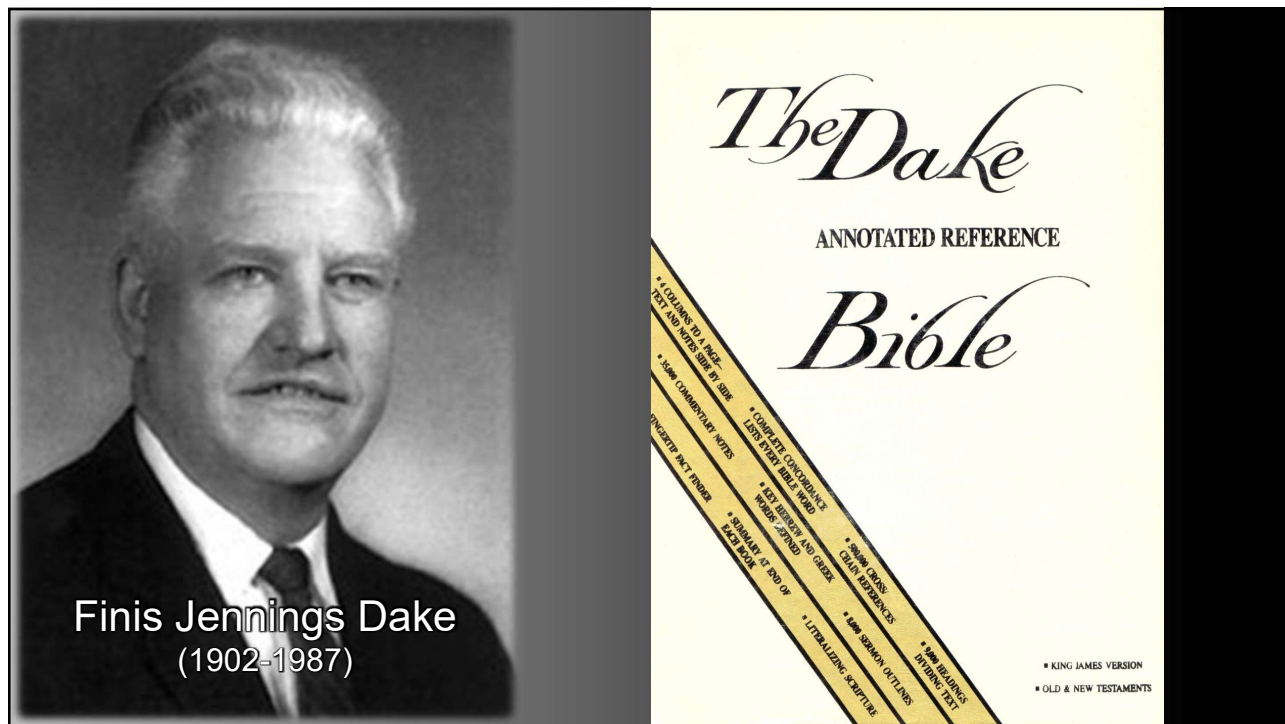
*"God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in, and of himself; and is alone, in, and unto himself, all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature ... He is the alone fountain of all being. His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."*

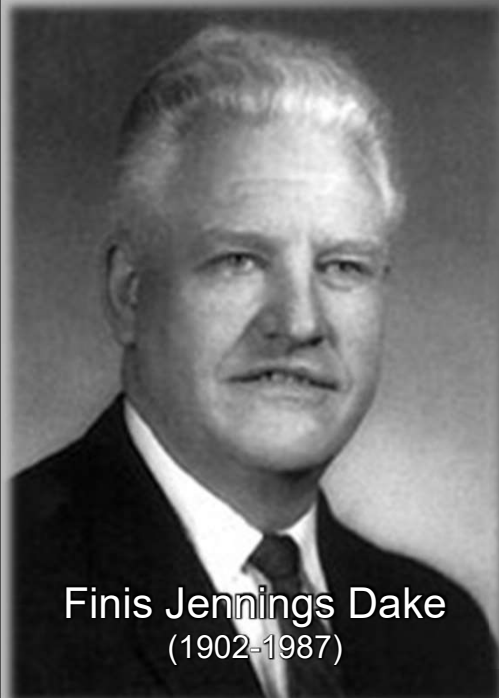
## The London Baptist Confession 1677

*"The Lord our God is but one only living and true God whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions ..."*



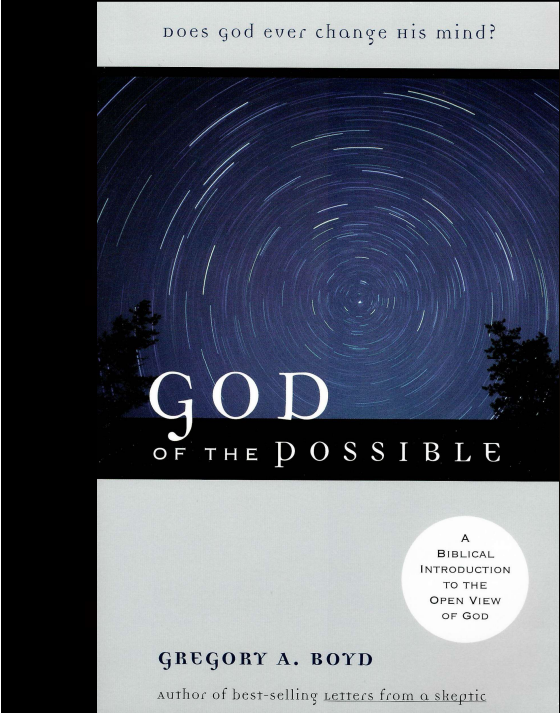
How Is This a  
Concern for  
Classical Theists?





**Finis Jennings Dake**  
(1902-1987)

7:9-14; 10:5-19) (Jn. 5:37)  
(Phil. 2:5-7)  
(Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor.  
11:7; Jas. 3:9)  
(Ex. 33:23) (Gen.  
6:6; 8:21) (Ps. 8:3-6;  
Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7) (Num.  
12:8) (Isa. 30:27)  
(Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10) (Ps. 11:4;  
18:24; 33:18) (Ps. 18:6)  
(Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev.  
5:1-7; 22:4-6)

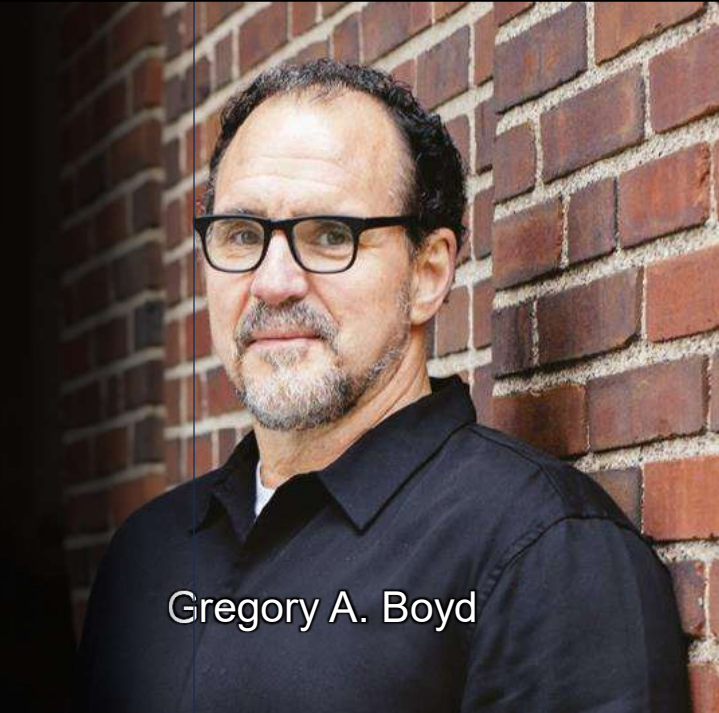


does god ever change his mind?

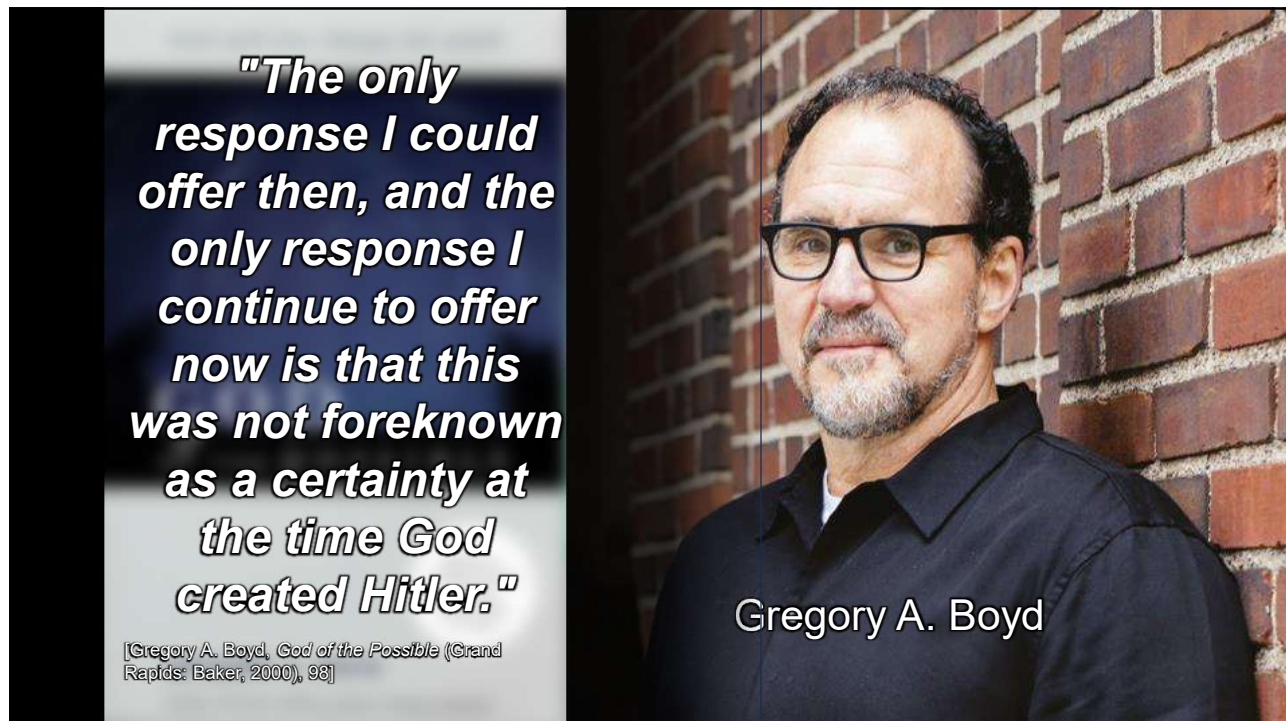
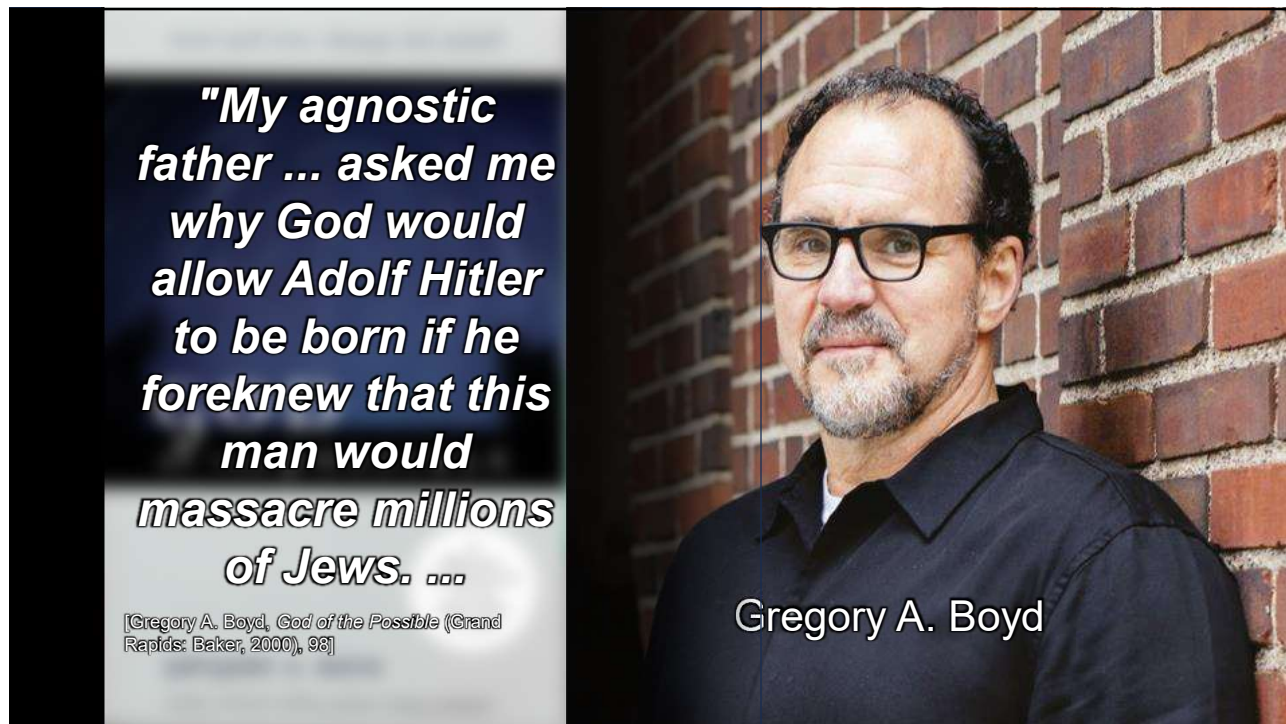
**GOD**  
OF THE POSSIBLE

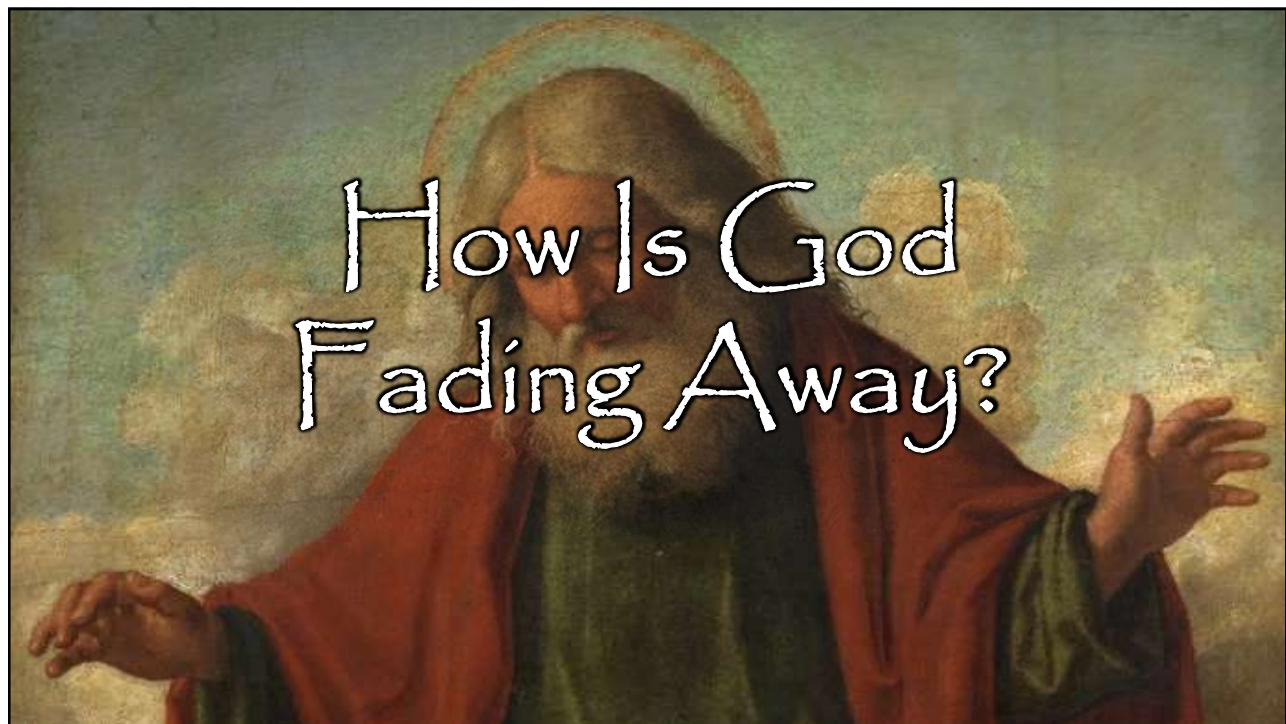
A  
BIBLICAL  
INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
OPEN VIEW  
OF GOD

**GREGORY A. BOYD**  
author of best-selling *Letters from a Skeptic*



**Gregory A. Boyd**





Simplicity

Omniscience

Immutability

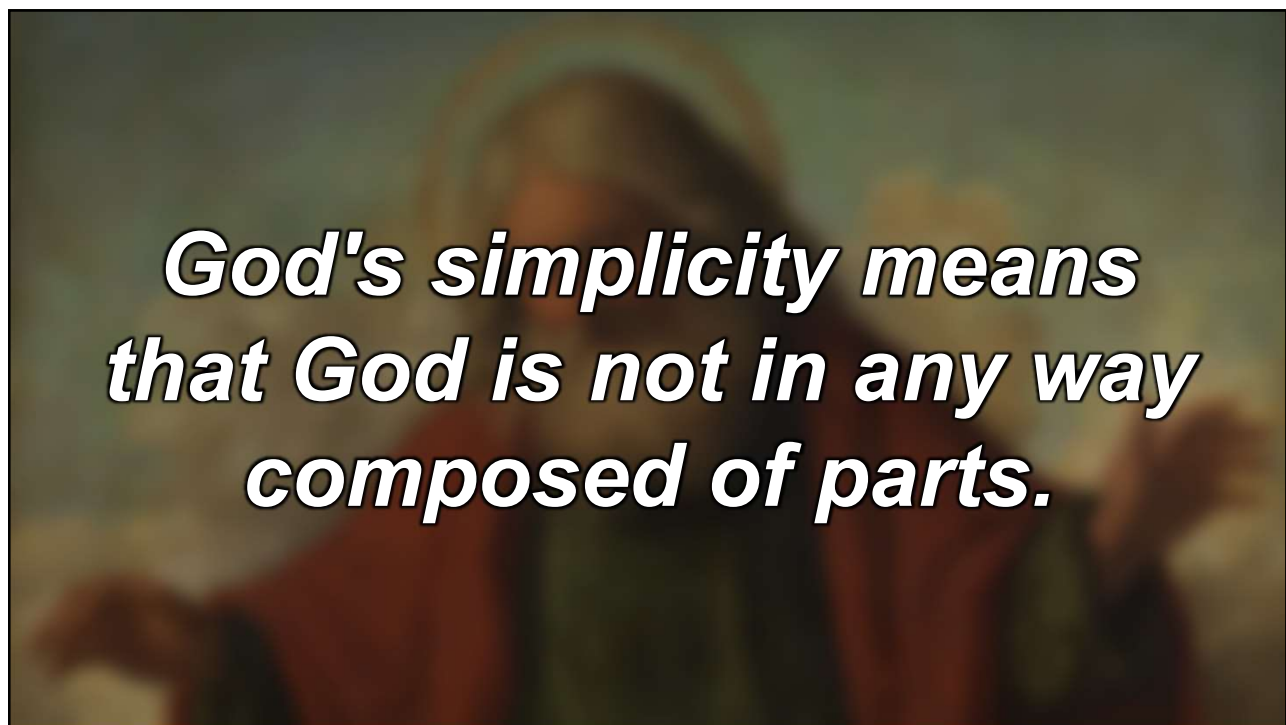
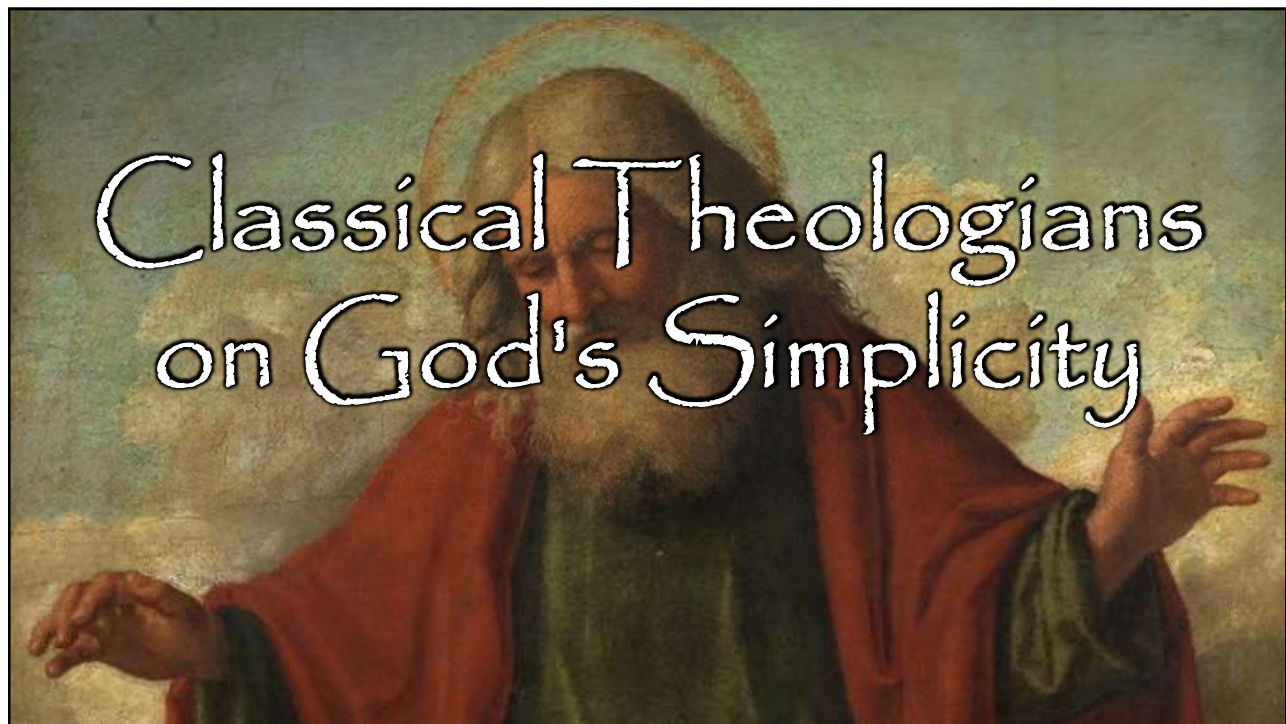
Timelessness

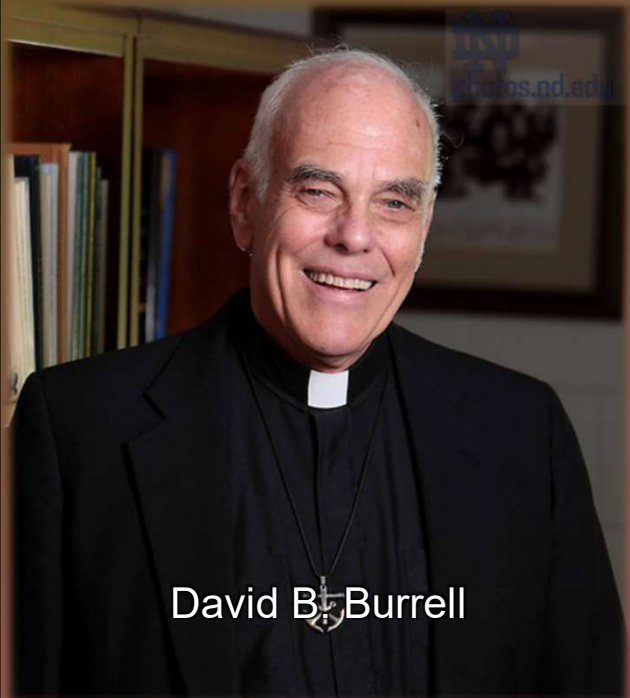
Impassibility

Immateriality

Contending for the  
Classical Attributes  
of God

Classical Theism in  
Twelve (Not So)  
Easy Steps



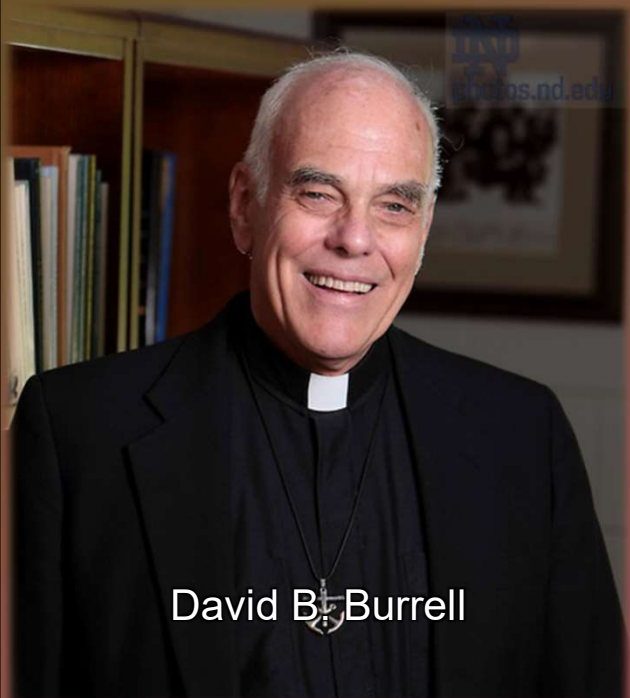


David B. Burrell

Knowing  
the  
Unknowable  
God

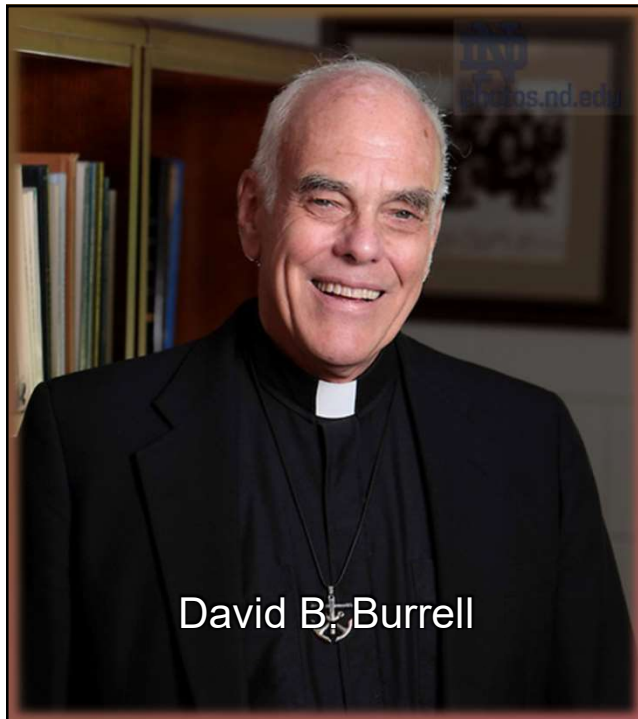
Ibn-Sina  
Maimonides  
Aquinas

DAVID B.  
BURRELL, C.S.C.



David B. Burrell

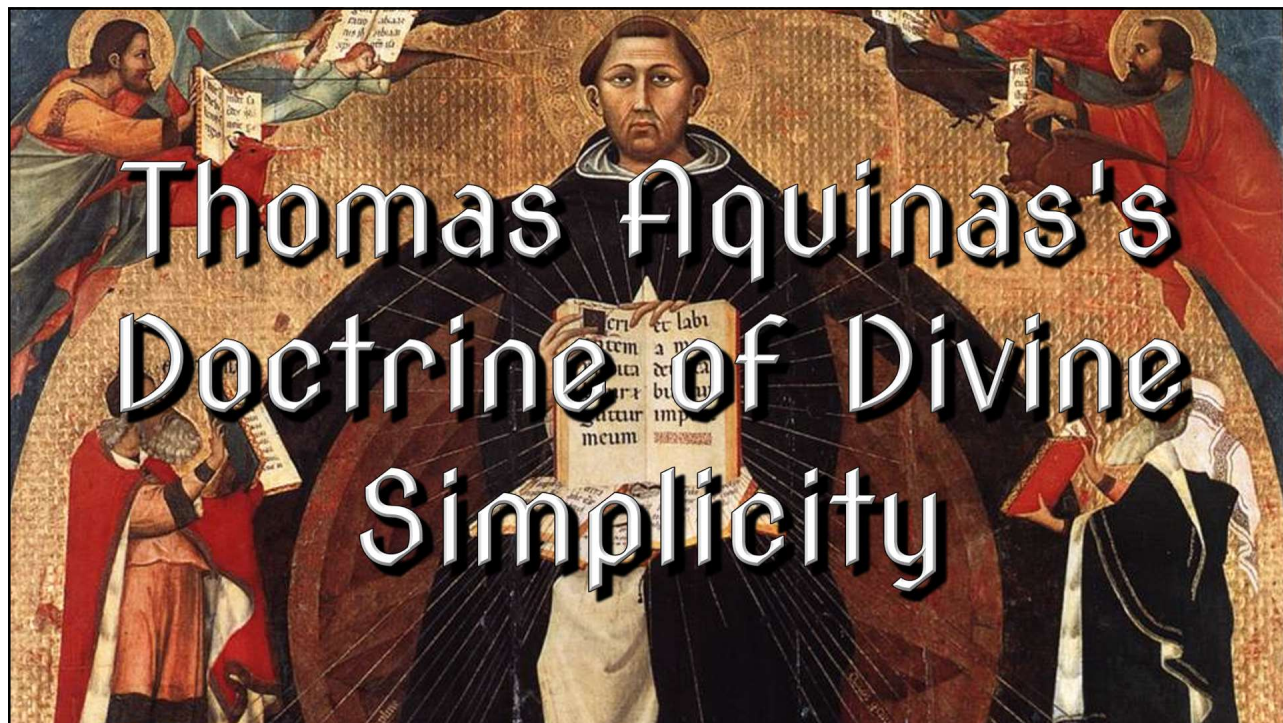
"The best way I know to put this is to remind ourselves that simpleness is not an attribute of God, properly speaking... That is, we do not include 'simpleness' in that list of terms we wish to attribute to God—classically, 'living', 'wise', 'willing'. It is rather that *simpleness* defines the manner in which such properties might be attributed to God.



David B. Burrell

"When we say God is simple, we are speaking not about God directly but about God's ontological constitution; just as when we say that Eloise is composite, we are not predicating anything about her in any of the nine recognizable ways of Aristotle."

[David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 46]



***"On these accounts He came to us; though He was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a body after our fashion ... being invested with a body, yet not circumscribing the unmixed simplicity of His Godhead."***

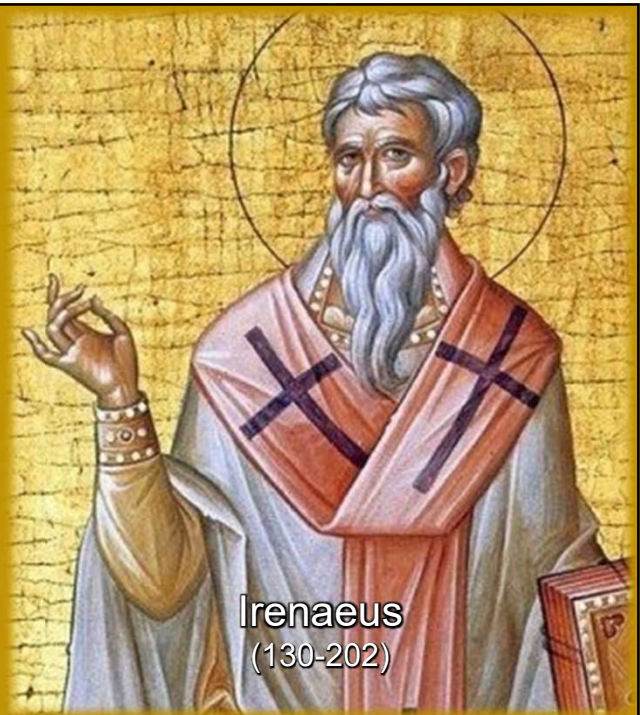
[From the *Discourse on the Cross*, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/melito.html>, accessed 07/24/23.]



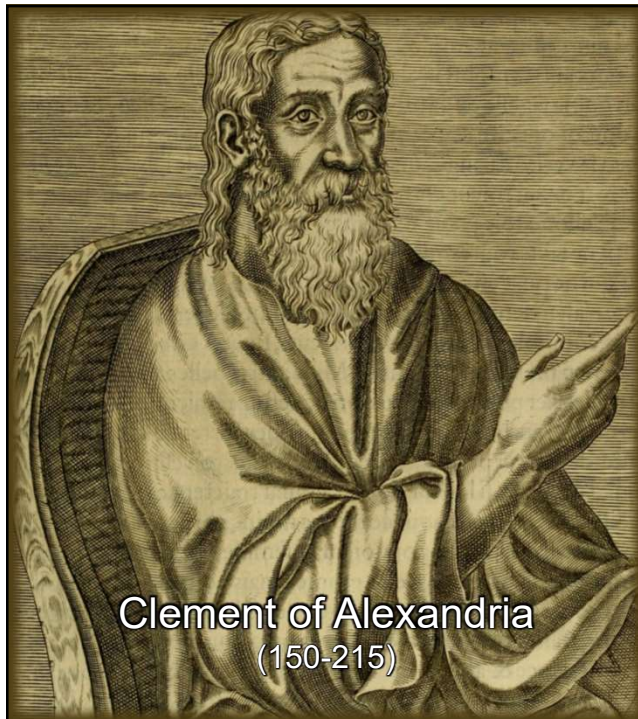
**Melito of Sardis**  
(d. 180)

***"He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself."***

[*Against Heresies* II, 13, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anh01.html>]



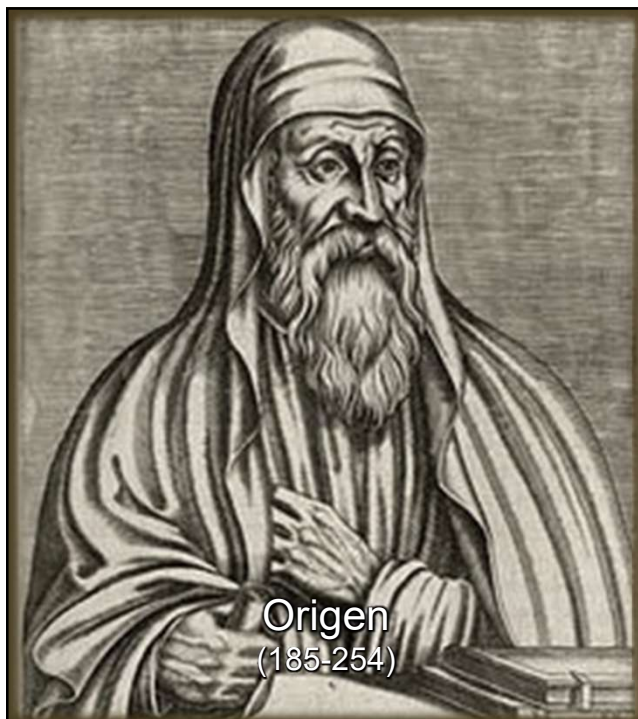
**Irenaeus**  
(130-202)



**Clement of Alexandria**  
(150-215)

***"God is both invisible and ineffable ... For how is one to speak about that which is neither a genus nor a differentia nor a species nor an individuality nor a number—in other words which is neither any kind of accidental property nor the subject of any accidental property? ... Nor can one speak of him as having parts."***

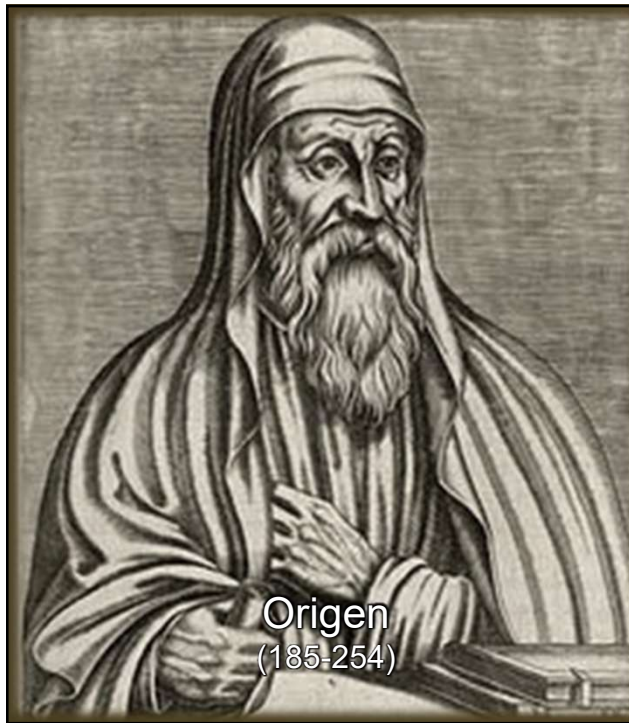
[Miscellanies 5, xii, 78-82, in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4, 6]



**Origen**  
(185-254)

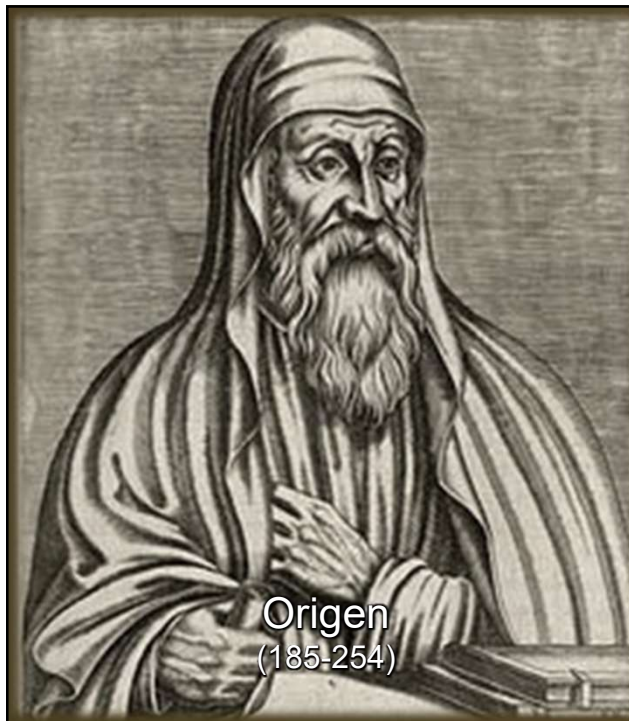
***"God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind ... But God, who is the beginning of all things, is not to be regarded as a composite being, lest perchance there should be found to exist elements prior to the beginning itself, out of which everything is composed, whatever that be which is called composite."***

[To the Bishops of Africa (*Ad Afros Epistola Synodica*), Chap. 7 "The Position that the Son is a Creature Inconsistent and Untenable"]



Origen  
(185-254)

*"God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts μονας [monas], and, so to speak, ἑνας [henas], and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning. But mind, for its movements or operations, needs no physical space, nor sensible magnitude, nor bodily shape, nor color, nor any other of those adjuncts which are the properties of body or matter.*



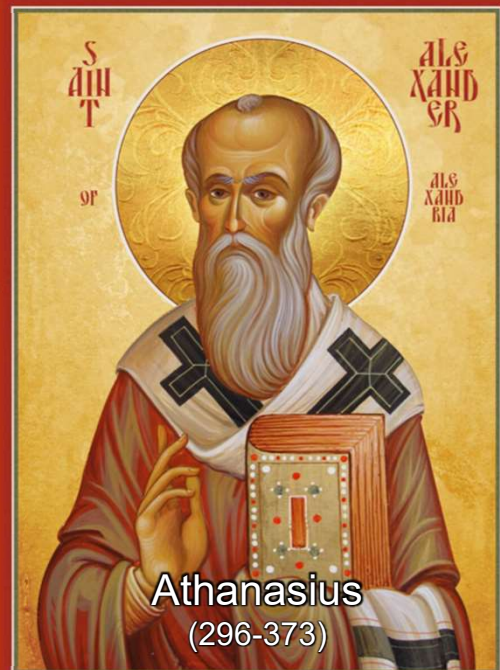
Origen  
(185-254)

*"Wherefore that simple and wholly intellectual nature can admit of no delay or hesitation in its movements or operations, lest the simplicity of the divine nature should appear to be circumscribed or in some degree hampered by such adjuncts, and lest that which is the beginning of all things should be found composite and differing, and that which ought to be free from all bodily intermixture, in virtue of being the one sole species of Deity, so to speak, should prove, instead of being one, to consist of many things."*

[Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.6, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, Ages Software CD ver. 2: 1997)]

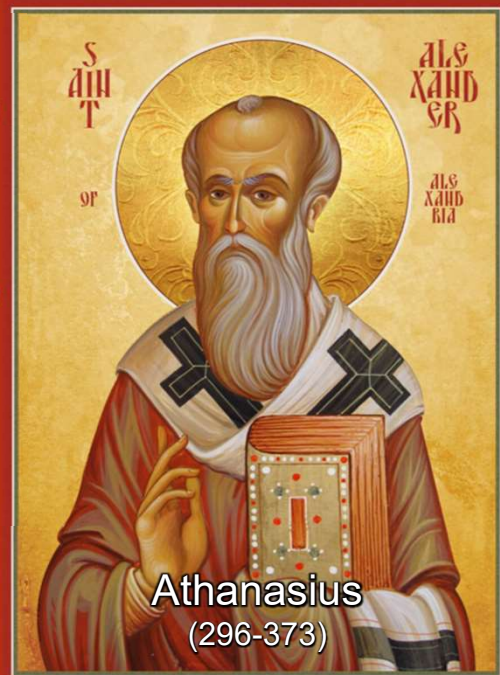
***"If then any man conceives God to be compound, as accident is in essence, or to have any external envelopment, and to be encompassed, or as if there is aught about Him which completes the essence, so that when we say 'God,' or name 'Father,' we do not signify the invisible and incomprehensible essence, but something about it, then let them complain of the Council's stating that the Son was from the essence of God; but let them reflect, that in thus considering they utter two blasphemies; for they make God corporeal, and they falsely say that the Lord is not Son of the very Father, but of what is about Him. But if God be simple, as He is, it follows that in saying 'God' and naming 'Father,' we name nothing as if about Him, but signify his essence itself."***

[Defense of the Nicene Definition (De Decretis) Chap. 5 "Defense of the Council's Phrases," §22]



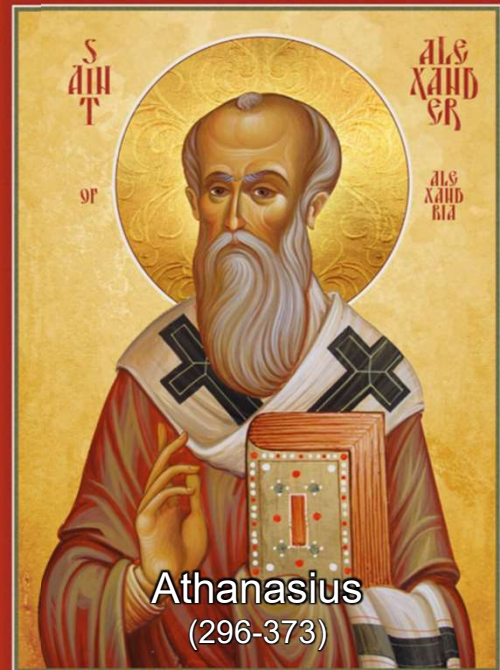
***"If it is from virtue, the antecedent of willing and not willing, and of moral progress, that you hold the Son to be like the Father; while these things fall under the category of quality; clearly you call God compound of quality and essence. But who will tolerate you when you say this? For God, who compounded all things to give them being, is not compound, nor of similar nature to the things made by Him through the Word. Far be the thought. For He is simple essence, in which quality is not, nor, as James says, 'any variableness or shadow of turning.'"***

[To the Bishops of Africa (Ad Afros Epistola Synodica), Chap. 7 "The Position that the Son is a Creature Inconsistent and Untenable"]

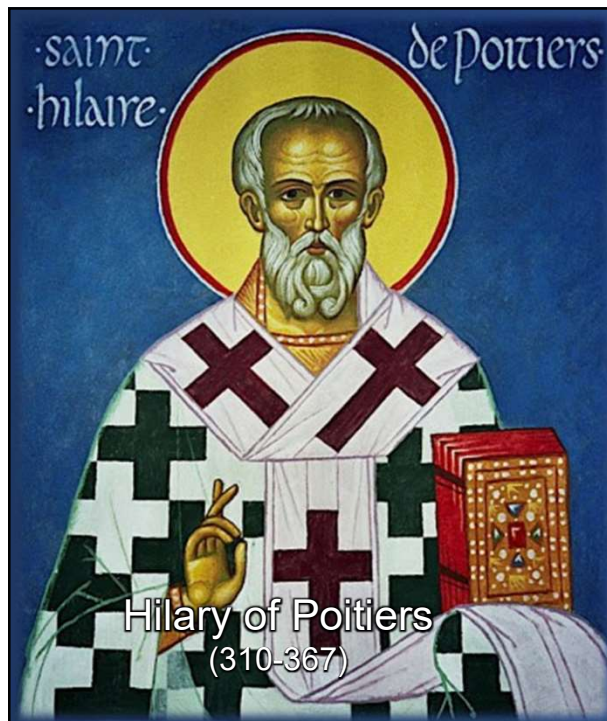


***"For God, who compounded all things to give them being, is not compound, nor of similar nature to the things made by Him through the Word. Far be the thought. For He is simple essence, in which quality is not, nor, as James says, 'any variableness or shadow of turning.' "***

[To the Bishops of Africa (Ad Afros Epistola Synodica), Chap. 7 "The Position that the Son is a Creature Inconsistent and Untenable"]



**Athanasius**  
(296-373)



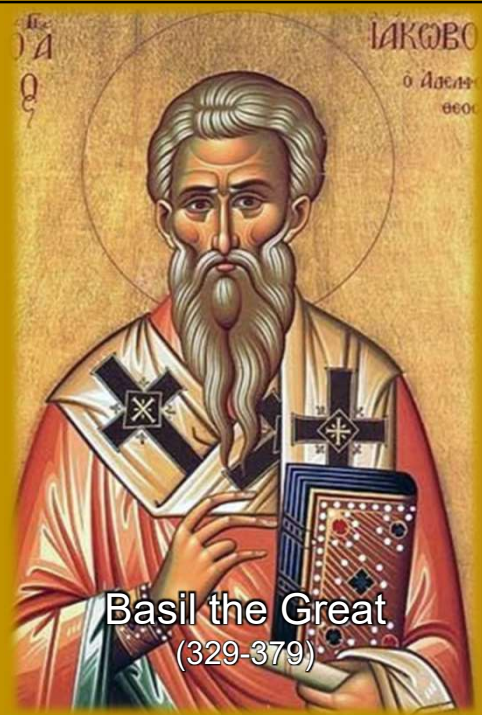
**Hilary of Poitiers**  
(310-367)

***"God is not after human fashion of a composite being, so that in Him there is a difference of kind between Possessor and Possessed; but all that He is, is life; a nature, that is, complete, absolute and infinite, not composed of dissimilar elements but with one life permeating the whole."***

[On the Trinity, viii, § 43, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/330208.htm>, accessed 07/05/22]

***"His attributes  
are various, but  
his essence is  
simple."***

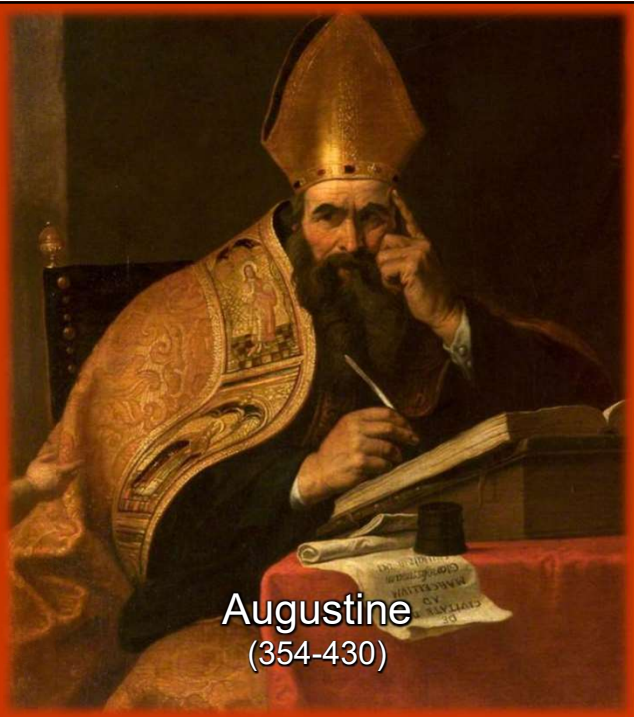
[Letter 234 in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 11]



**Basil the Great**  
(329-379)

***"There is then  
one sole Good,  
which is simple,  
and therefore  
unchangeable;  
and that is God."***

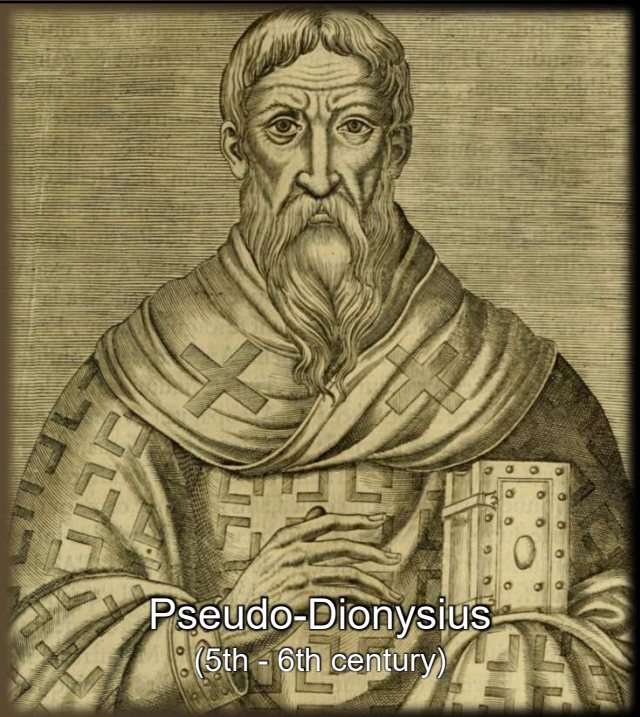
[*City of God*, XI, 10, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), 440]



**Augustine**  
(354-430)

***"Hence, we see in almost every theological treatise the Godhead religiously celebrated, both as Monad and unity, on account of the simplicity and oneness of Its supernatural indivisibility ..."***

[On the Divine Names, Caput I, §IV,  
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/dionysius/works.i.iii.i.html>, accessed 07/05/22]



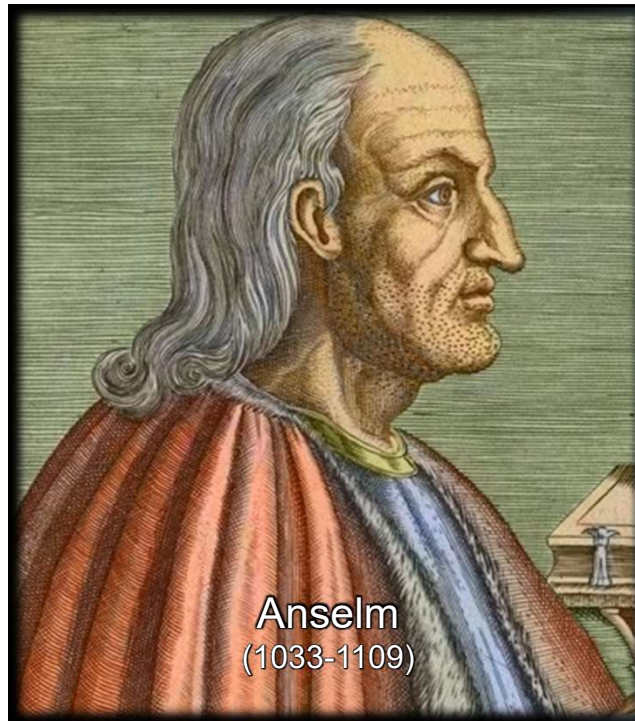
**Pseudo-Dionysius**  
 (5th - 6th century)



**John of Damascus**  
 (676-749)

***"We believe, then, in One God, one beginning, having no beginning, uncreate, unbegotten, imperishable and immortal, everlasting, infinite, uncircumscribed, boundless, of infinite power, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, without flux, passionless, unchangeable, unalterable, unseen, the fountain of goodness and justice, ..."***

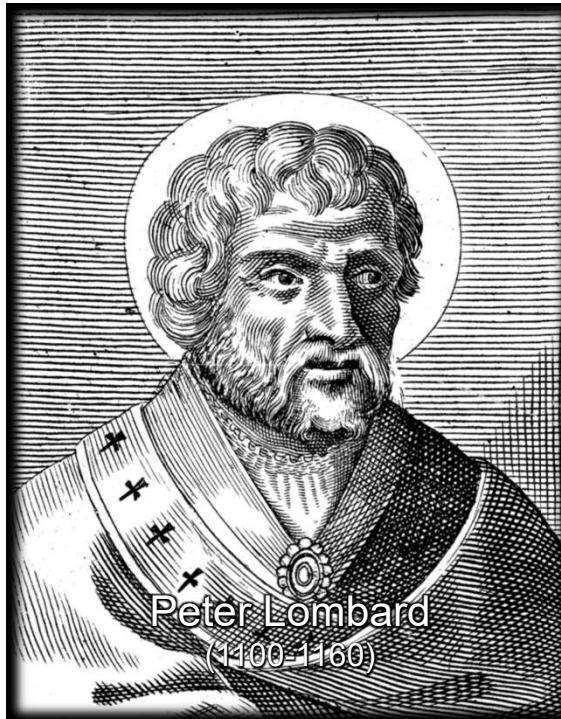
[An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith, chap. 8;  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33041.htm>, accessed 07/05/22]



Anselm  
(1033-1109)

***"There are no parts in thee, Lord, nor art thou more than one. But thou are so truly a unitary being, and so identical with thyself, that in no respect are thou unlike thyself; rather thou are unity itself, indivisible by any conception. Therefore, life and wisdom and the rest are not parts of the, but all are one; and each of these is the whole, which thou art, and which all the rest are."***

[*Proslogium*, 18, trans. S. N. Deane (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), 25]



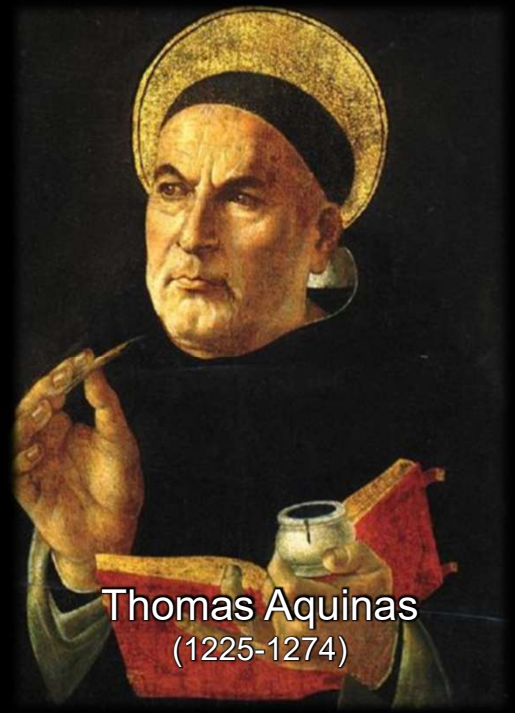
Peter Lombard  
(1100-1160)

***Simplicity means "no diversity or change or multiplicity of parts, or accidents, or any other forms."***

[*The Sentences*, Bk. 1, *The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano, *Medieval Sources in Translation* 42 (Toronto: PIMS, 2007), 8.3 (23), as cited in Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 77]

***"The absolute simplicity of God may be shown in many ways. . . For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His 'suppositum'; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple."***

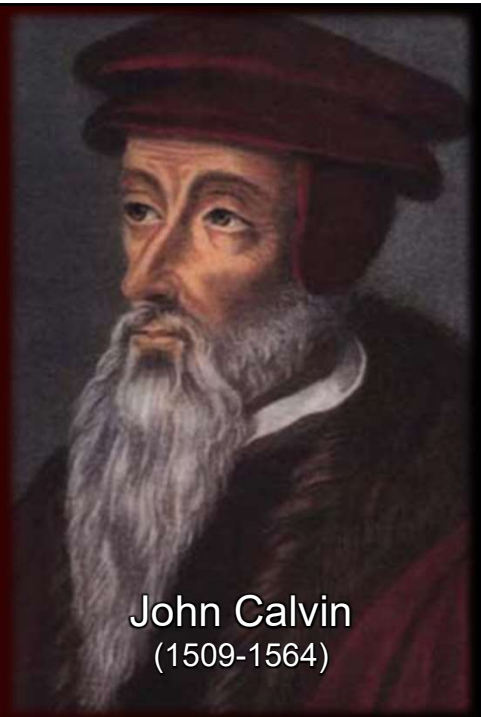
[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics 1981), I, Q3, art. 7]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"For the essence of God [is] simple and undivided, and contained in himself entire, in full perfection, without partition or diminution."***

[*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), Bk. 1, XIII, §2, vol. 1, p. 110]



**John Calvin**  
(1509-1564)

***"Although the great and ever-blessed God is a being absolutely simple and infinitely remote from all shadow of composition, He is, nevertheless, in condescension to our weak and contracted faculties, represented in Scripture as possessed of divers Properties, or Attributes, which, though seemingly different from His Essence, are in reality essential to Him, and constitutive of His very Nature.***

[Observations on the Divine Attributes, Monergism Books, ebook p. 3]



**Girolamo Zanchi**  
(1516-1590)

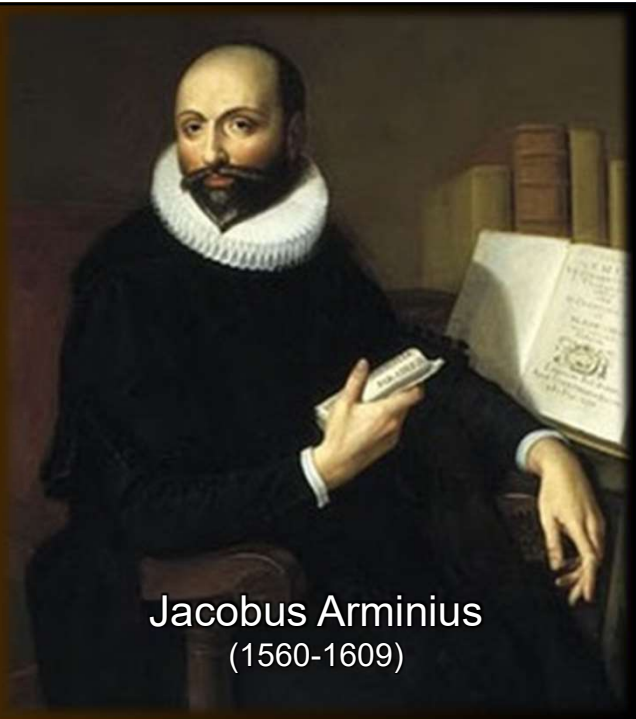


**Domingo (Dominic) Báñez**  
(1528-1604)

**"... although we come to know this truth through rational proofs, namely, that esse belongs to the very essence of God and that He is subsistent esse Himself, and infinite, immutable, eternal, and may other attributes, which are of His very essence, we nevertheless know all these vaguely and through a certain negation or analogy to creatures. We do not know them through a proper concept which expresses His quiddity just as it is."**

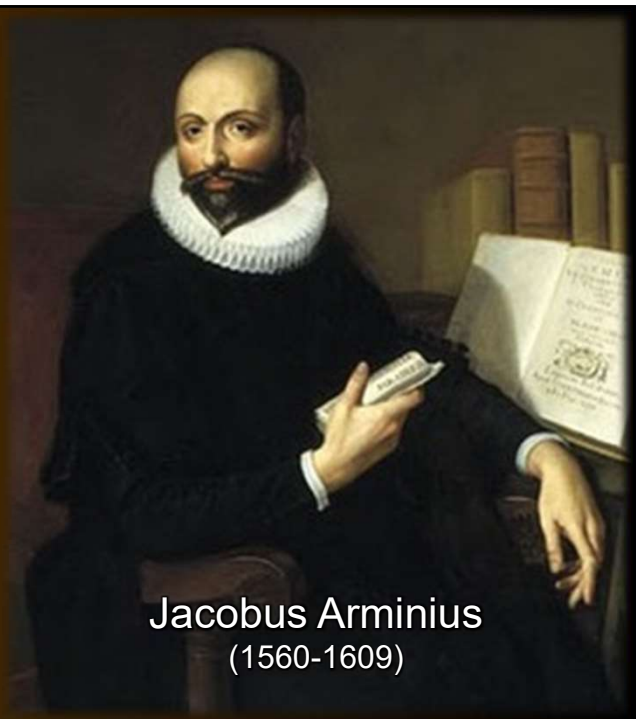
[Dominic Báñez, *The Primacy of Existence in Thomas Aquinas: A Commentary in Thomistic Metaphysics*, trans. Benjamin S. Llamzon (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966), 29, reprinted (Proctorville: Wythe-North, 2021), 29].

***"Simplicity is a pre-eminent mode of the Essence of God, by which he is void of all composition, and of component parts whether they belong to the senses or to the understanding. ...***



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

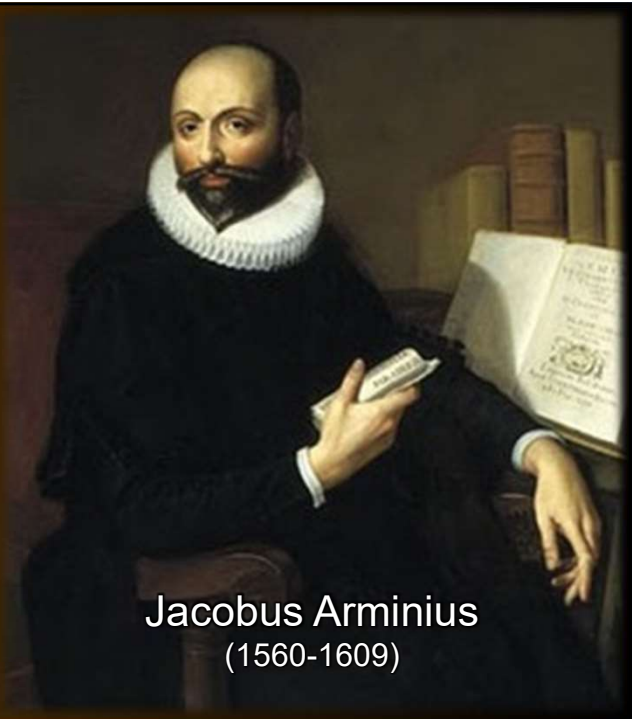
***"The essence of God, therefore, neither consists of material, integral and quantitative parts, of matter and form, of kind and difference, of subject and accident, nor of form and the thing formed, ...***



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

***"neither hypothetically and through nature, through capability and actuality, nor through essence and being. Hence God is his own Essence and his own Being, and is the same in that which is, and that by which it is."***

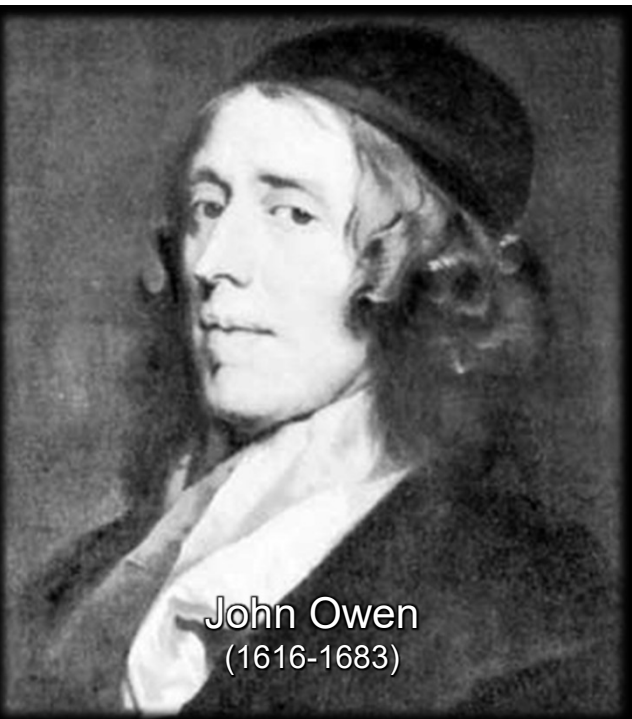
[Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), I, 438]



**Jacobus Arminius**  
(1560-1609)

***"The attributes of God, which alone seem to be distinct things in the essence of God, are all of them essentially the same with one another, and every one the same with the essence of God itself."***

[*Vindiciae Evangelicae: The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined: Mr. Biddle's First Chapter Examined in The Ages Digital Library: The John Owen Collection CD ROM* (Rio, WI: AGES Software), 94]

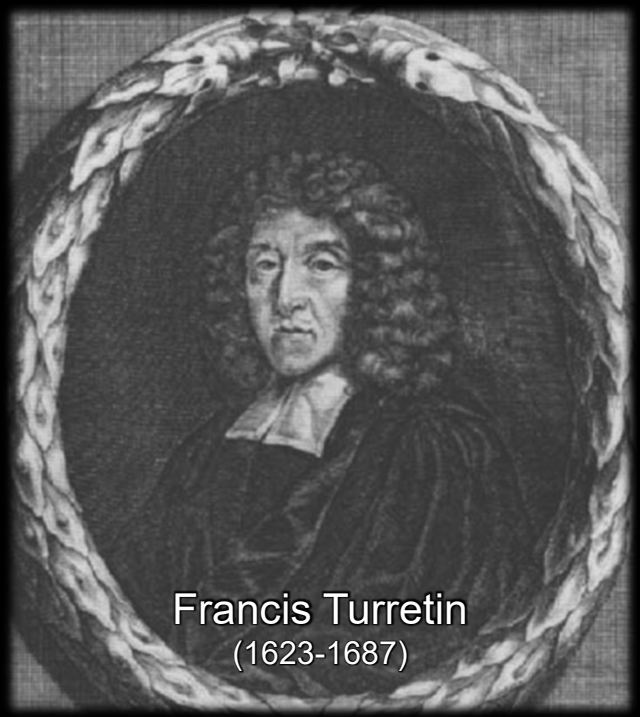


**John Owen**  
(1616-1683)

***"Is God most simple and free from all composition? We affirm against Socinus and Vorstius. ...***

***The orthodox have constantly taught that the essence of God is perfectly simple and free from all composition. ... The divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also as incapable of composition and divisibility."***

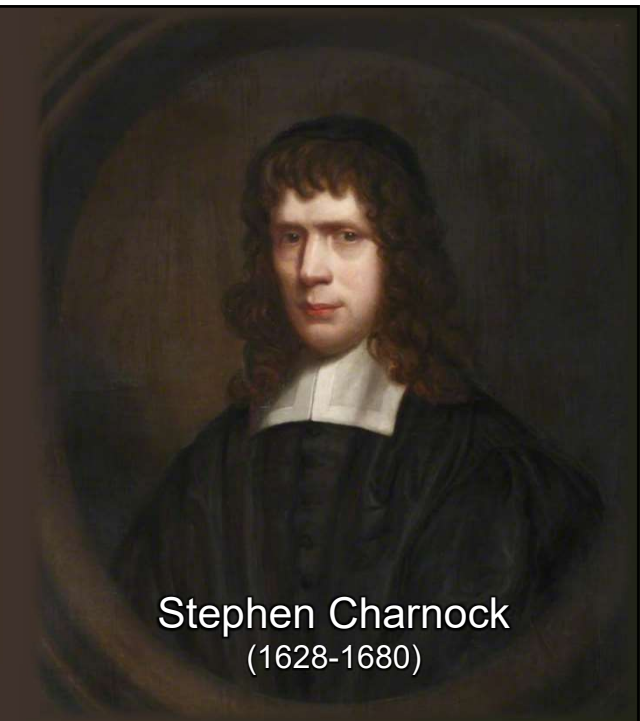
[Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), I, 191]



**Francis Turretin**  
(1623-1687)

***"This is signified by the name God gives himself (Ex. iii. 14): 'I am that I am:' as simple, pure, uncompounded being, without any created mixture ..."***

[Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), I, 182-183]



**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"He is an absolutely  
simple Spirit, not  
having the least  
particle of composition***

***"  
..."***

[Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), I:319-320]



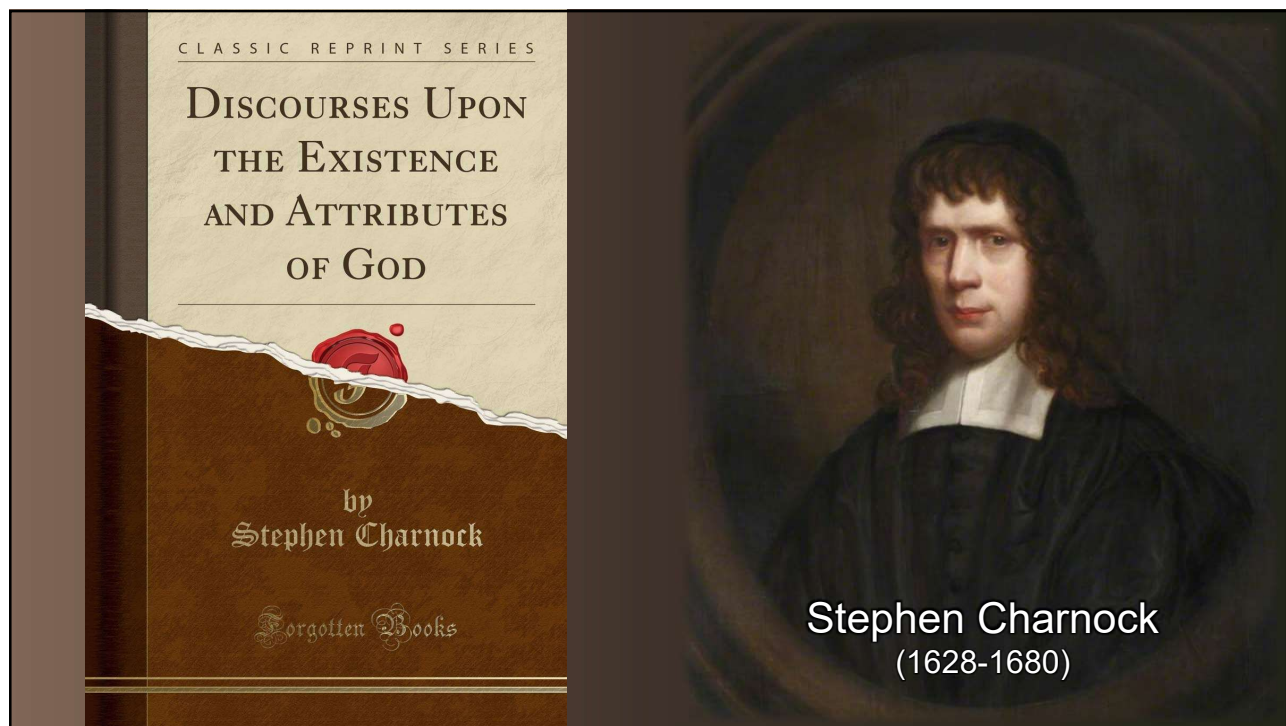
**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"God is the most simple  
being; for that which is first  
in nature, having nothing  
beyond it, cannot by any  
means be thought to be  
compounded; for  
whatsoever is so, depends  
upon the parts whereof it is  
compounded, and is not  
the first being."***

[Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), I:333]

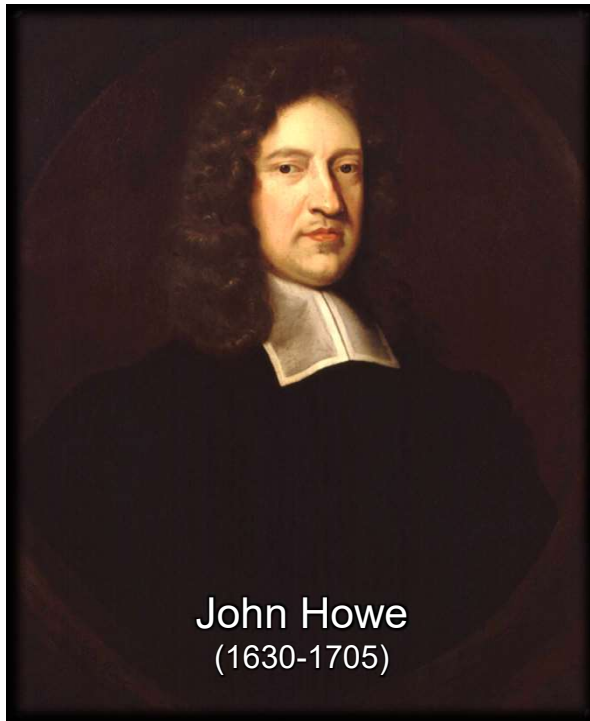


**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)



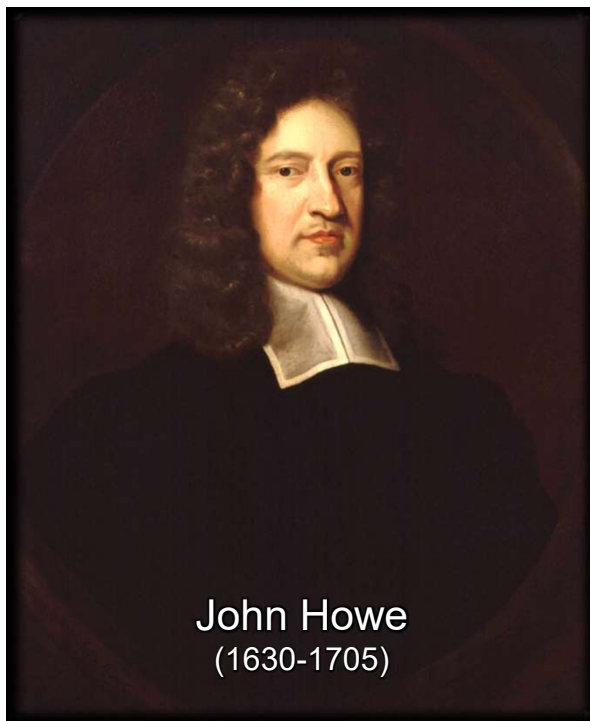
He was engaged, at the time, in delivering to his people, at Crosby Hall [in London], that series of Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God, on which his fame as a writer chiefly rests. The intense interest which he was observed to take in the subjects of which he treated, was regarded as an indication that he was nearly approaching that state in which he was to be "fill with all the fulness of God." Not unfrequently was he heard to give utterance to a longing desire for that region for which he gave evidence of his being so well prepared. These circumstances were, naturally enough, looked upon as proofs that his mighty mind, though yet on earth, had begun to "put off its mortality," and was fast ripening for the paradise of God.

WM. SYMINGTON, D.D., "LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE CHARNOCK" in Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 (1853)), I: 9-10



**John Howe**  
(1630-1705)

***"Whatsoever simplicity the ever-blessed God hath, by any express revelation, claimed to himself, or can by evident and irrefragable reason be demonstrated to belong to him, as a perfection, we ought humbly and with all possible reverence and adoration, to ascribe to him."***



**John Howe**  
(1630-1705)

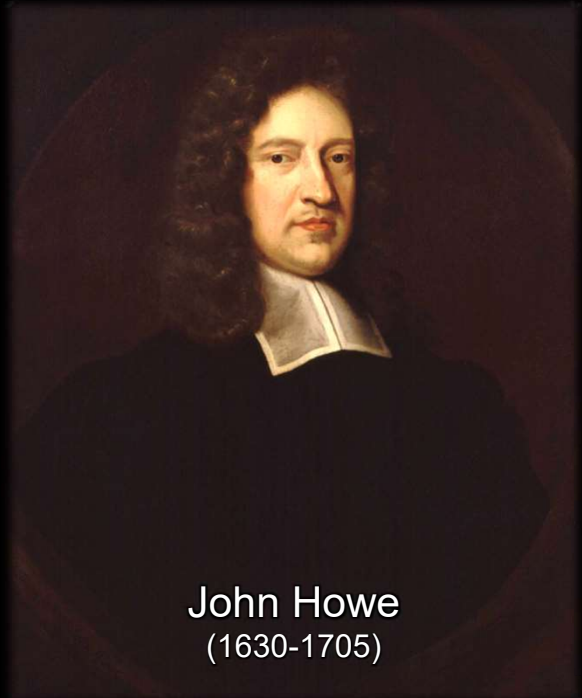
***"But such simplicity as he hath not claimed, as is arbitrarily ascribed to him by overbold and adventurous intruders into the deep and most profound arcana of the divine nature ... we ought not to impose it upon ourselves, or be so far imposed upon, as to ascribe to him such simplicity."***

["A Calm and Sober Inquiry Concerning the Possibility of a Trinity in the Godhead," in *The Works of John Howe: 1630-1705 in Three Volumes* (Ligonier: Soli De Gloria, 1990), vol. II, p. 530. This edition is reprinted from *The Works of John Howe in 3 Volumes* (London: William Tegg and Co. 1848) which is based on *The Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A.* (n.c., Calamy, 1724).]



John Howe  
(1630-1705)

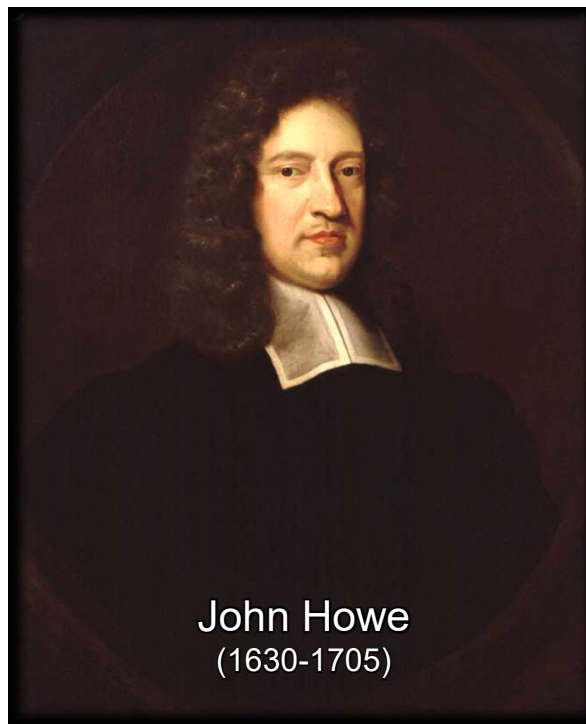
*However ...*



John Howe  
(1630-1705)

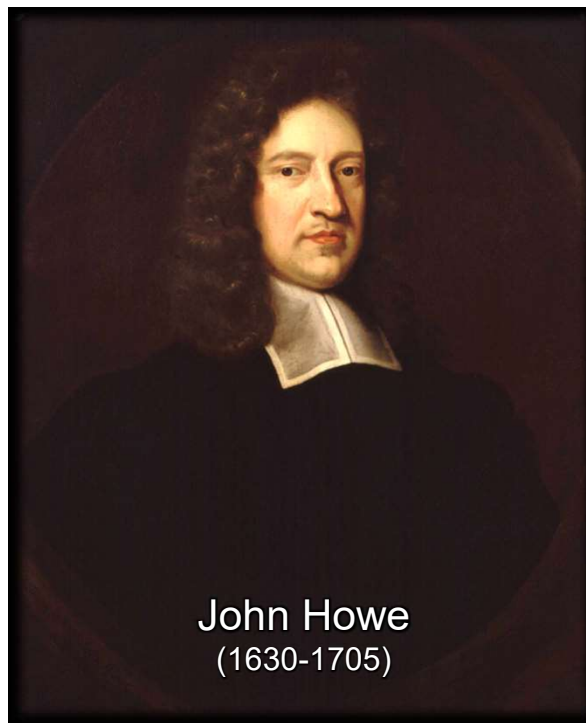
*"... such as can never be proved to belong to perfection and a blemish, would render the divine nature less intelligible, more impossible to be so far conceived as is requisite, as would discompose and disturb our minds, confound our conceptions, make our apprehensions of his other known perfections less distinct, or inconsistent, render him less adorable, or less an object of religion; or such as is manifestly unreconcilable with his plan affirmations concerning himself; ..."*

[Howe, "Trinity," p. 530]



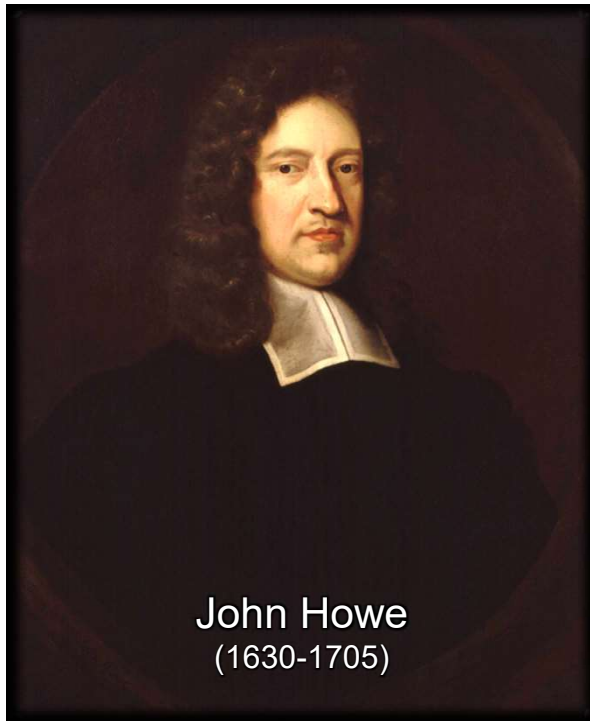
John Howe  
(1630-1705)

*"It would be an over-officious and too meanly servile religiousness, to be awed by the sophistry of presumptuous scholastic wits, into a subscription to their confident determinations concerning the being of God, that such and such things are necessary or impossible thereto, beyond what the plain undisguised reason of things, or his own express word do evince;*



John Howe  
(1630-1705)

*to imagine a sacredness in their rash conclusion so as to be afraid of searching into them, or of examining whether they have any firm and solid ground or bottom; to allow the schools the making of our Bible, or the forming of our creed (who license and even sport petulant and irreverent a liberty as they would upon a worm, or and the meanest insect, while yet they can pronounce little with certainty even concerning that,)*




**John Howe**  
(1630-1705)

*"hath nothing in it either of the Christian or the man. It will become as well as concern us, to disencumber our minds, and release then from the entanglement of their unproved dictates; whatsoever authority they may have acquired, only by having been long, and commonly, taken for granted. The more reverence we have of God the less we are to have for such men as have themselves expressed little."*

[Howe, "Trinity," pp. 530-531]

*"God being a Spirit, we learn that he is a simple and uncomposed Being, and does not consist of parts, as a body does; his spirituality involves his simplicity. ... every attribute of God is God himself, is his nature, and are only so many displays of it. It is certain God is not composed of parts, in any sense;*



**John Gill**  
(1697-1771)

***"not in a physical sense, of essential parts, as matter and form, of which bodies consist: nor of integral parts, as soul and body, of which men consist: nor in a metaphysical sense, as of essence and existence, of act or power: nor in a logical sense, as of kind and difference, substance and accident."***

[*A Body of Divinity*, (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 33-34]



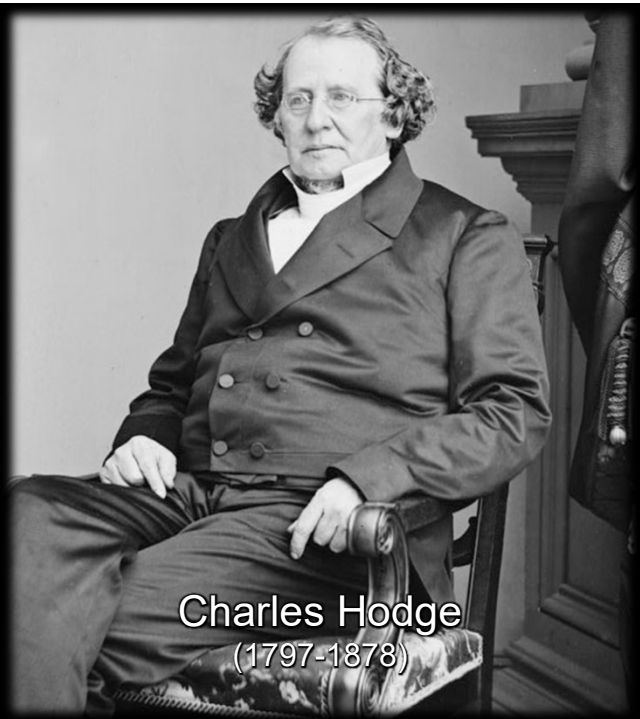
John Gill  
(1697-1771)

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

VOLUME ONE  
*INTRODUCTION*

Part I  
*THEOLOGY*

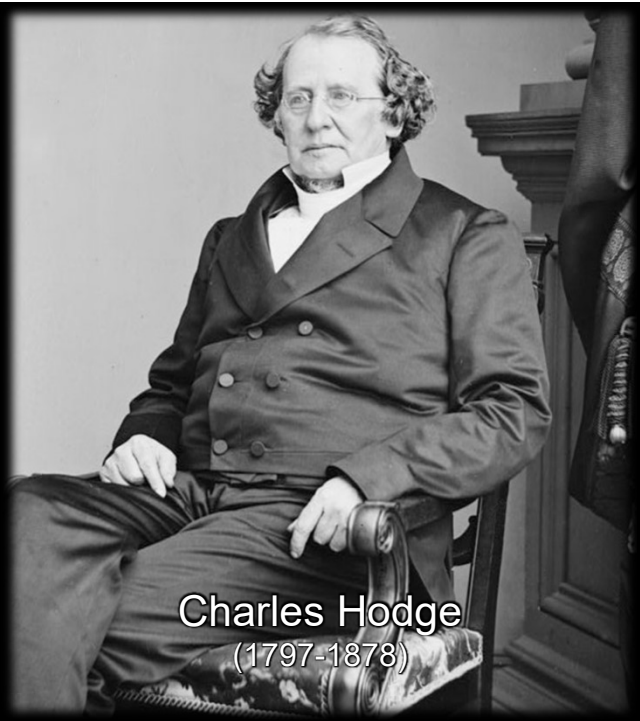
CHARLES HODGE



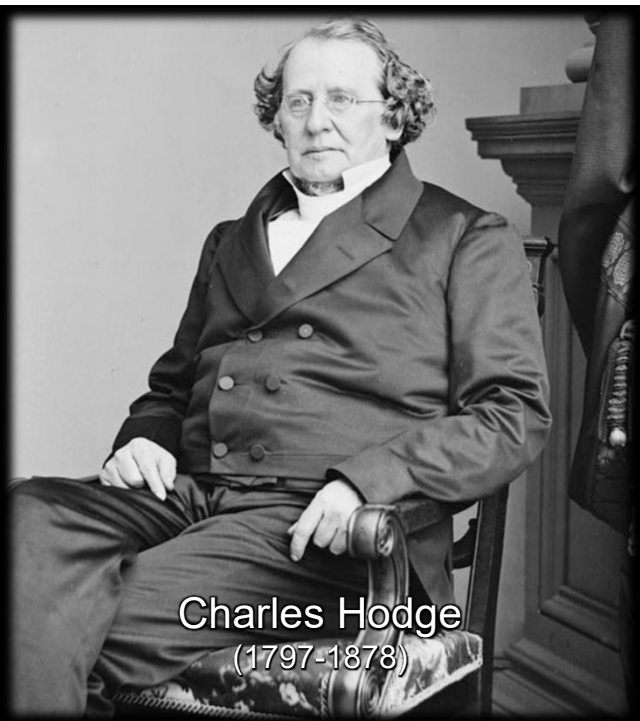
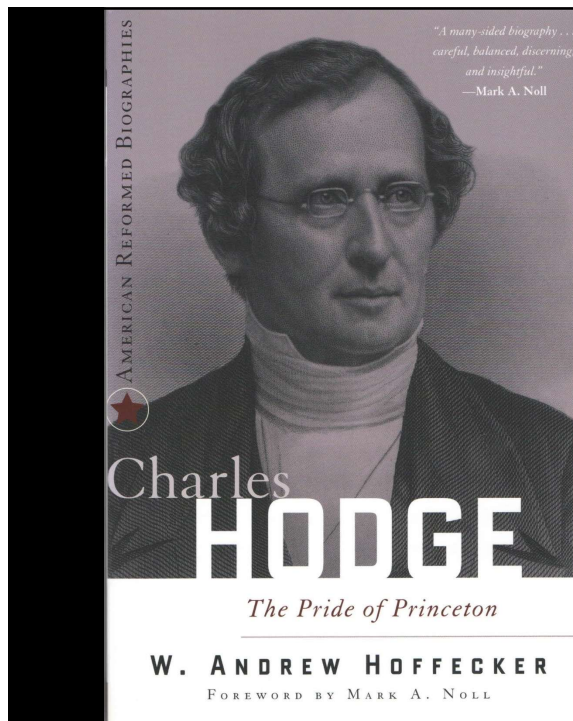
Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)

***"If God is a spirit, ... it follows that God is a simple Being, not only as not composed of different elements, but also as not admitting of the distinction between substance and accidents."***

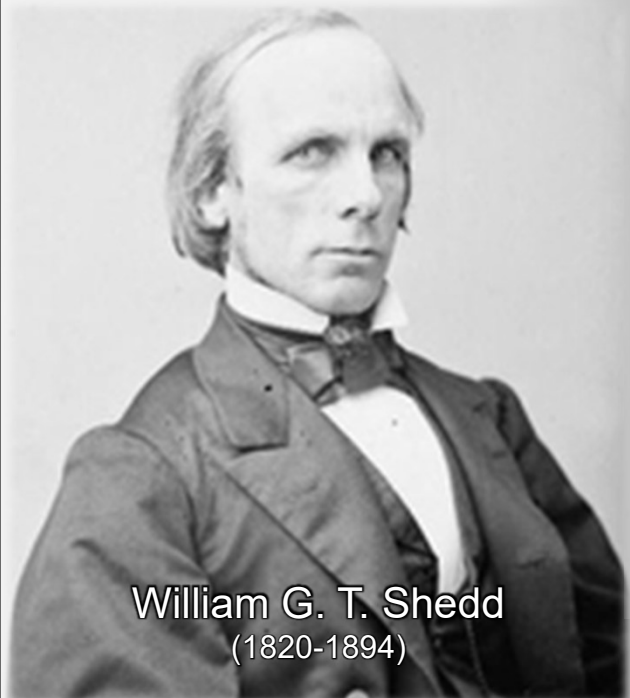
[*Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), I, V, §4, p. 379]



Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)



Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)

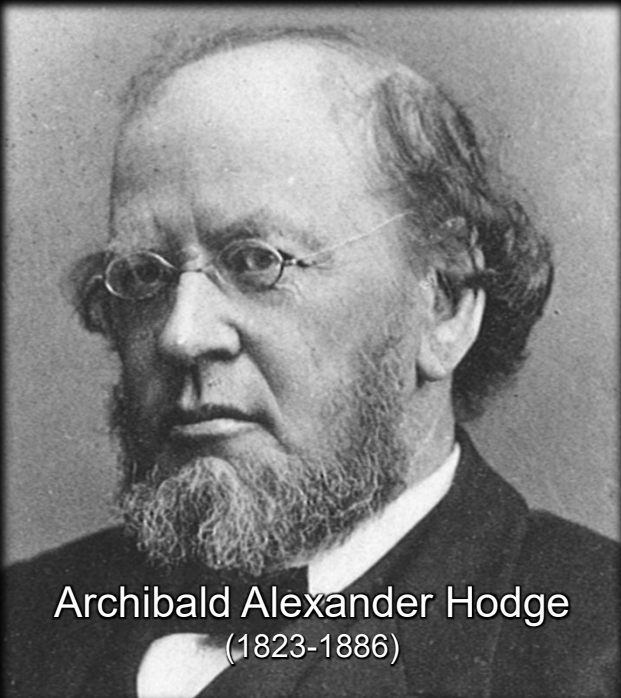


***"The Simplicity of God denotes that his being is uncompounded, incomplex, and indivisible. Simplicity does not belong to angels and men."***

William G. T. Shedd  
(1820-1894)

[William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), vol. 1, p. 338]

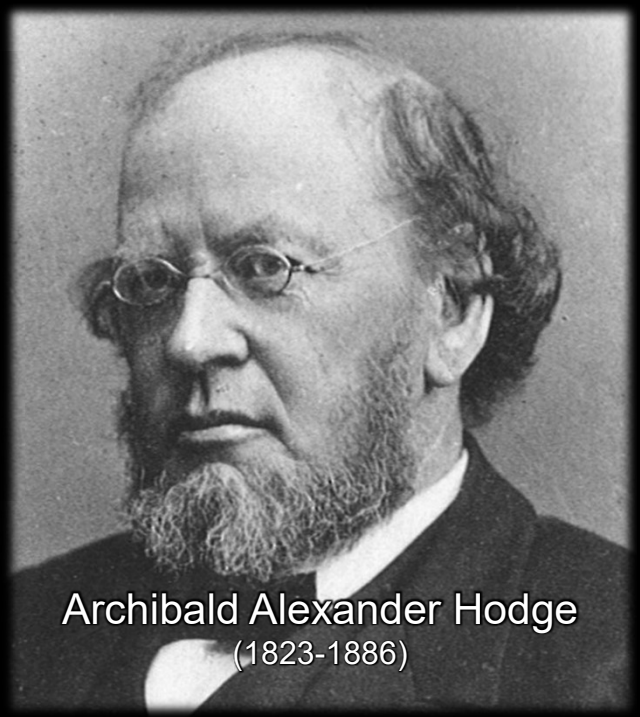
**"In order to avoid both extremes theologians have been accustomed to say that the divine attributes differ from the divine essence and from one another, 1st, not *realiter* or as one thing differs from another, or in any such way as to imply composition in God. Nor 2d, merely *nominaliter*, as though there were nothing in God really corresponding to our conceptions of his perfections.**



Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

**"But 3d, they are said to differ *virtualiter*, so that there is in him a foundation or adequate reason for all the representations which are made in Scripture with regard to the diving perfections and for the consequent conceptions which we have of them."**

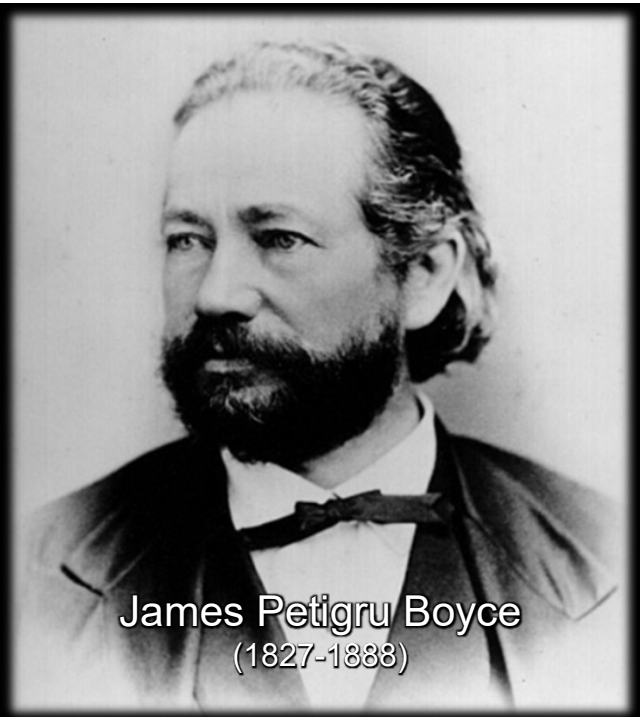
[A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology: For Students and Laymen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 136-137]



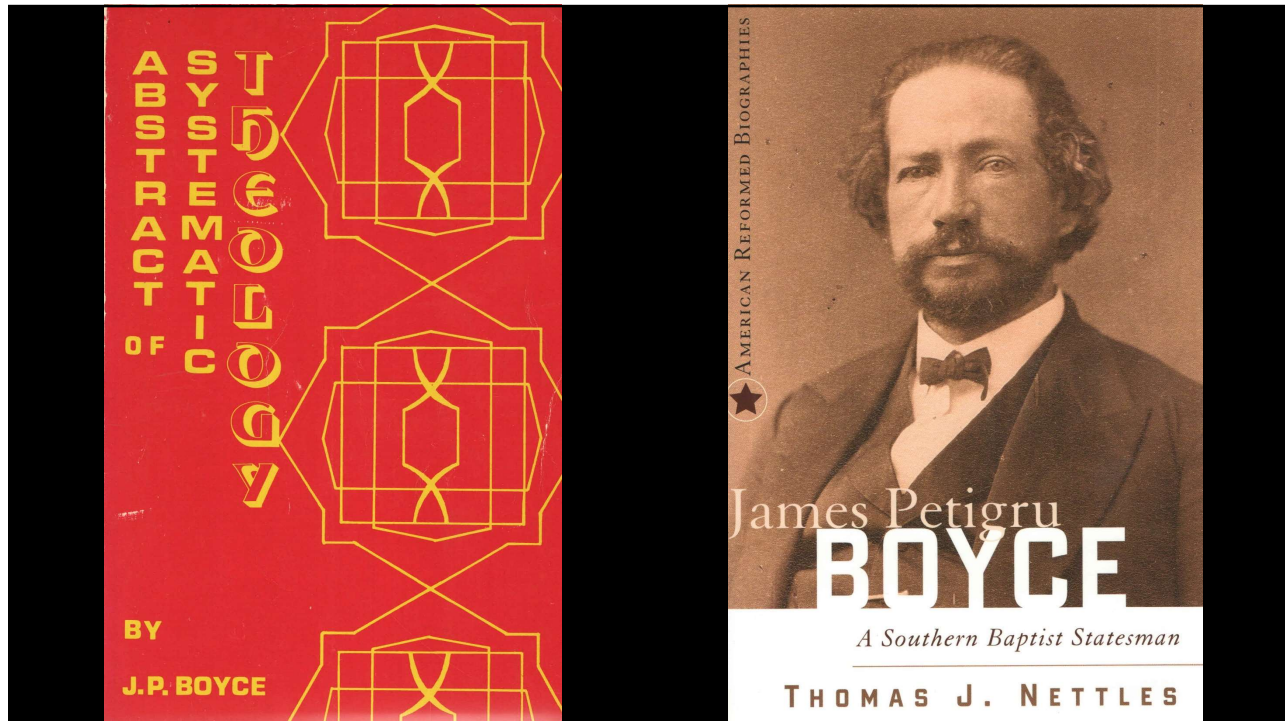
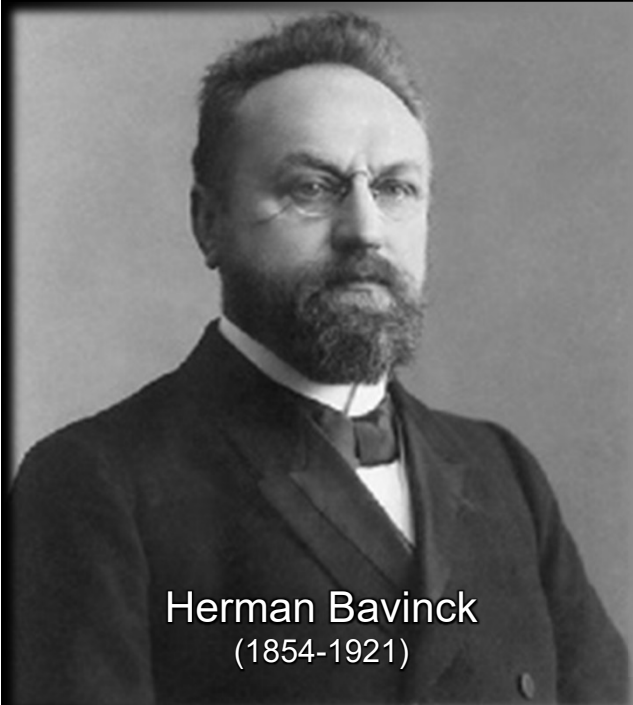
Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

***"By this we mean, that the nature of God, comprising his essence and his attributes, is simple or uncomposed pure spirit. ... In God there can be no composition, and therefore his spiritual nature must be uncompounded. Even his attributes and his nature must be in such a manner one, that his attributes essentially inhere in that nature and are not capable of separation from it, which really makes them one with that nature."***

[James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 67]



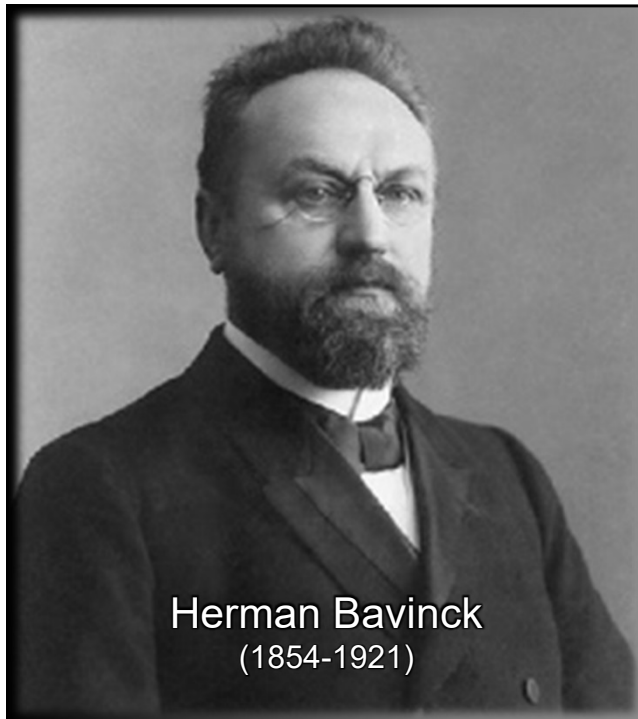
James Petigru Boyce  
(1827-1888)

**Herman Bavinck**  
(1854-1921)

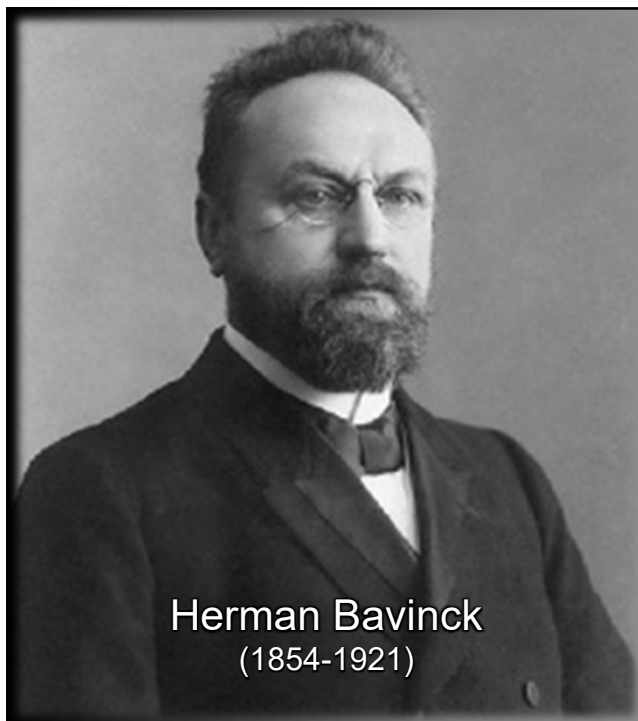
*"When theology speaks of God as 'essence,' it did not obtain this concept by abstraction but by the opposite process of addition, that is, by attributing to God in an absolute sense all the perfections that occur in creatures and therefore by thinking of him as absolute reality, the sum total of all being, the 'purest and simplest actuality.' Accordingly, the being that is ascribed to God in theology is at the same time the richest, most perfect, most intensive, most determinate and concrete, absolute and simple Being."*

[Bavinck, Herman, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend, John Bolt, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 121; (Exported from Logos Bible Software)]



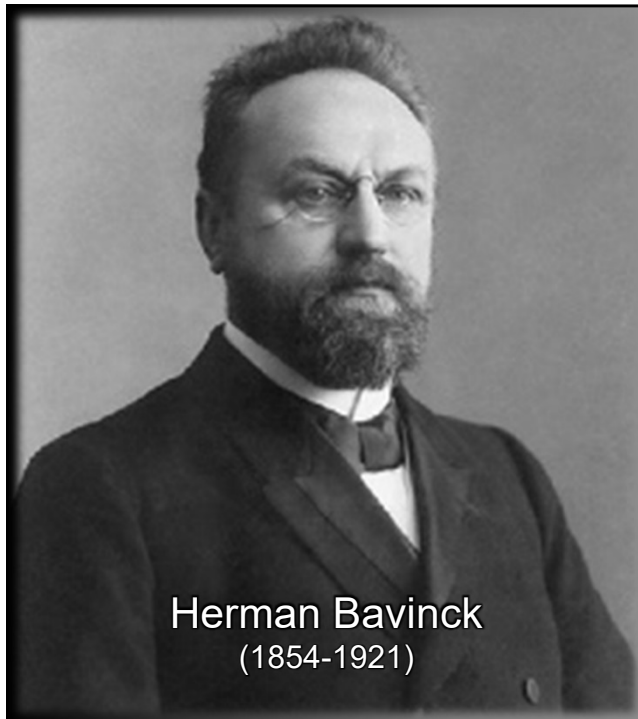
*"This simplicity is of great importance, nevertheless, for understanding of God. It is not only taught in Scripture (where God is called 'light,' 'life,' and 'love') but also automatically follows from the idea of God and is necessarily implied in the other attributes. Simplicity here is the antonym of 'compounded.'"*

Herman Bavinck  
(1854-1921)



*"If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of genus (class) and differentiae (attributes of differing species belonging to the same genus), substance and accident, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence, and immutability cannot be maintained . . ."*

Herman Bavinck  
(1854-1921)



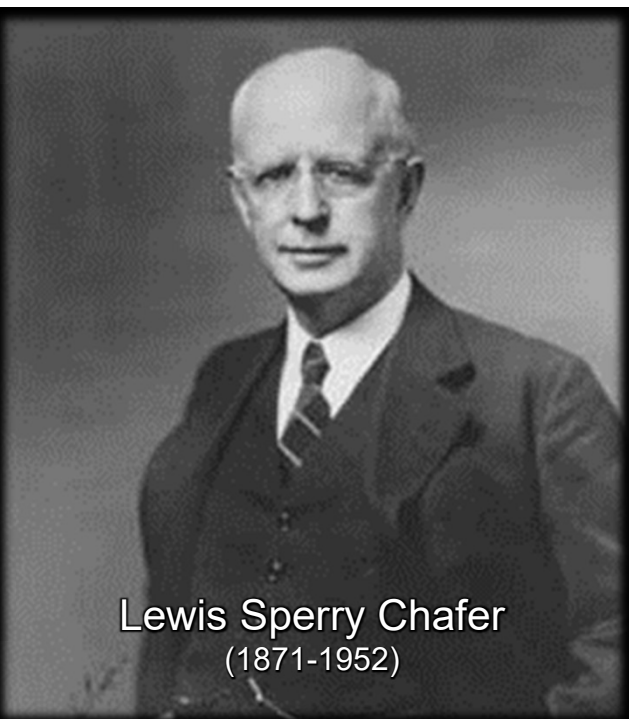
***"In the case of creatures all this is very different. In their case there is a difference between existing, being, living, knowing, willing, acting, and so on. All that is compounded is created. No creature can be completely simple, for every creature is finite."***

[Bavinck, Logos digital, 2004:176]

**Herman Bavinck**  
(1854-1921)

***"By this term it is indicated that the divine Being is uncompounded, incomplex, and indivisible. ... He being the perfect One, is to be worshiped as the finality and infinity of simplicity."***

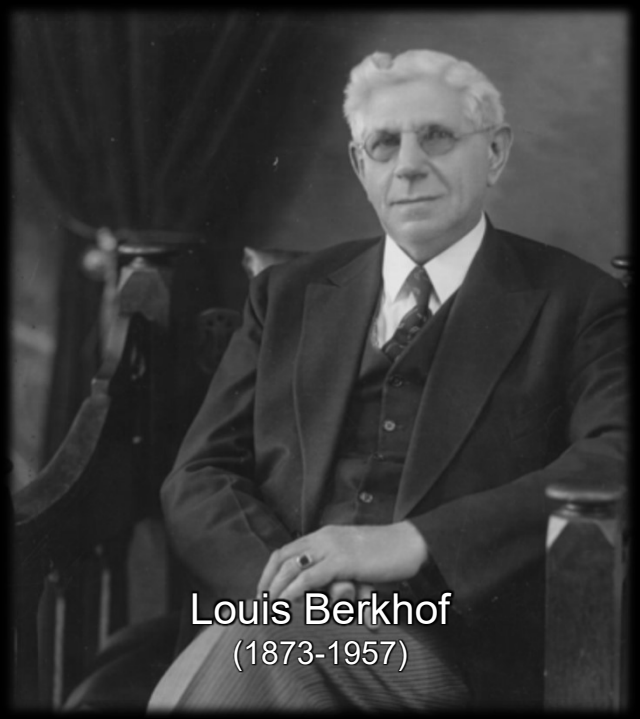
[Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Press, 1947), I, 213]



**Lewis Sperry Chafer**  
(1871-1952)

***"From the simplicity of God it follows that God and His attributes are one. The attributes cannot be considered as to many parts that enter into the composition of God, for God is not, like men, composed of different parts."***

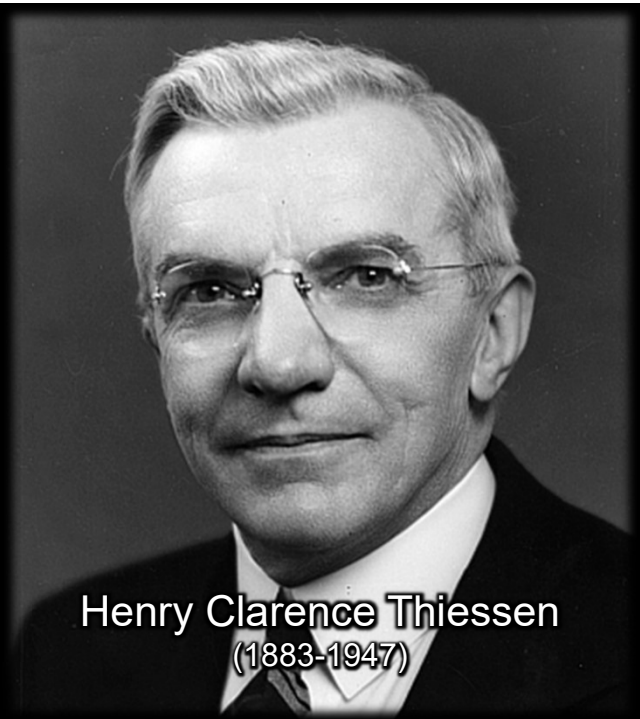
[Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 44-45]



Louis Berkhof  
(1873-1957)

***"That the divine nature is undivided and indivisible is intimated in Deut. 6:4 .... That is, God does not consist of parts nor can He be divided into parts. His being is simple ...."***

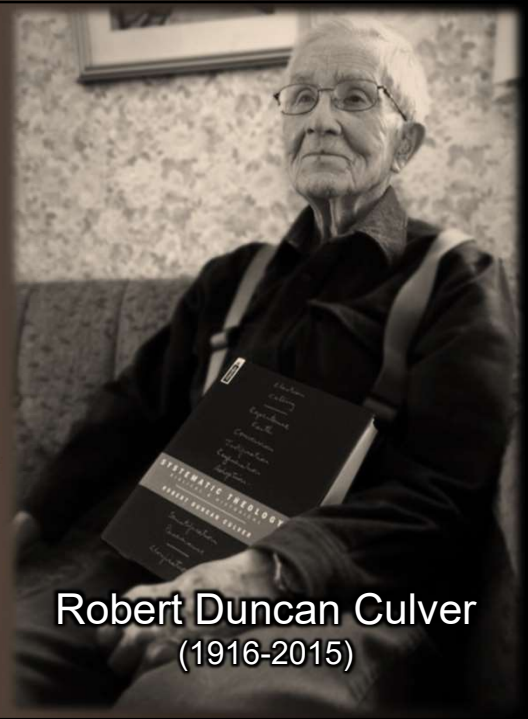
[Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 134]



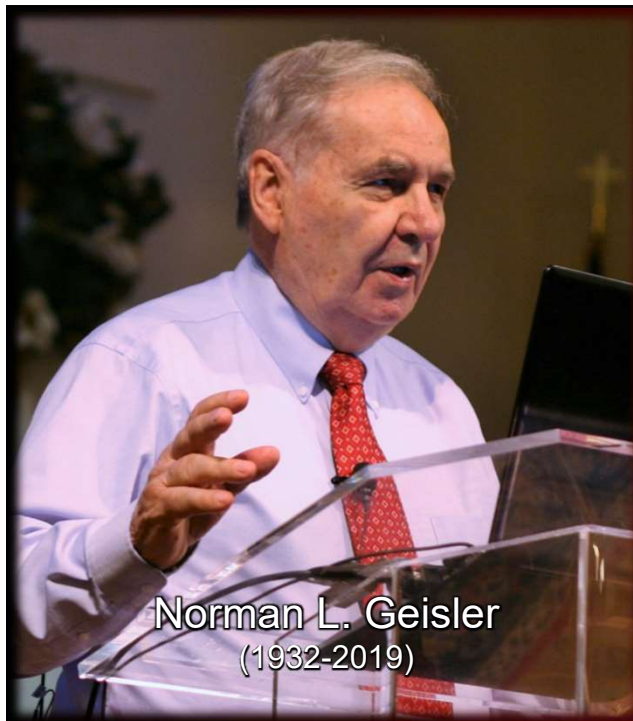
Henry Clarence Thiessen  
(1883-1947)

***"Orthodox theologians generally affirm that the being or substance of God is simple. Then they try to explain and offer cautions. By simple or simplicity, we mean without parts. ... There is no variance in any one or all the attributes, for they are steadily the same ..."***

[Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 63]



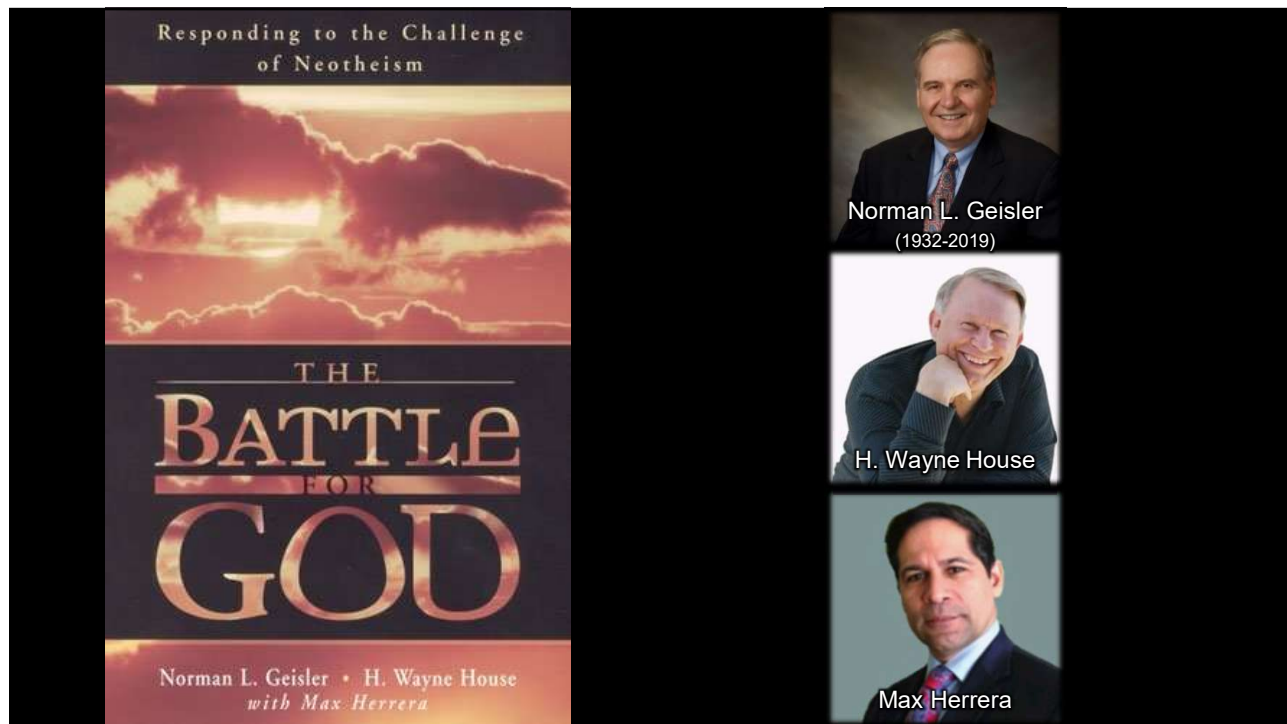
**Robert Duncan Culver**  
(1916-2015)

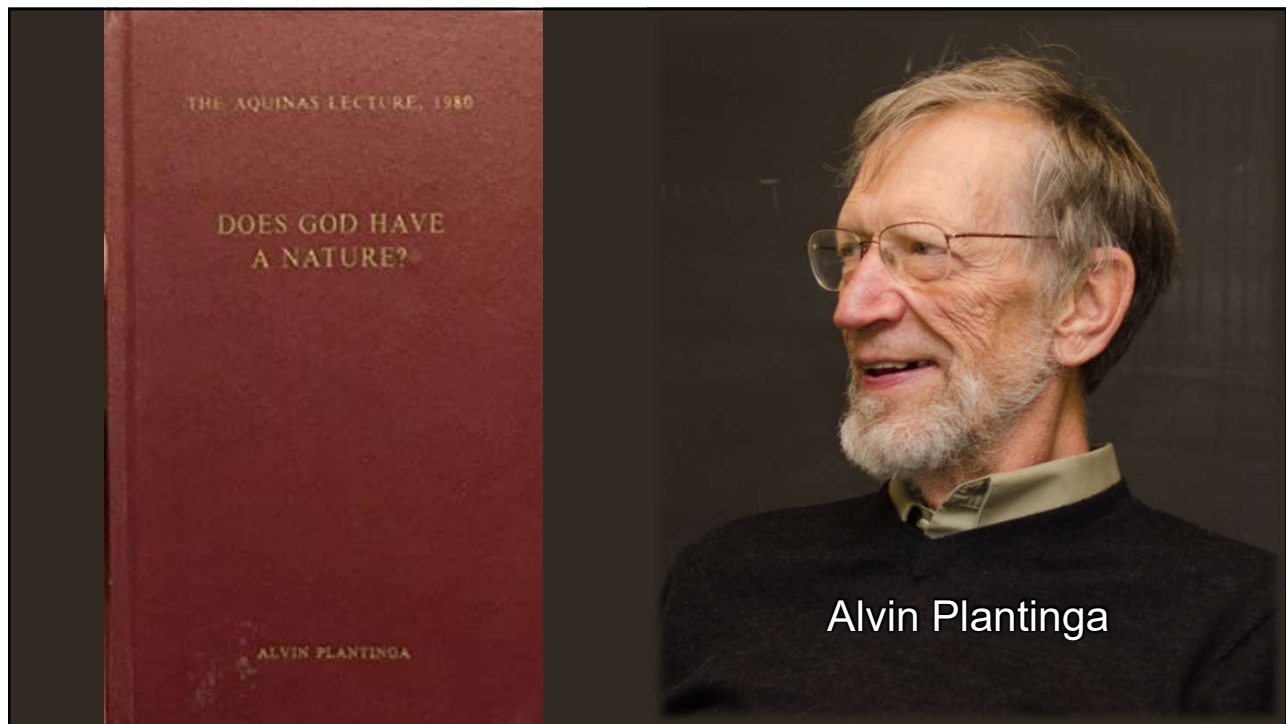


**Norman L. Geisler**  
(1932-2019)

***"The divine attribute of simplicity is foundational to the orthodox view of the nature of God. ... God is ontologically one Being, without dimensions, poles, or divisions."***

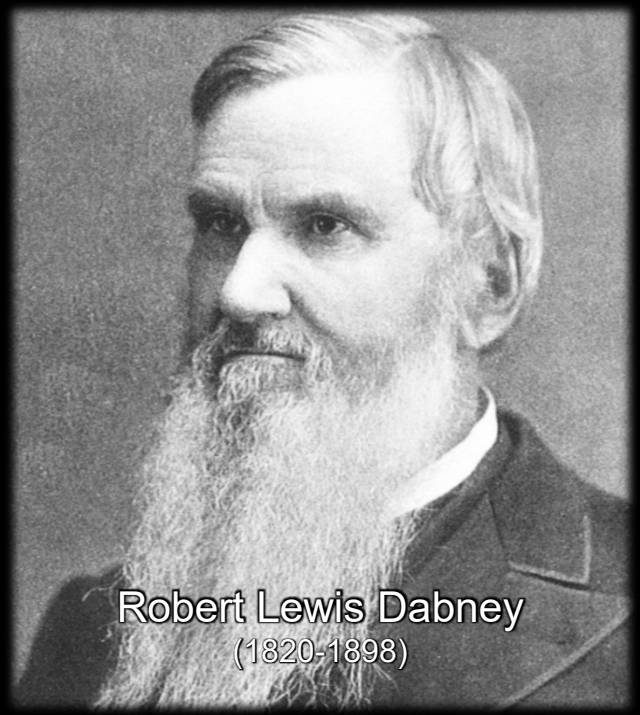
[Norman Geisler, H. Wayne House, Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 142]



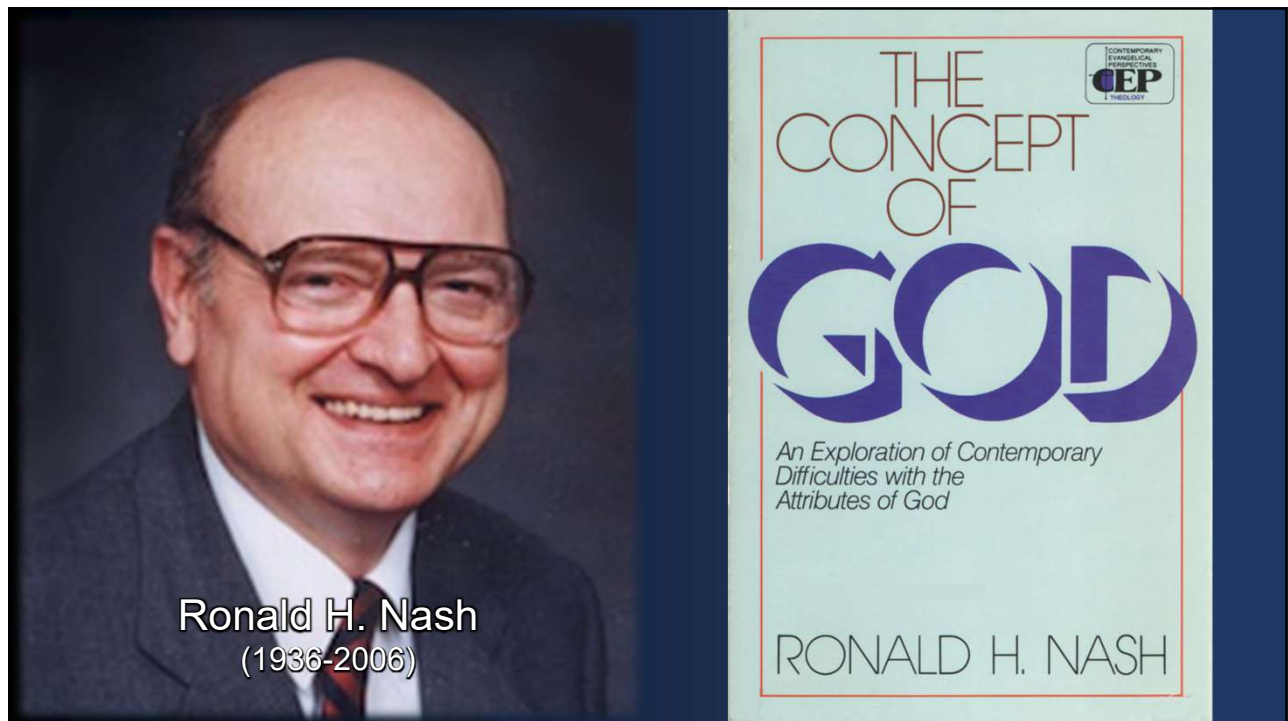


***"But that God is more simple than finite spirits in this, that in Him substance and attribute are one and the same, as they are not in them, I know nothing."***

[Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 43.]



Robert Lewis Dabney  
(1820-1898)




Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

THE  
CONCEPT  
OF  
**GOD**

An Exploration of Contemporary  
Difficulties with the  
Attributes of God

RONALD H. NASH

CONTEMPORARY  
EVANGELICAL  
PERSPECTIVES  
**CEP**  
THEOLOGY



Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

"It would appear that Christian theologians have **no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity**. It seems doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God. **No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given.** And it is **difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.**

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

Hopefully, this presentation has contributed somewhat to giving some good reasons.

Further, understandably Nash could not have been expected to interact with the more formidable literature to any significant depth in his popular and short treatment.

Nevertheless, the level of confidence of his conclusions against simplicity seem unwarranted by not having done such an adequate deep dive.

"It would appear that Christian theologians have **no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity**. It seems doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God. **No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given.** And it is **difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.**

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

Given the metaphysics according to which the doctrine of simplicity is to be understood in its most robust formulation, the stakes are indeed quite high for what it preserves regarding our understanding of several of God's attributes.

RONALD H. NASH  
(1936-2006)

"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems **doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God.** No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

### ☞ God as Transcendent ☞

Since the doctrine of simplicity alone means that God essence is existence, which is to say God is substantial existence itself (*deus ipsum esse subsistens est*), then only the doctrine of simplicity safeguards a thoroughgoing doctrine of God as transcendent.

No creature is existence itself, but *has* existence as something distinct from its nature.

Thus, the existence that God IS, is different than the existence that creation HAS.

"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems **doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God.** No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

## ☞ God's Ultimacy ☞

"[Simplicity] is a consequence of God's *ultimacy*. For anything composed of parts is ontologically posterior to those parts, and can exist only if something causes the parts to be combined."\*

\*[Edward Feser, "Simply Irresistible"  
<https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/simply-irresistible/>  
 accessed 07/08/23]

"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems **doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God**. No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

## ☞ God as Creator ☞

Since the doctrine of simplicity alone means that God essence is existence, which is to say God is substantial existence itself (*deus ipsum esse subsistens est*), then only the doctrine of simplicity safeguards a thoroughgoing doctrine of creation.

All things in creation *have* existence and can only *have* existence because they are being continually caused to *have* existence by God who *is* existence itself.

"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems **doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God**. No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God.

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

In his book, Nash displays a deep misunderstanding of **existential** Thomism.

The expression 'existential' in 'existential Thomism' is not to be confused with the philosophy of Existentialism (e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre or Søren Kierkegaard).

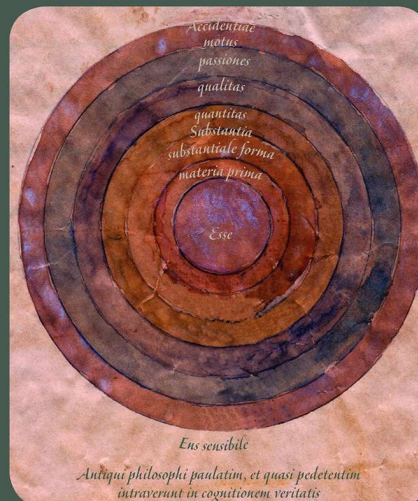
Here the expression refers to Aquinas's doctrine of the primacy of *esse* (lit., "to be;" the infinitive of *sum*, "I am;" translated often as "existence").

Aquinas's doctrine of existence is the fundamental key to his entire philosophy.

In his book, Nash displays a deep misunderstanding of **existential** Thomism.

## Thomistic Existentialism & Cosmological Reasoning

JOHN F. X. KNASAS



In his book, Nash displays a deep misunderstanding of existential Thomism. This is evident when he uses the Process theologian David Ray Griffin as the voice of evaluating Aquinas's philosophical theology.

Because of this, Nash never seems to realize that the *actus purus* (pure actuality) in the philosophy of Aquinas differs markedly from the *actus purus* (pure actuality) in the philosophy of Aristotle who never himself had any metaphysics of existence in distinction from essence.

But it is precisely this metaphysical doctrine that makes simplicity what it is in Aquinas's philosophy.

**"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God. No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God."**


[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]

Given that Nash fails to grasp exactly what the doctrine of simplicity is in Aquinas's philosophy, it is no surprise that he cannot see any of the profound entailments the doctrine of simplicity has for philosophical theology.

Otherwise, he would have seen that the doctrine of simplicity shows not only how God is unique in His being, but also that there cannot be more than one being whose essence is existence itself.

**"It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God. No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given. And it is difficult to see how the property of simplicity is unique to God."**


[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96]



**Ronald H. Nash**  
(1936-2006)


**"Perhaps, like Emil Brunner, we should conclude that the doctrine has no practical value; it is pure speculation 'which has nothing at all to do with the God of the Christian faith.'"**

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95-96. Nash cites Brunner from *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 294]




**Ronald H. Nash**  
(1936-2006)

**"Plantinga's recent book makes plain that the doctrine of simplicity is also used in an attempt to avoid a dilemma that threatens the coherence of theism:"**



**"if God is sovereign, then He cannot have a nature; if God has a nature, then He cannot be sovereign. Attempts to escape this dilemma by following either nominalism or Descartes lead to several grievous errors"**

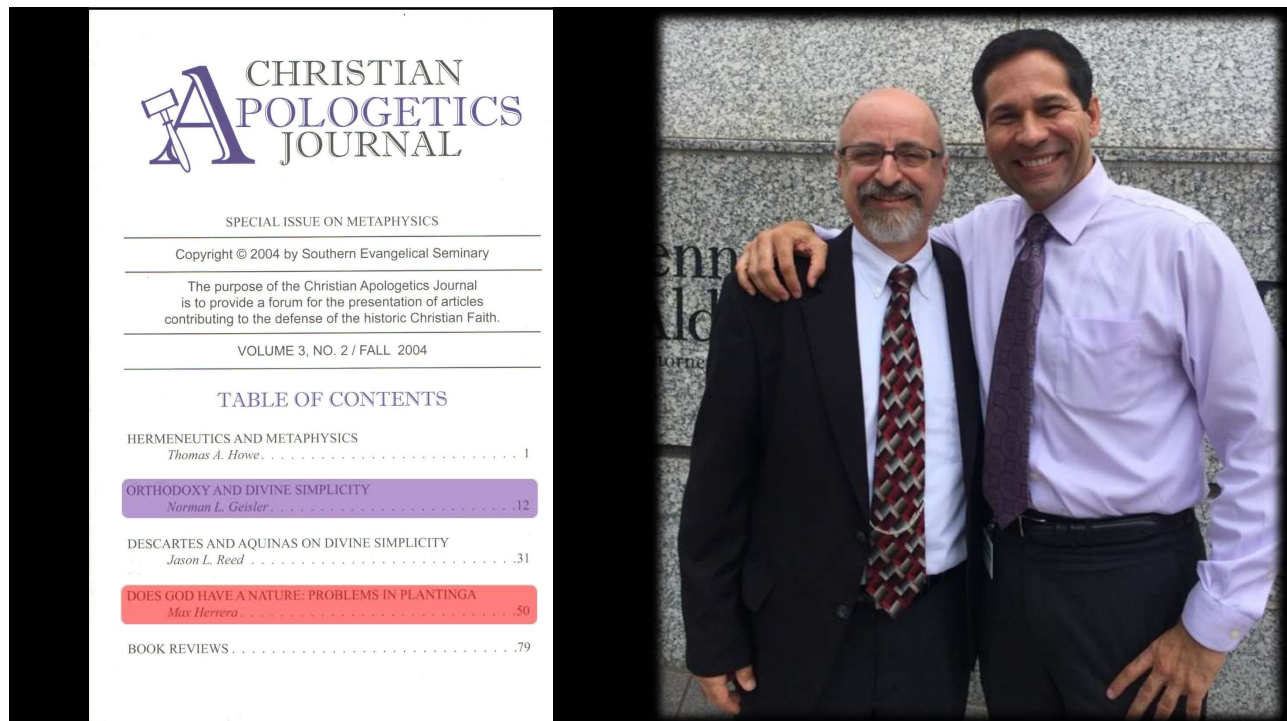
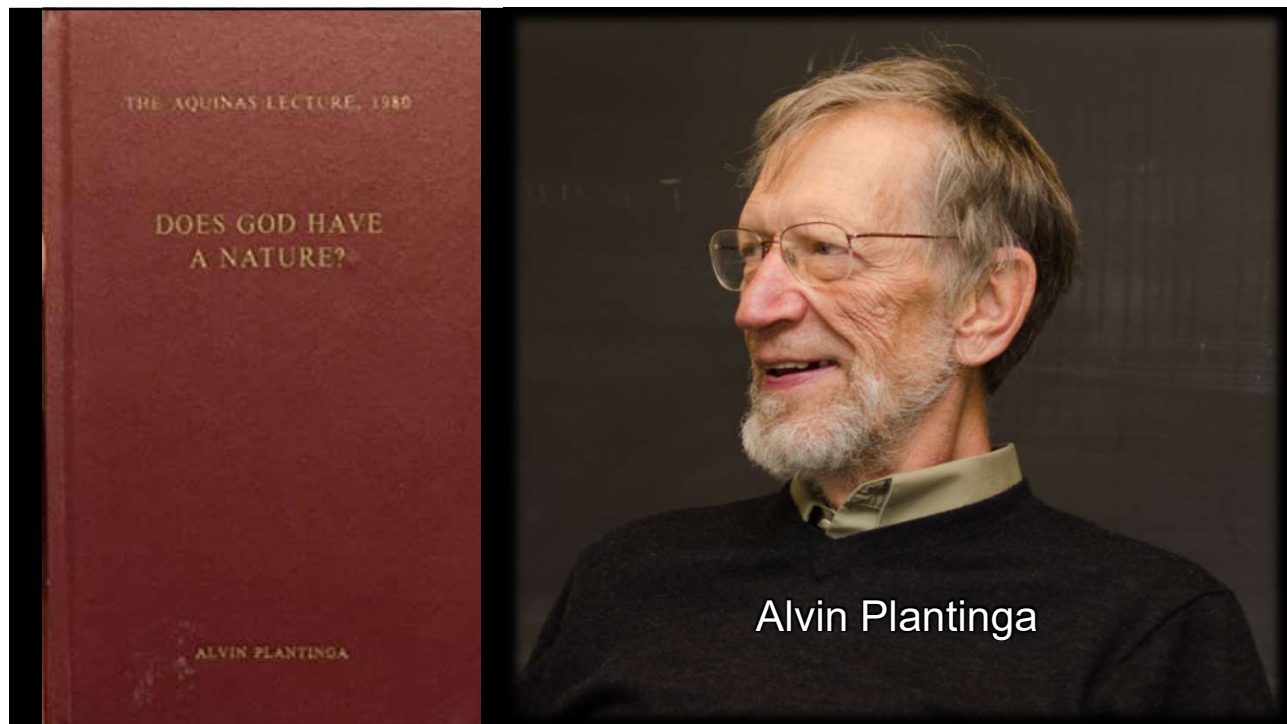
Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)




***Aquinas's attempt to escape the dilemma by equating God with His nature is unsatisfactory also because it entails conclusions that conflict with other important tenets of Christian theism."***

Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 95. The work by Plantinga is *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980)]





**"The acceptance of Aquinas's suggestion that **God is identical with His properties** carries a high price tag. It leads to the odd suggestion that the biblical teaching that God is **characterized by a variety of distinct properties** is wrong. It also appears to deny the personhood of God."**

Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 94-95]



## Quodlibetal Blog

Musings from Anywhere by Dr. Richard G. Howe

Home About Bookmark the permalink.

**Feb 22** **Discussing Aquinas** by quodlibetalblog

I recently had a thoughtful young man ask me a question about God's simplicity (the doctrine that says that God is not composed of any parts—metaphysical or otherwise), particularly in regard to God being able to freely create or freely not create. This entry, *mutatis mutandis*, is the heart of my admittedly too brief and undeveloped response to him.

I recently participated in a panel discussion on Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity at the Evangelical Philosophical Society's joint session with the American Academy of Religion in Denver, CO with Brian Huffling, Stephen Davis and William Lane Craig. You can watch the video on my YouTube channel here. My paper is available here. (My

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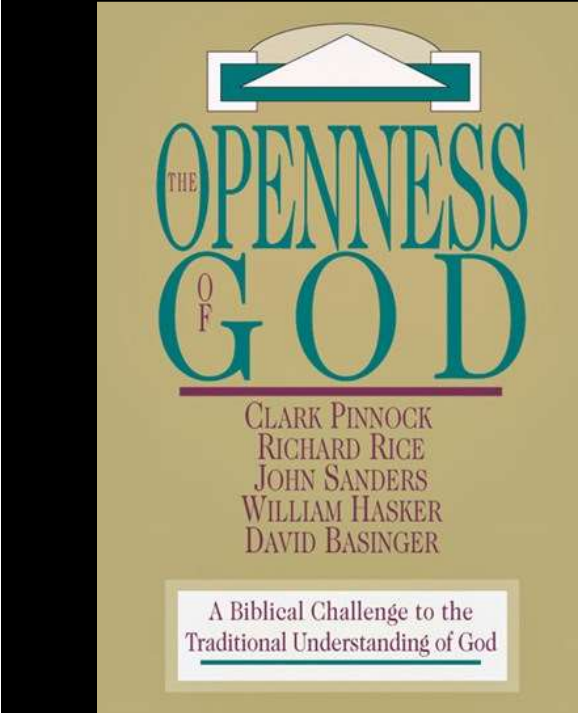
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- Antwoord (in Afrikaans)

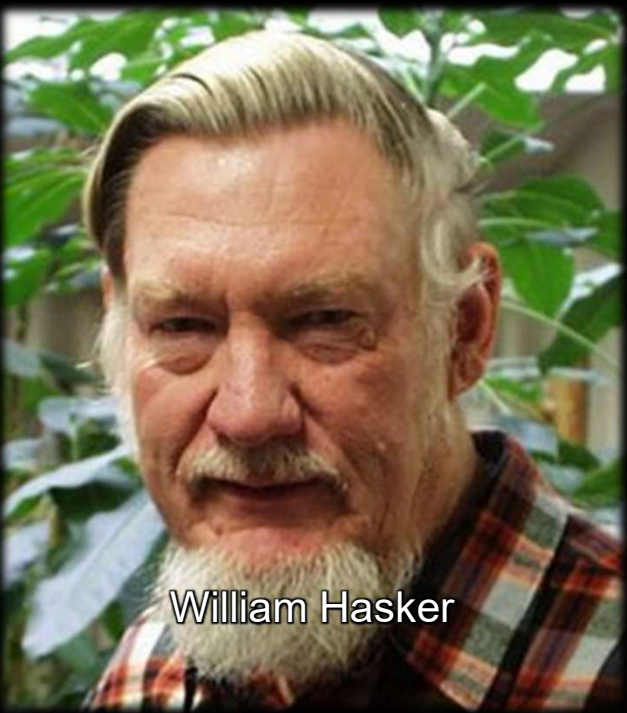
Quodlibetal Blog  
Messages from Aquinas by Dr. Richard G. Huxley

Aquinas's doctrine of simplicity arises out of an explicit metaphysics. As such, many discussions about the truth or falsity of simplicity (and other issues) really collapse into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the metaphysics that underlie it.

They expect these issues to be entirely explicable along the lines of their own contemporary analytic assumptions, and when they don't, they react as if that somehow exposes the issue as being problematic if not outright false. This is why, it seems to me, some people find it "hard ... to make sense" (as my friend put it) of some of these doctrines.

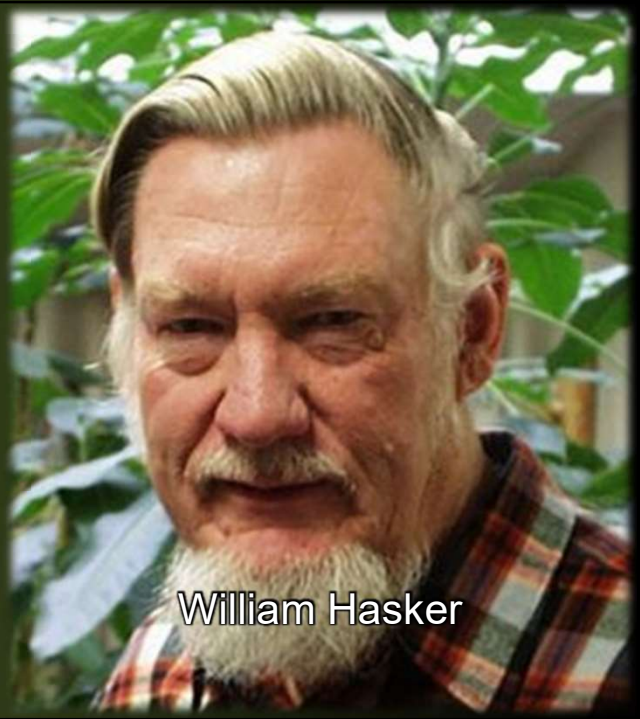


A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God

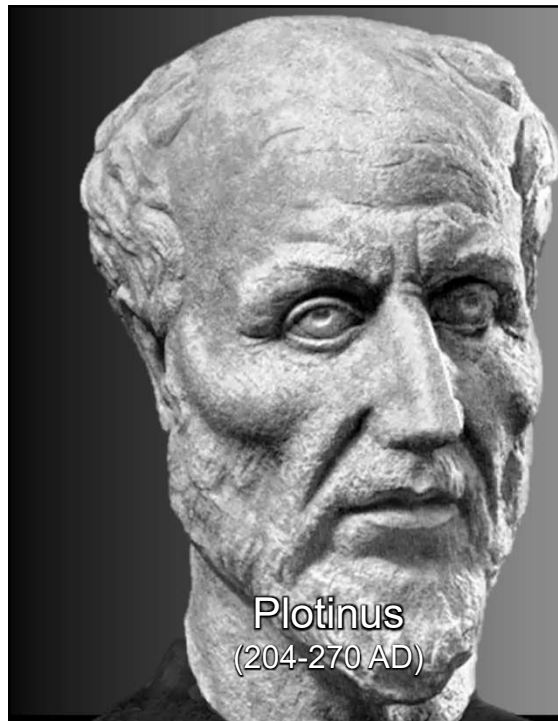


William Hasker

**"The philosophy of neo-Platonism, as seen in *Plotinus* and later on in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, was a powerful molding force in ancient and medieval theology.**



William Hasker

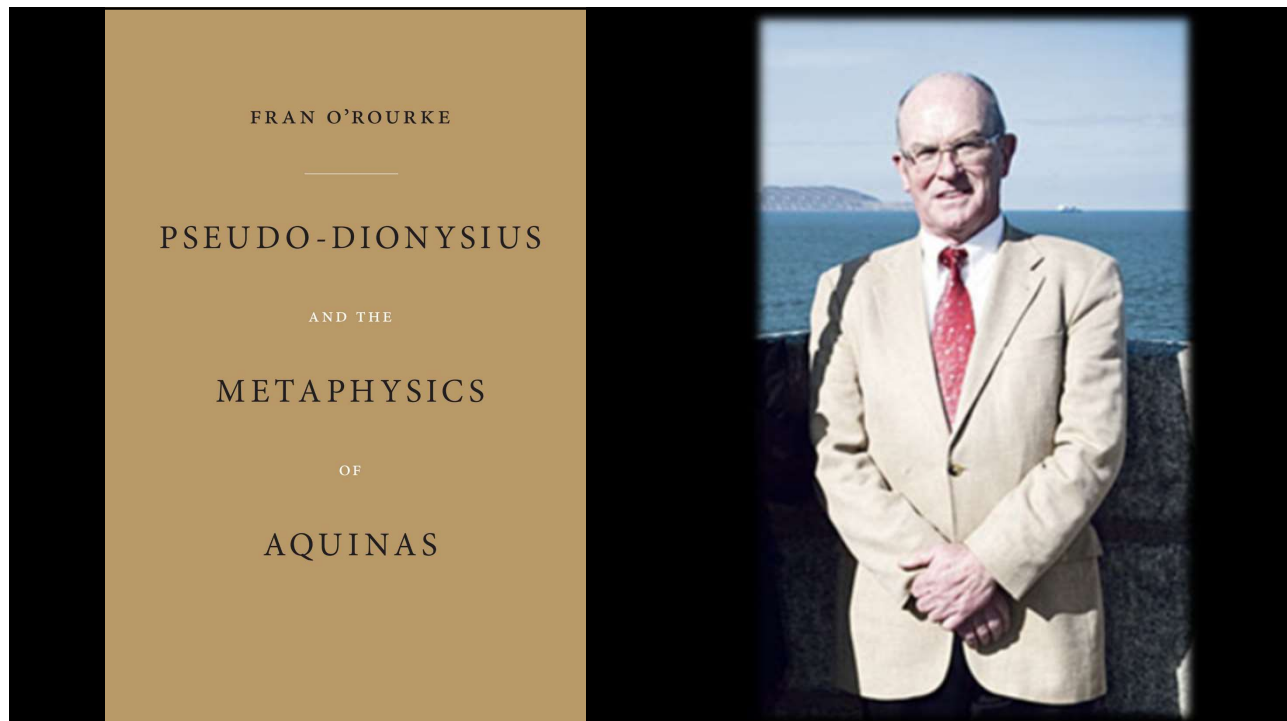
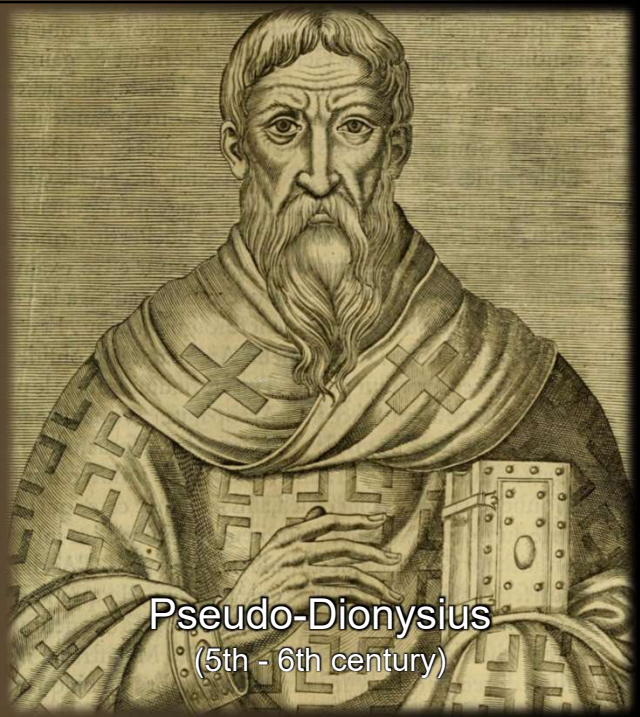


Plotinus  
(204-270 AD)

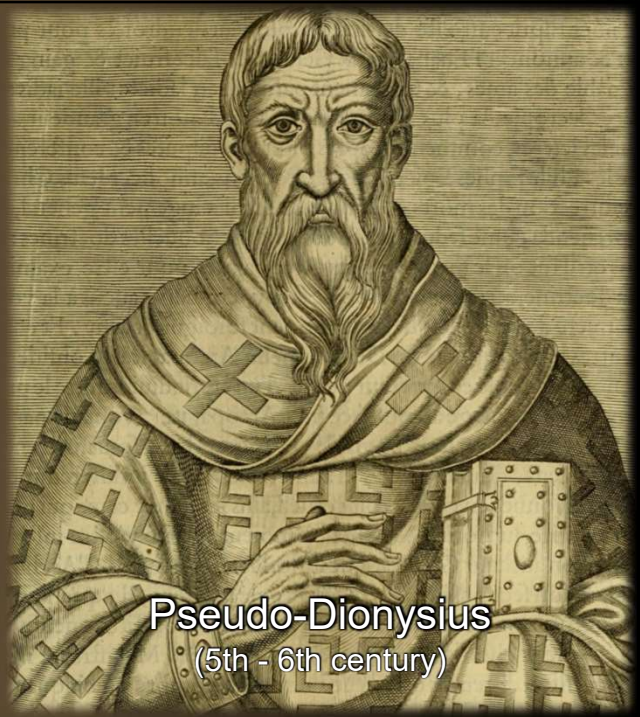
- ❖ author of *Enneads* (from the Greek for nine), organized by his disciple Porphyry into six groups of nine treatises
- ❖ regarded as the founder of Neo-Platonism
- ❖ "... initiated a new phase in the development of the Platonic tradition  
..."
- ❖ noted for his doctrines of "the one" and "emanation"

\*[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/>, accessed 10/13/21]

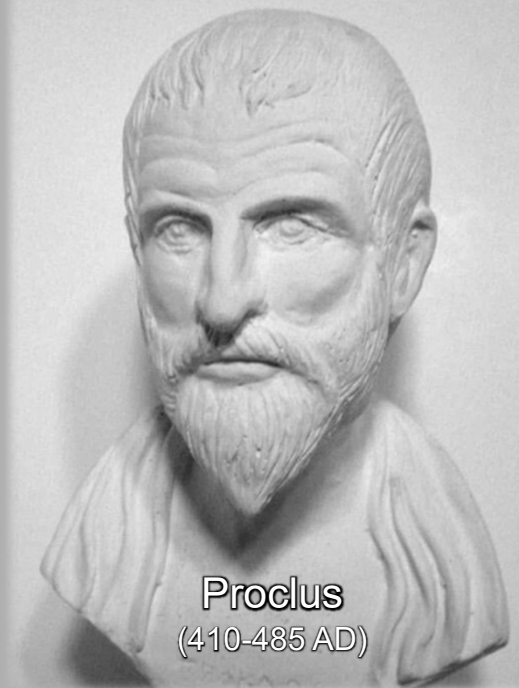
- ❖ author of *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, *Celestial Hierarchy*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and more
- ❖ originally identified as Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of Paul in Acts 17:34
- ❖ embodied the ideas of the Neo-Platonist philosopher Proclus (410-485)
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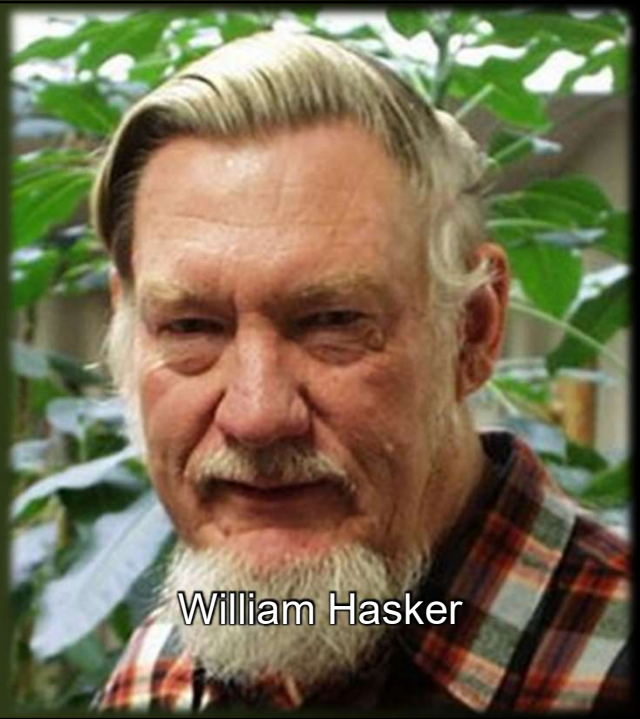


- ❖ wrote commentaries on Plato's *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Cratylus*, and more
- ❖ possessed "a wide knowledge concerning the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and of his Neo-Platonic predecessors"\*
- ❖ had the reputation "of being the greatest Scholastic of Antiquity"\*



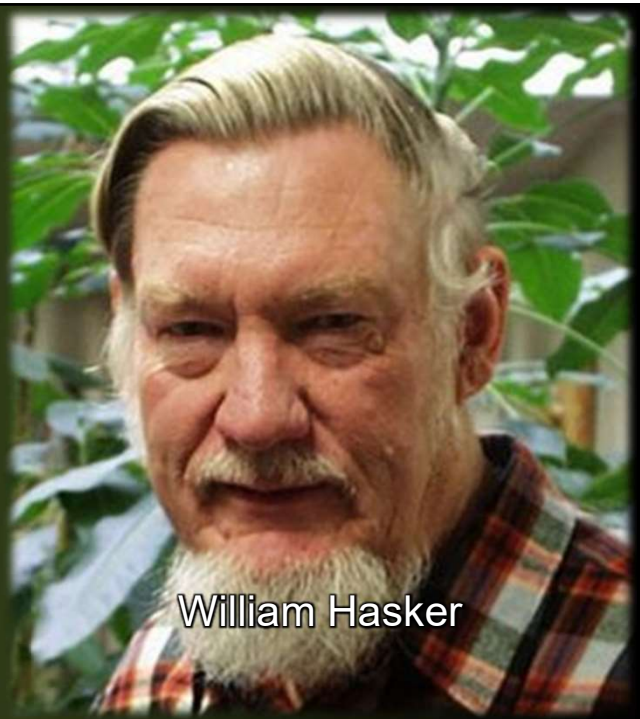
\*[Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* Bk 1, Pt. V, XLVI (Garden City: Image Books), 478]

***"Today, however, neo-Platonism really does not exist as a living philosophy, though it continues to have considerable indirect influence through the theological tradition."***



William Hasker

***"The doctrine of divine simplicity, so crucial to the classical understanding of God, has been abandoned by a strong majority of Christian philosophers, though it still has a small band of defenders."***

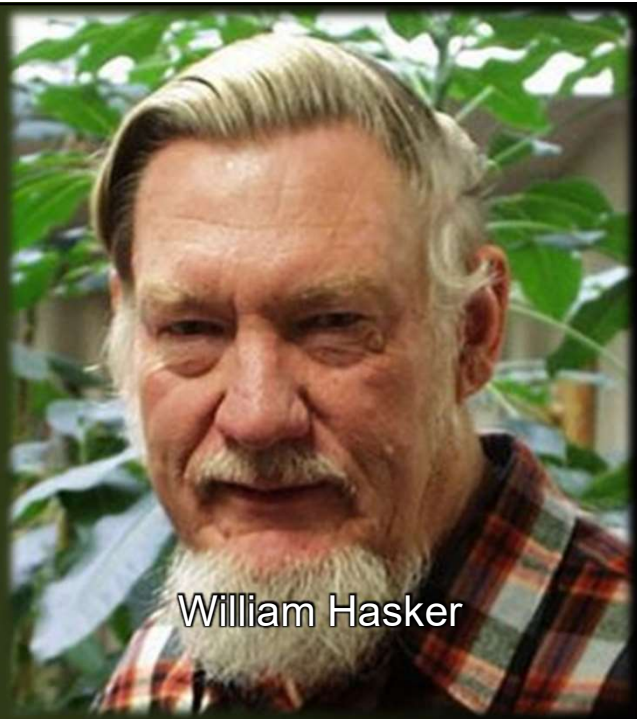


William Hasker

[William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 127]

**"Today, however, *neo-Platonism* really does not exist as a living philosophy ..."**

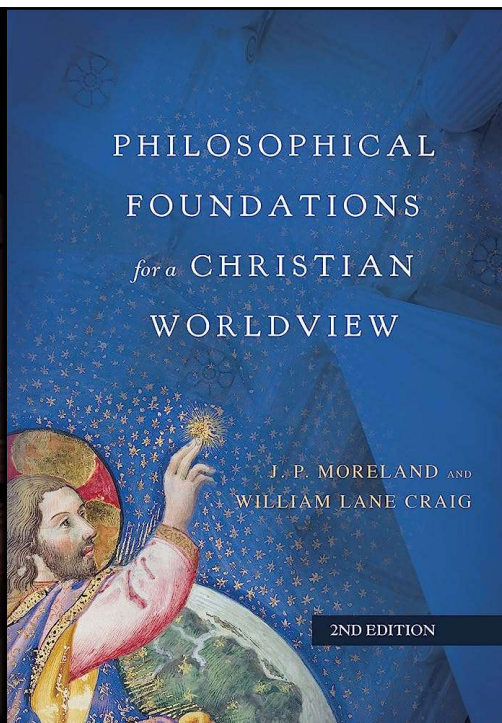
**"The doctrine of divine simplicity ... *has been abandoned* by a strong majority of Christian philosophers ..."**



William Hasker



William Lane Craig



J. P. Moreland

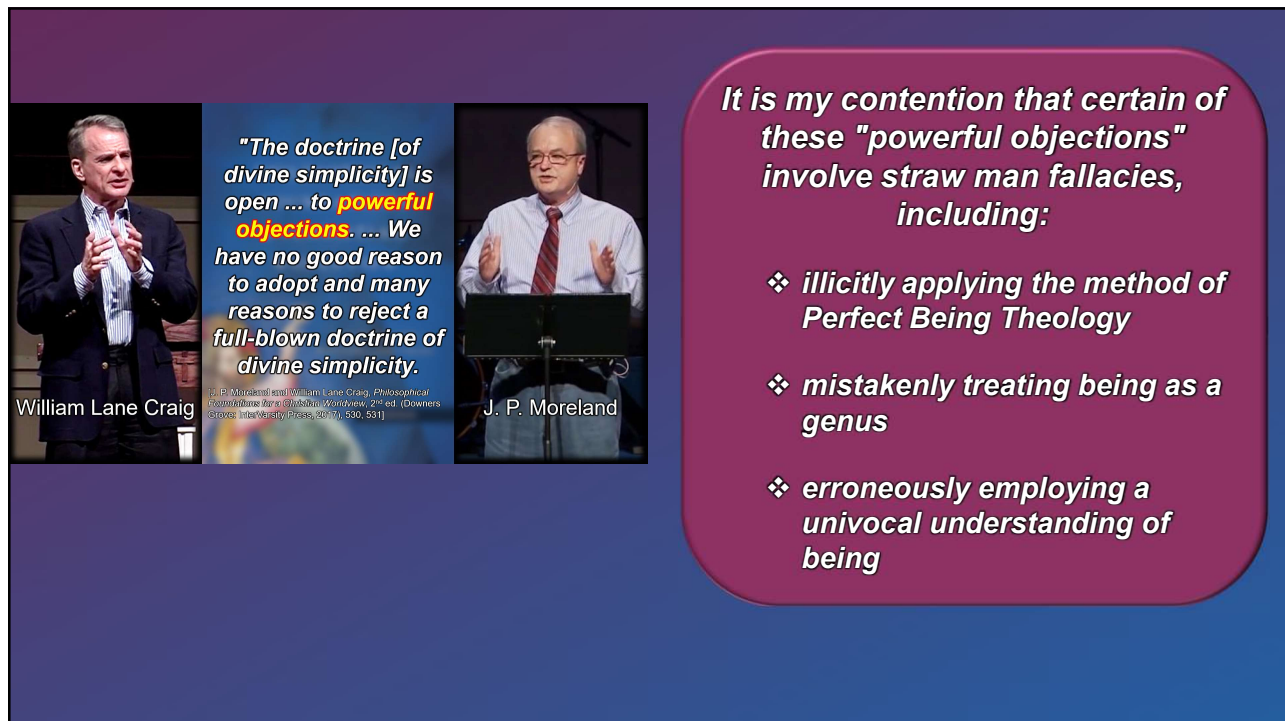


**"The doctrine [of divine simplicity] is open ... to **powerful objections**. ... We have no good reason to adopt and many reasons to reject a full-blown doctrine of divine simplicity.**

[J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 530, 531]

William Lane Craig

J. P. Moreland



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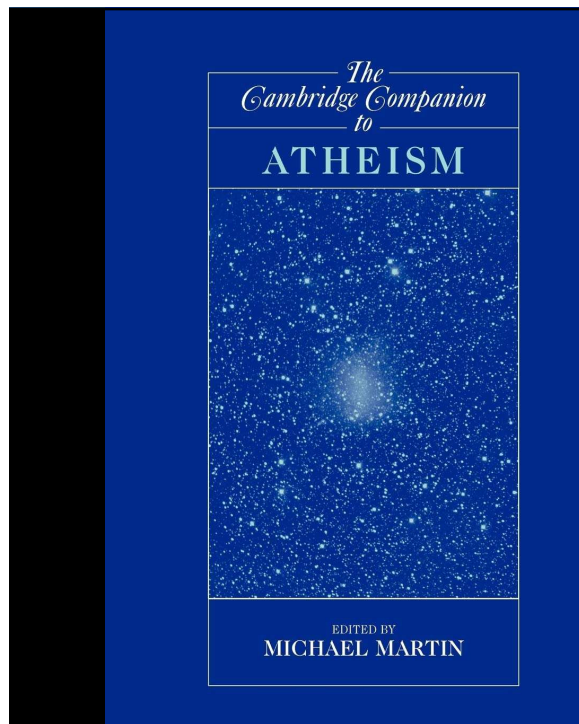
[J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 530, 531]

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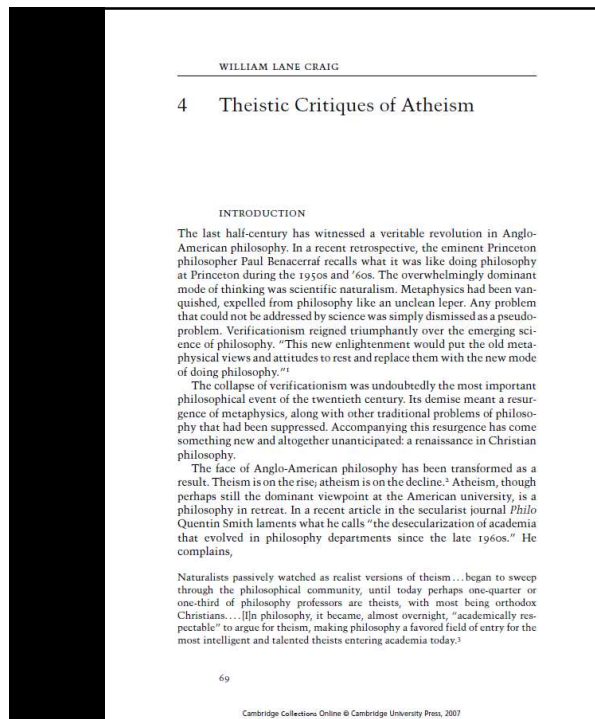
J. P. Moreland

*It is my contention that certain of these "powerful objections" involve straw man fallacies, including:*

- ❖ *illicitly applying the method of Perfect Being Theology*
- ❖ *mistakenly treating being as a genus*
- ❖ *erroneously employing a univocal understanding of being*



William Lane Craig



William Lane Craig

*"For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God."*

**"Perfect Being Theology"**

### **ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY APPROACH**

By the use of the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy:

1. Carefully define the term 'perfect'.
2. On the basis of this definition, identify what "perfect making properties" must constitute a "perfect being."
3. Since God by definition is a "perfect being," then conclude that God must possess these "perfect making properties."
4. Any property that does not "clearly" appear in the Bible and/or is clearly not "perfect making" must be denied of God.

### **CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY APPROACH**

By the use of the tools, methods and categories of classical philosophy:

1. Carefully discover what the nature of God must be like.
2. On the basis of this discovery identify what attributes must be true of God.
3. Identify those attributes as the definition of what it means to be ultimately and infinitely perfect.

*"For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God."*

Understandably, Craig is using his prior notions of "greatest conceivable being" and "most perfect being" to set boundaries on what the text of Scripture can mean.

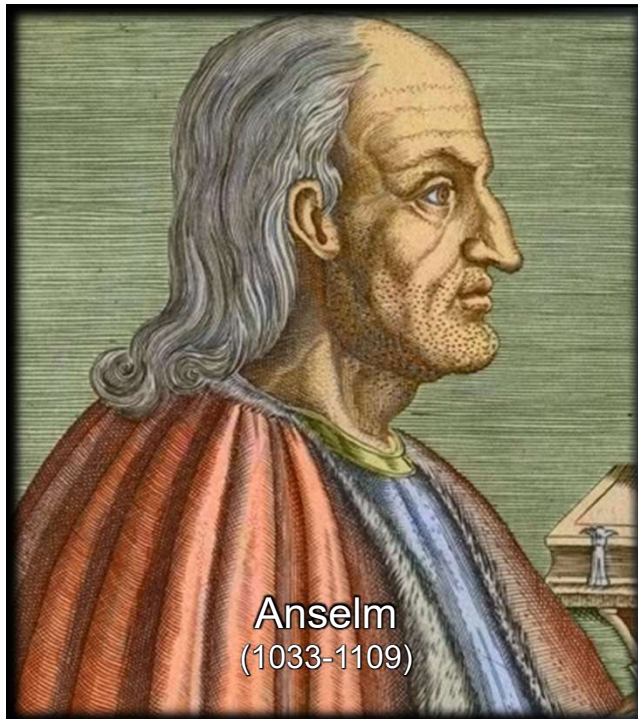
Further, Craig (correctly, in my view) acknowledges that the text of Scripture "underdetermines" (i.e., says less than) what God is like.

*"For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God."*

To be sure, Craig is certainly free to incorporate the philosophical methods and ideas from any philosopher / theologian he desires.

In many respects, I have no issues with Craig naming Anselm as a representative of the "Judeo-Christian tradition."

It should be noted, however, (and as we have seen), the same Anselm who gave him the method of "perfect being theology" also himself affirmed the doctrine of Divine simplicity!



Anselm  
(1033-1109)

*"There are no parts in thee, Lord, nor art thou more than one. But thou art so truly a unitary being, and so identical with thyself, that in no respect are thou unlike thyself; rather thou art unity itself, indivisible by any conception. Therefore, life and wisdom and the rest are not parts of thee, but all are one; and each of these is the whole, which thou art, and which all the rest are."*

[*Proslogium*, 18, trans. S. N. Deane (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), 25]

*"Theists thus find that antitheistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in formulating a more adequate conception. For example, most Christian philosophers **today** deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though **medieval** theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making."*

[William Lane Craig, "Theistic Critiques of Atheism, *Cambridge Companion*, 72]

Note Craig's juxtaposition. Simplicity, impassibility, and immutability are denied today though they were affirmed in the middle ages.

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Note Craig's juxtaposition. It is philosophers who deny simplicity, impassibility, and immutability while it is theologians who affirmed them were.

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Consider Craig's comment that most Christian philosophers today deny simplicity, impassibility, and immutability.

I wonder how many Catholic Christians philosophers there are today in comparison to the number of non-Catholic Christian philosophers.

Catholics are required by Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to hold to simplicity.

*"Theists thus find that antitheistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in formulating a more adequate conception. For example, **most Christian philosophers today** deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making."*

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*"We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God, eternal and immense, omnipotent, unchangeable, incomprehensible, and ineffable, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three Persons indeed but one essence, substance, or nature absolutely simple; ..."*

**Canon 1**

***"Theists thus find that antitheistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in formulating a more adequate conception. For example, **most Christian philosophers today** deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making."***

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Consider Craig's comment that most Christian philosophers today deny simplicity, impassibility, and immutability.

I wonder how many Catholic Christians philosophers there are today in comparison to the number of non-Catholic Christian philosophers.

Catholics are required by Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to hold to simplicity.

Is it true, therefore that "most Christian philosophers today deny that God is simple"?

***"Theists thus find that antitheistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in formulating a more adequate conception. For example, **most Christian philosophers today** deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making."***

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Granting, for the sake of argument, that most Christian philosophers today deny God is simple, is this an argument that the doctrine of simplicity is false?

Or could it be that having so many contemporary Christian philosophers denying simplicity is a commentary on the regrettable state of contemporary Christian philosophy?

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Last, note the two "arguments" Craig offers as to why today's Christian philosophers today deny simplicity, impassibility, and immutability.

1. These attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible.
2. These attributes are not clearly great making.

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Regarding the first argument, did not Craig earlier acknowledge that "the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data"?

Why, then, should we necessarily conclude anything about simplicity if indeed the Bible does not ascribe simplicity to God?

Could it not be (granting for the sake of argument) that this is one of those instances where the biblical data "underdetermine" the concept of God?

1. These attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible.
2. These attributes are not clearly great making.

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[William Lane Craig, "Theistic Critiques of Atheism, *Cambridge Companion*, 72]

Regarding the second argument, the truth of simplicity does not rise or fall on the basis of philosophically discovering what "great making properties are" on the basis of a prior determination of what "perfect" means.

Rather, one should discover what God must be like as the First Cause, and then ascribe the characterization of 'perfect' to that.

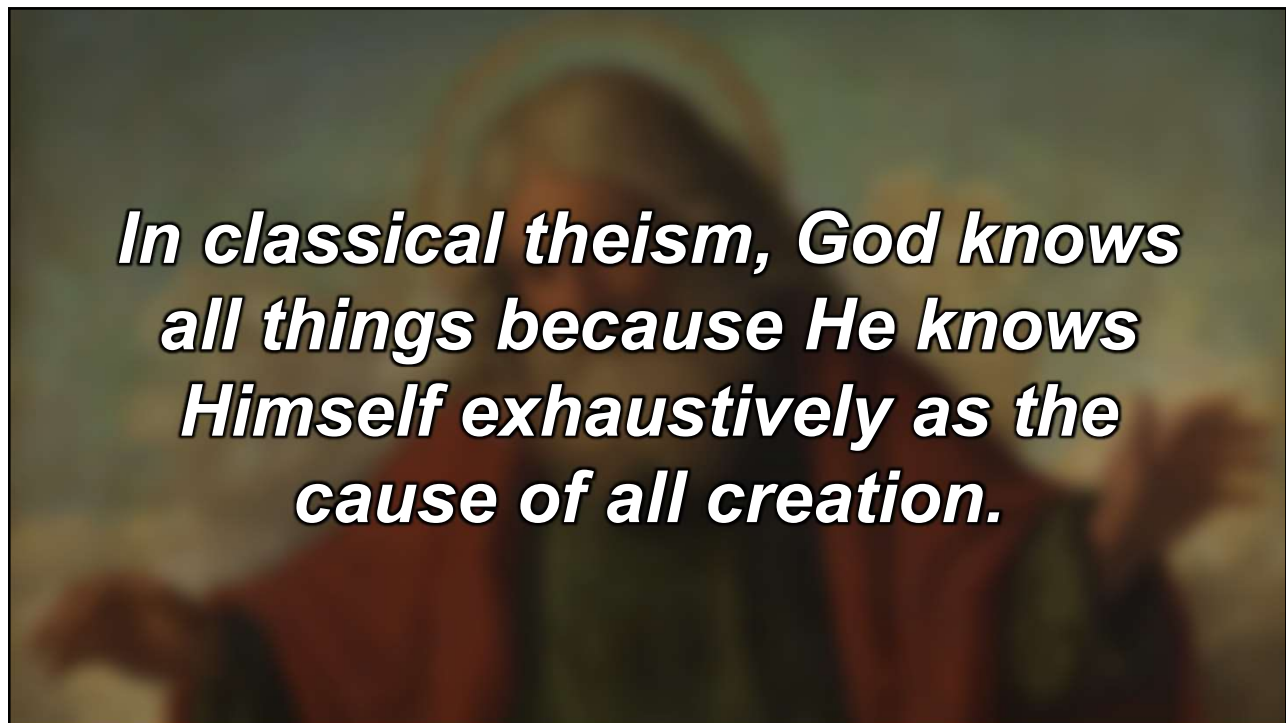
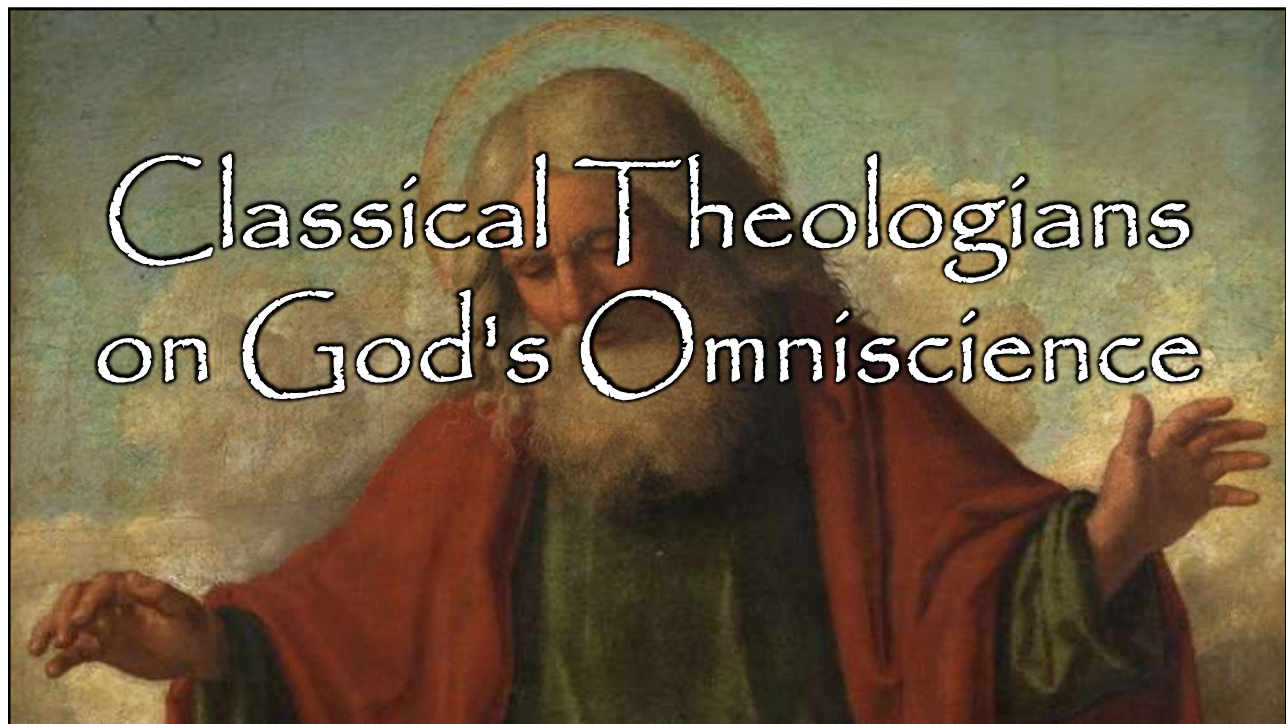
God determines what 'perfect' means rather than the meaning of 'perfect' disclosing what God must be like.

1. These attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible.
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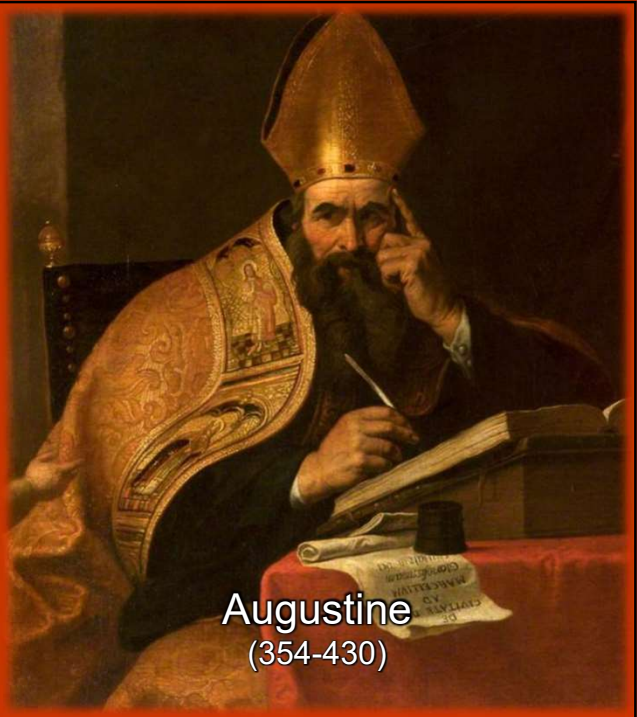


From this and other things that need to be said but will go without being said here, one can come to see in Aquinas how it is that the classical attributes of God—perfection, goodness, infinity, immutability, eternity, unity, omniscience, life, will, love, justice, mercy, providence, omnipotence—cascade inexorably from simplicity. To be sure, some contemporary philosophers of religion have contended for certain of these attributes by means quite different from the classical and medieval metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. But as is evidenced in the contemporary discussion, even among evangelicals, not all of these classical attributes have survived these contemporary means. Whether that is a good or bad thing for Christian theism, I will, for the time being, leave it to you to decide.



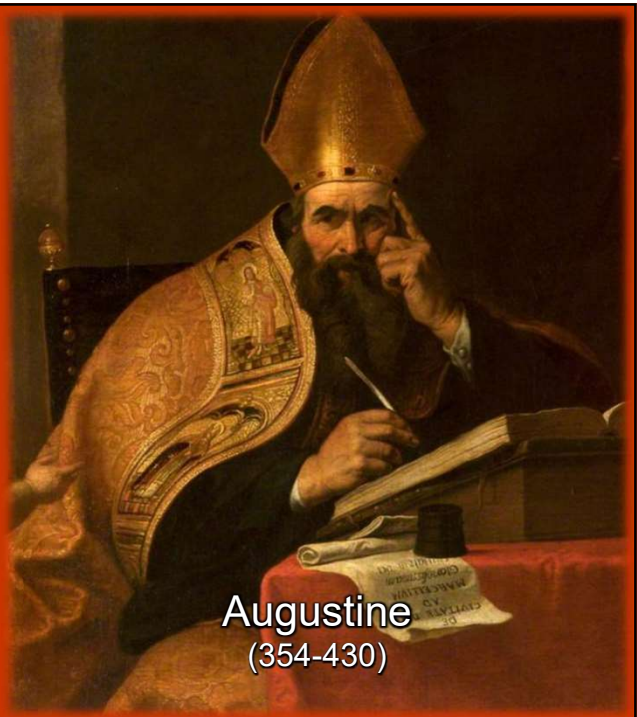


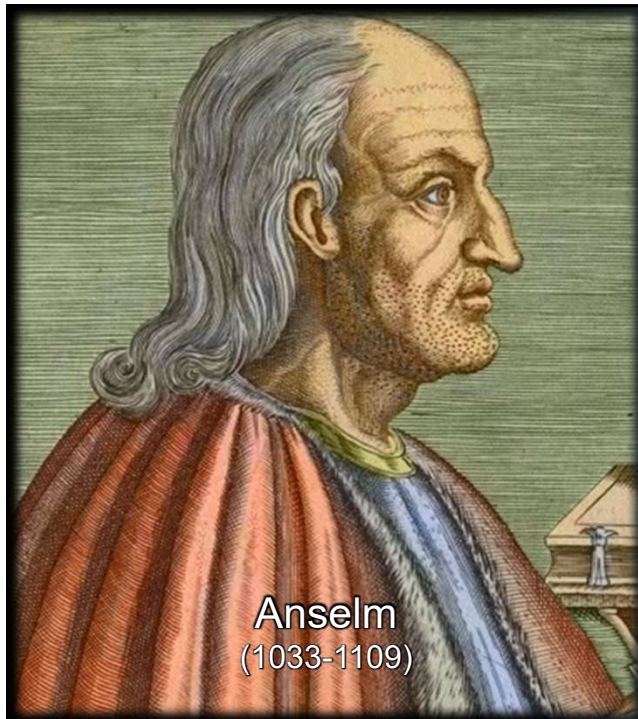
***"It is not that God's knowledge varies in any way, that the future, the present, and the past affect that knowledge in three different ways. It is not with God as it is with us. He does not look ahead to the future, look directly at the present, look back to the past."***



***"He sees in some other manner, utterly remote from anything we experience or could imagine. He does not see things by turning his attention from one thing to another, He sees all without any kind of change.."***

[City of God XI, §21, trans. John O'Meara (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 452]





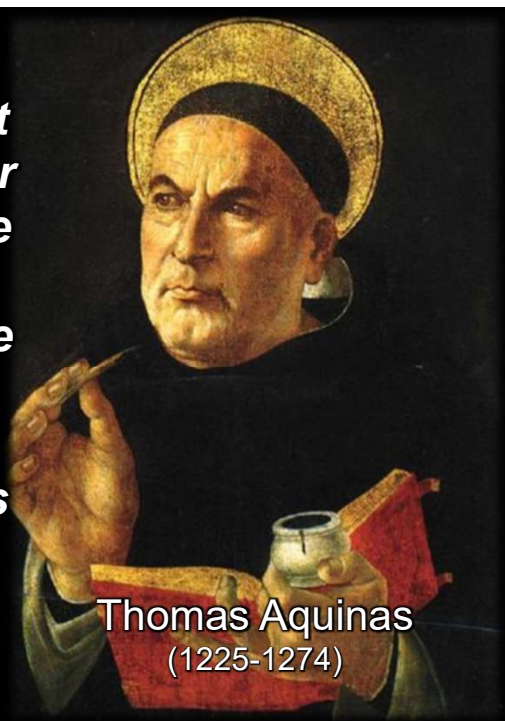
**Anselm**  
(1033-1109)

***"For He foreknows every future event. But what God foreknows will necessarily occur in the same manner as He foreknows it to occur. ... For although He foreknows all future events, nevertheless He does not foreknow every future event as occurring by necessity ... He foreknows that some things are going to occur through the free will of rational creatures"***

[Anselm, *Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption*, 157-158, 161, in Norman Geisler, H. Wayne House, Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 34]

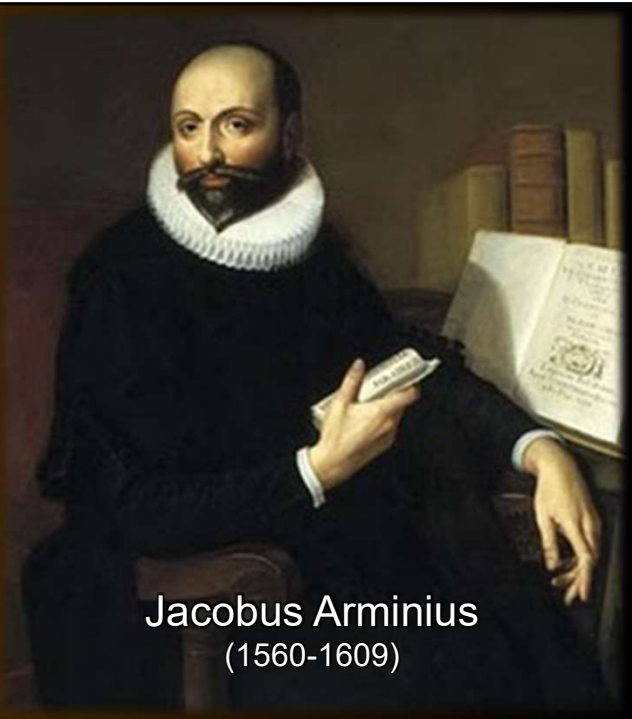
***"There is nothing in any thing that is not caused by God, mediately or immediately. Now, when the cause is known, the effect is known ... But God knows Himself and all the intervening causes between Himself and any given thing. ... Therefore, God knows whatever is found in reality."***

[*Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 50, §2, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 182]



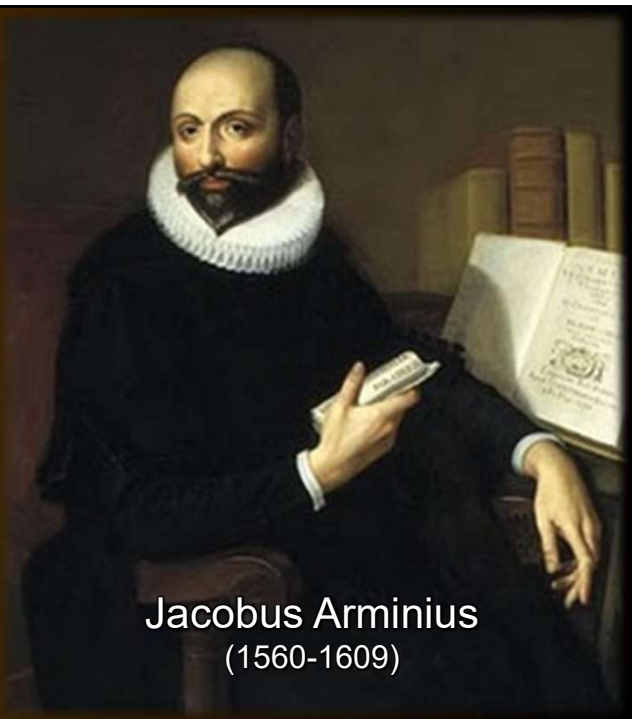
**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"The understanding of God is a faculty of his life ... by which He distinctly understands all things and every thing which now have, will have, have had, can have, or might hypothetically have, any kind of being;***



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

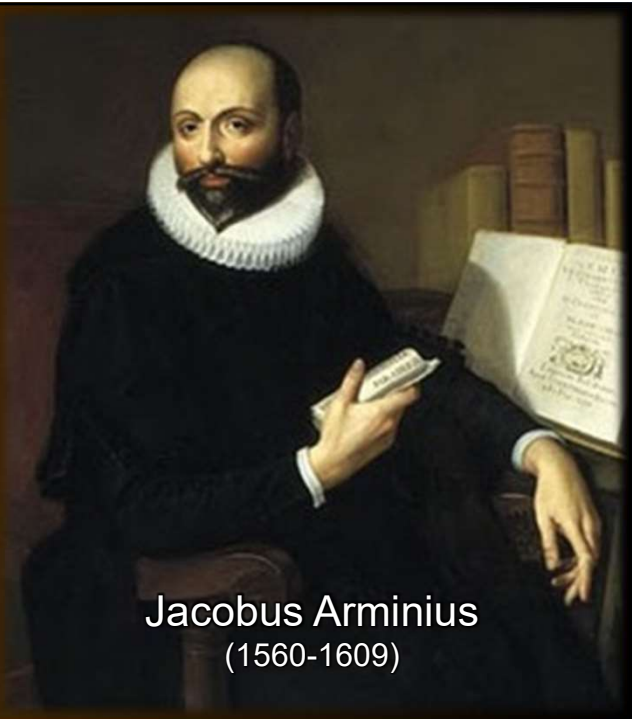
***"by which He likewise distinctly understands the order which all and each of them hold among themselves, the connections and the various relations which they have or can have;***



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

***"not excluding even that entity which belongs to reason, and which exists, or can exist, only in the mind, imagination, and enunciation."***

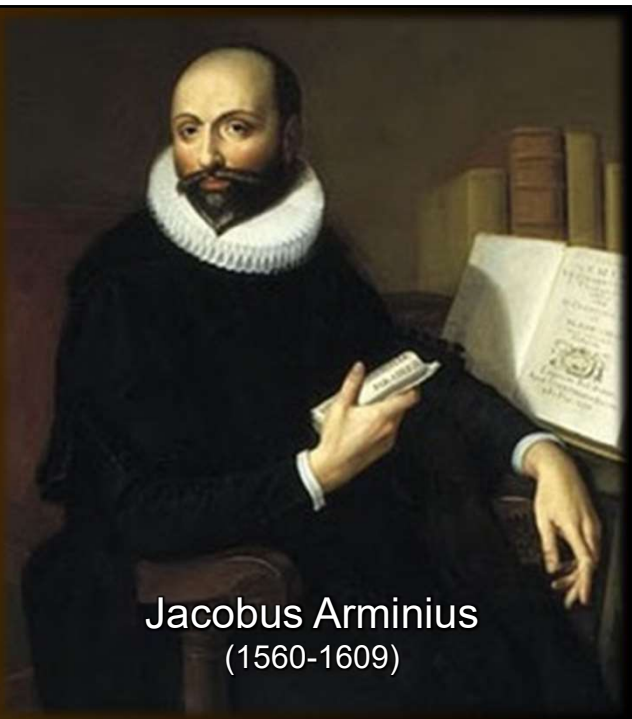
[Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), I, 444]



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

***"All the things which God knows, He knows neither by intelligible images, nor by similitude ... but He knows them by his own essence, and by this alone, with the exception of evil things which he knows indirectly by the opposite good things; as, through means of the habitude, privation is discovered."***

[Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), I, 44]



Jacobus Arminius  
(1560-1609)

***"All things are present to his understanding because he hath at once a view of all successions of times; and his knowledge of future things is as perfect as of present things, or what is past; it is not a certain knowledge of present things, and an uncertain knowledge of future, but his knowledge of one is as certain and unerring as his knowledge of the other."***

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:437]



**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"God knows himself perfectly, comprehensively. Nothing in his own nature is concealed from him. ... God knows all other things, whether they be possible, past, present, future; whether they be things that he can do, but will never do, or whether they be things that he hath done, but are not now; things that are now in being, or things that are not now existing, that lie in the womb of their proper and immediate causes."***

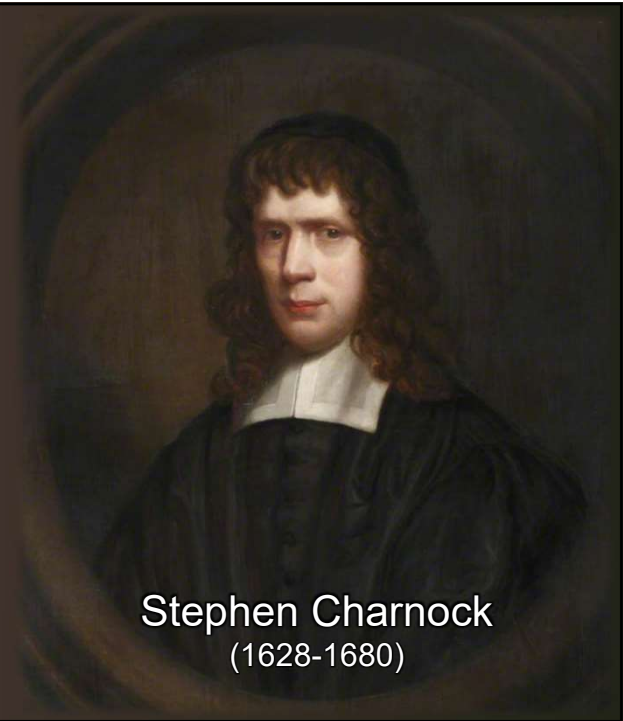
[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:416, 417]



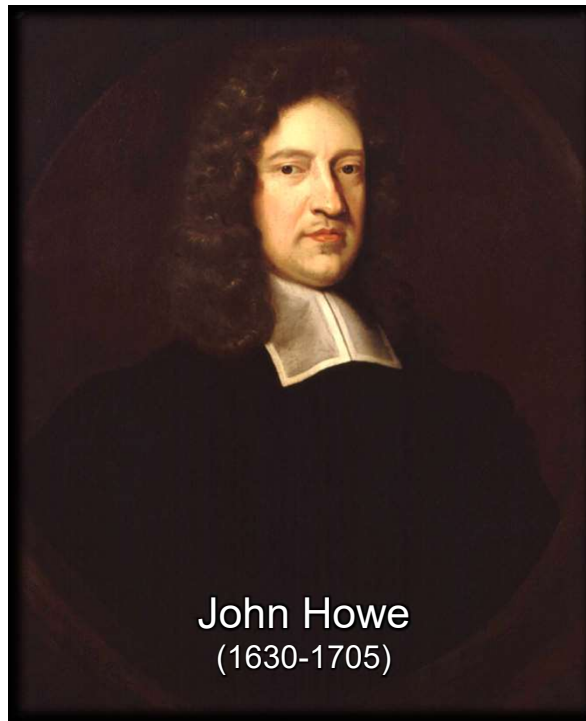
**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"God knows all future contingencies, that is, God knows all things that shall accidentally happen, or, as we say, by chance; and he knows all the free motions of men's wills that shall be to the end of the world."***

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:439]

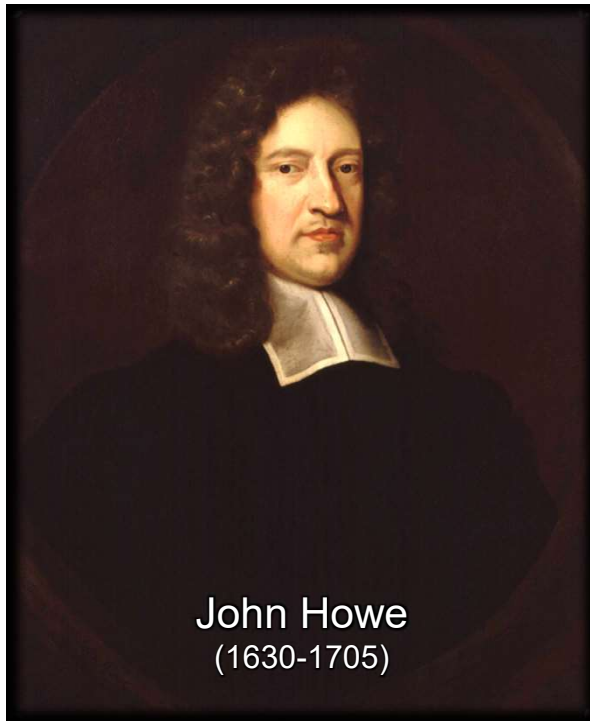


**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)



**John Howe**  
(1630-1705)

***"As it cannot but seem to us a higher perfection to know all things at once, than gradually to arrive to the knowledge of one thing after another ... and that nothing is more certain, than that all possible perfection must agree to God; so we find his own word asserting to him that most perfect knowledge which seems to exclude the possibility of increase; or that any thing should succeed into his knowledge."***




**John Howe**  
(1630-1705)

***"For how plainly is it affirmed of him that he knows all things. And even concerning such future things as about which our present inquiry is conversant, the affirmation is express and positive: 'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.' Isa. xlv.9, 10."***

[John Howe, "The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience," in *The Works of John Howe*, 3 vols. (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), v. 2, p. 481]

***"Now if there is knowledge in any of the creatures of God, then much more in God himself. Besides, all that knowledge that is in angels or men, comes from God; he is a God of knowledge, or knowledges, of all knowledge ... the source and fountain of it, and therefore it must be in him in its perfection: knowledge of all things, natural, civil, and spiritual, is from him, is taught and given by him."***

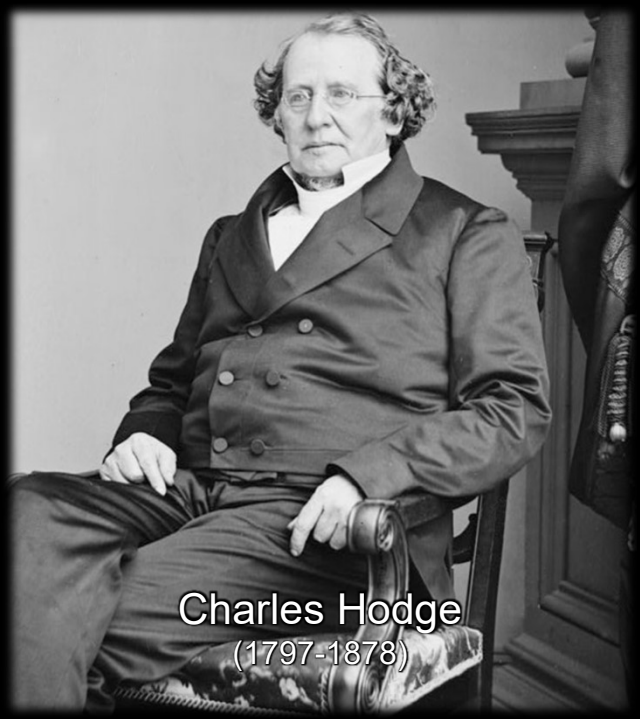
[John Gill, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971), 58-59]



**John Gill**  
(1697-1771)

***"Among the objects of the divine knowledge are the free acts of men. The Scriptures abundantly teach that such acts are foreknown. ... If God be ignorant of how free agents will act, his knowledge must be limited, and it must be constantly increasing, which is altogether inconsistent with the true idea of his nature."***

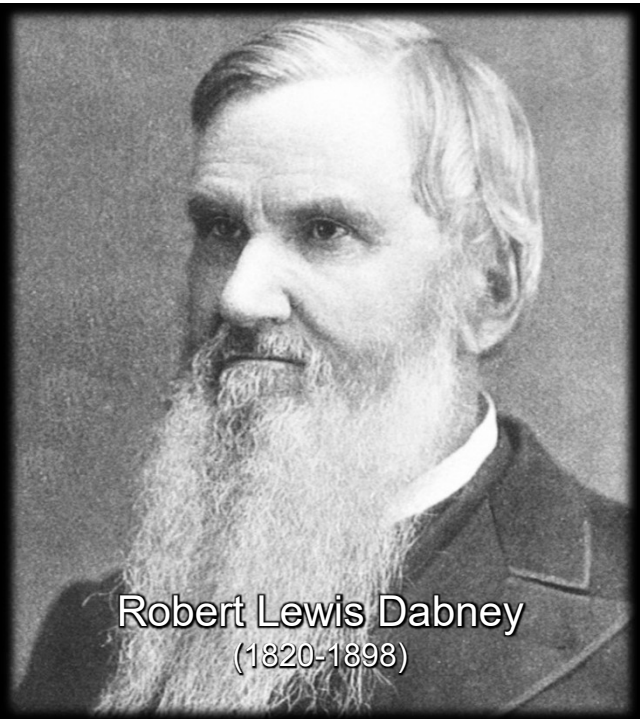
[Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), I:400]



Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)

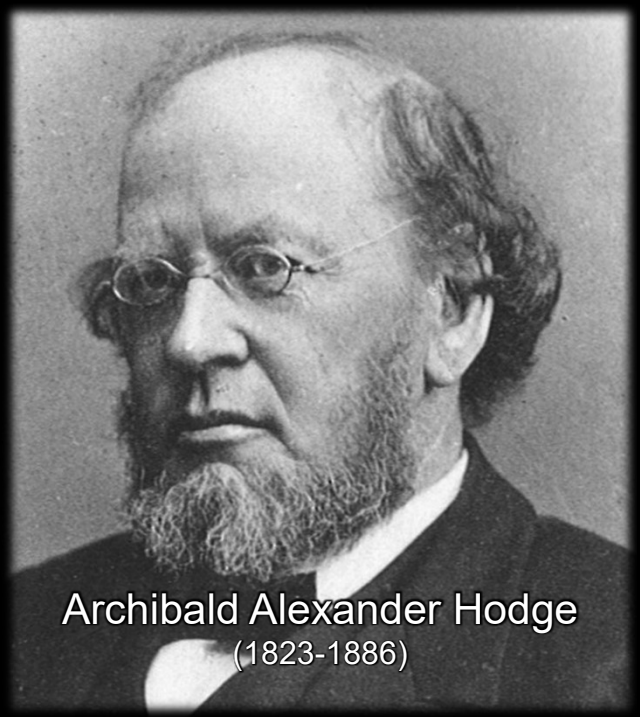
***"God has a perfect and universal foreknowledge of all the volitions of free-agents. The Scriptures expressly assert it."***

[Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 156]



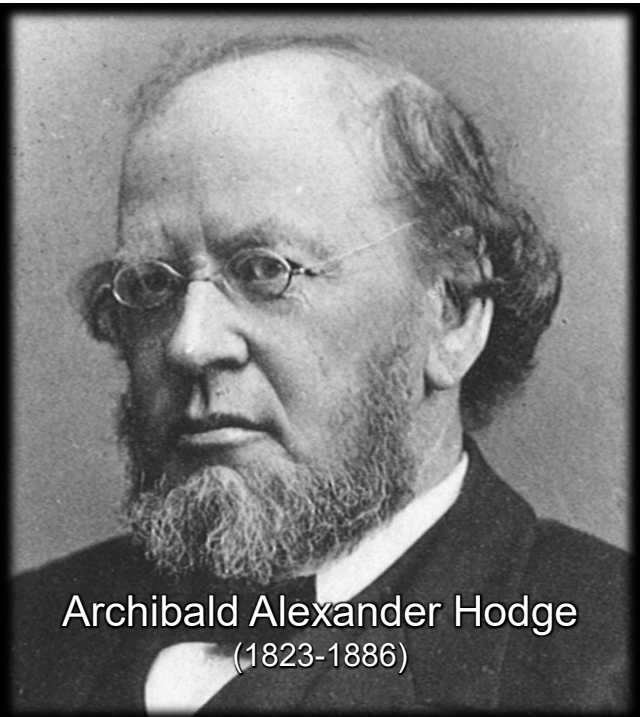
Robert Lewis Dabney  
(1820-1898)

***"God's knowledge ... does in no way depend upon his creatures or their actions, but solely upon his own infinite intuition of all things possible in the light of his own reason, and of all things actual and future in the light of his own eternal purpose. ...***



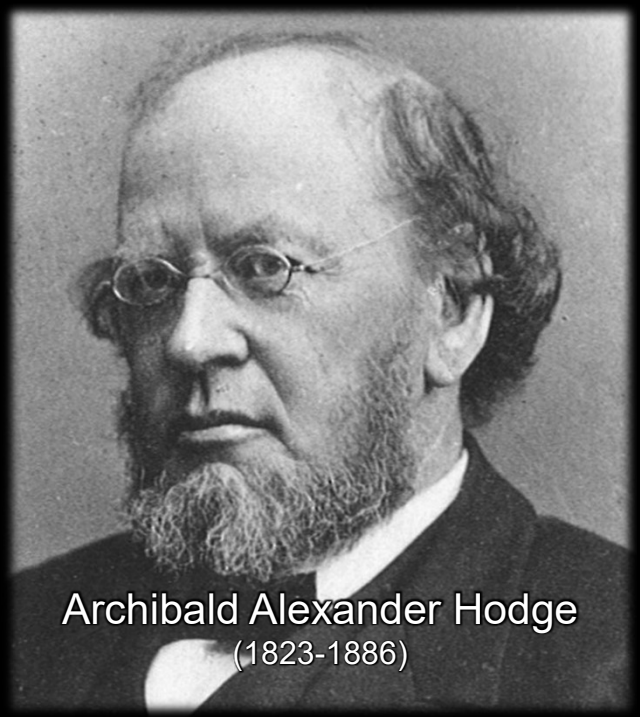
Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

***"All possible objects, as such, whether they are or ever have been, or ever will be or not, [are] seen in the light of his own infinite reason.***



Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

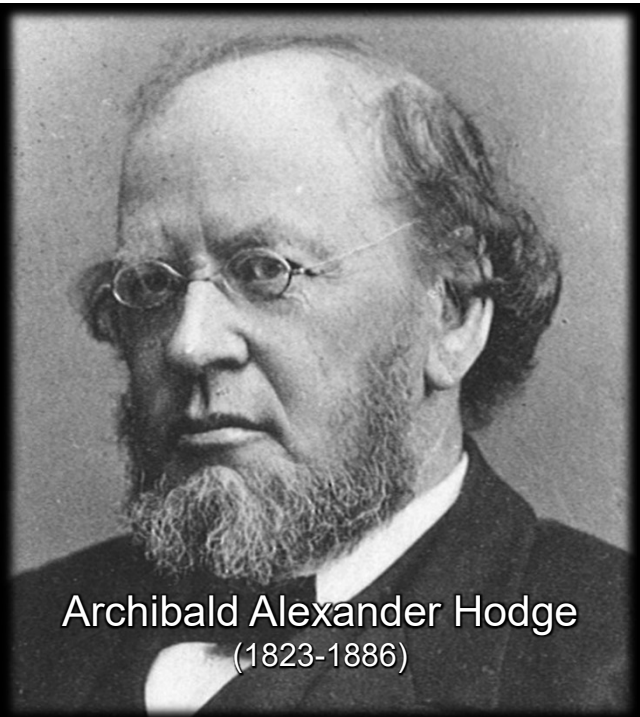
***"All things actual, which have been, are, or will be, he comprehends in one eternal, simultaneous act of knowledge, as ever present actualities to him, and as known to be such in the light of his own sovereign and eternal purpose. ..."***



Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

***"The contingency of events [by] the volition of a free agent ... are foreknown by him as contingent in their cause, but as none the less certain in their event."***

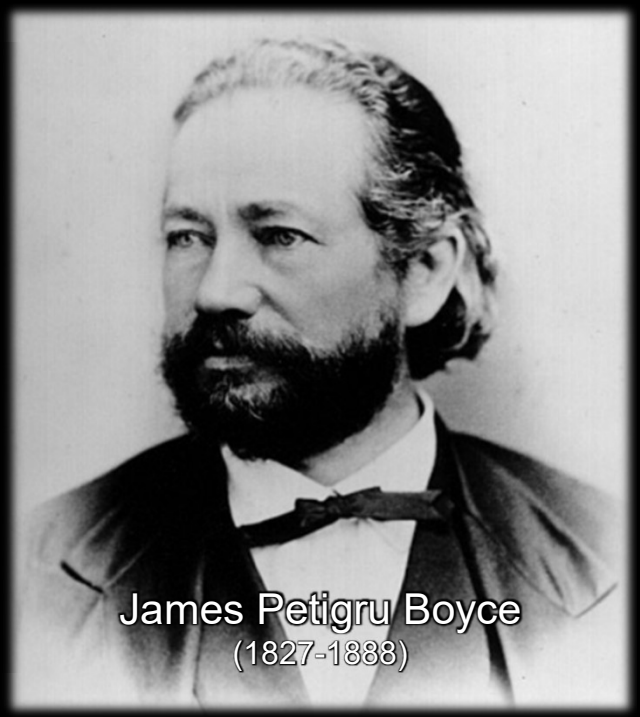
[A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology for Students and Laymen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 144, 145, 146]



Archibald Alexander Hodge  
(1823-1886)

***"What then are the objects of his knowledge? Himself, his nature, or essence ... His creation in all its fullness ... He knows all the past, present, and future of all things, knowing the future with the same certainty and accuracy with which he knows the present and past; for the future is already as present to him as though actually existing with the creatures and tie belonging to it, as is as distinctly perceived as it shall be then."***

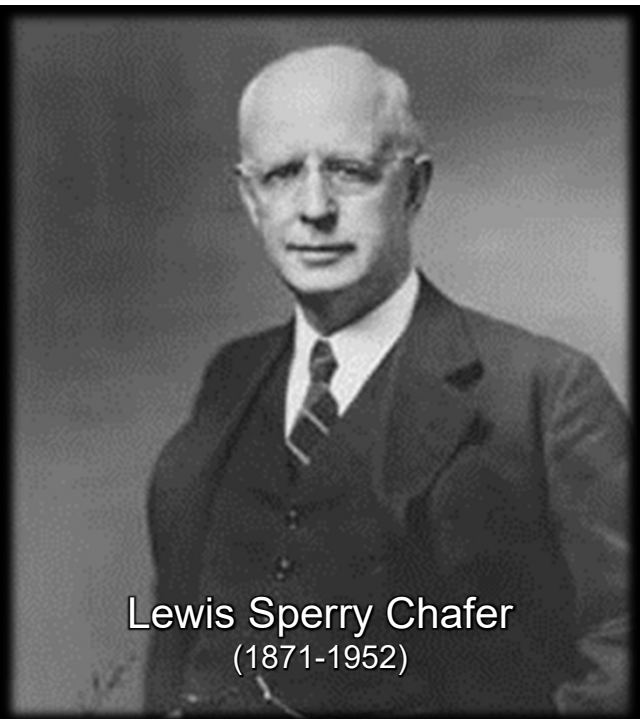
[James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 87, 88]



**James Petigru Boyce**  
(1827-1888)

***"The omniscience of God comprehends all things—things past, things present, and things future, and the possible as well as the actual. ... Omniscience brings everything—past, present, and future—with equal reality before the mind of God."***

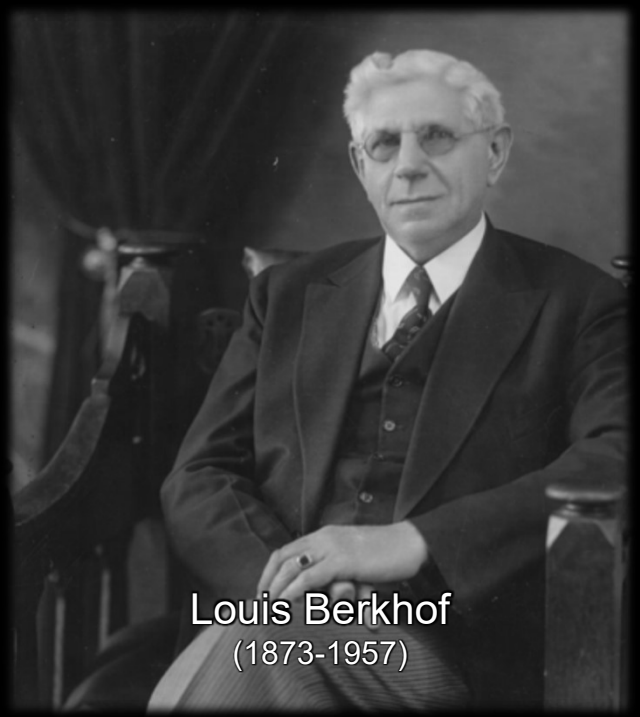
[Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), I:192]



**Lewis Sperry Chafer**  
(1871-1952)

***"It is perfectly evident that Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events. ... Moreover, it does not leave us in doubt as to the freedom of man."***

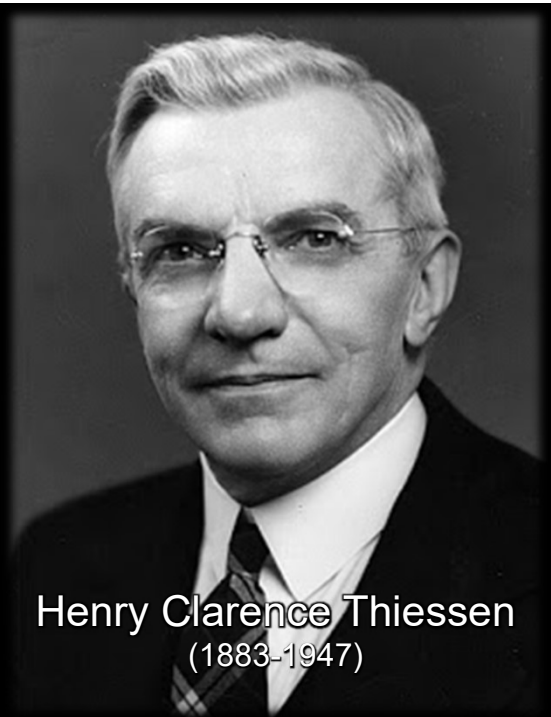
[Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 69]



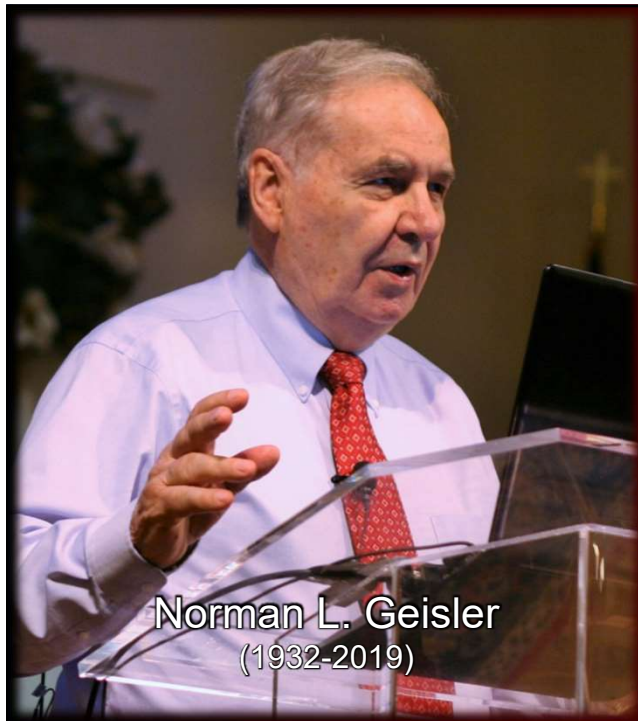
**Louis Berkhof**  
(1873-1957)

***"By the omniscience of God we mean that He knows himself and all other things whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present, or future, and that He knows them perfectly and from all eternity. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly."***

[Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 124]



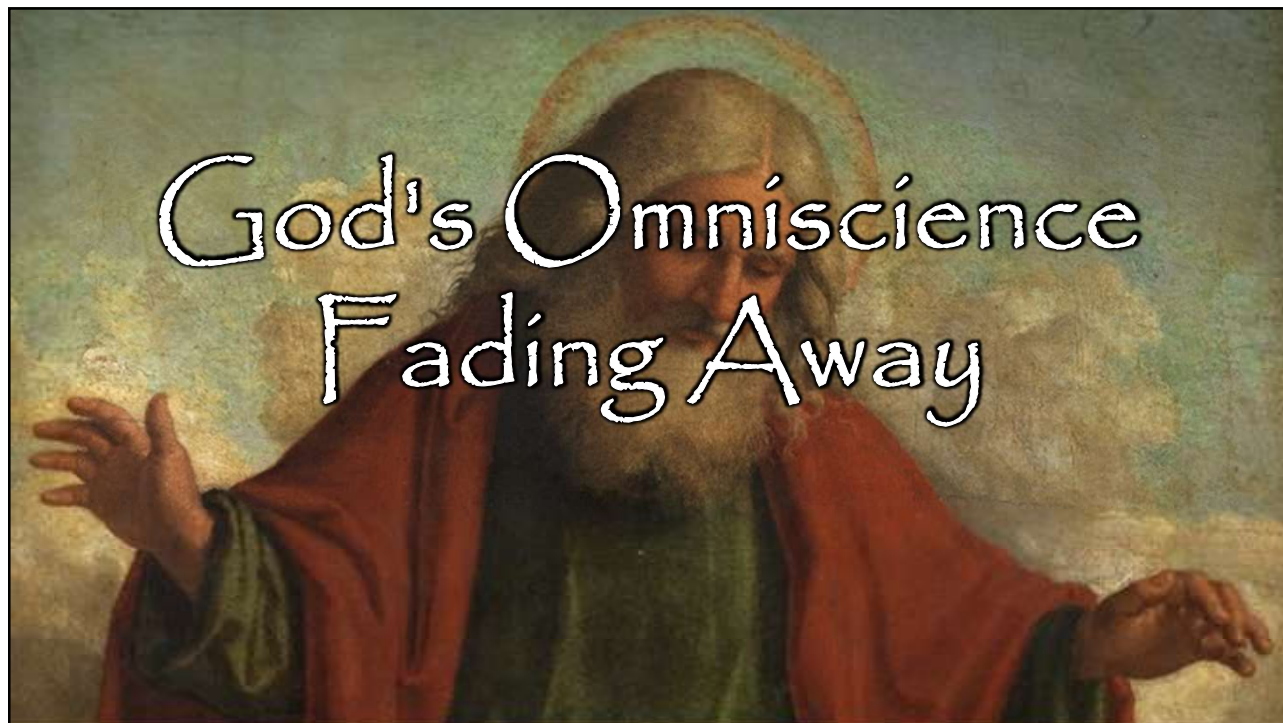
**Henry Clarence Thiessen**  
(1883-1947)

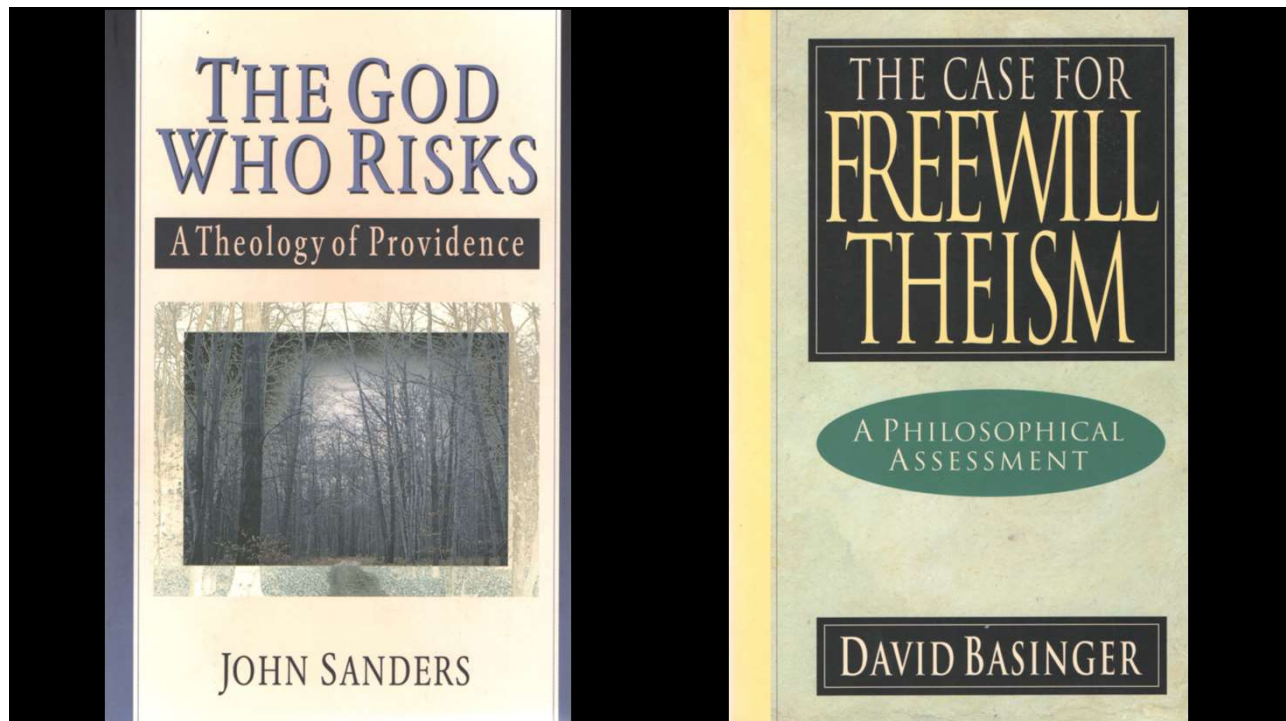
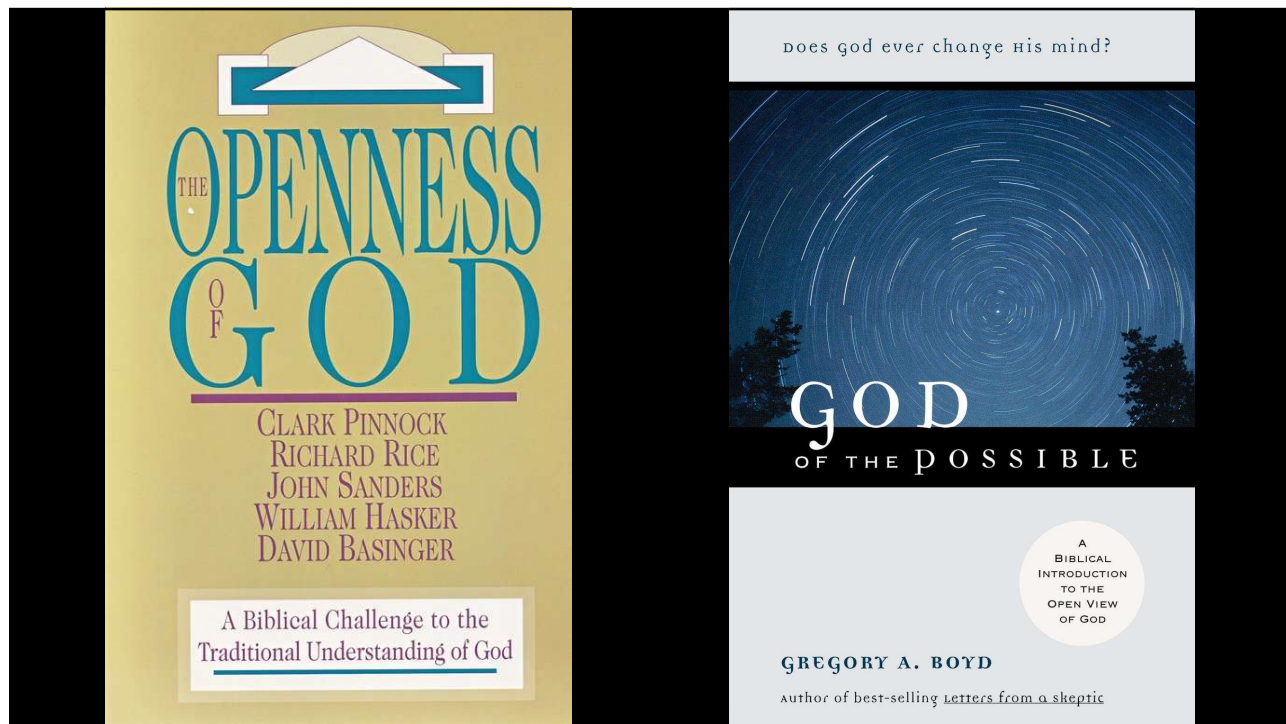
A photograph of Norman L. Geisler, an older man with grey hair, wearing a light blue shirt and a red patterned tie. He is standing behind a clear acrylic podium, gesturing with his right hand while speaking. A laptop is visible on the podium.

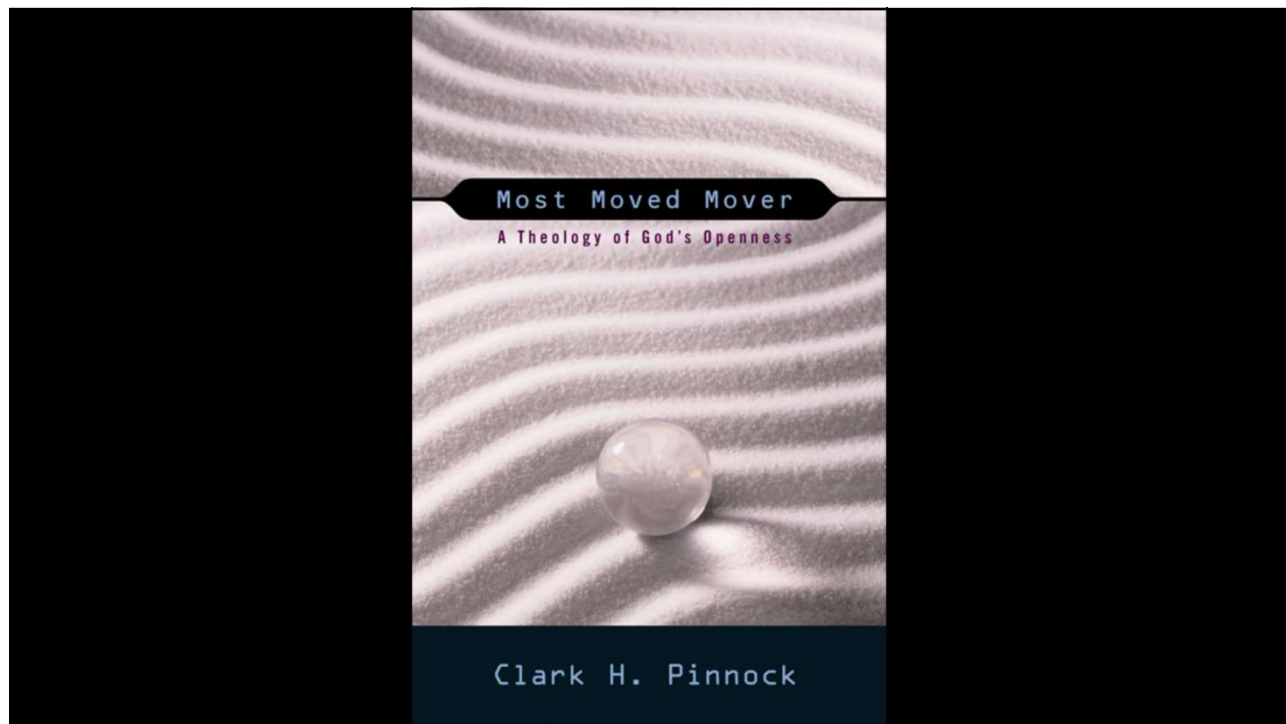
**Norman L. Geisler  
(1932-2019)**


***"Christians and Jews,  
from their earliest  
recorded histories, have  
united in their affirmation  
that God knows all things  
exhaustively (past,  
present, and future, actual  
and contingent) ... God's  
knowledge of Himself and  
His creation is infinite."***

[Norman Geisler, H. Wayne House, Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 20, 21]








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## Because God is Free the Future Must be Open

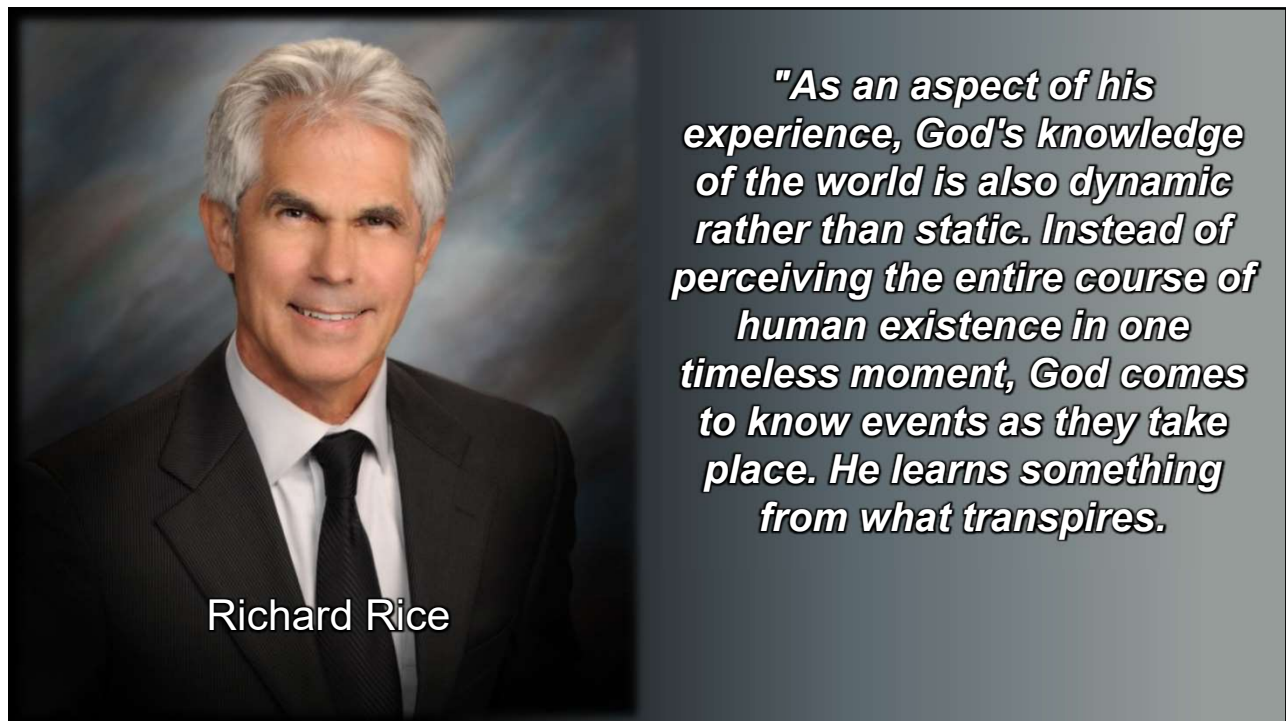
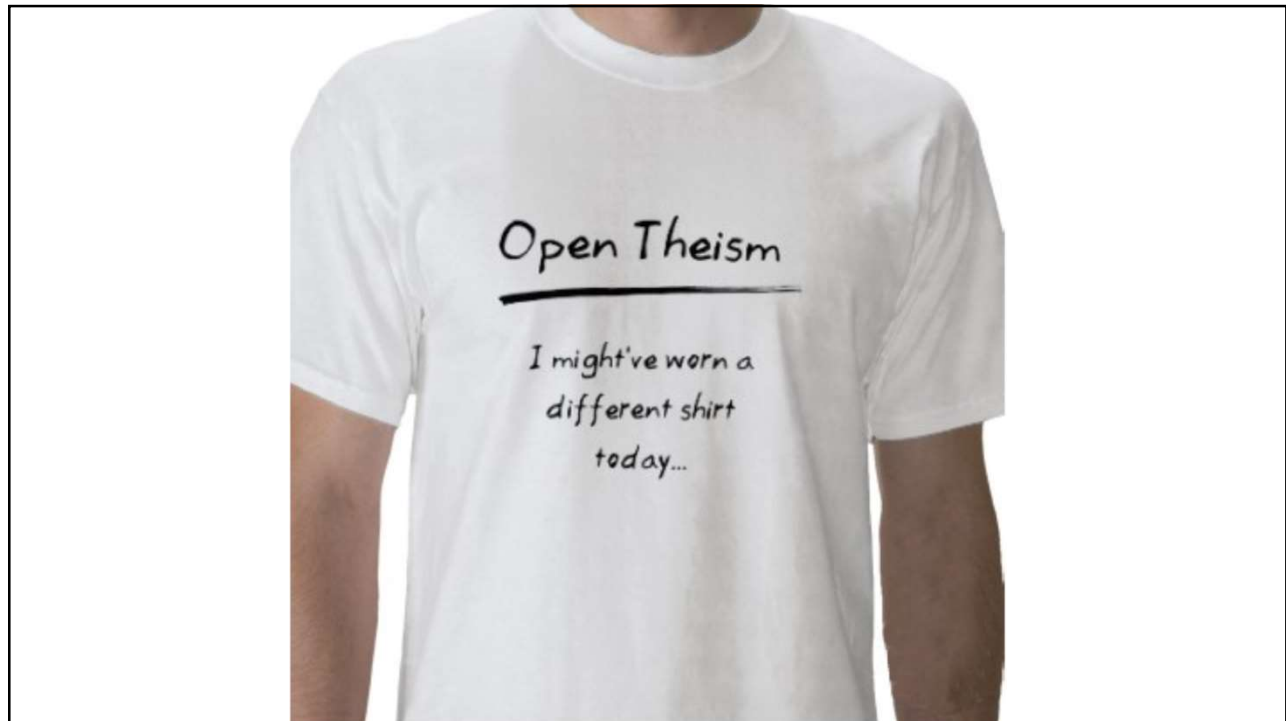
Ultimately, open theism is not based on man's freedom but on God's freedom. Open theism is the Christian doctrine that the future is not settled but open because God is alive, eternally free, and inexhaustibly creative. Although this undeniable truth is virtual heresy to many Calvinist and Arminian theologians, regardless, open theists affirm the obvious, that God is able to think new thoughts. And He can write new songs. And if He wants to He could design new butterflies too.

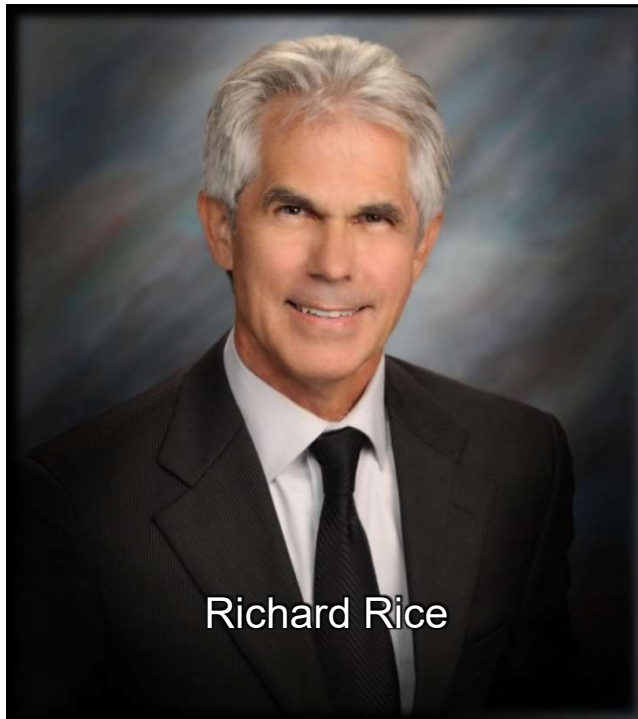
**Select Open Theism and Related Events**

**Broadcast Series:** Research fellow at Scotland's University of St. Andrews, Dr. Ryan Mullins, is [interviewed](#) (during the coronavirus shutdown) on America's most-powerful Christian radio station about his Oxford Studies title *The End of the Timeless God*.

**Broadcast Series:** Liberty University's associate professor Dr. Richard Holland is [interviewed](#) about his book *God, Time, and the Incarnation*.

**The Will Duffy / Matt Slick Open Theism Debate:** focused on God's free will, the changes the Incarnation brought about within God, and the list of [33 categories](#) of Bible verses affirming that the future is open...

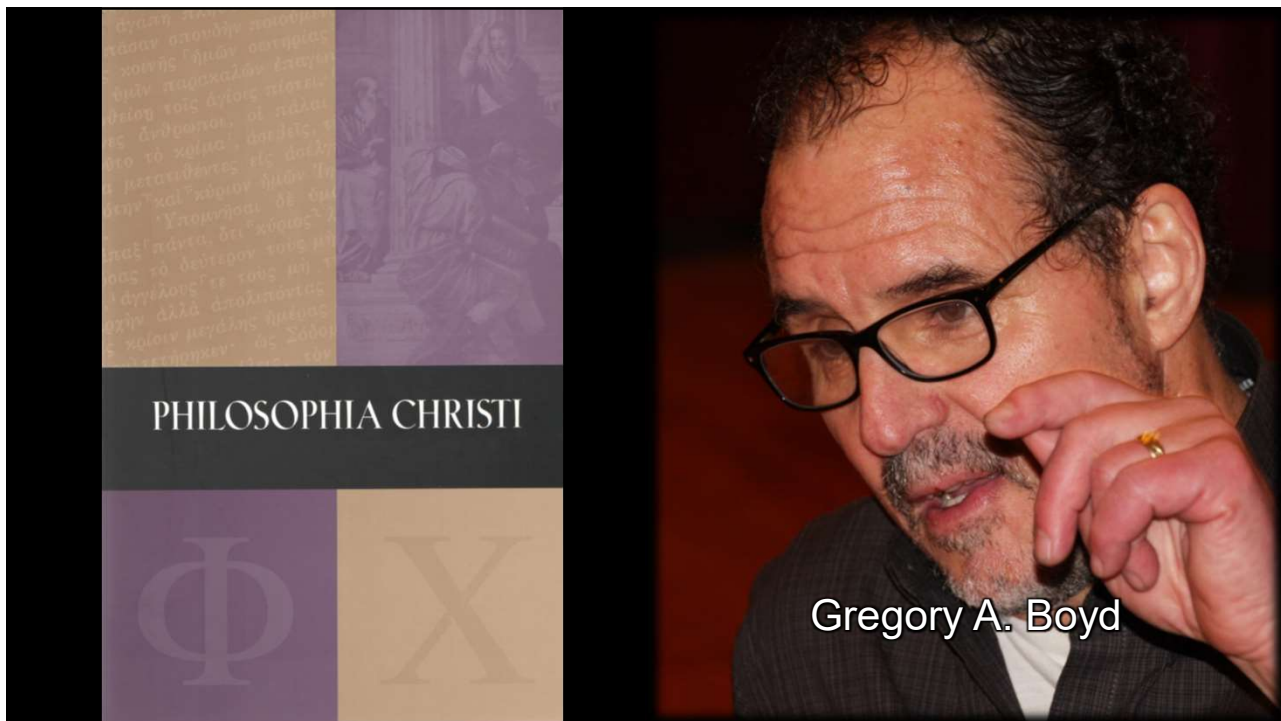




**Richard Rice**

*"We call this position the 'open view of God' because it regards God as receptive to new experiences and as flexible in the way he works toward his objectives in the world. Since it sees God as dependent on the world in certain respects, the open view of God differs from much conventional theology." "*

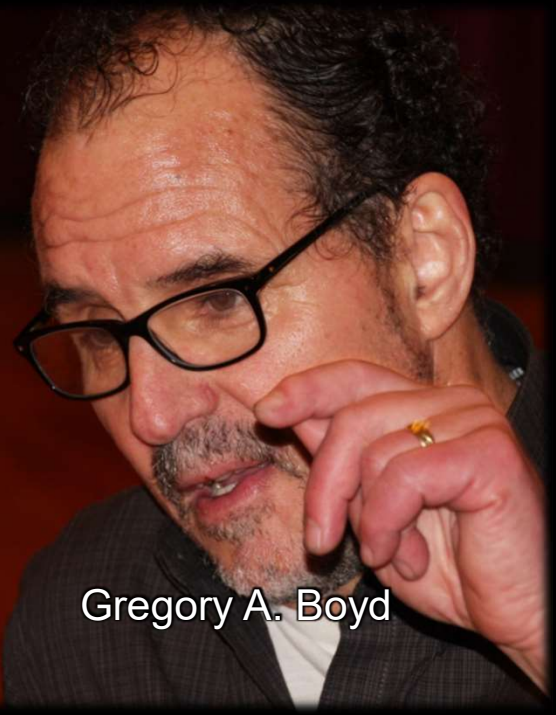
[Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective" in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 16)]



**PHILOSOPHIA CHRISTI**

**Gregory A. Boyd**

*"Scripture also frequently depicts God as experiencing regret ... disappointment, frustration, and unexpected outcomes ... suggesting that the future is to this extent composed of possibilities rather than certainties."*



Gregory A. Boyd

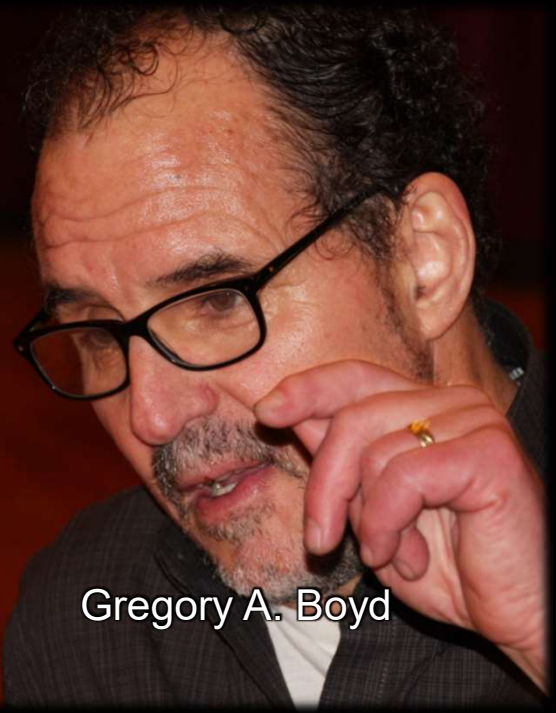
*"Scripture also frequently depicts **God as experiencing regret** ... disappointment, frustration, and unexpected outcomes ... suggesting that the future is to this extent composed of possibilities rather than certainties."*

*Undoubted Boyd has in mind such verses as Gen. 6:6.*

*"And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."*

***"It is, I submit, more difficult to conceive of God experiencing such things if the future is exhaustively settled in his mind than if it is in part composed of possibilities."***

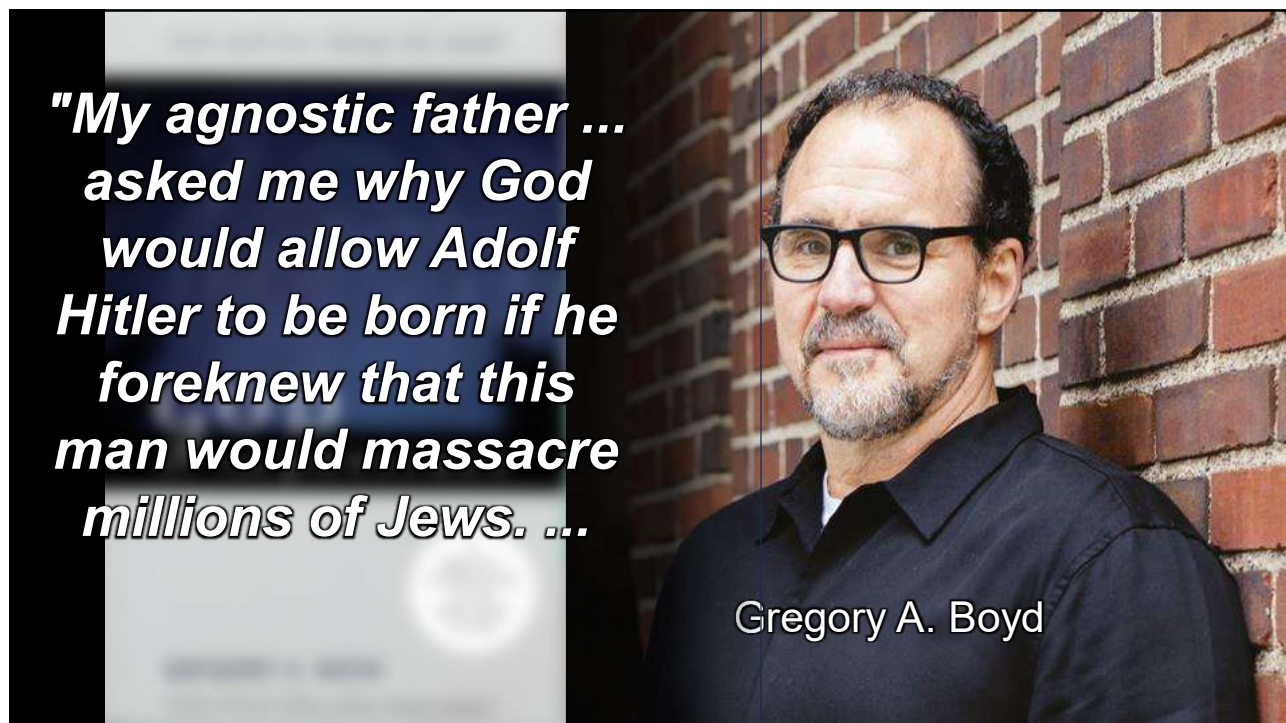
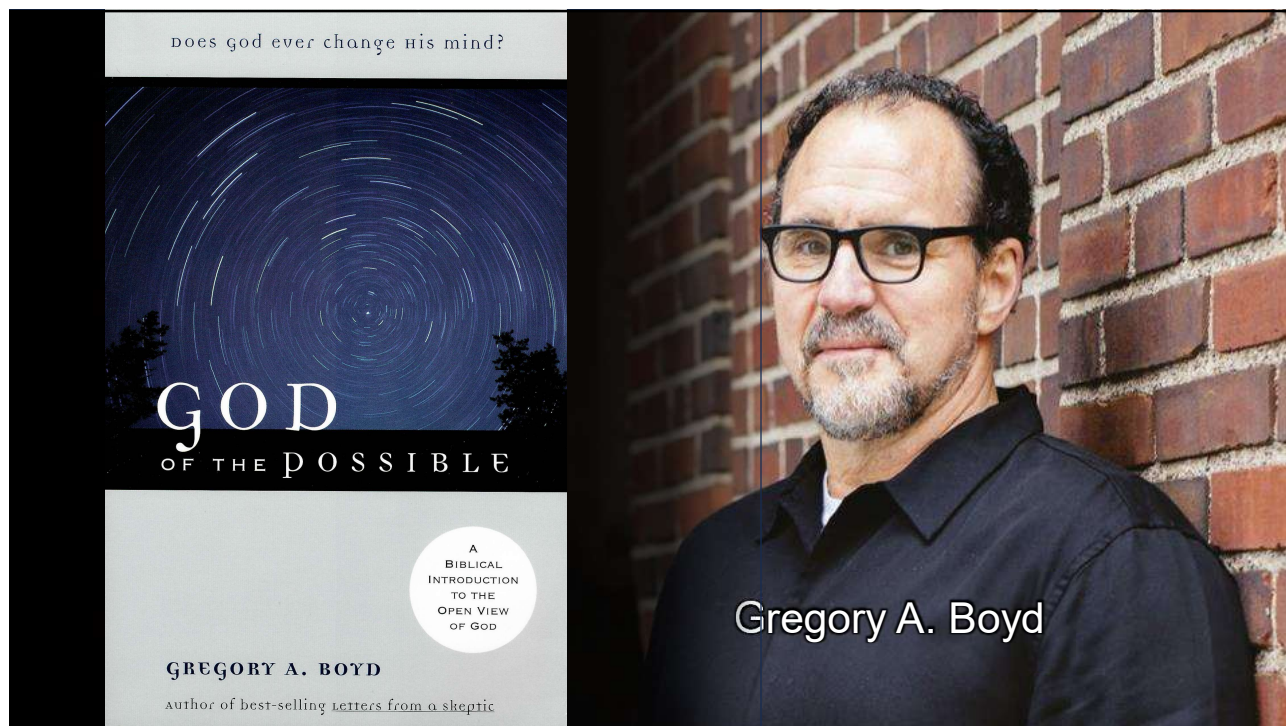
[Gregory A. Boyd, "Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God," *Philosophia Christi* 5, No. 1, (2003):192]



Gregory A. Boyd



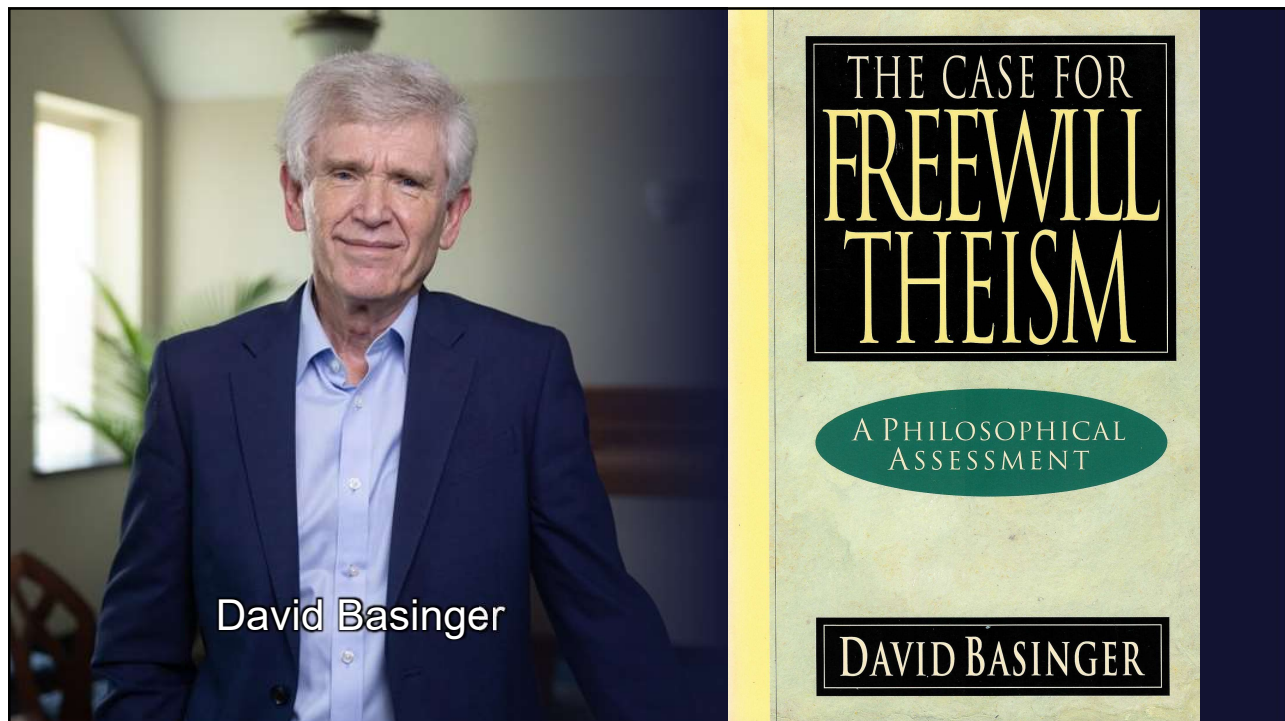
Gregory A. Boyd



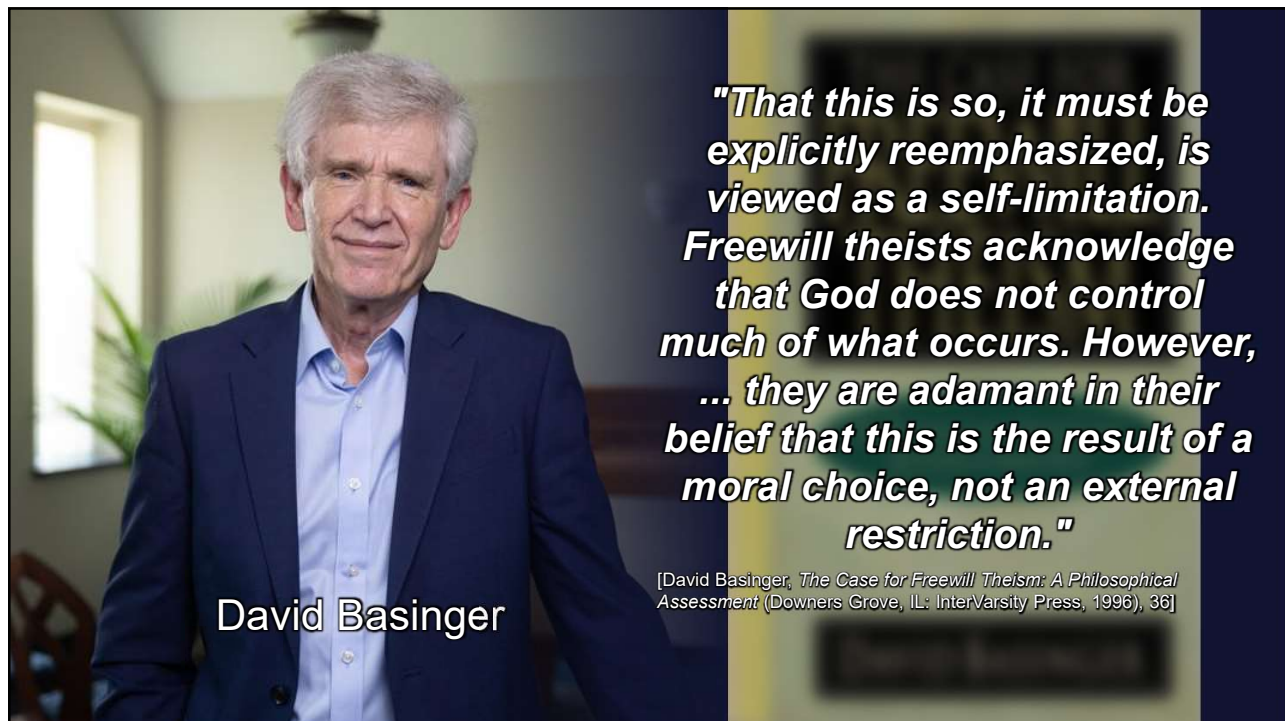
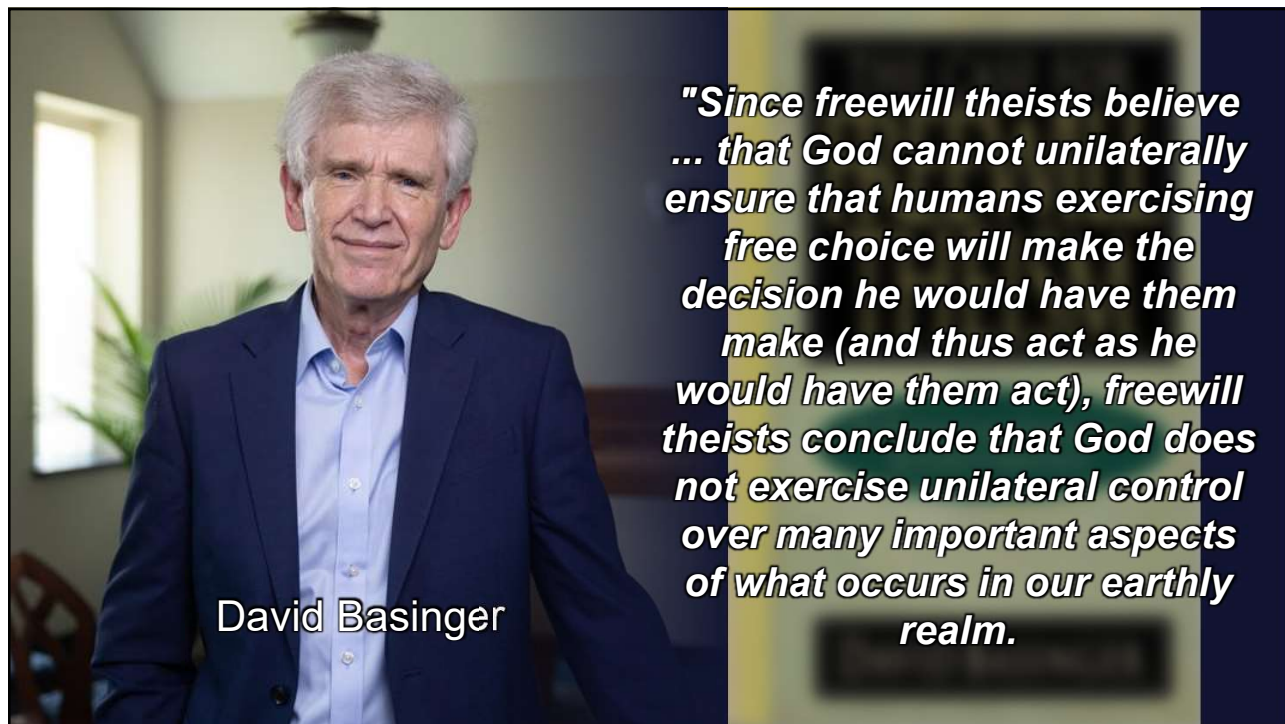
***"The only response I could offer then, and the only response I continue to offer now is that this was not foreknown as a certainty at the time God created Hitler."***

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 98]




Gregory A. Boyd




David Basinger






ReThink everything you thought you Knew









## How People Misunderstand Open Theism

Open theism holds that, because agents are free, the future includes possibilities (what agents *may* and *may not* choose to do). Since God's knowledge is perfect, open theists hold that God knows the future partly as a realm of possibilities. This view contrasts with classical theism that has usually held that God knows the future exclusively as a domain of settled facts. There are no "maybes" for God.

The debate is *not* about the scope and perfection of Gods' knowledge, for both open theists and classical theists affirm God's omniscience. *God always knows everything*. The debate, rather, is about the content of the reality God perfectly knows. It comes down to the question of whether or not possibilities are real.

<https://renew.org/2019/06/how-people-misunderstand-open-theism/>


ReThink everything you thought you Knew



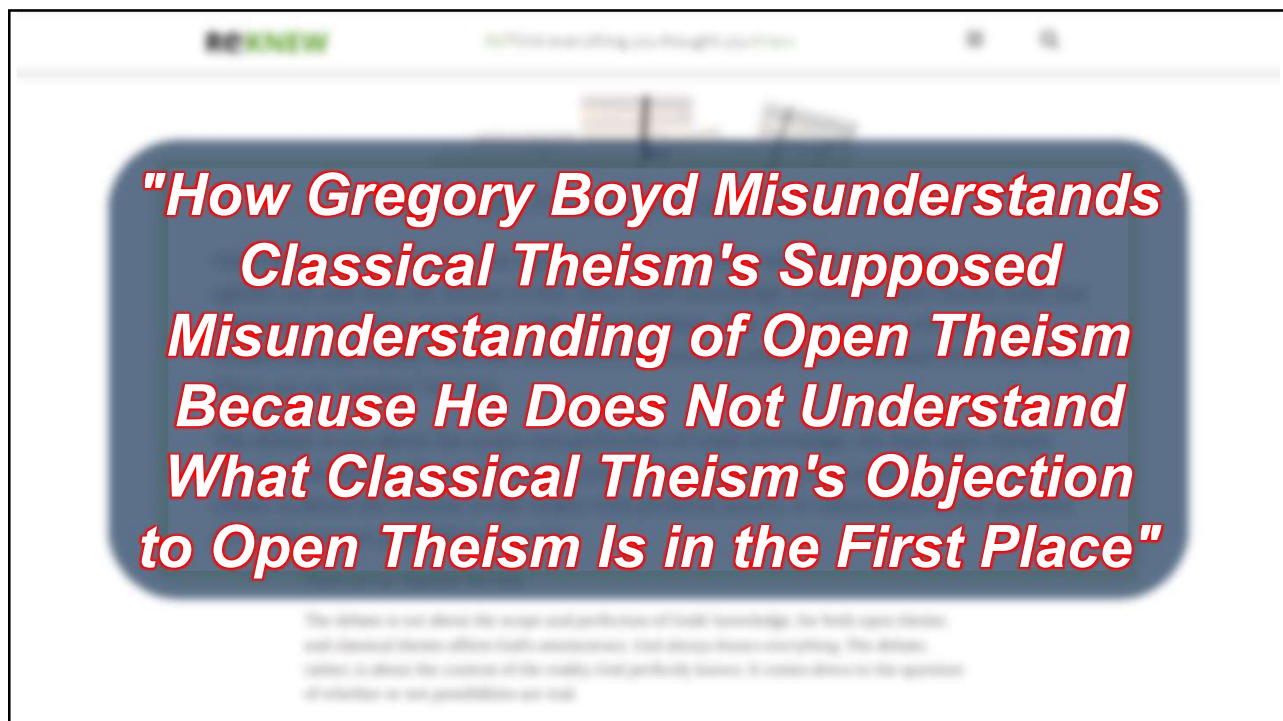
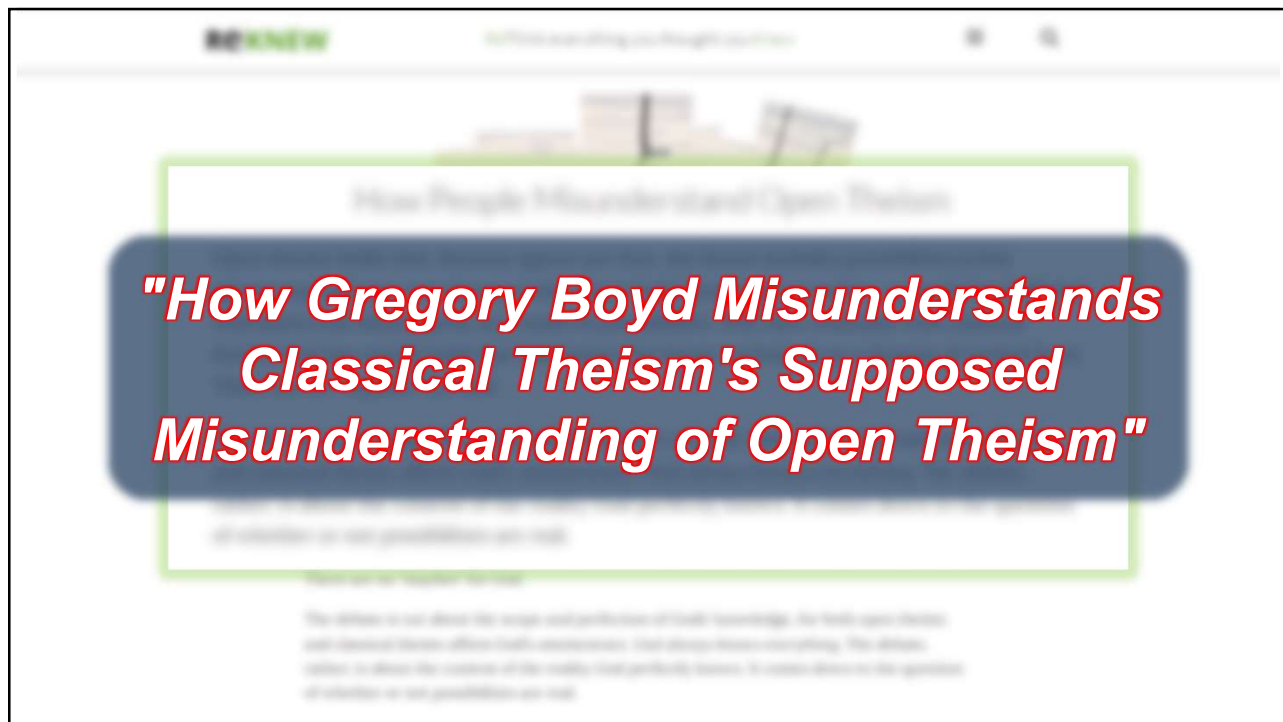


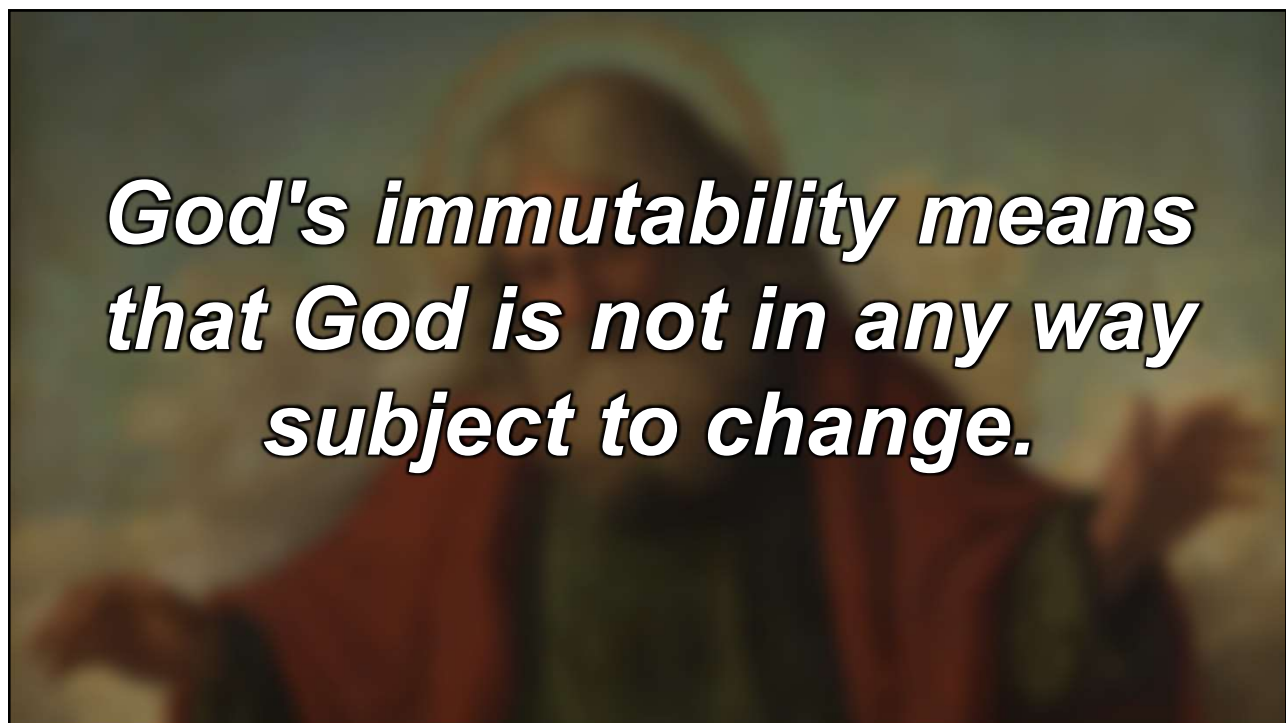
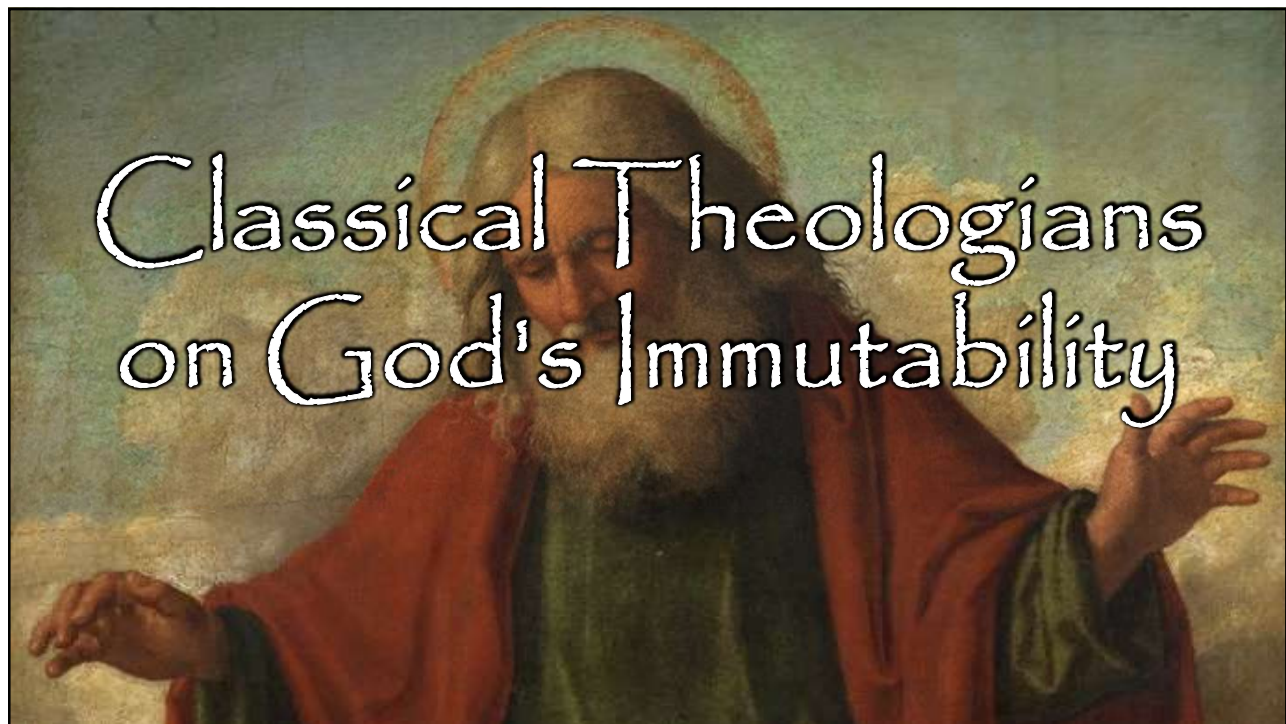
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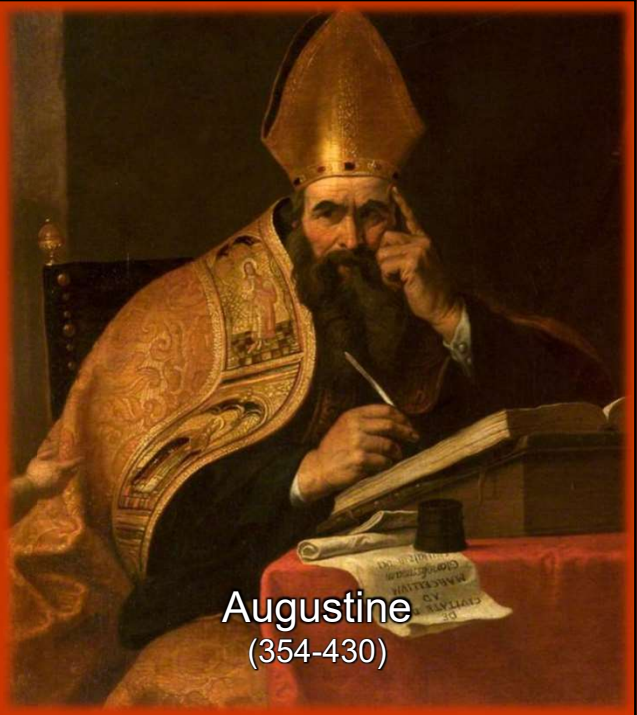
<https://renew.org/2019/06/how-people-misunderstand-open-theism/>





***"For God is existence in a supreme degree — he supremely is — and he is therefore immutable."***

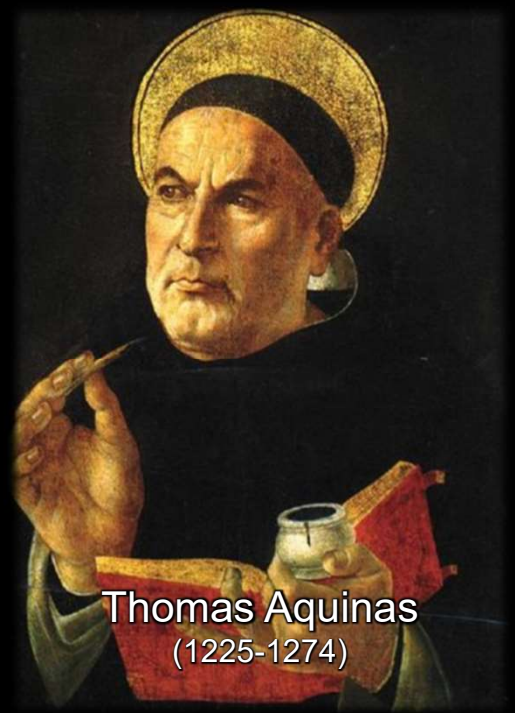
[*City of God* XII, 2, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 473]



Augustine  
(354-430)

***"As relations applied to God temporally are only in God in our idea, so, 'to become', or 'to be made' are applied to God only in idea, with no change in Him."***

[ST I, Q13, art. 7, ad. 2]



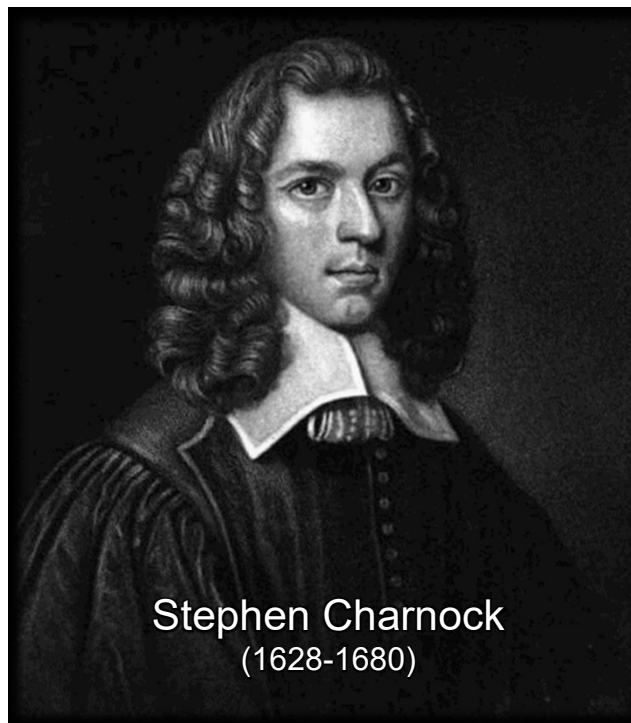
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"In this state of infinite, eternal being and goodness, antecedent unto any act of wisdom or power without himself all that he will be, all that he can be, unto eternity. For where there is infinite being and infinite goodness, there is infinite blessedness and happiness, whereunto nothing can be added. God is always the same."***

[John Owens, "The Glory of Christ in the Recapitulation of all things in him" in *Meditation and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* contained in *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (n.c., Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-53) reprinted (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), vol. 1:368]



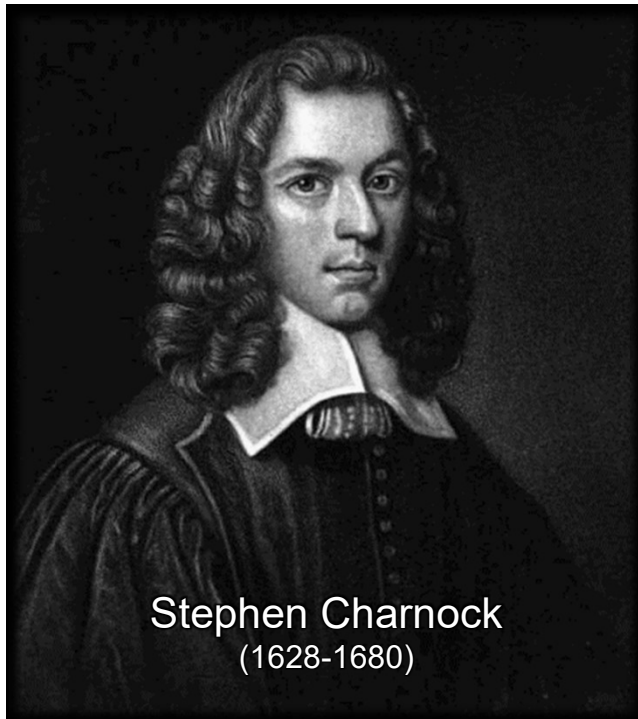
**John Owen**  
(1616-1683)



**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"The church should continue in it stability, because it stands not upon the changeableness of creatures, but is built upon the immutable rock of the truth of God, which is as little subject to change, as his essence."***

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:310-311]



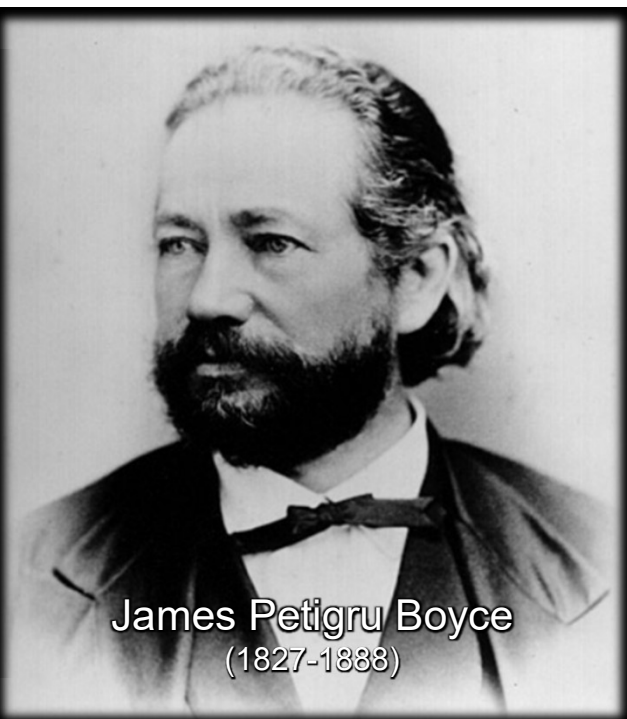
**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"He who hath not being from another, cannot but be always what he is: God is the first Being, an independent Being; he was not produced of himself, or of any other, but by nature always hath been, and, therefore, cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature. ... Again, because he is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations which are found in corporeal and bodily natures."***

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:319]

***"By the immutability of God is meant that he is incapable of change, either in duration of life, or in nature, character, will or happiness. In none of these, nor in any other respect is there any possibility of change. ... We know that whatever possibility of change in God appears is due only to our own imperfections of knowledge and incapacity to form true conceptions."***

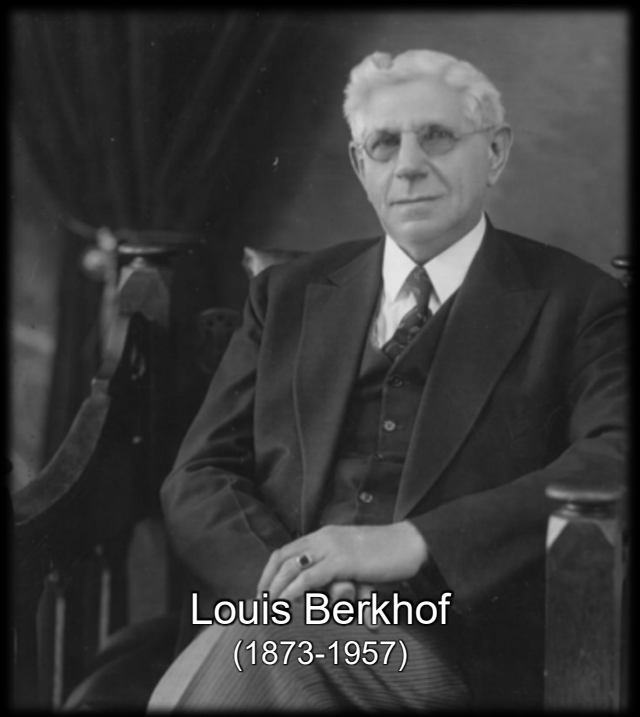
[James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 73, 74]



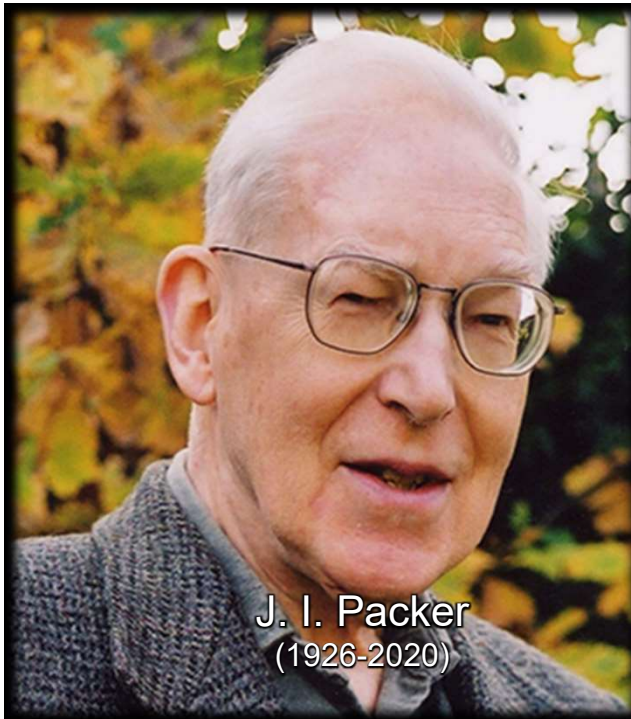
**James Petigru Boyce**  
(1827-1888)

***"The Immutability of God ... is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises."***

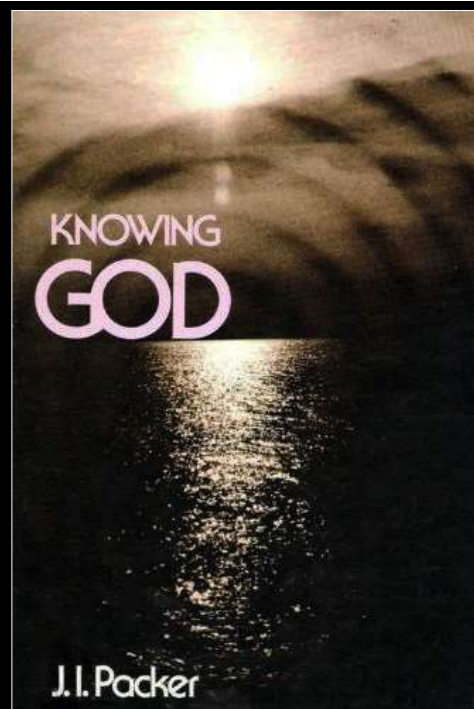
[Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 58]

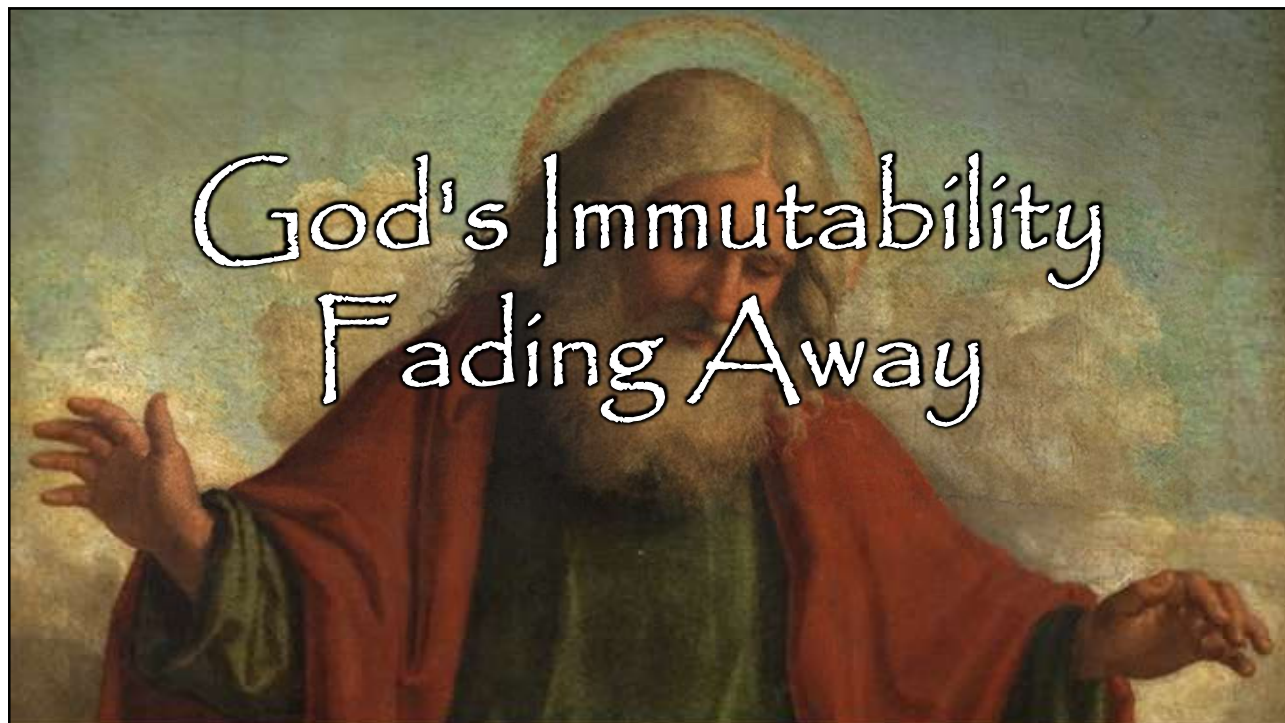
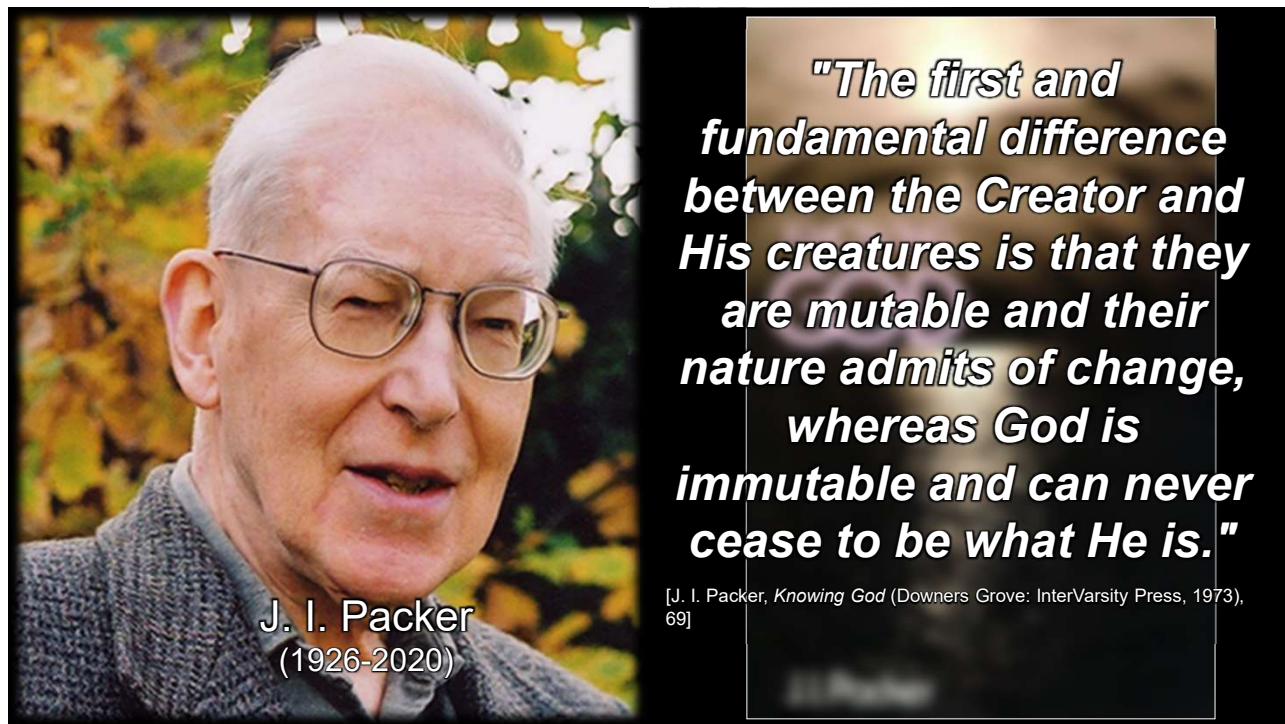


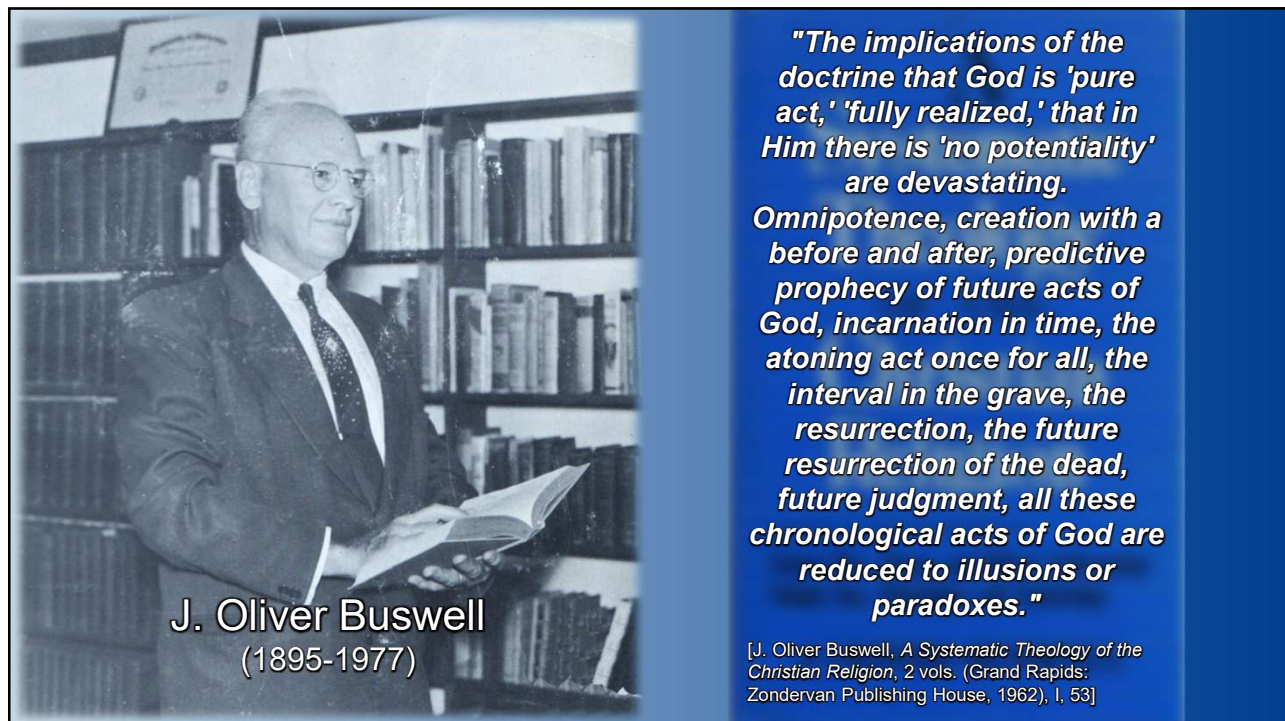
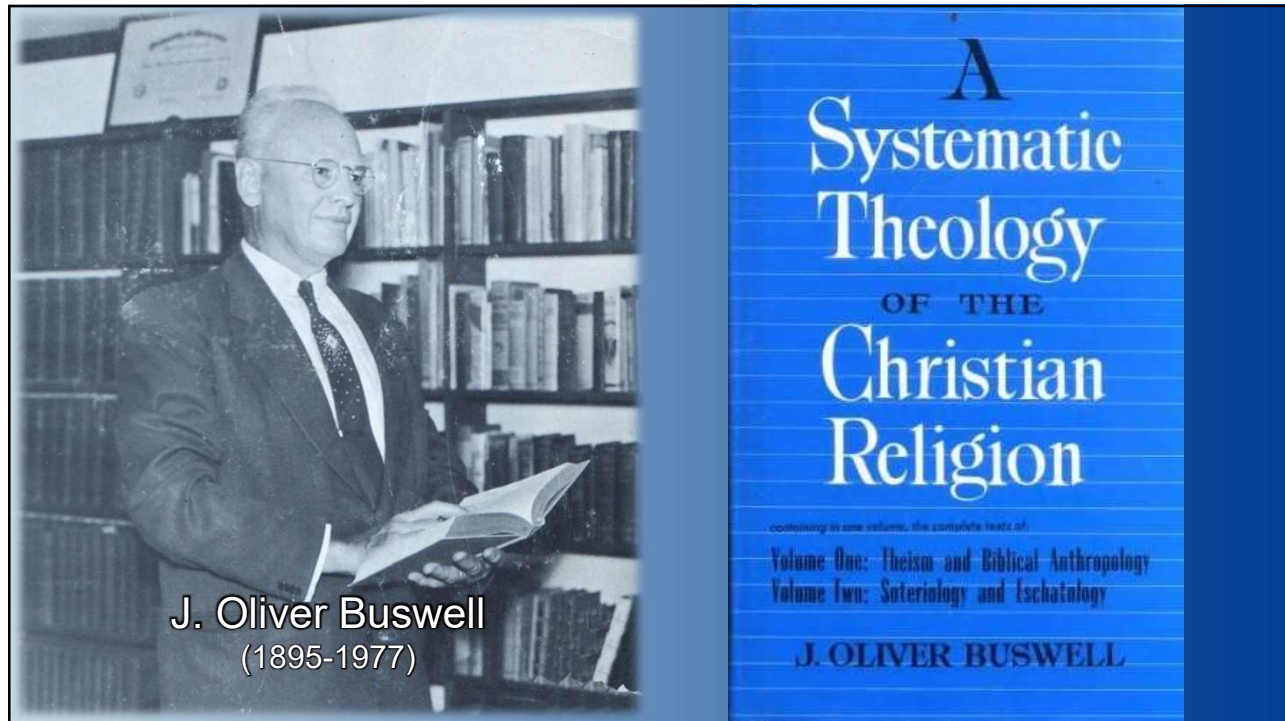
Louis Berkhof  
(1873-1957)

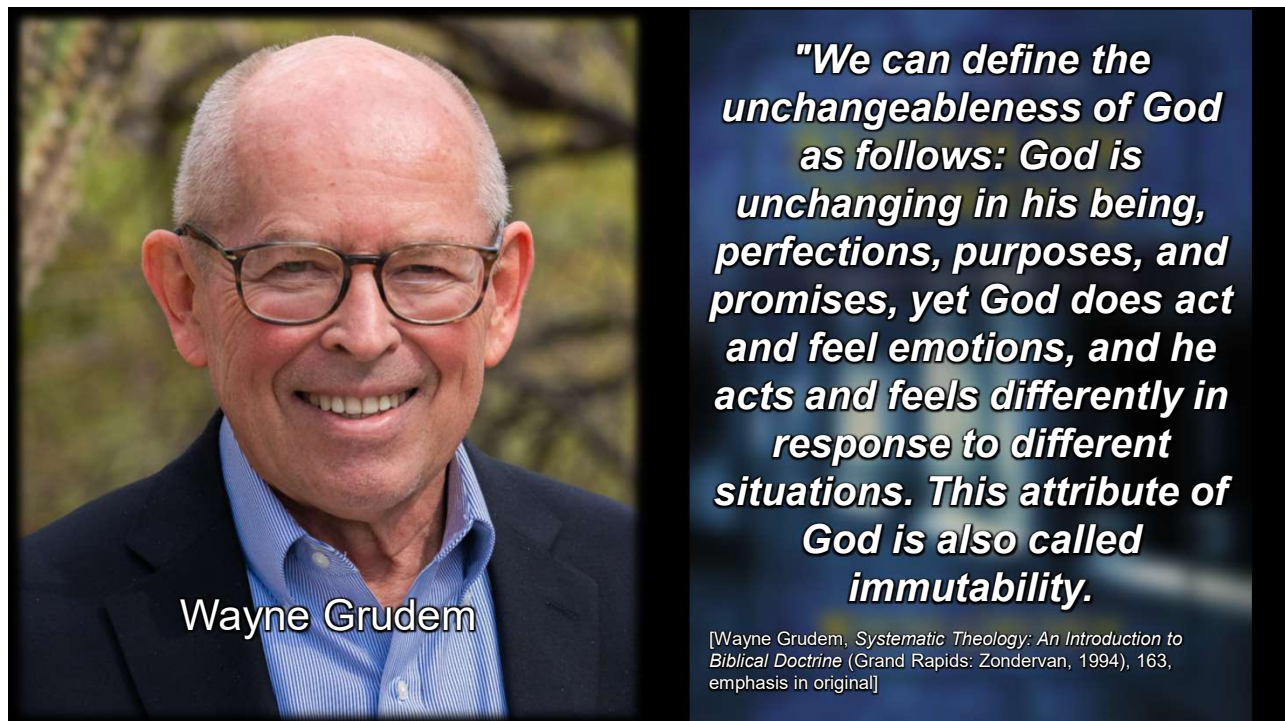
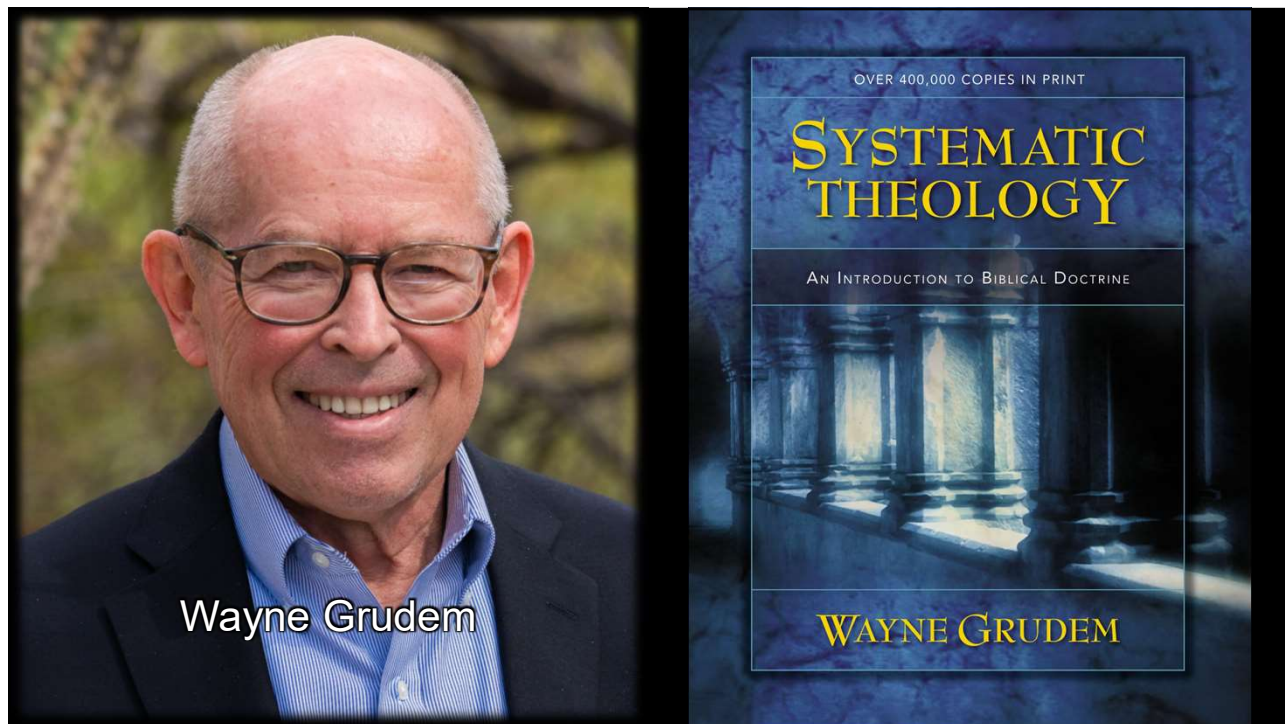


J. I. Packer  
(1926-2020)



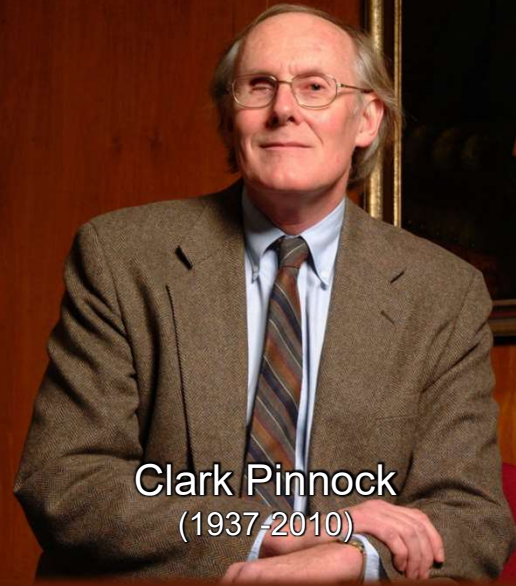






**"Some have claimed that God is wholly actual and not at all potential and thus cannot change in any way. ... This is a mistake from a biblical standpoint. ... God is immutable in essence and in his trustworthiness over time, but in other respects God changes."**

[Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 117)]



Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

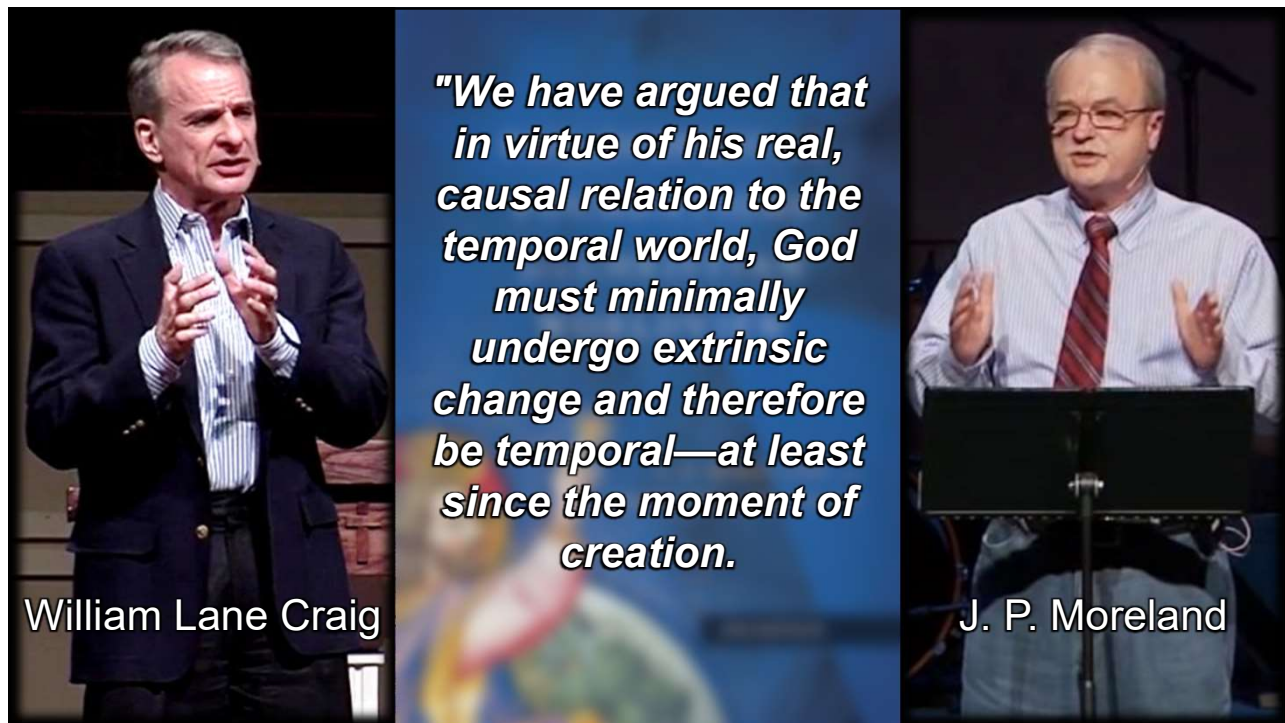
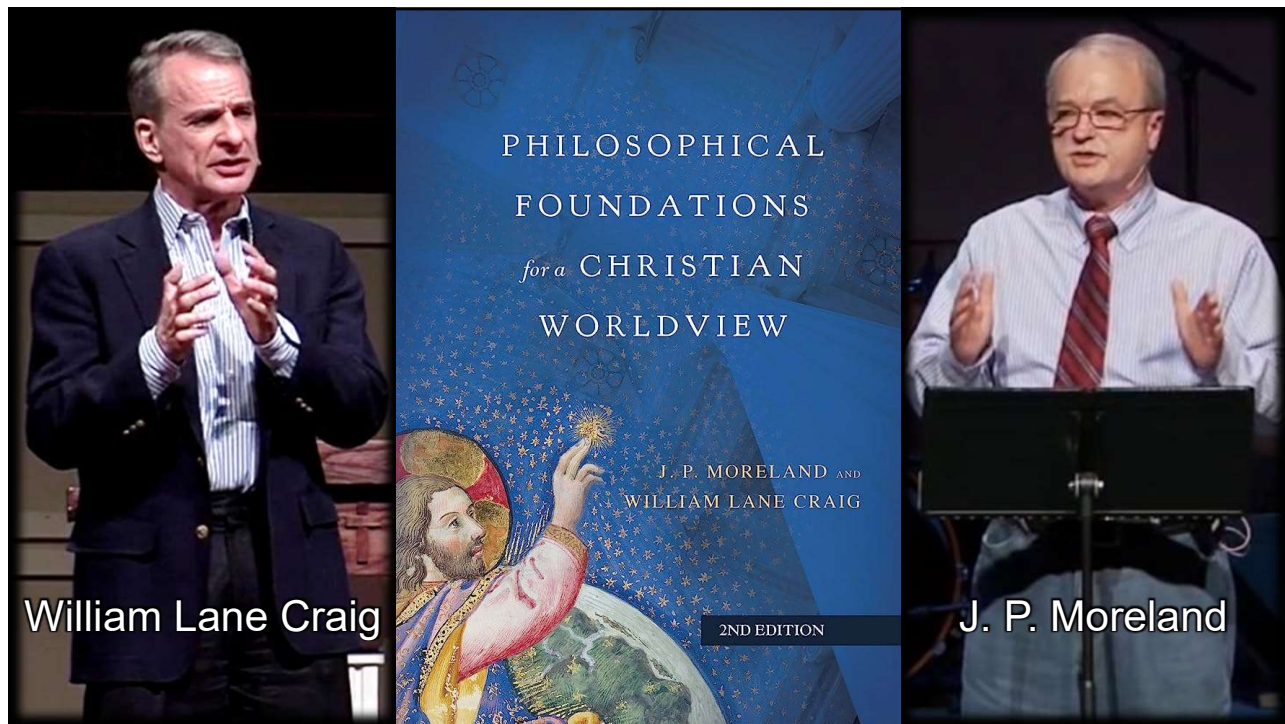
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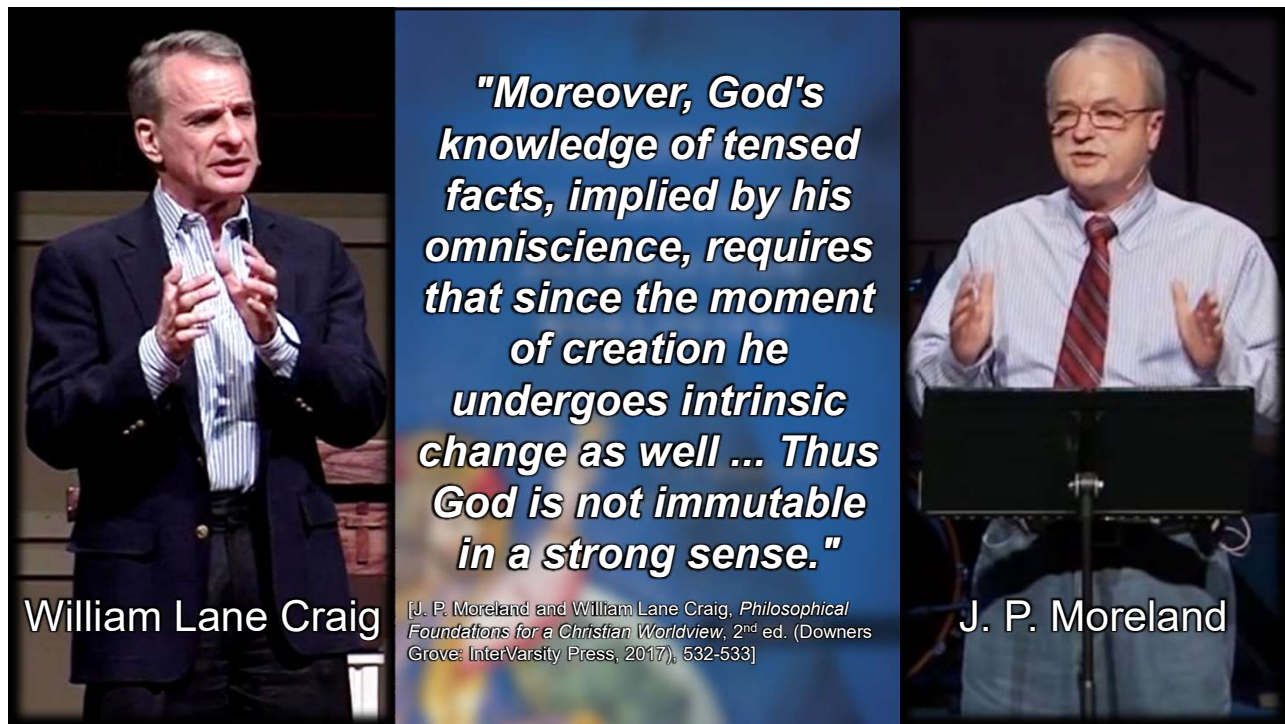
[Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 117)]

This is Aquinas's view, though he used the expression "pure actuality."

It is a common misunderstanding to say that God's pure actuality entails that He is "not at all potential."

This misunderstanding stems from failing to realize that Aquinas distinguishes **passive potency** and **active potency**.



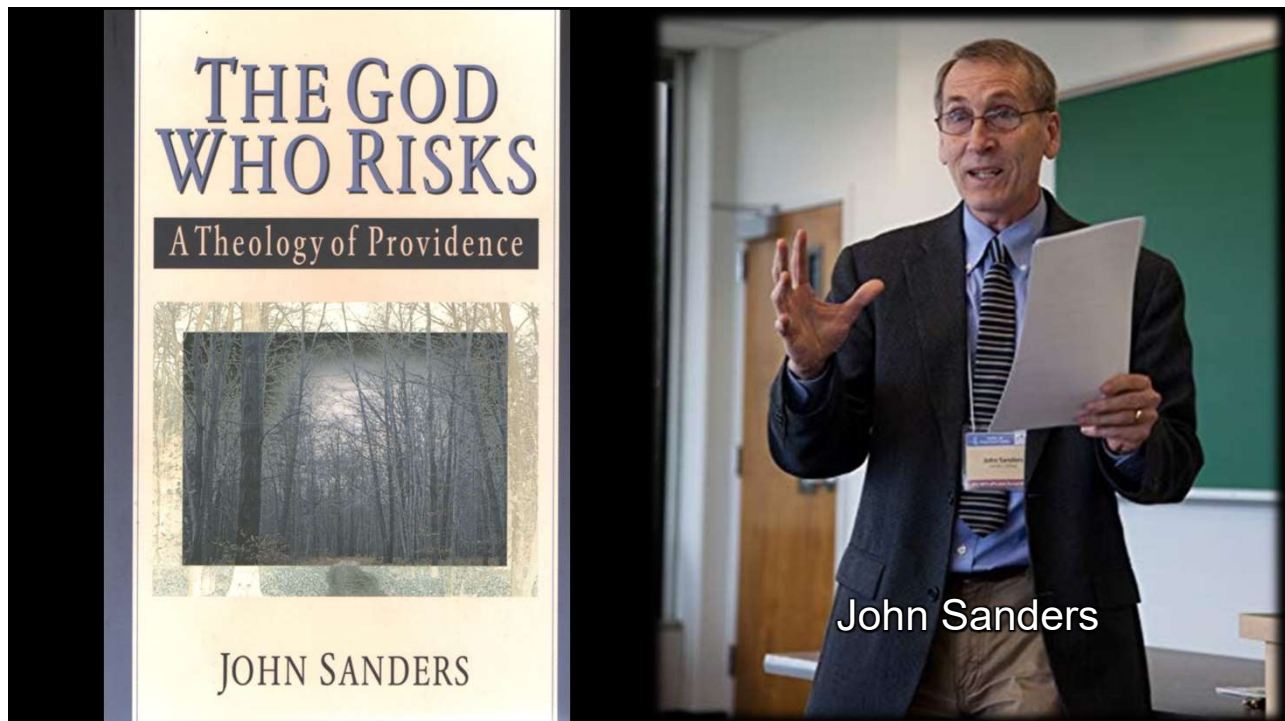


***"Moreover, God's knowledge of tensed facts, implied by his omniscience, requires that since the moment of creation he undergoes intrinsic change as well ... Thus God is not immutable in a strong sense."***

William Lane Craig

[J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 532-533]

J. P. Moreland

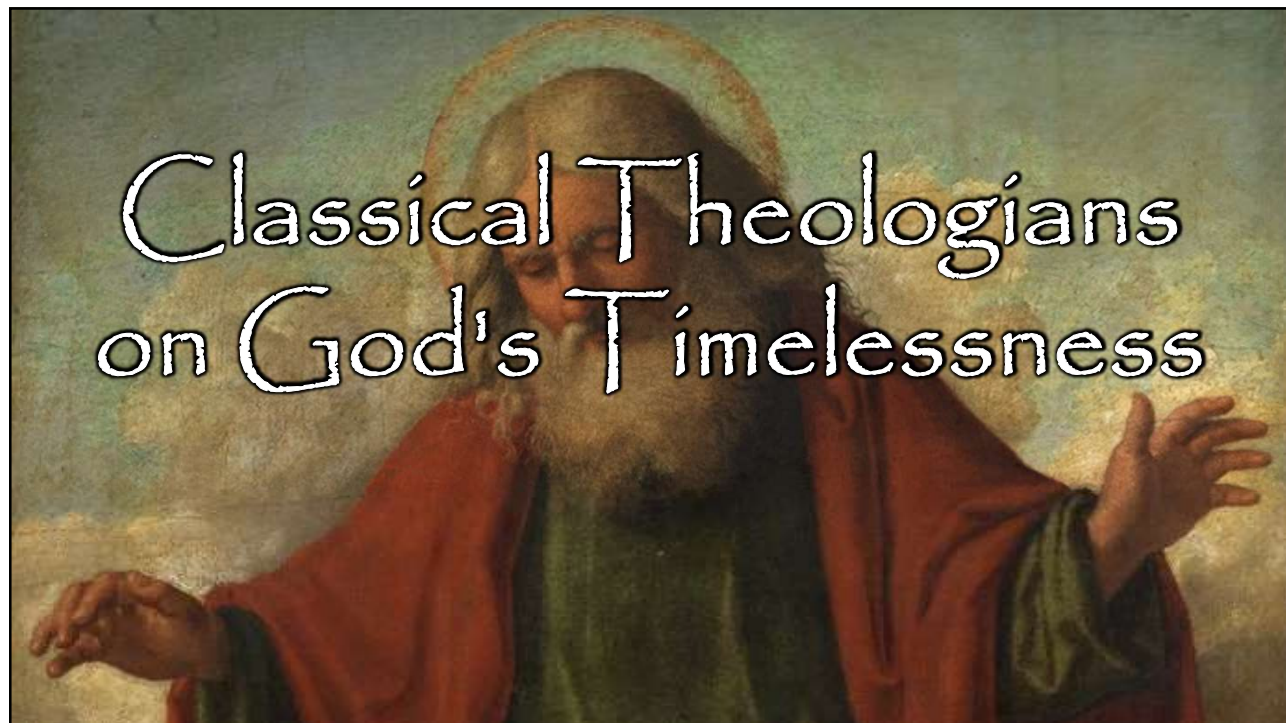
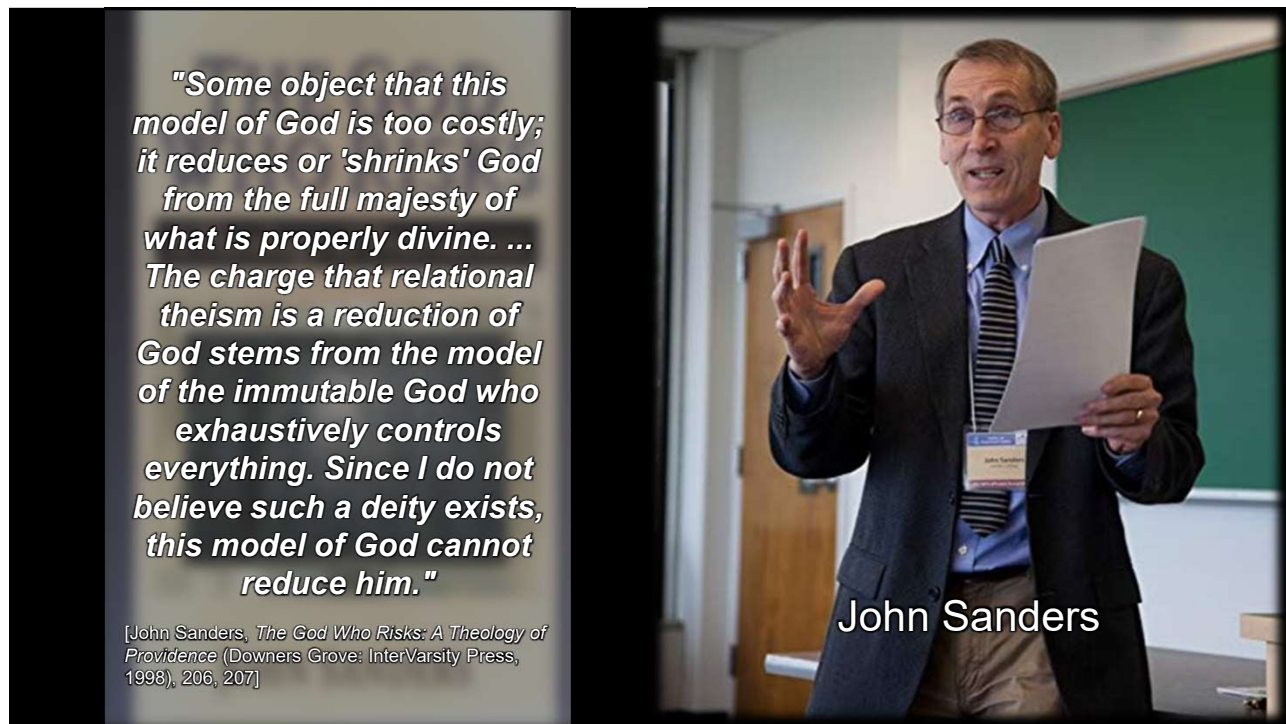


**THE GOD WHO RISKS**

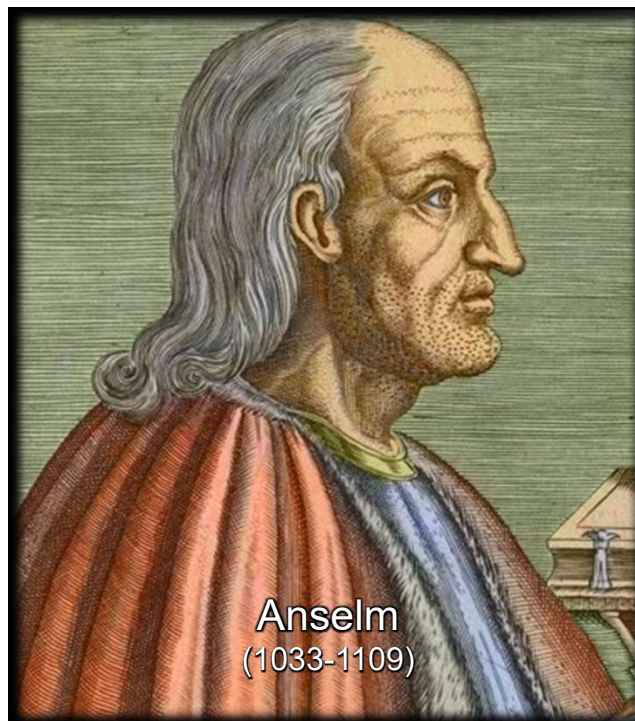
A Theology of Providence

JOHN SANDERS

John Sanders



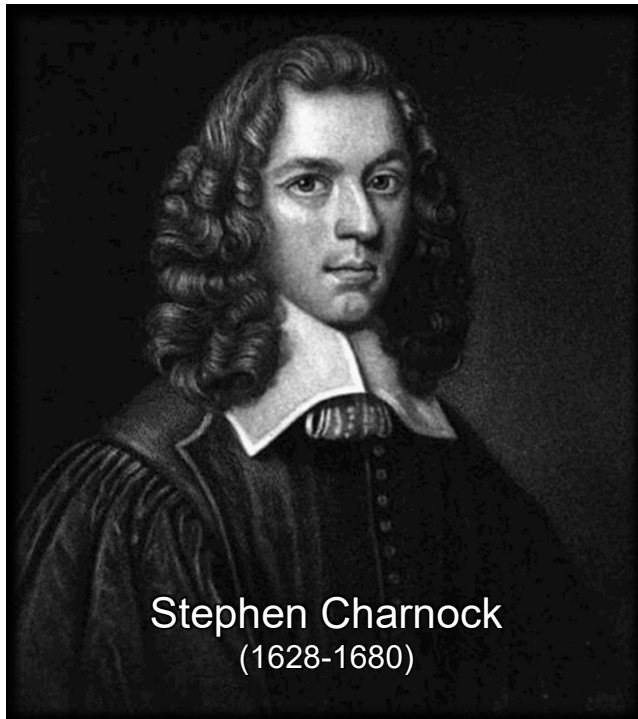
***In classical metaphysics,  
time is the measure of  
change. Since God does  
not change, He is not in  
any way temporal.***



**Anselm**  
(1033-1109)

***"It is evident that this  
supreme Substance is  
without beginning and  
without end; that it has  
neither past, nor future,  
nor the temporal, that  
is, transient present in  
which we live."***

[Norman Geisler, H. Wayne House, Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 79.]



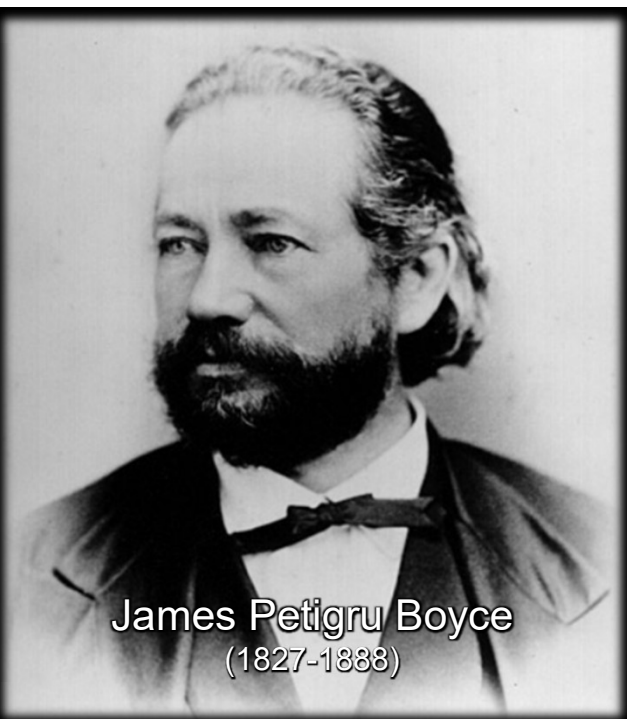
***"He was before the world, yet he neither began nor ends; he is not a temporary, but an eternal God; it takes in both parts of eternity, what was before the creation of the world, and what is after; though the eternity of God be one permanent state, without succession."***

**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:278]

***"God has no succession [of moments], no increase of life, is possessed of the whole of his existence at once, and eternally possessed, has had no beginning, can have no end, and lives in the present only, having no past or future."***

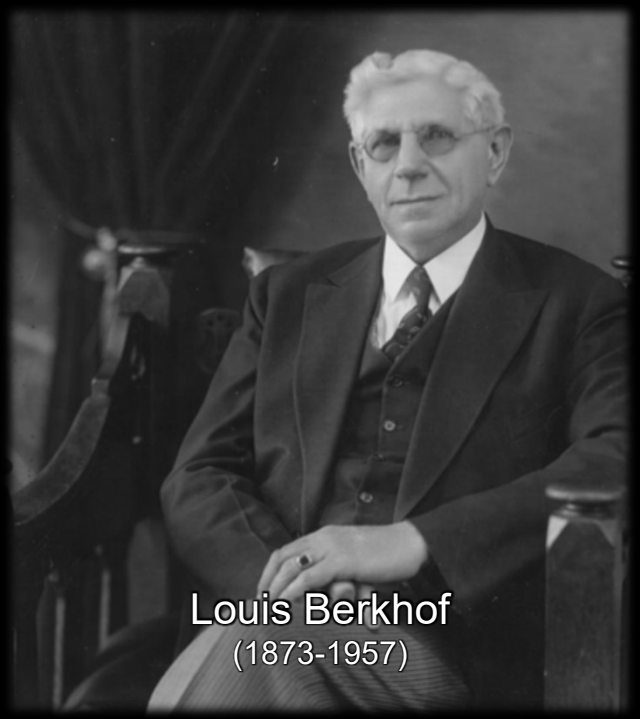
[James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 70]



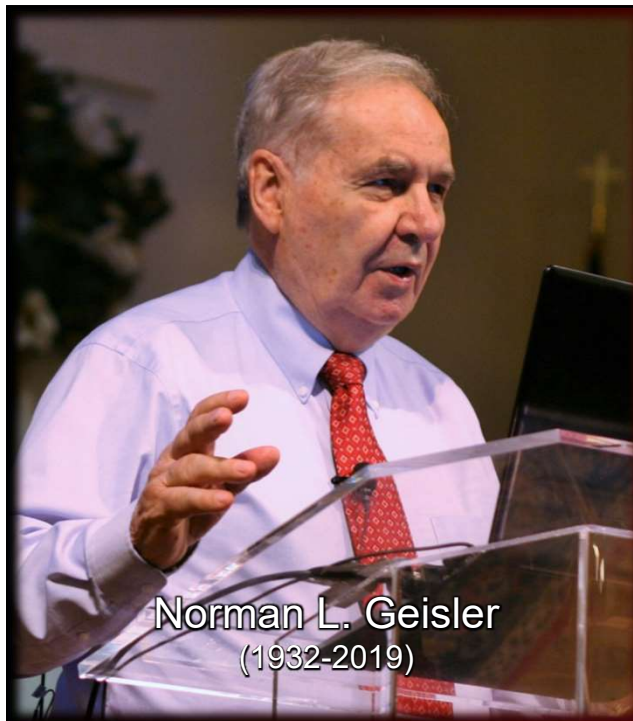
**James Petigru Boyce**  
(1827-1888)

***"The infinity of God in relation to time is called His eternity ... Eternity in the strict sense of the word is ascribed [sic] to that which transcends all temporal limitations. ... Our life is divided into a past, present and future, but there is no such division in the life of God. He is the eternal 'I am.'"***

[Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 60]



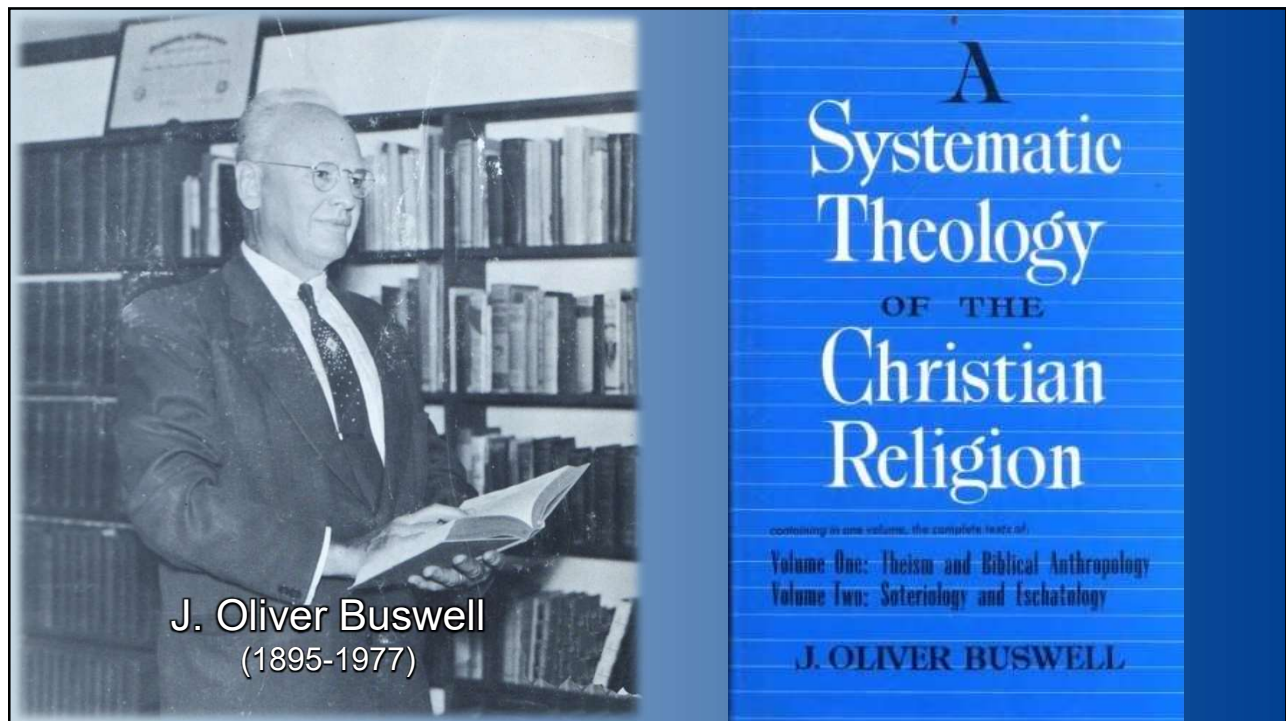
Louis Berkhof  
(1873-1957)

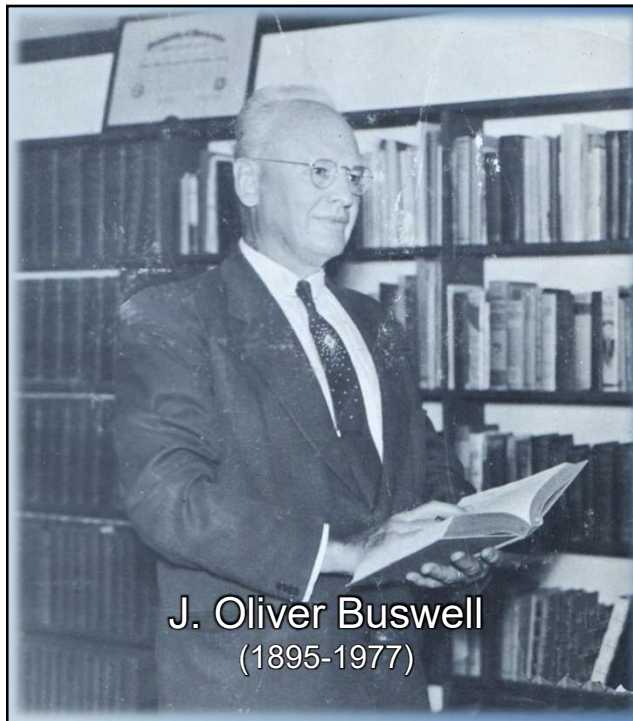


Norman L. Geisler  
(1932-2019)

***"Classical theism affirms that God is above and beyond time. Again, God has no past, present, or future; He simply has an enduring eternal present."***

[Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Vol. Two: God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003, 93)]

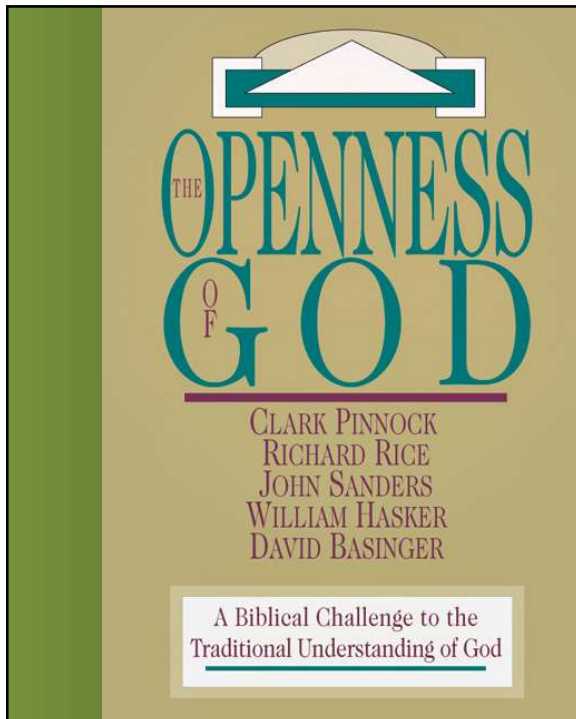




J. Oliver Buswell  
(1895-1977)

***"Eternity is not timelessness. ... Nothing could be farther from the Scriptural teaching than the notion that God's eternity means that He is totally disconnected from finite events in time, yet this notion has persisted from ancient days and is prevalent in current philosophical theology."***

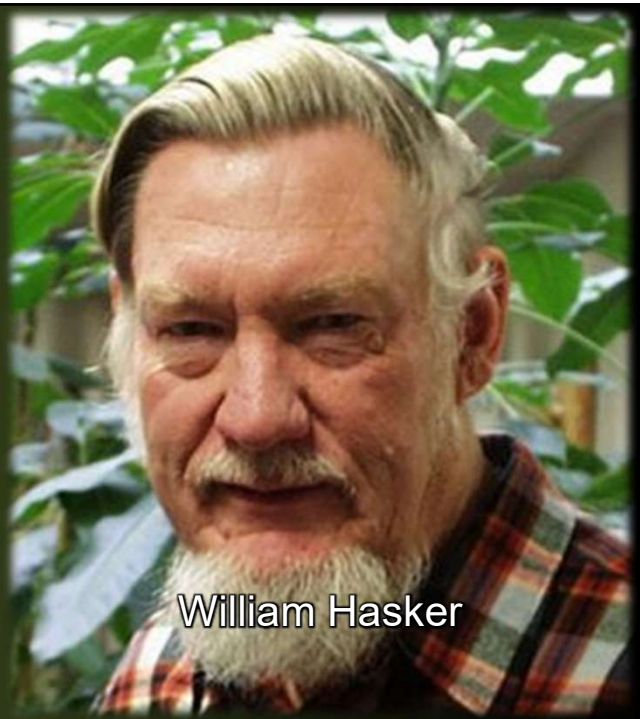
[J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), I, 42, 43]



# THE OPENNESS OF GOD

CLARK PINNOCK  
RICHARD RICE  
JOHN SANDERS  
WILLIAM HASKER  
DAVID BASINGER

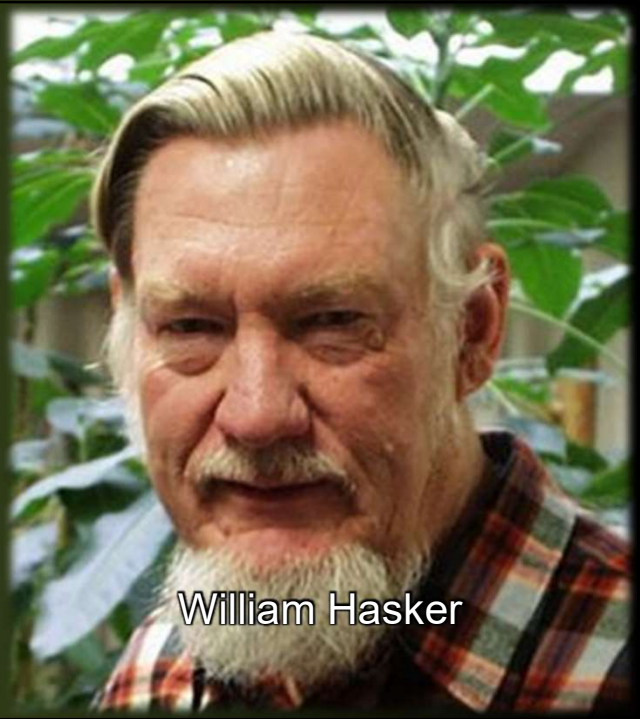
A Biblical Challenge to the  
Traditional Understanding of God



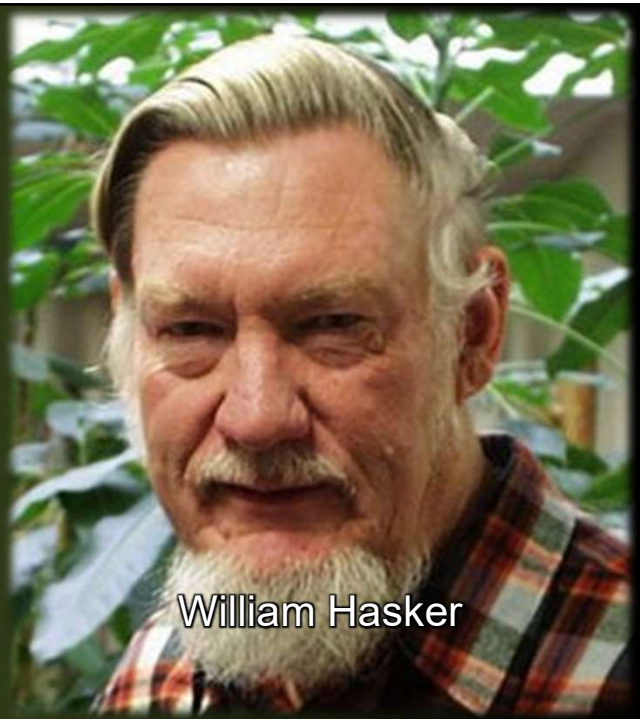
William Hasker

***"The bias against change has been powerfully influential in classical theology, leading to the insistence on an excessively strong doctrine of divine immutability—which, in turn, provides key support for divine timelessness, since timelessness is the most effective way (and perhaps the only way) to rule out, once and for all, the possibility of any change in God."***

[William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 129]

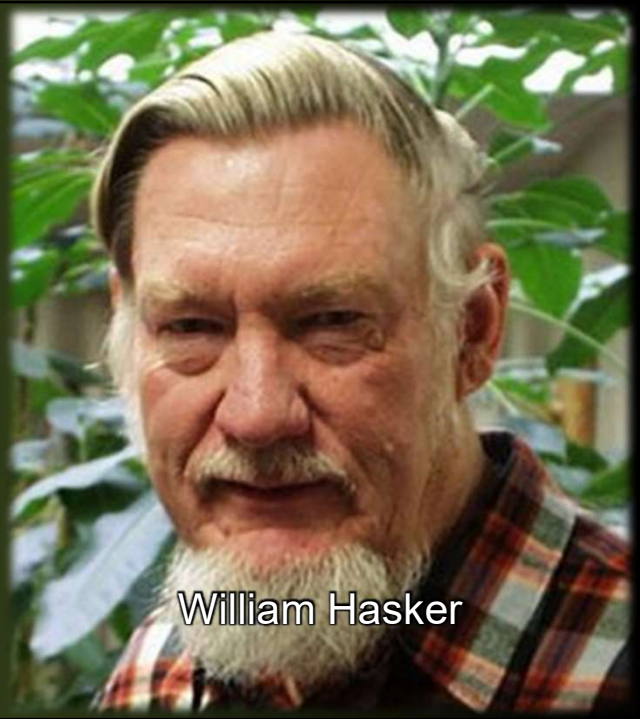


***"The other main difficulty about divine timelessness is that it is very hard to make clear logical sense of the doctrine. If God is truly timeless, so that temporal determinations of 'before' and 'after' do not apply to him, then how can God act in time, as the Scriptures say that he does?"***



***"How can he respond when his children turn to him in prayer and obedience? And above all, if God is timeless and incapable of change, how can God be born, grow up, live with and among people, suffer and die, as we believe he did as incarnated in Jesus?"***

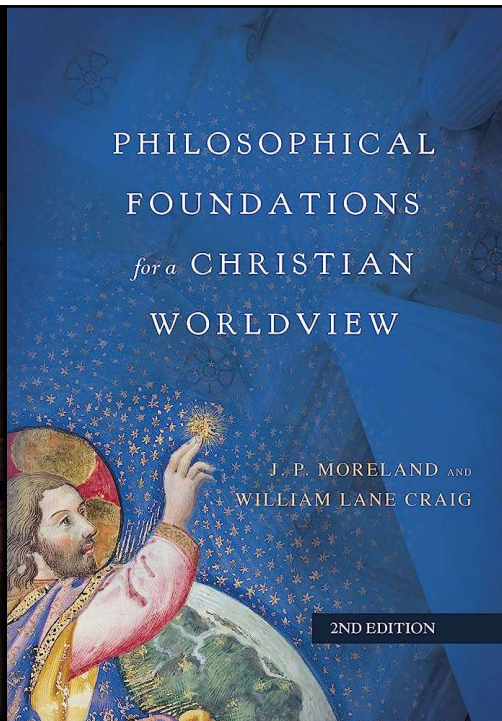
[William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 128-129]



William Hasker



William Lane Craig



J. P. Moreland



William Lane Craig

*"There do seem to be good reasons, too, for affirming divine temporality. If God is really related to the world, then it is extraordinarily difficult to see how God could remain untouched by the world's temporality."*



J. P. Moreland



William Lane Craig

*"For simply in virtue of his being related to changing things (even if he himself somehow managed to remain intrinsically changeless), there would exist a before and after in God's life."*

[J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 512, emphasis in original]



J. P. Moreland

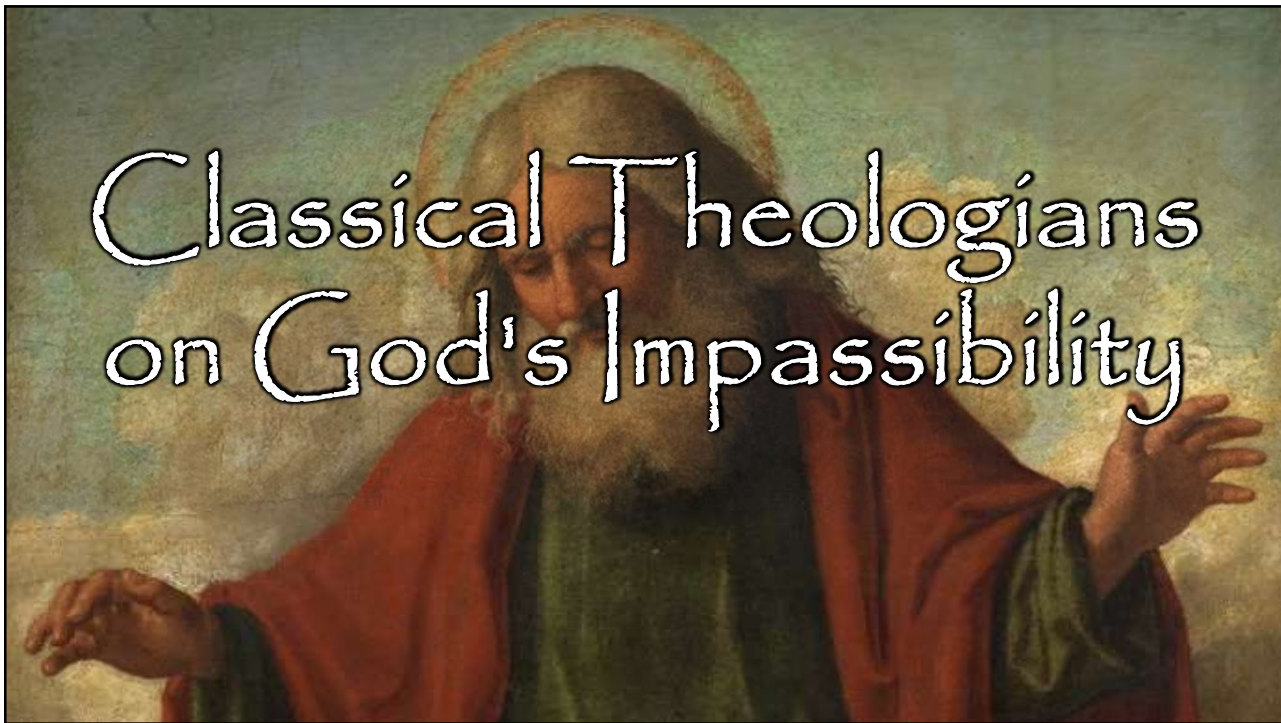
***"It seems to me, therefore, that it is not only coherent but also plausible that God existing changelessly alone without creation is timeless and that he enters time at the moment of creation in virtue of his real relation to the temporal universe."***

[William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in Gregory E. Ganssle, ed. *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 160]



William Lane Craig

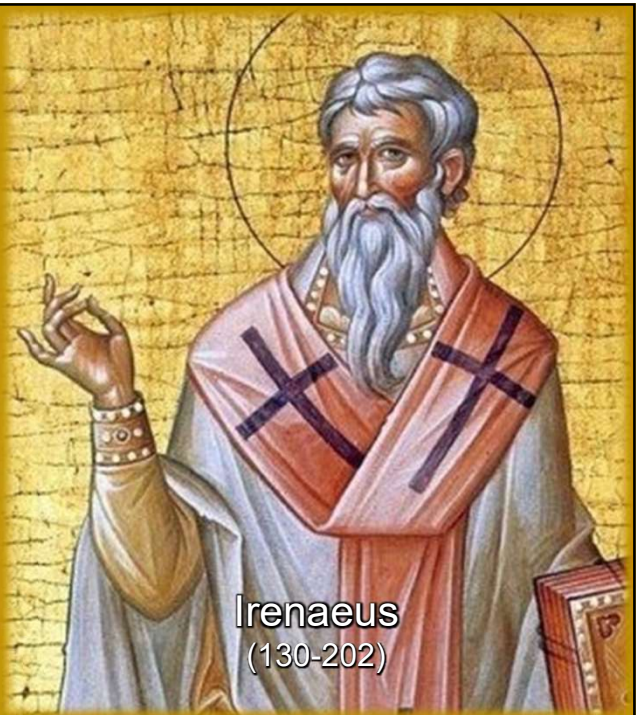
# Classical Theologians on God's Impassibility




***God's impassibility means  
that God is not in any way  
subject to passions.***

***"God is not as men are;  
and ... His thoughts are  
not like the thoughts of  
men. For the Father of  
all is at a vast distance  
from those affections  
and passions which  
operate among men."***

[Against Heresies 2.13.3]





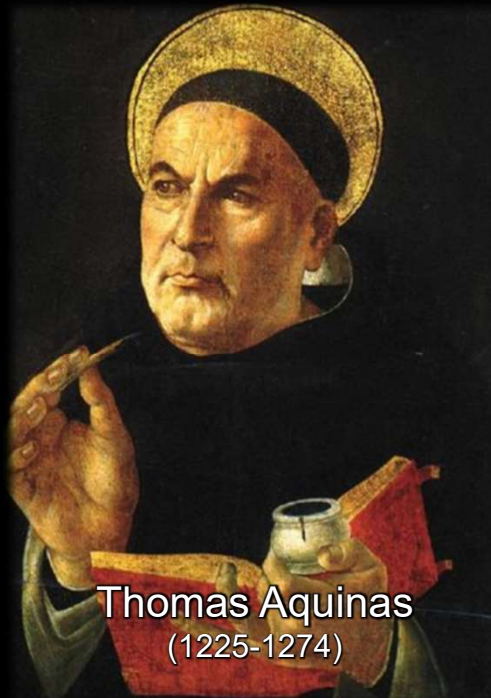
***"God is altogether impassible, and is to be regarded as wholly free from all affections of that kind."***

[De Principiis 2.4.4]

Origen  
(185-254)

***"The passions in question are in sinners in one way; in the just, both the perfect and the imperfect, in another way; in Christ as man in another; and in the first man and the blessed in still another. They are not in the angels or in God at all, because in them there is no sense appetite, of which such passions are movements."***

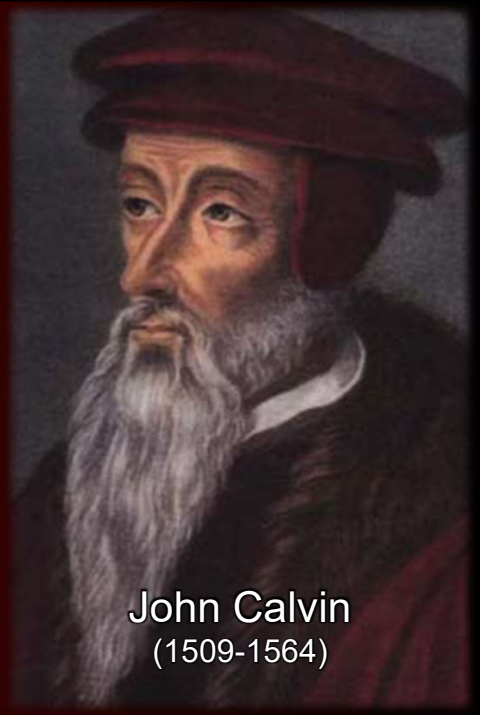
[On Truth XXVI, 8]



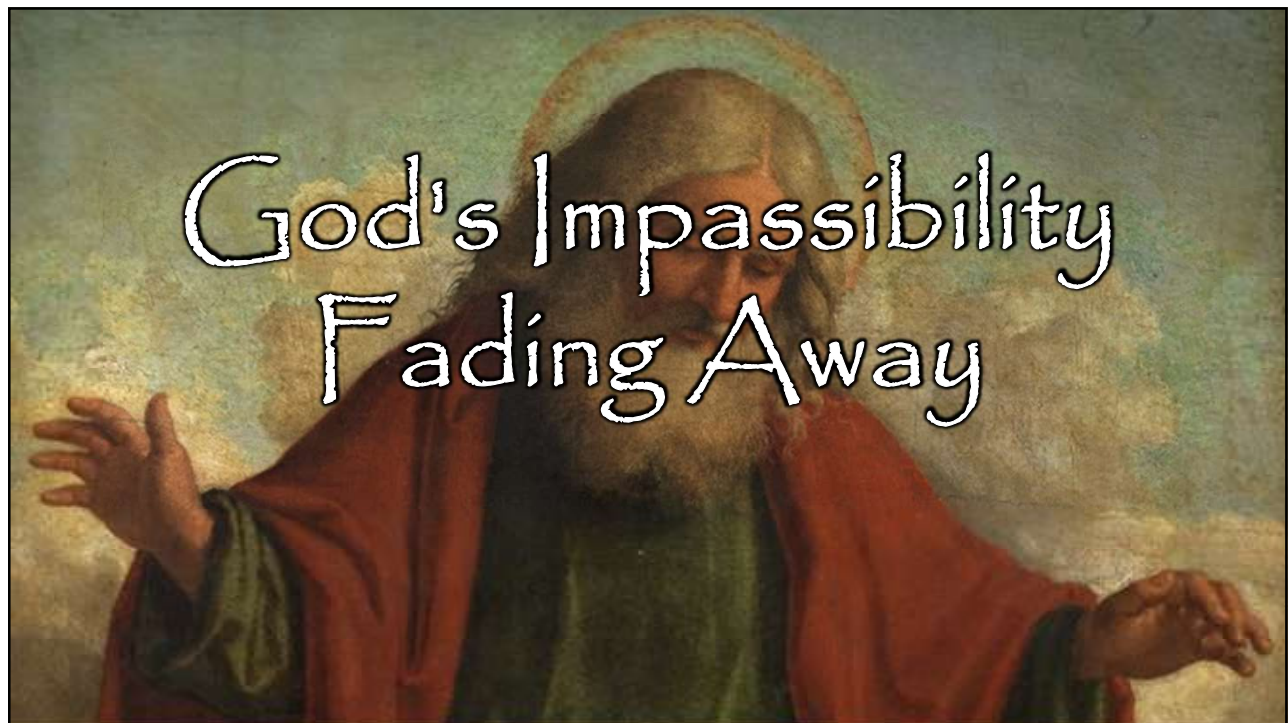
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

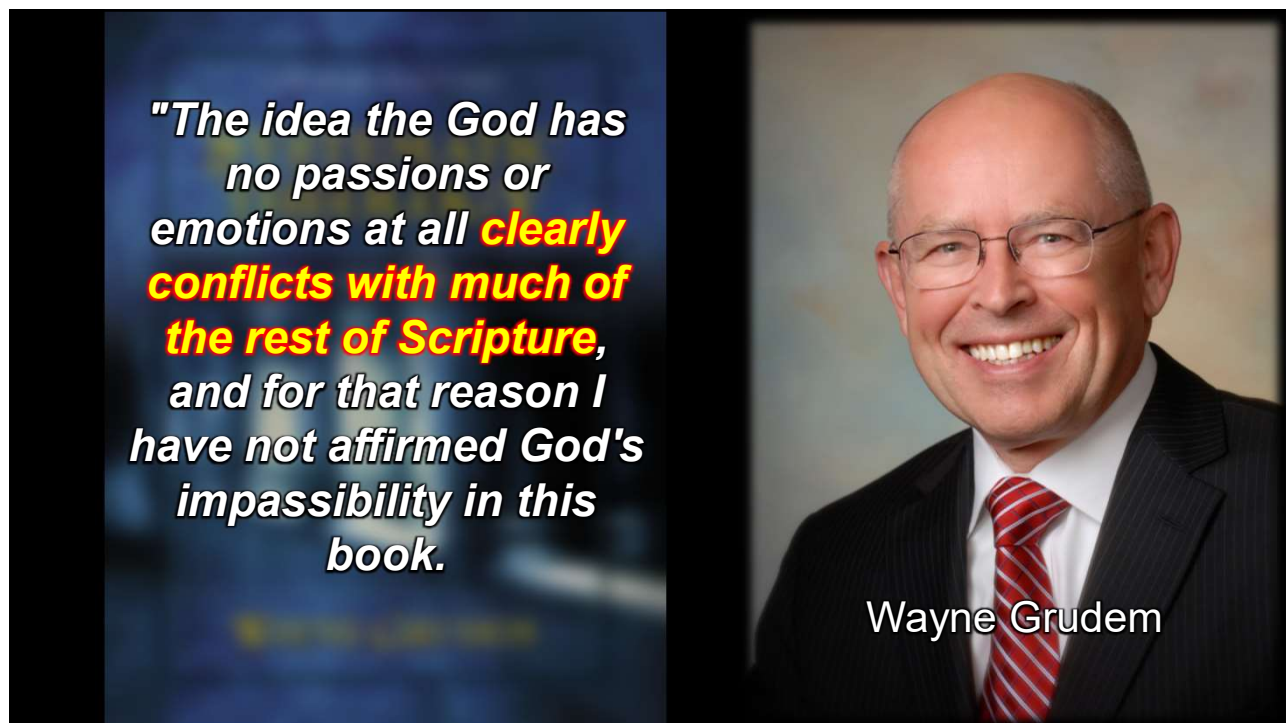
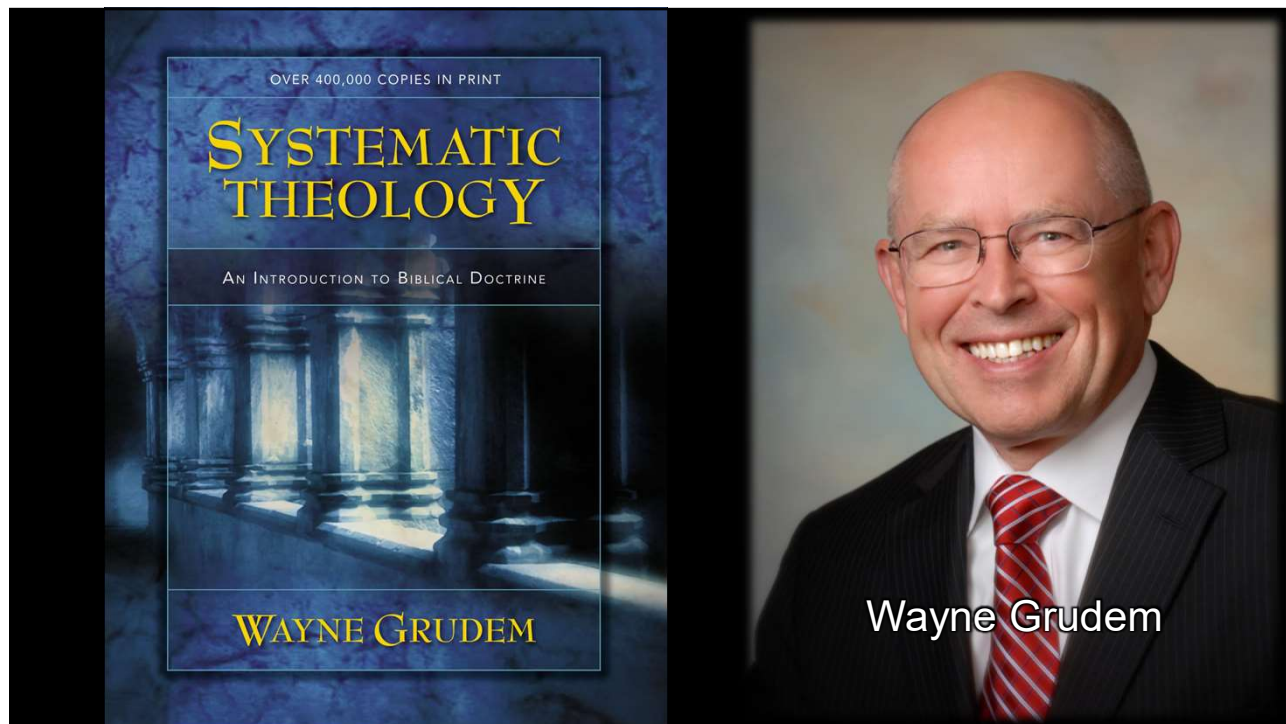
***"Wherefore, as when we hear that God is angry with the wicked, we ought not to imagine that there is any emotion in him, but ought rather to consider the mode of speech accommodated to our sense."***

[John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 1.17.13, vol. 1, pp. 195-196]



John Calvin  
(1509-1564)





***"Instead, quite the opposite is true, for God, who is the origin of our emotions and who created our emotions, certainly does feel emotions:***



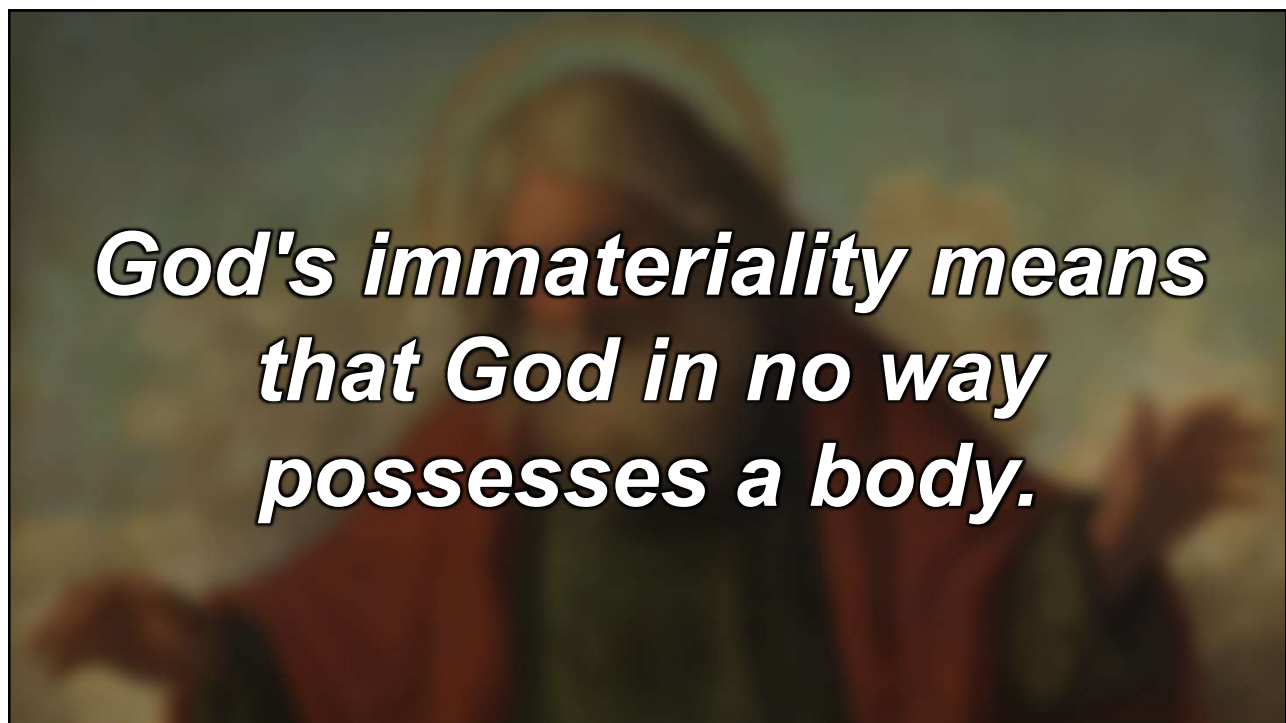
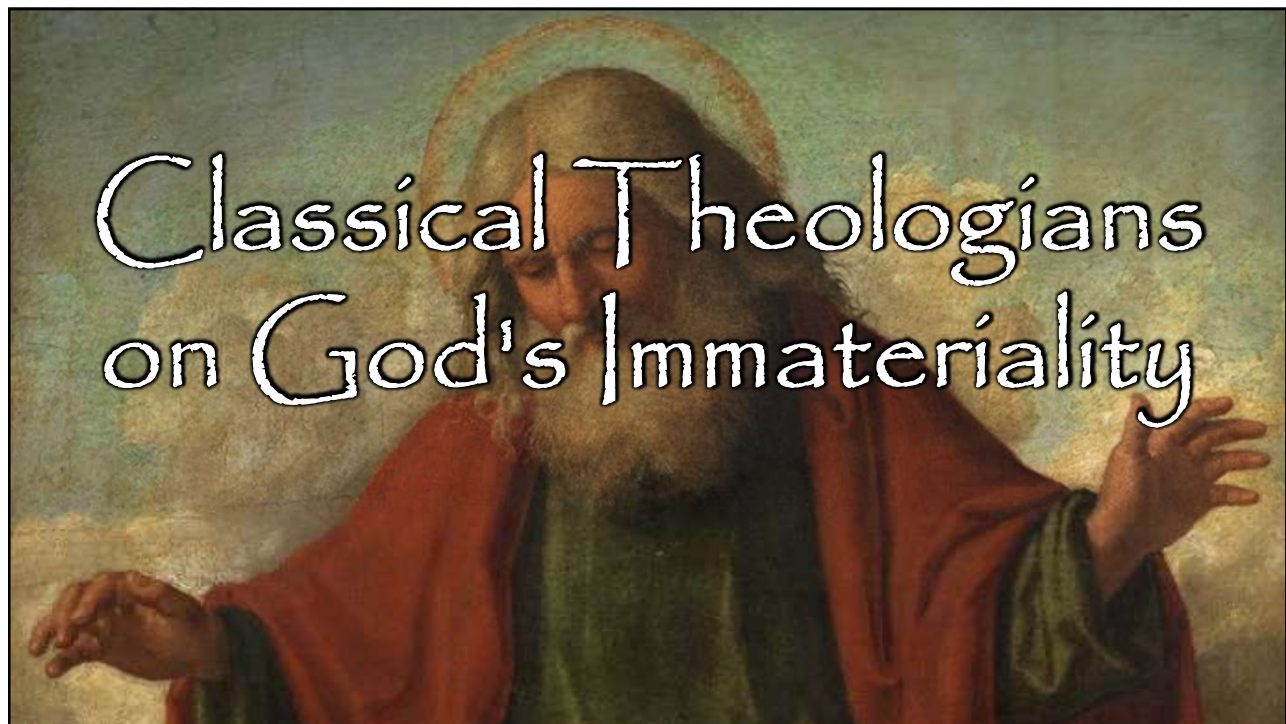
Wayne Grudem

***"God rejoices (Isa. 62:5). He is grieved (Ps. 78:40; Eph. 4:30). His wrath burns hot against his enemies (Ex. 32:10). He pities his children (Ps. 103:13). He loves with everlasting love (Isa. 54:8; Ps. 103:17)."***

[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 166]

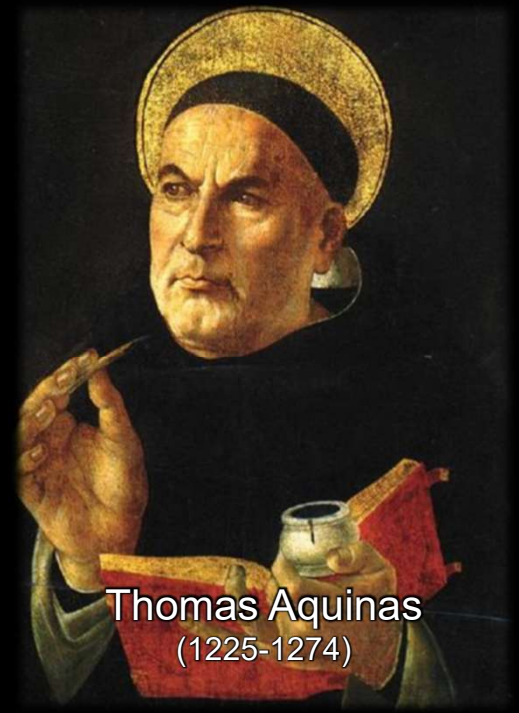


Wayne Grudem

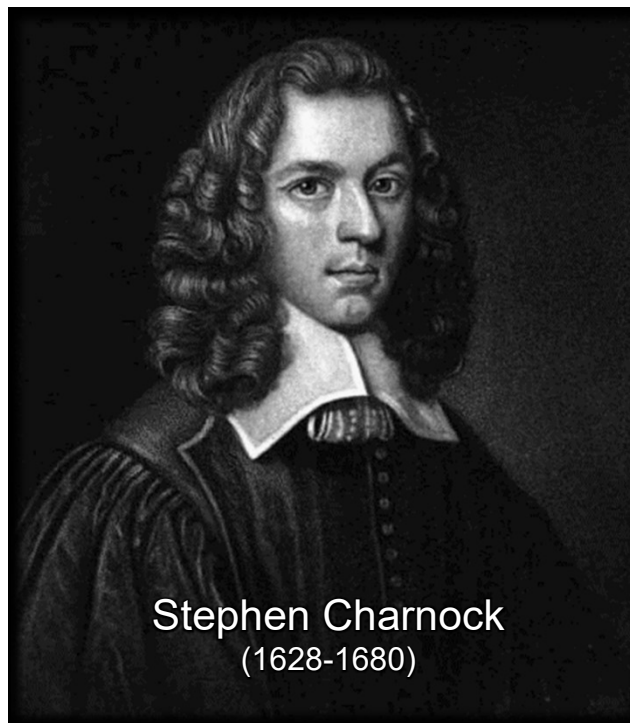


***"It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality. But every body is in potentiality, because the continuous, as such, is divisible to infinity; it is therefore impossible that God should be a body."***

[S7, I, Q3., art. 1]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



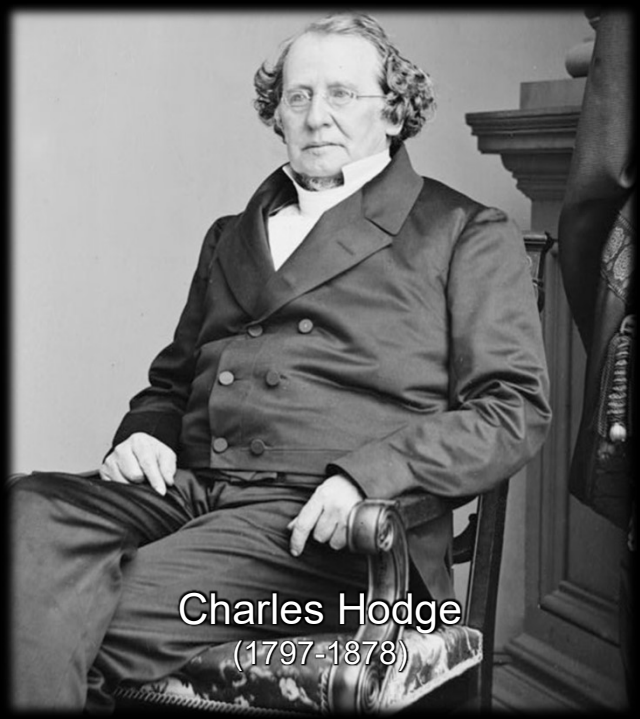
**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

***"God is a Spirit; that is, he hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter, not a visible substance, a bodily form."***

[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:178]

***"It is impossible, therefore, to overestimate the importance of the truth contained in the simple proposition, God is a Spirit. It is involved in that proposition that God is immaterial. None of the properties of matter can be predicated of Him."***

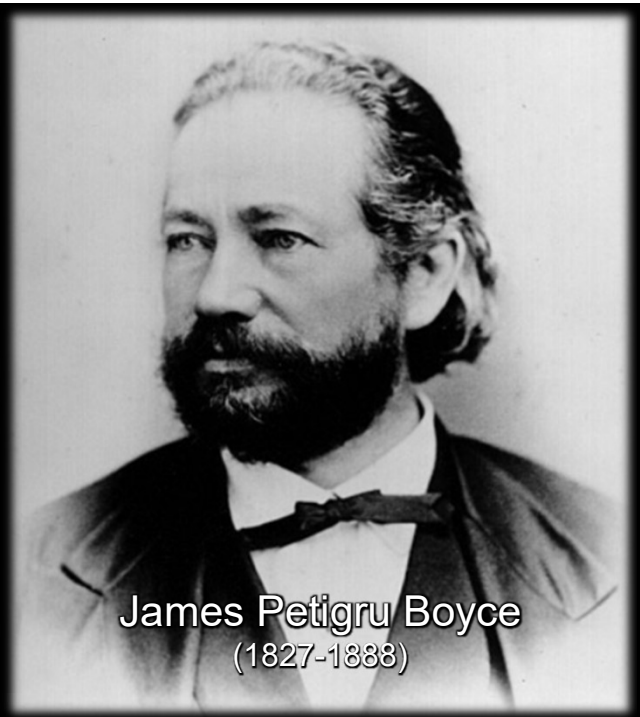
[Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979, I, V, §4)]



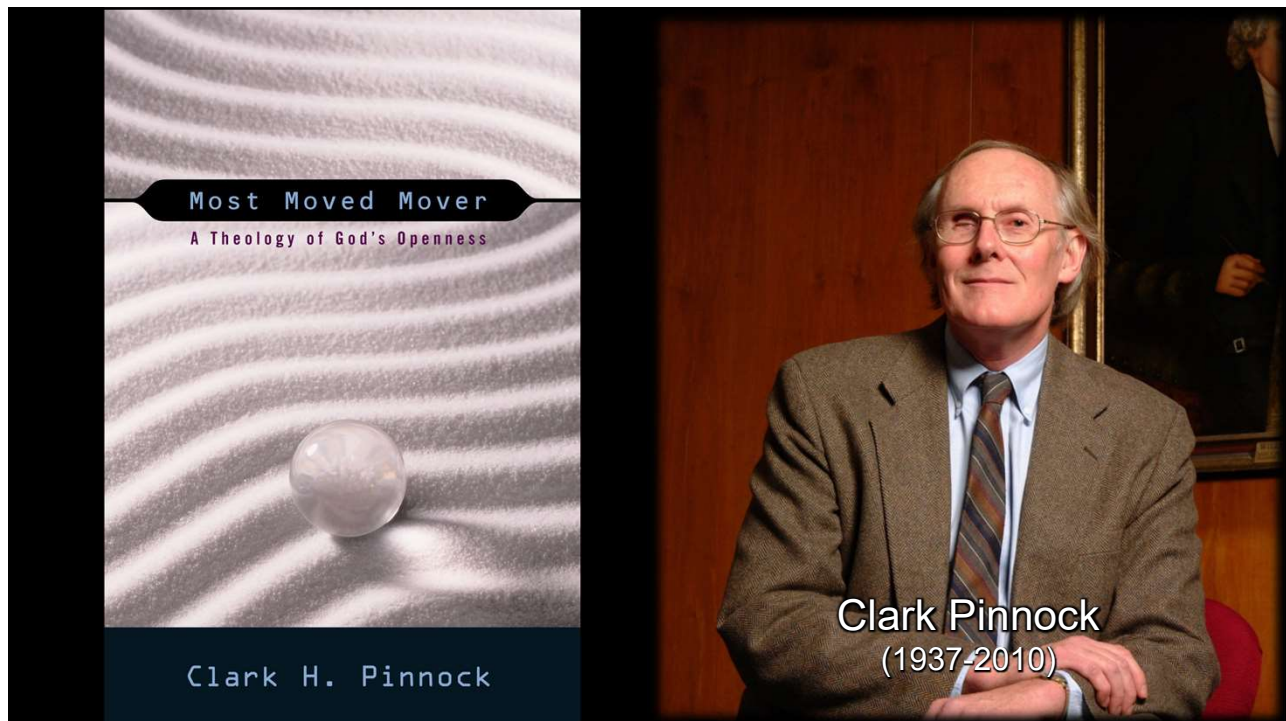
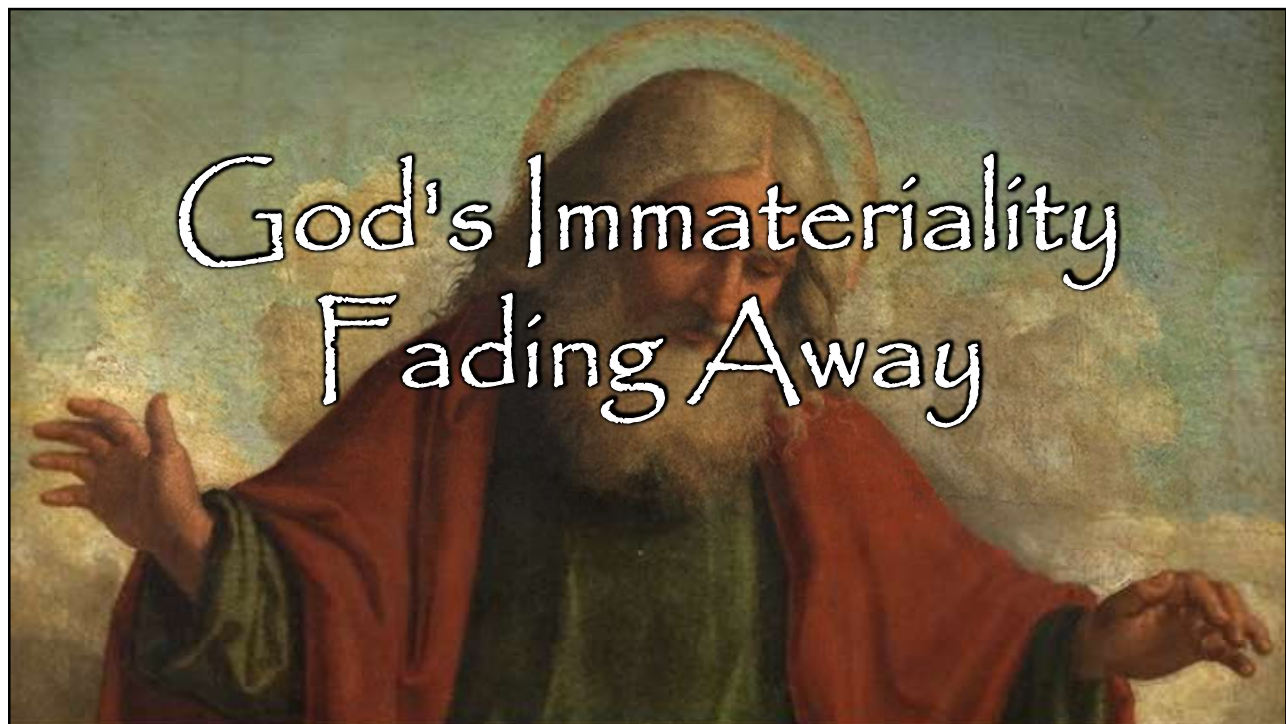
Charles Hodge  
(1797-1878)

***"By this we mean that he has no material organization, that he has neither body nor members of the body such as we have, neither shape nor form, neither passions nor limitations, but only a spiritual nature."***

[James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 62]



James Petigru Boyce  
(1827-1888)



Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"If [God] is with us in the world, if we are to take biblical metaphors seriously, is God in some way embodied?"*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"Critics will be quick to say that, although there are expressions of this idea in the Bible, they are not to be taken literally. But I do not believe that the idea is as foreign to the Bible's view of God as we have assumed."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"In tradition, God is thought to function primarily as a disembodied spirit but this is scarcely a biblical idea. For example, ... human beings are said to be embodied creatures created in the image of God."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"Is there perhaps something in God that corresponds with embodiment? Having a body is certainly not a negative thing because it makes it possible for us to be agents."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"Perhaps God's  
agency would be  
easier to envisage if  
he were in some way  
corporeal."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"Most people, I  
suspect, think that  
God chooses to be  
associated with a  
body, while being  
himself formless."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"That may be so, but it is also possible that God has a body in some way we cannot imagine and, therefore, that it is natural for God to seek out forms of embodiment."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"I do not feel obligated to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it. It is true that from a Platonic standpoint, the idea is absurd, but this is not a biblical standpoint."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"The only persons we encounter are embodied persons and, if God is not embodied, it may prove difficult to understand how God is a person. What kind of actions could a disembodied God perform?"*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

*"Embodiment may be the way in which the transcendent God is able to be immanent and why God is presented in such terms."*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

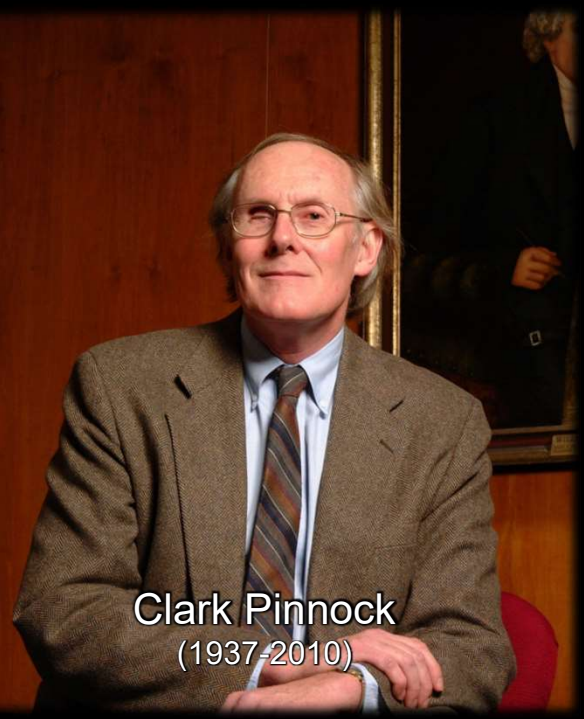
*"I would say that God transcends the world, while being able to indwell it. Perhaps God uses **the created order as a kind of body** and exercises top-down causation upon it.*

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

***panentheism***  
***process theology***

***"As human subjectivity expresses itself in, with, and through bodies, so the transcendent subjectivity of God is somehow immanent in the patterns, processes, and events of the world."***

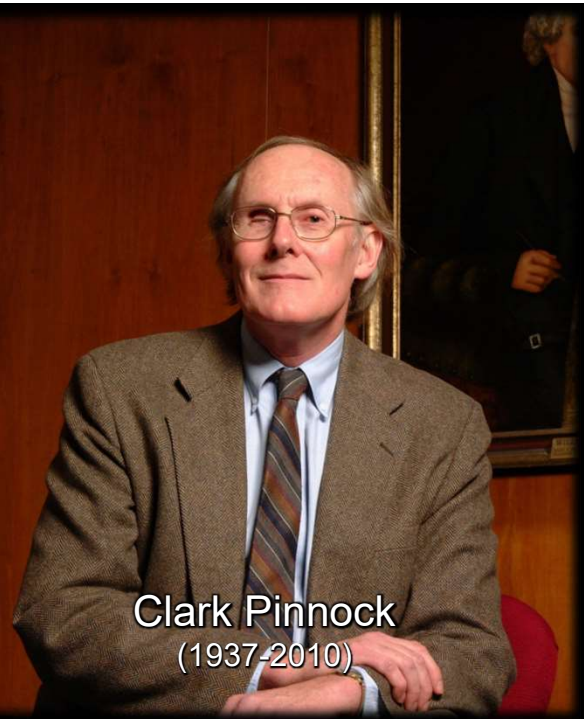
Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

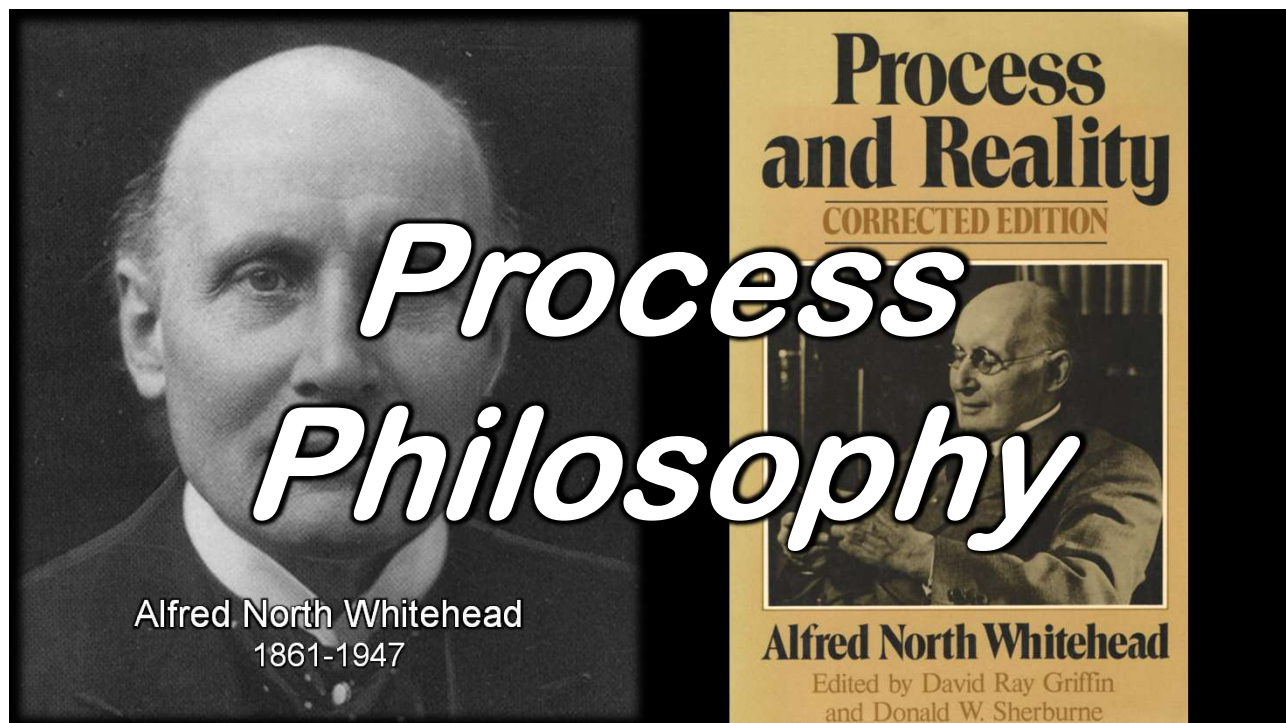
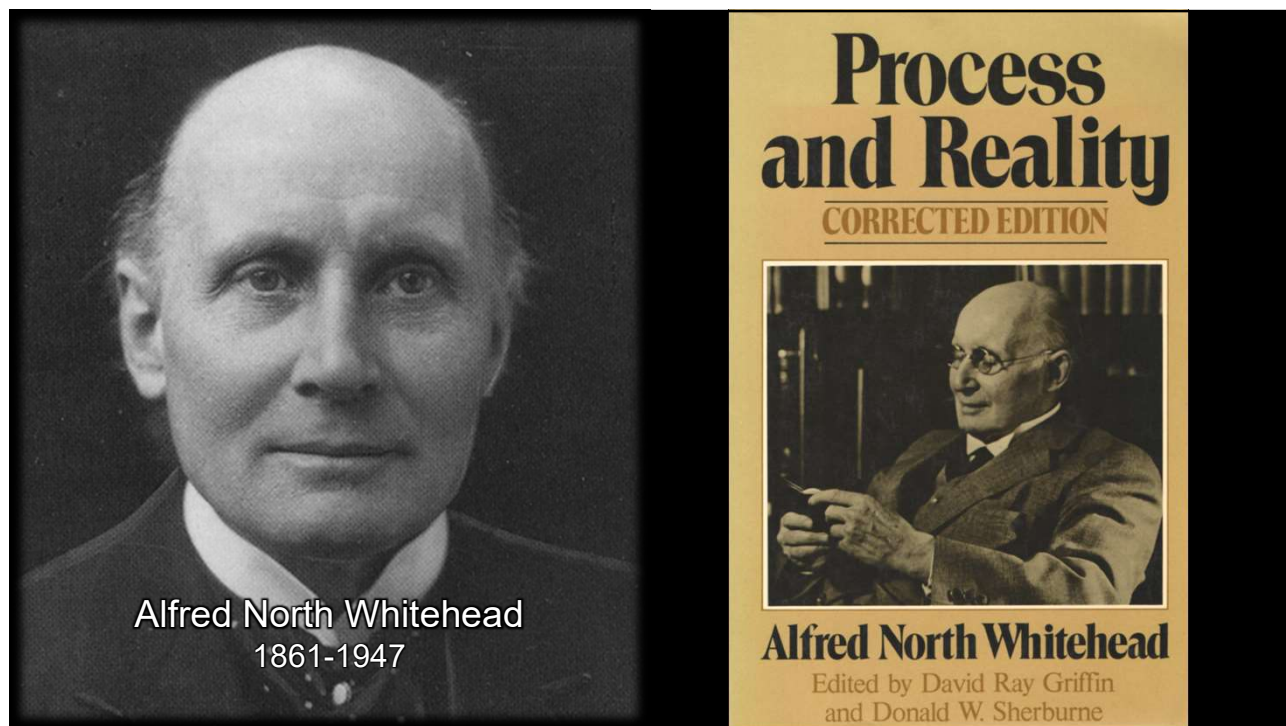


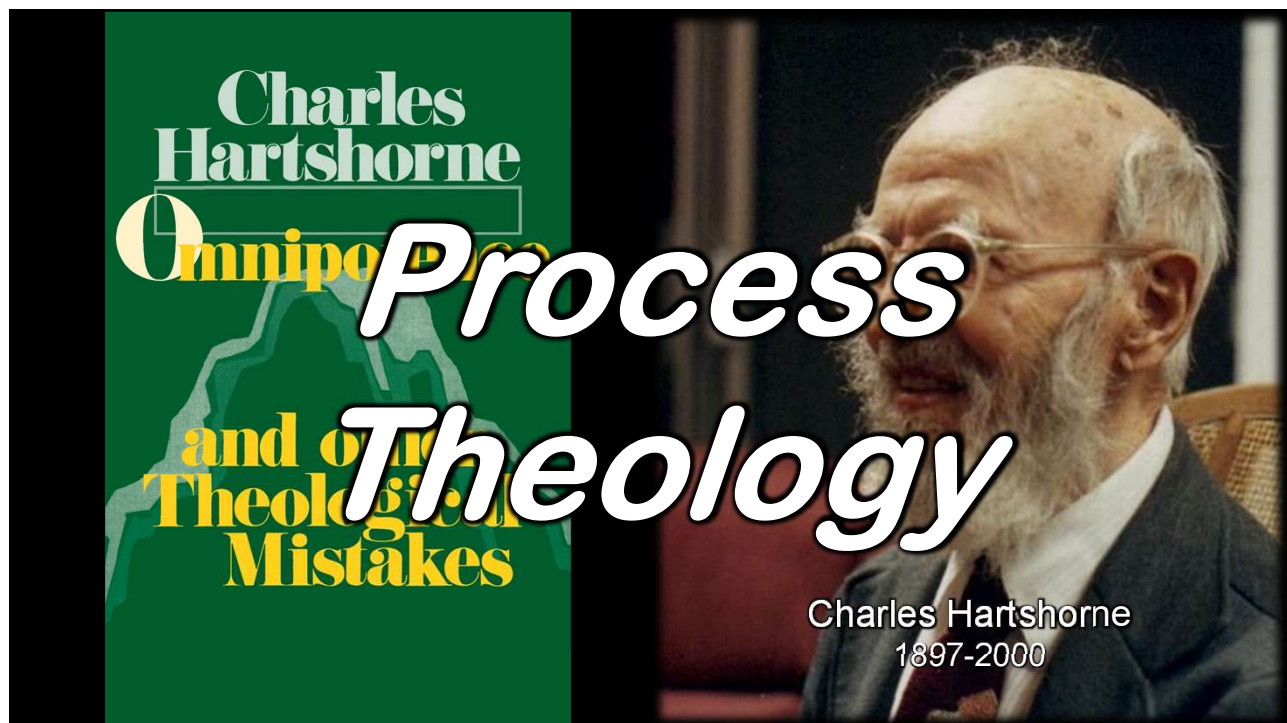
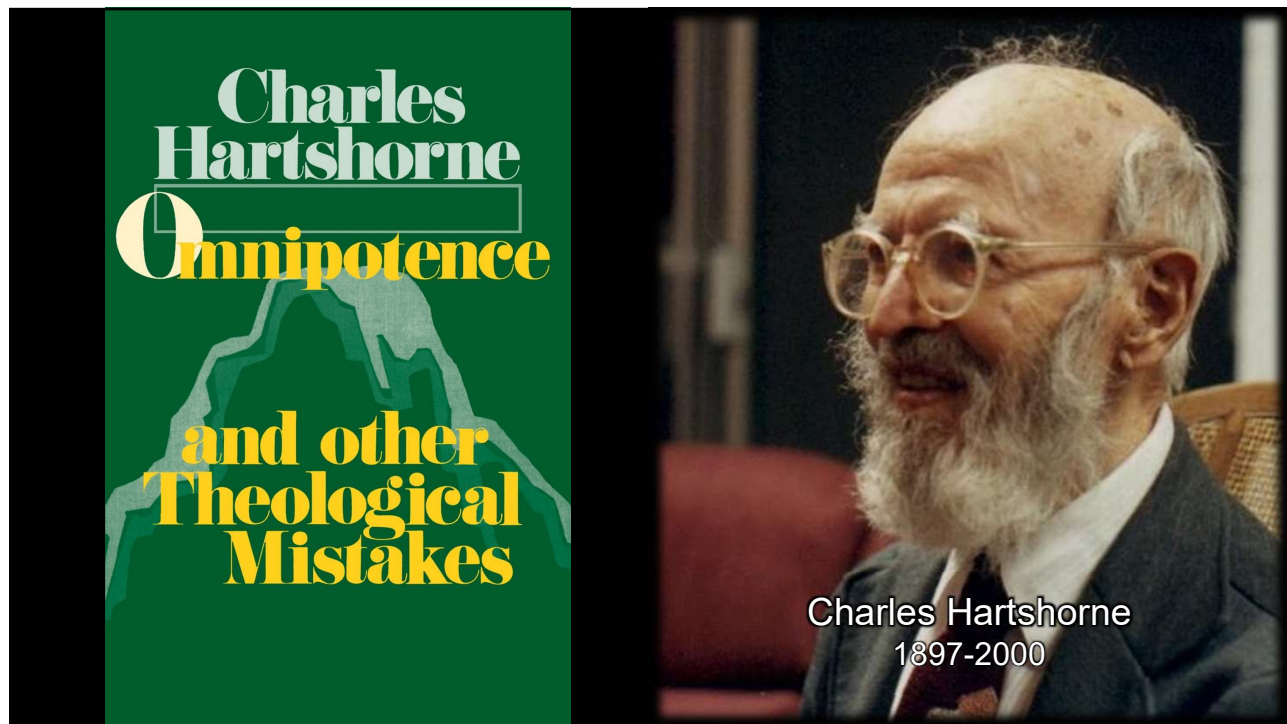
***"The evangelical narrative is unintelligible apart from the assumption of God's presence in nature and history and especially in Jesus Christ."***

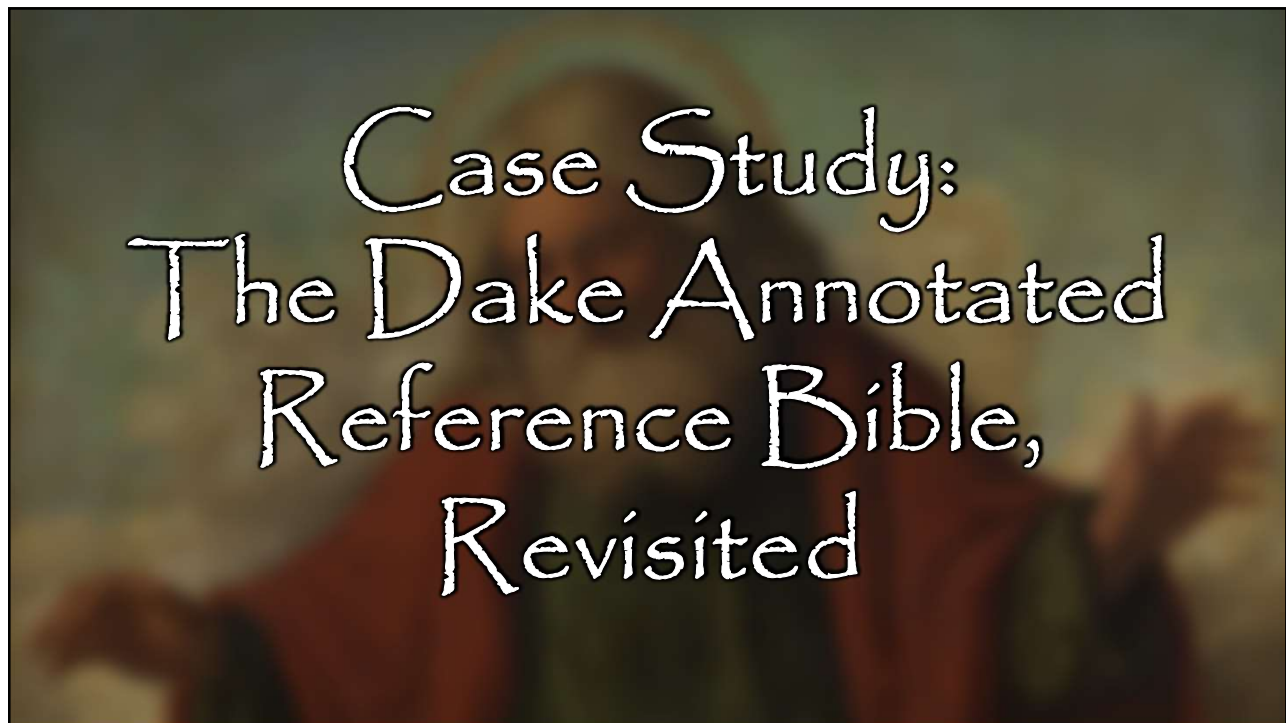
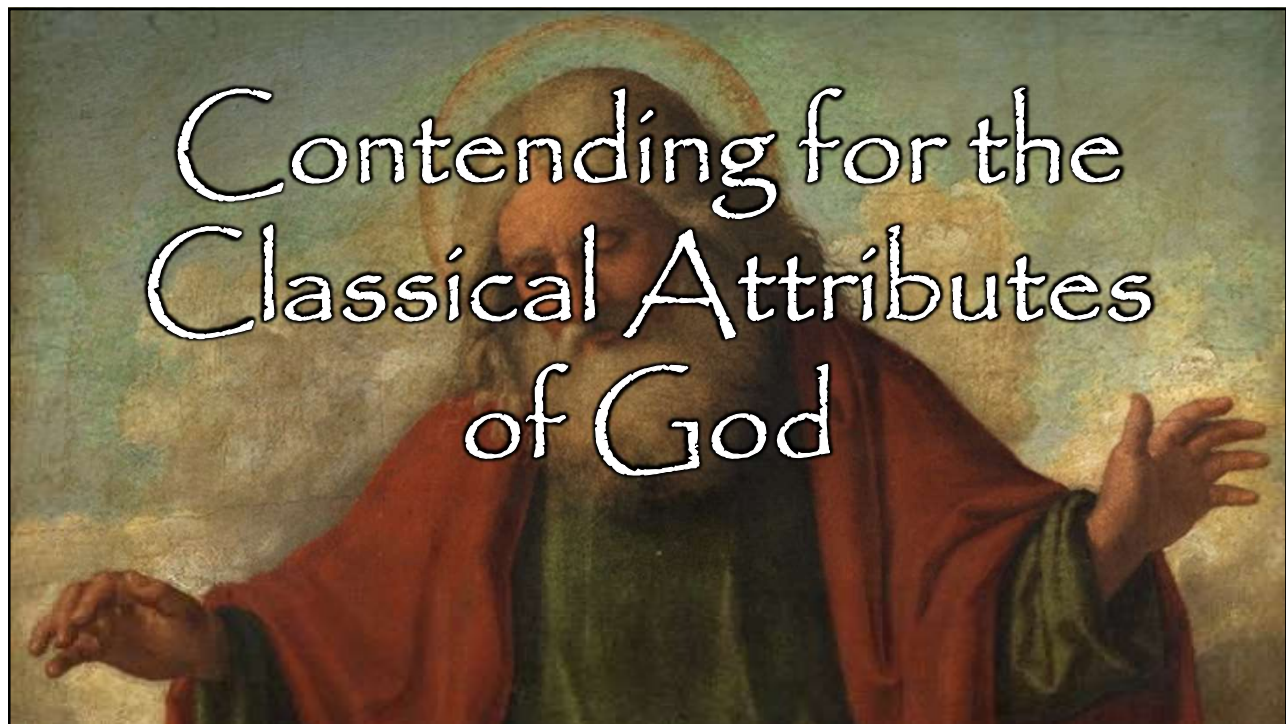
[Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 33-35]

Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

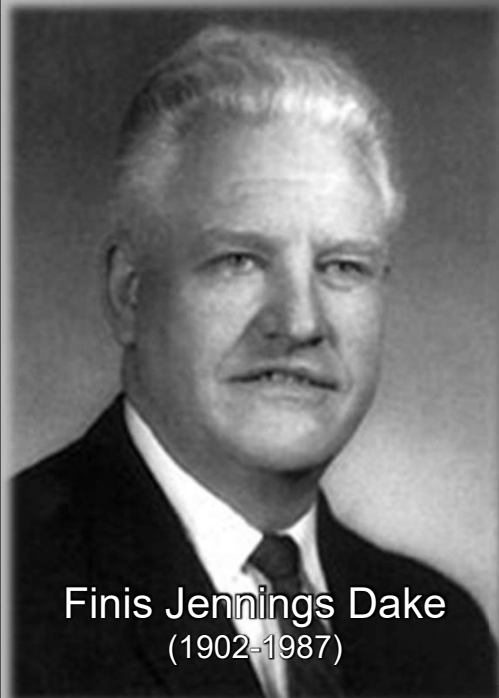








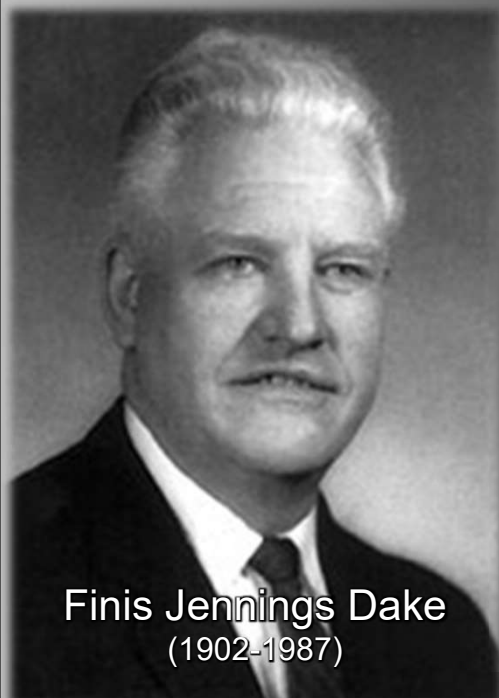




Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)

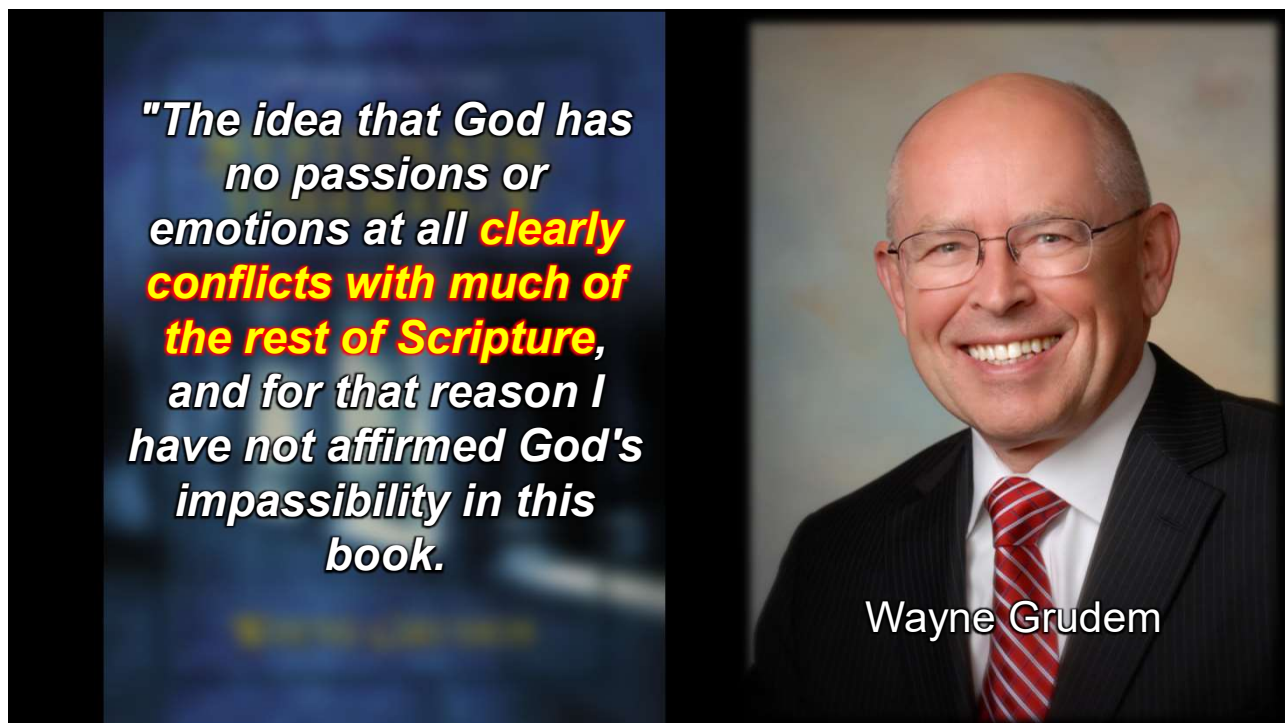
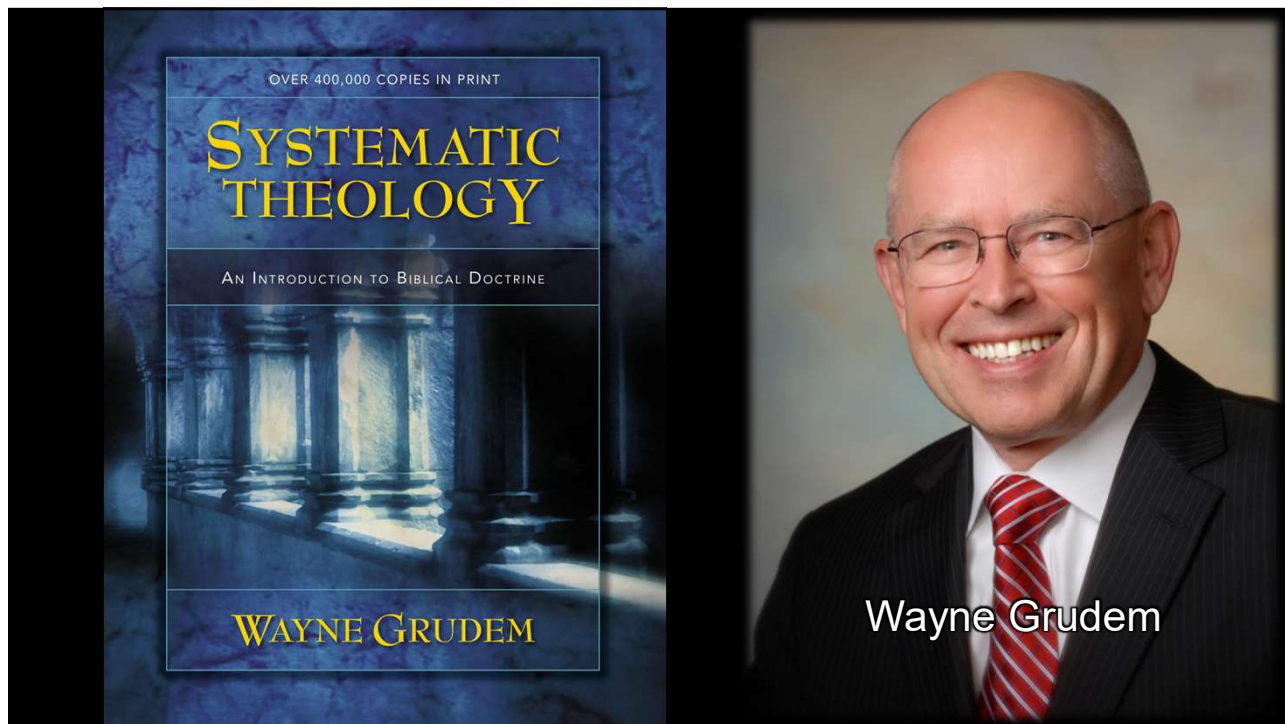
"God has a personal **spirit body** (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19); shape (Jn. 5:37); form (Phil. 2:5-7); image and likeness of a man (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). He has bodily parts such as, back parts (Ex. 33:23), heart (Gen. 6:6; 8:21), hands and fingers (Ps. 8:3-6; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7), mouth (Num. 12:8), lips and tongue (Isa. 30:27), feet (Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10), eyes (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18), ears (Ps. 18:6), hair, head, face, arms (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev. 5:1-7; 22:4-6), and other bodily parts."

[Dake, NT, p. 97]



Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)

(Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19) (Jn. 5:37)  
(Phil. 2:5-7)  
(Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9)  
(Ex. 33:23) (Gen. 6:6; 8:21) (Ps. 8:3-6; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7) (Num. 12:8) (Isa. 30:27)  
(Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10) (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18) (Ps. 18:6)  
(Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev. 5:1-7; 22:4-6)



***"Instead, quite the opposite is true, for God, who is the origin of our emotions and who created our emotions, certainly does feel emotions:***



Wayne Grudem

***"God rejoices (Isa. 62:5). He is grieved (Ps. 78:40; Eph. 4:30). His wrath burns hot against his enemies (Ex. 32:10). He pities his children (Ps. 103:13). He loves with everlasting love (Isa. 54:8; Ps. 103:17)."***

[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 166]



Wayne Grudem

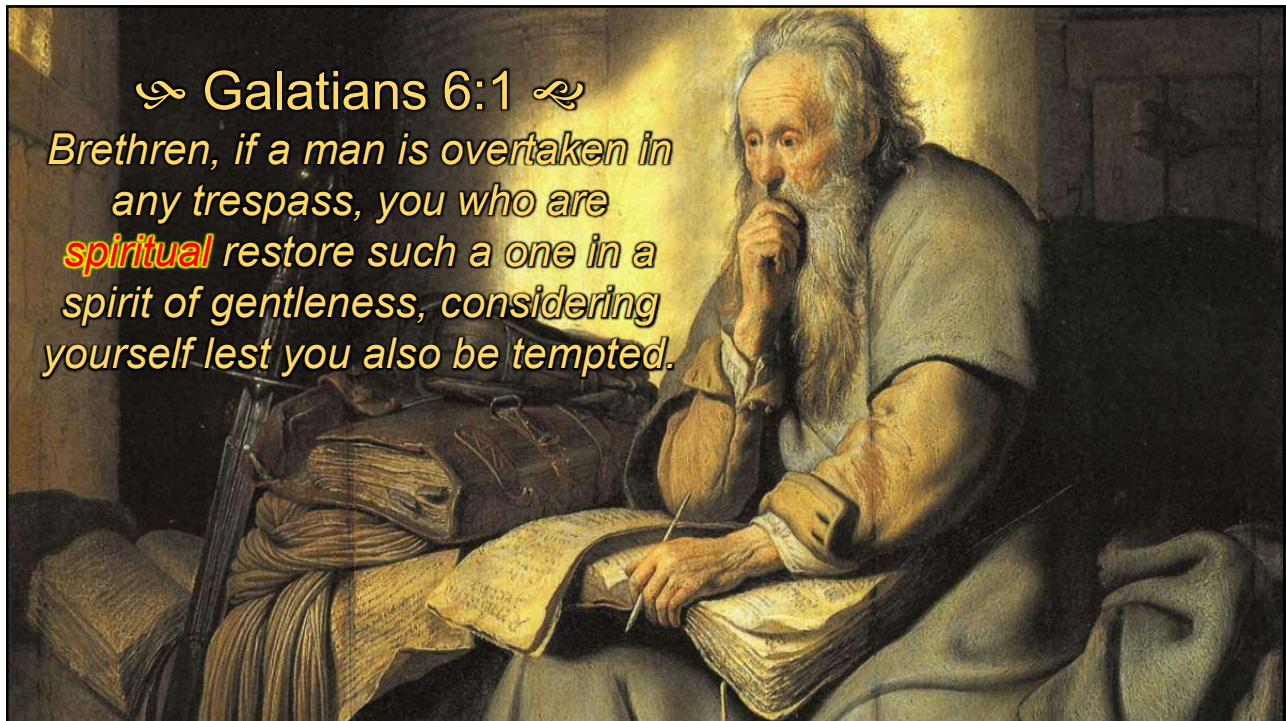
"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,

and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." Gen. 3:8

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."  
John 4:24

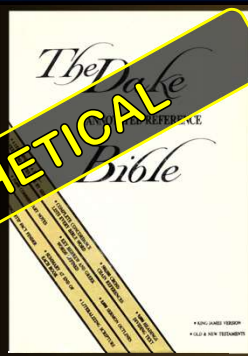
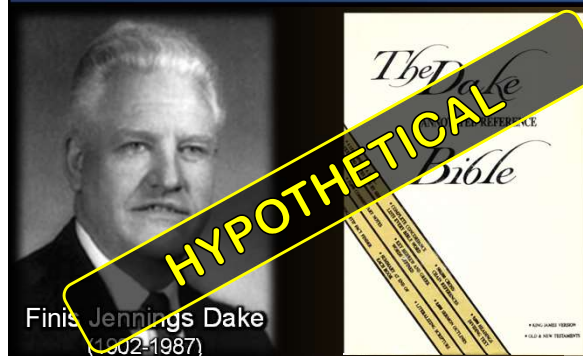
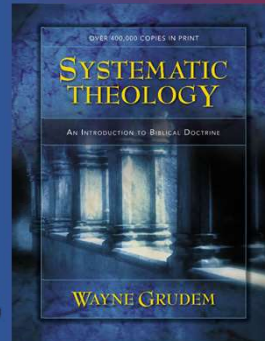
✧ Galatians 6:1 ✧

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are **spiritual** restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*



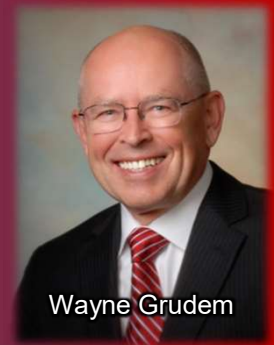
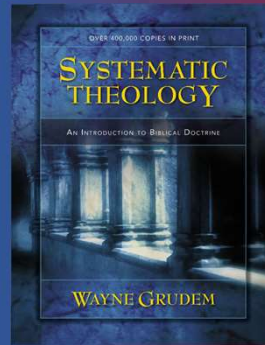


*"The idea the God has no  
**passions or emotions** at all  
clearly conflicts with much of  
the rest of Scripture, and for  
that reason I have not affirmed  
God's impassibility in this book.*

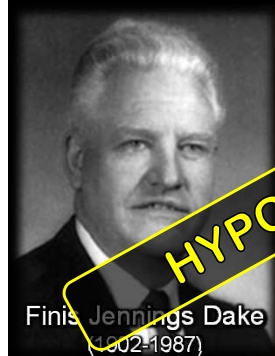


*"The idea that God has no  
**physical body** at all  
clearly conflicts with much of  
the rest of Scripture, and for that  
reason I have not affirmed God's  
immateriality in this book.*

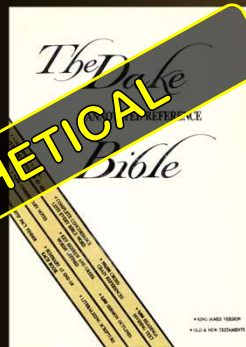
***"Instead, quite the opposite is true, for God, who is the origin of our emotions and who created our emotions, certainly does feel emotions:***



Wayne Grudem



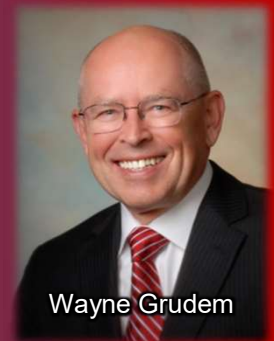
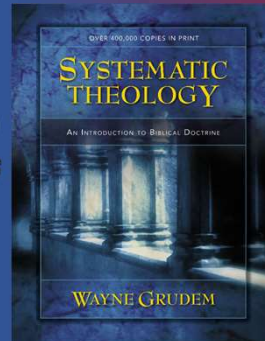
Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)



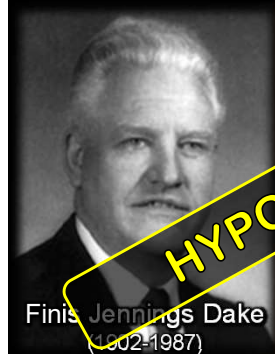
***Instead, quite the opposite is true, for God, who is the origin of our bodies and who created our bodies, certainly does have a body:***

***"God rejoices (Isa. 62:5). He is grieved (Ps. 78:40; Eph. 4:30). His wrath burns hot against his enemies (Ex. 32:10). He pities his children (Ps. 103:13). He loves with everlasting love (Isa. 54:8; Ps. 103:17)."***

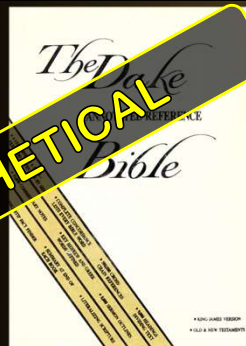
[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 166]



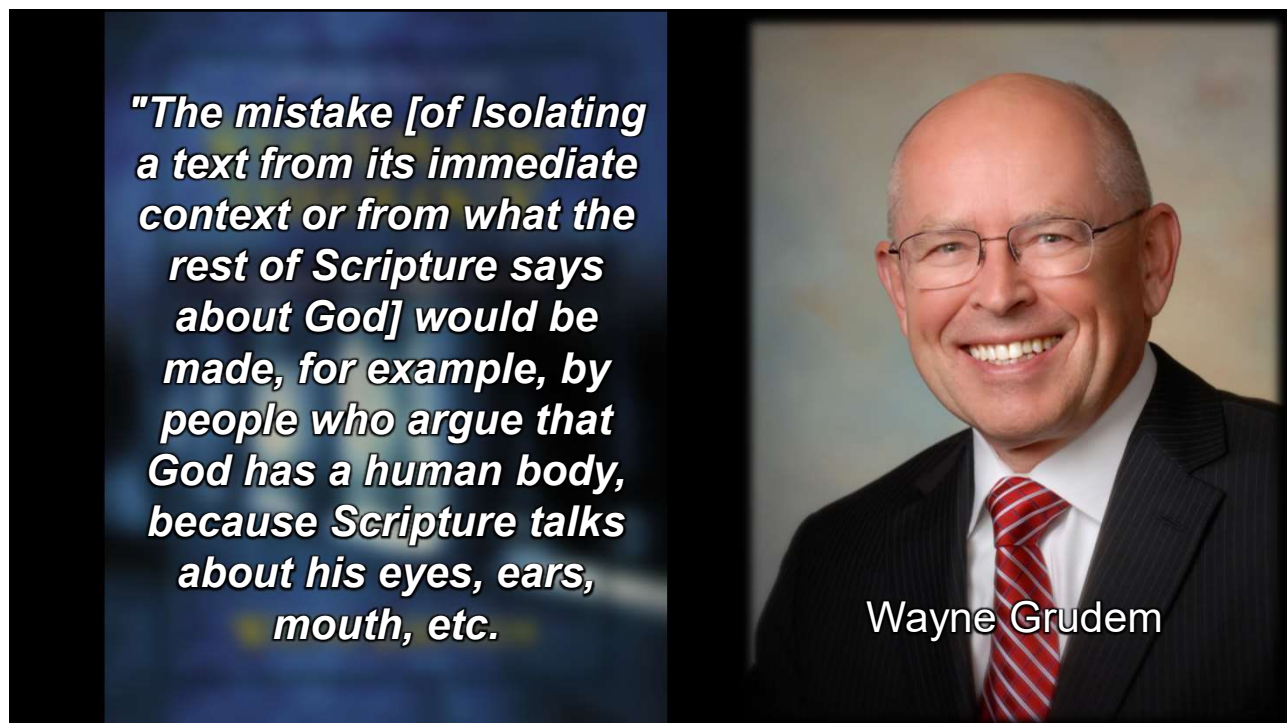
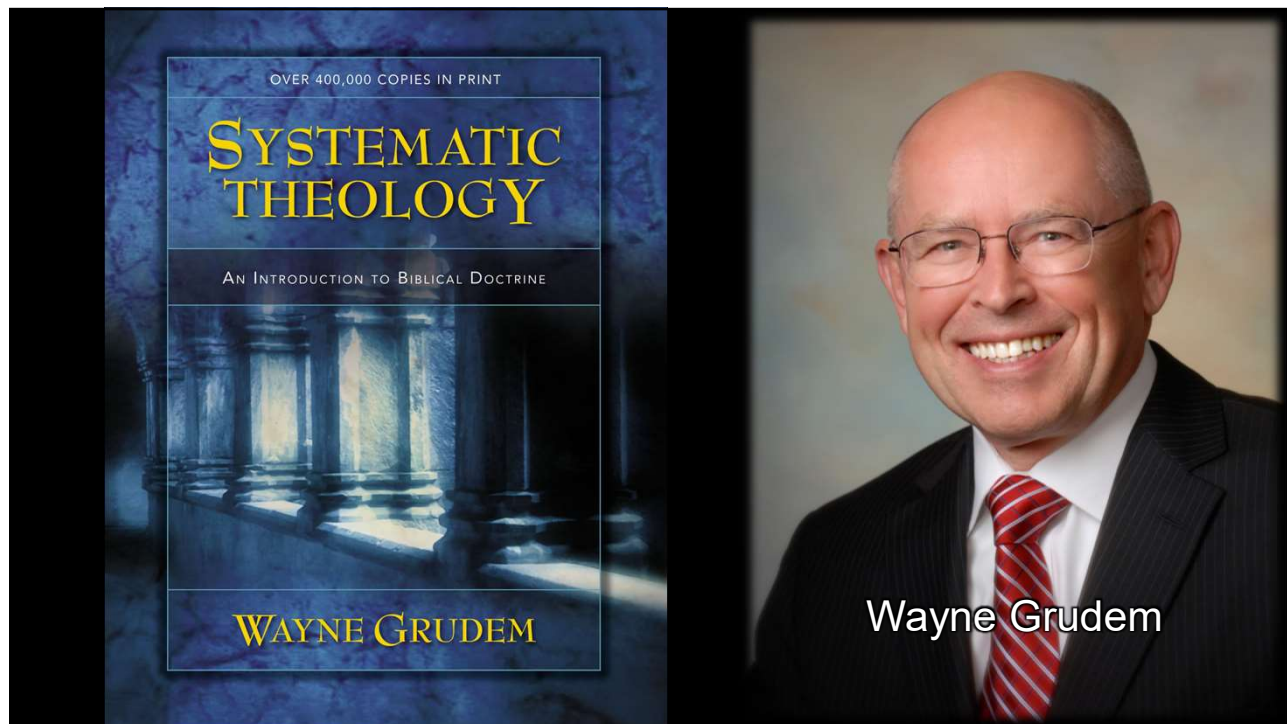
Wayne Grudem

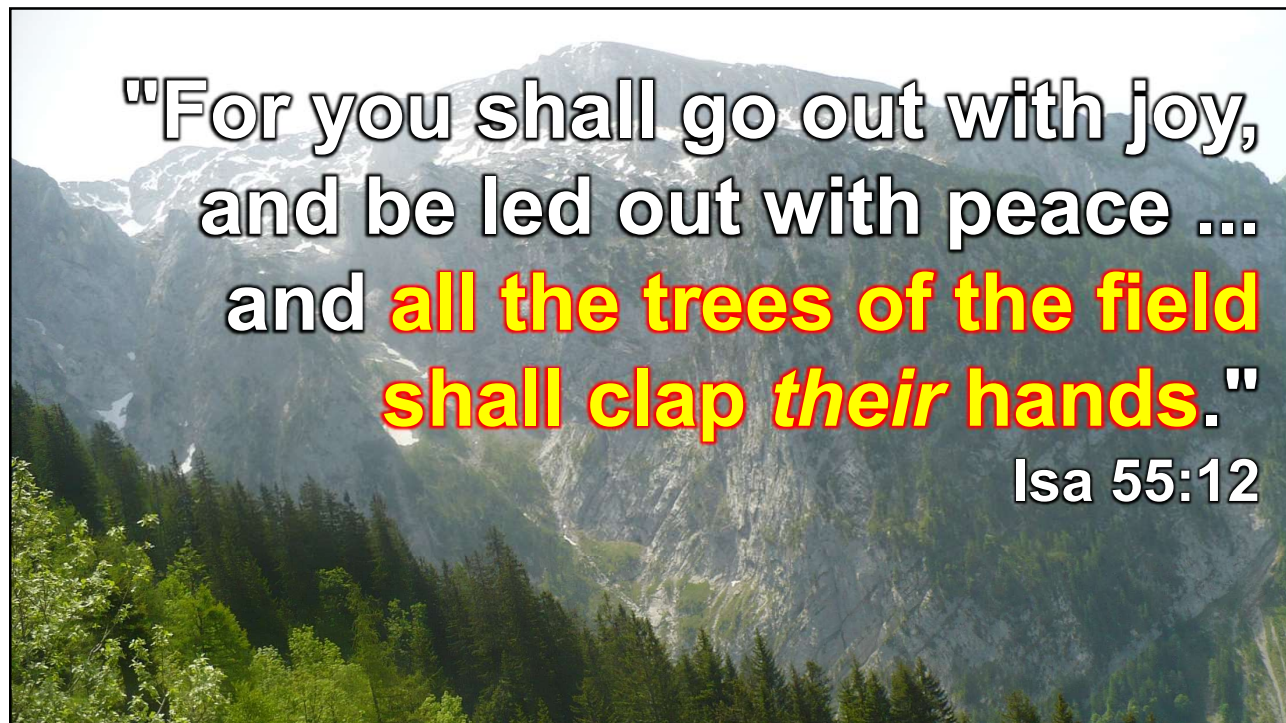
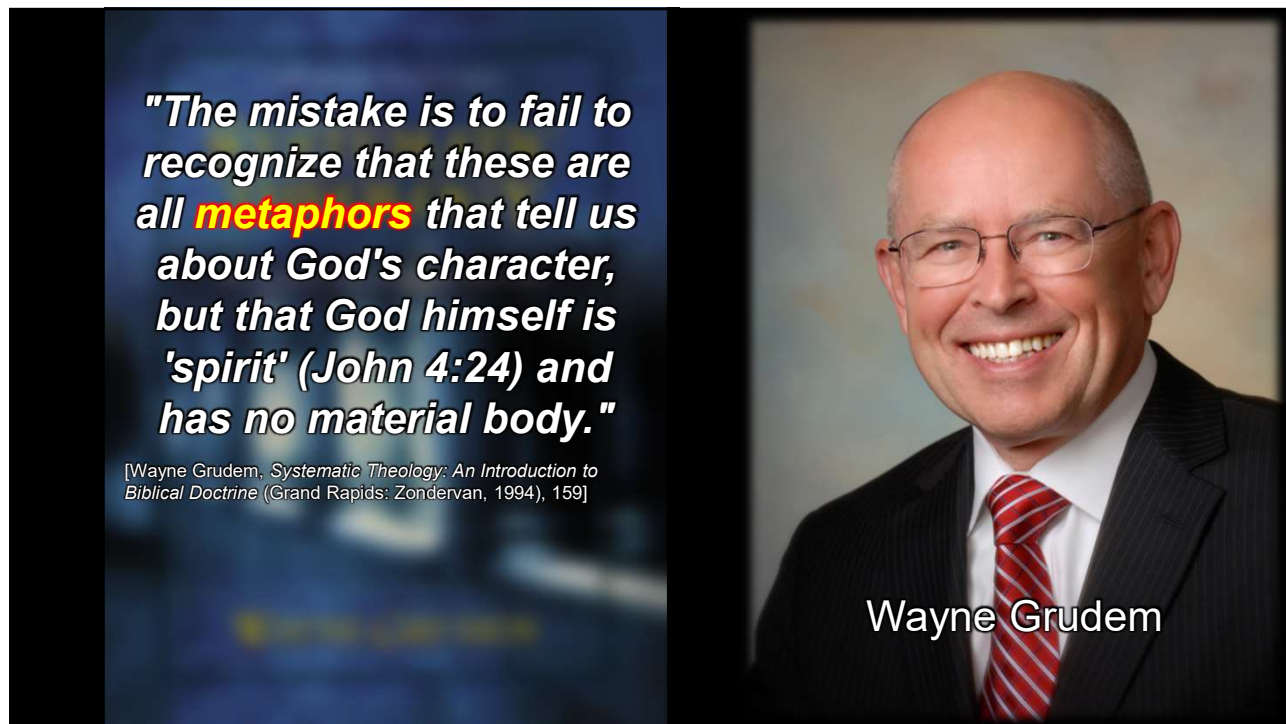


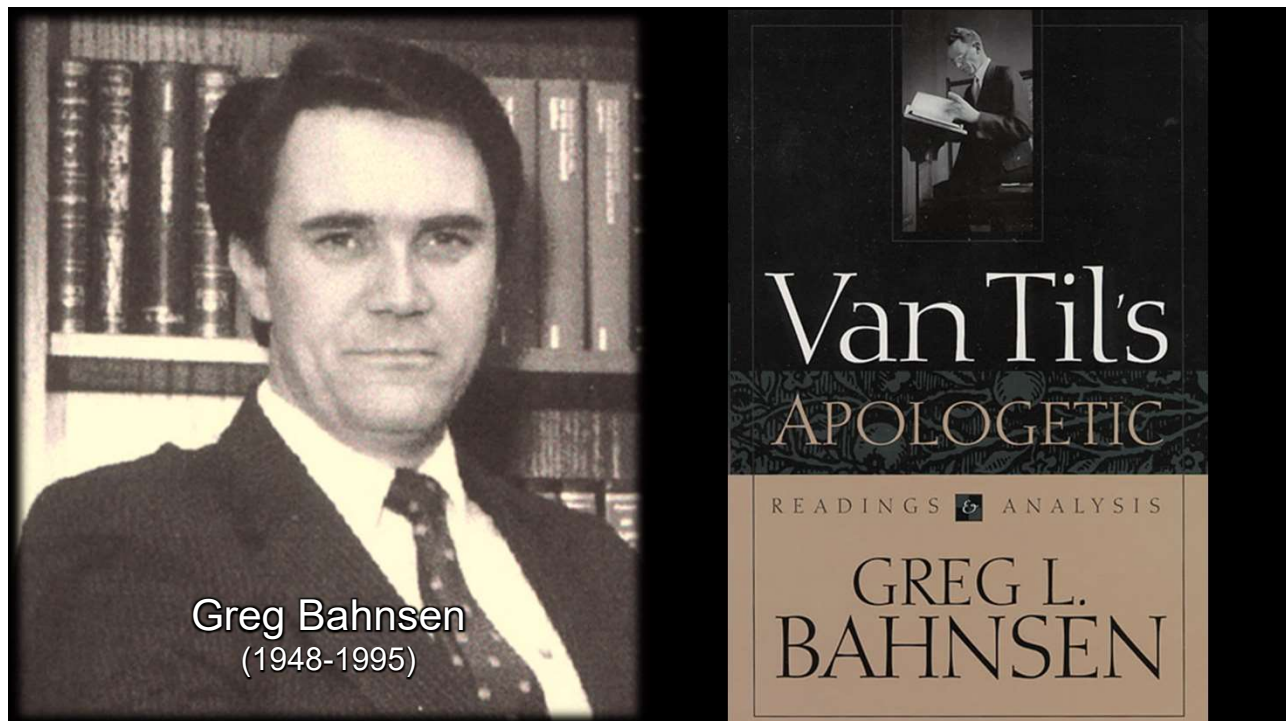
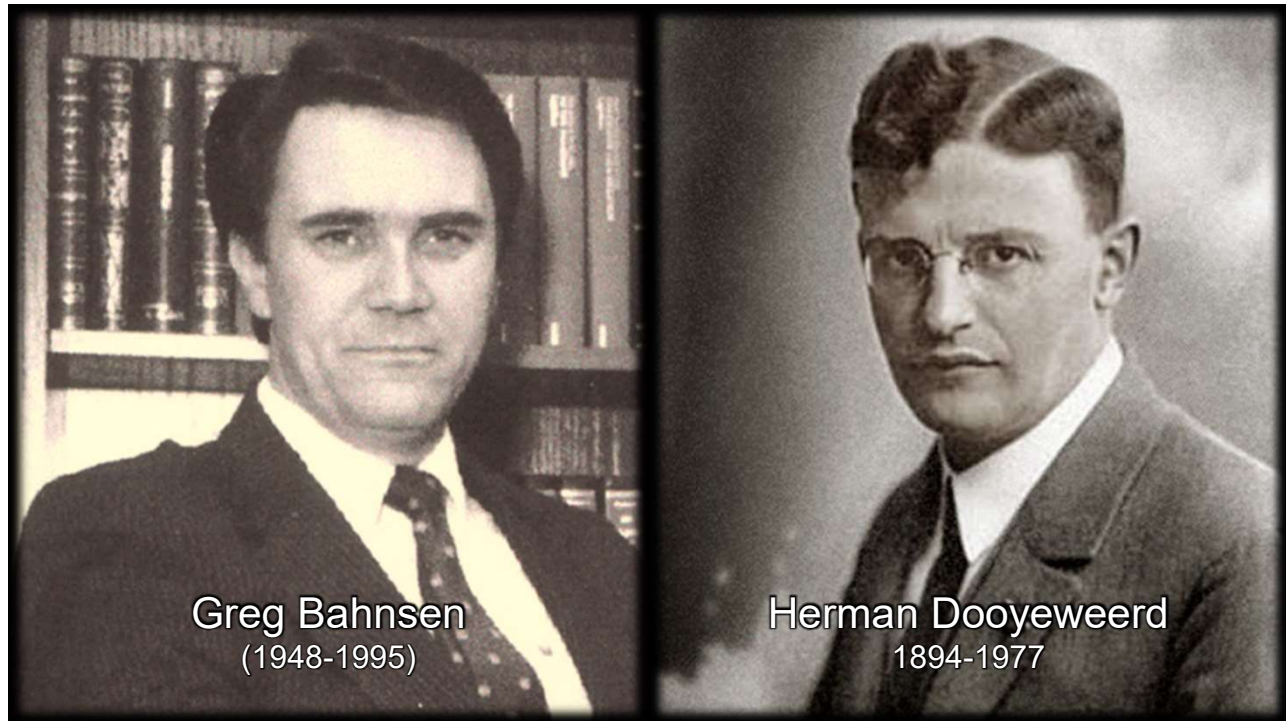
Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)

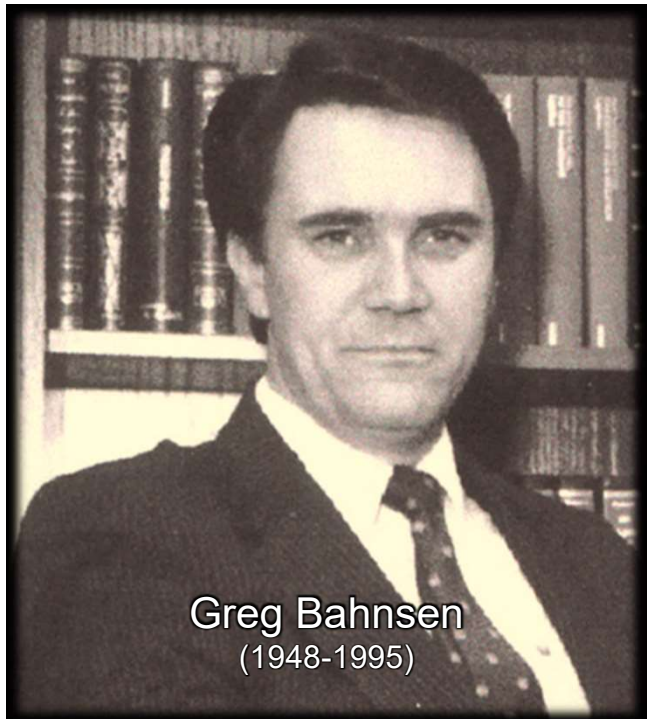


***He has a heart (Gen. 6:6). He has fingers (Ps. 8:3-6). He has hands (Heb. 1:10). He has a mouth (Num. 12:8), lips and a tongue (Isa. 30:27). He has eyes (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18) and ears (Ps. 18:6).***









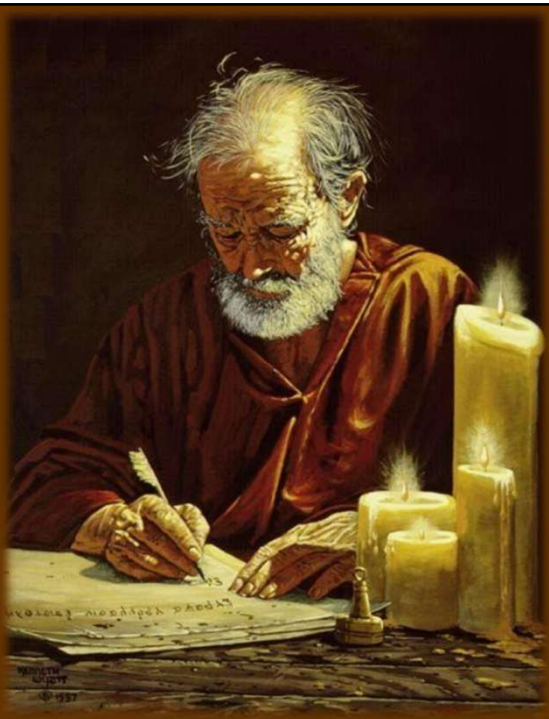
Greg Bahnsen  
(1948-1995)

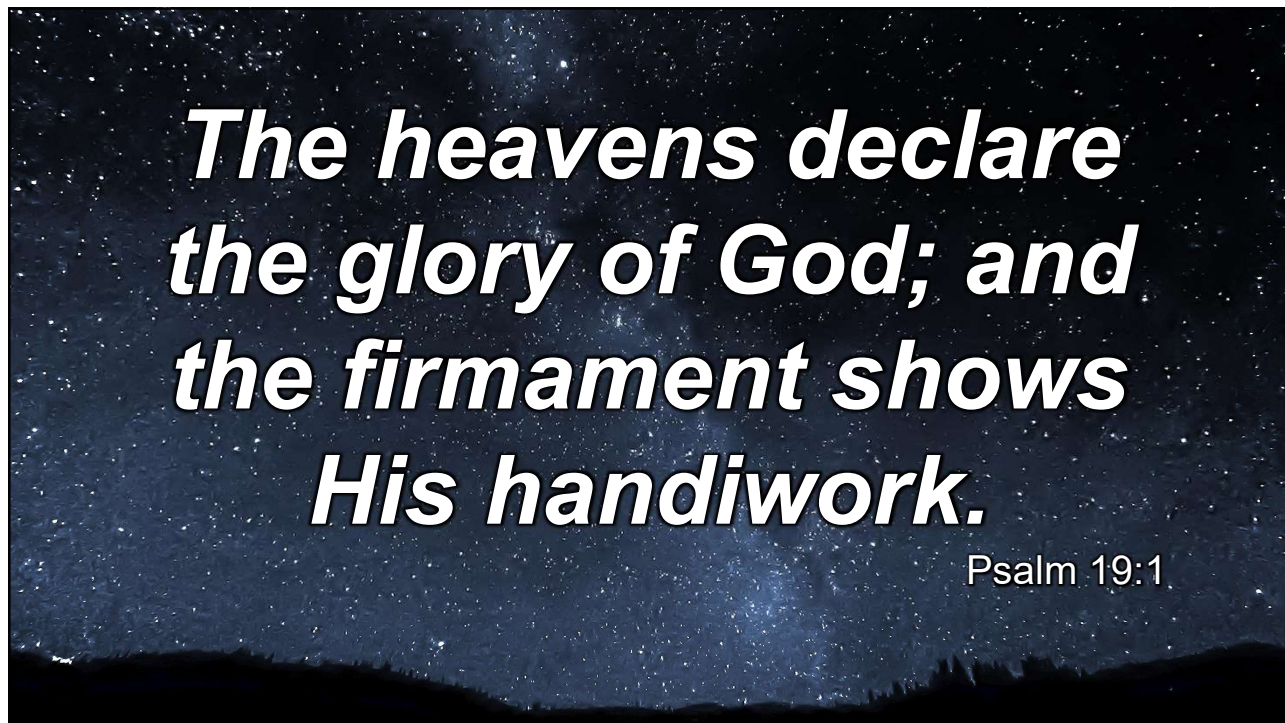
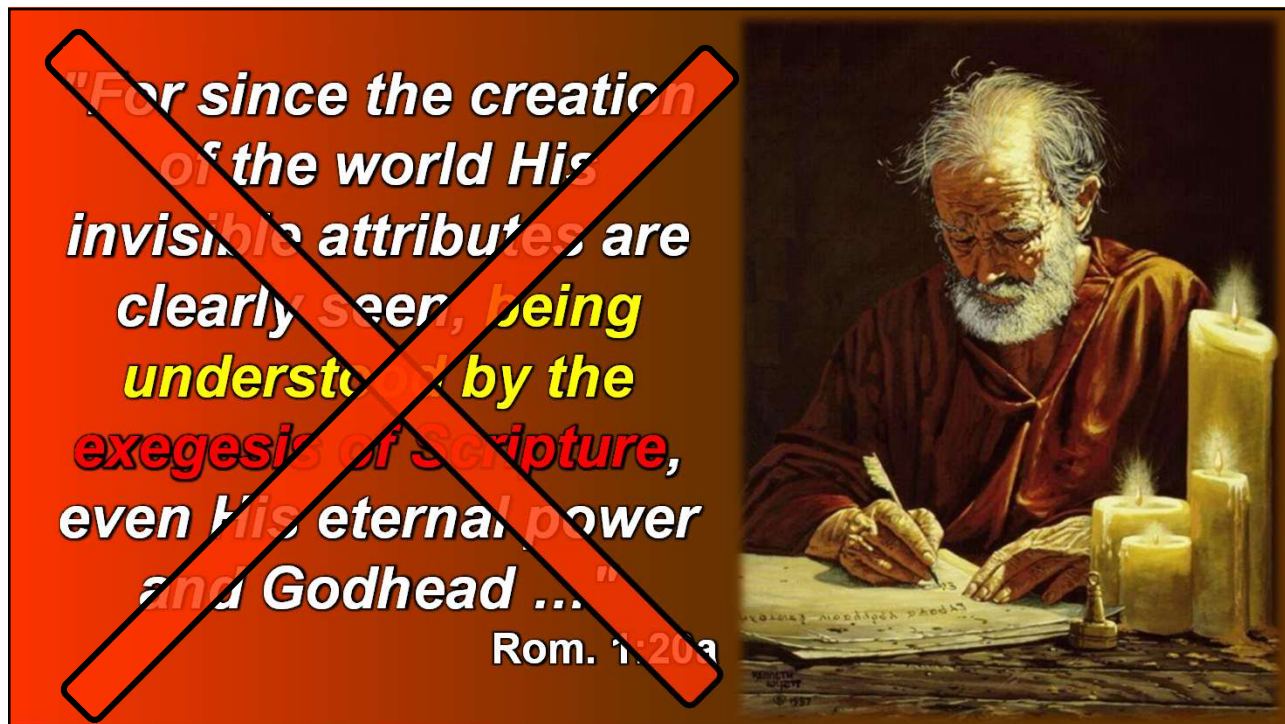
This is a troublesome conception of Christian philosophy. ... The philosopher is placed in the privileged position of laying down for the exegete how the Bible may and may not be used, how its teaching must be broadly conceived, and what the Bible can and cannot say. ... Philosophy is thereby rendered rationally autonomous ...."

[Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1998), 50]

***"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, **being understood by the things that are made,** even His eternal power and Godhead ..."***

Rom. 1:20a

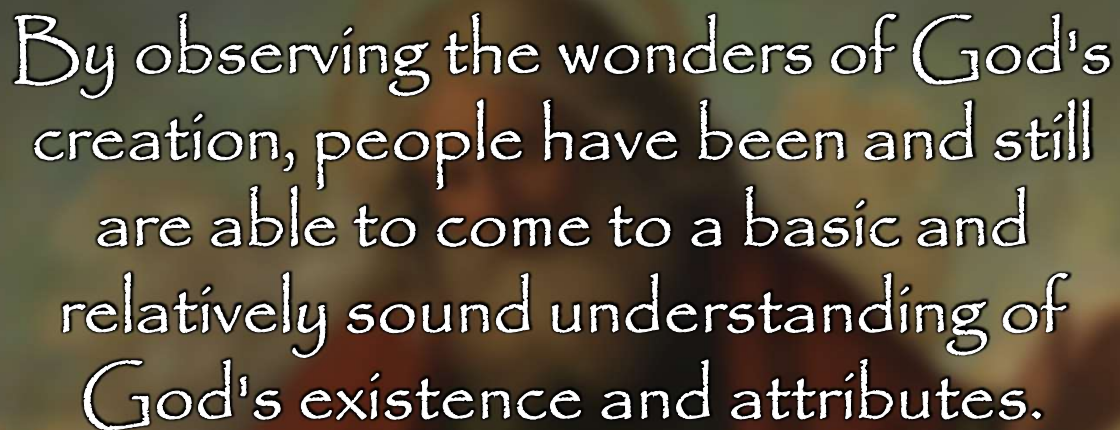






***The heavens declare  
His righteousness,  
and all the peoples  
see His glory.***

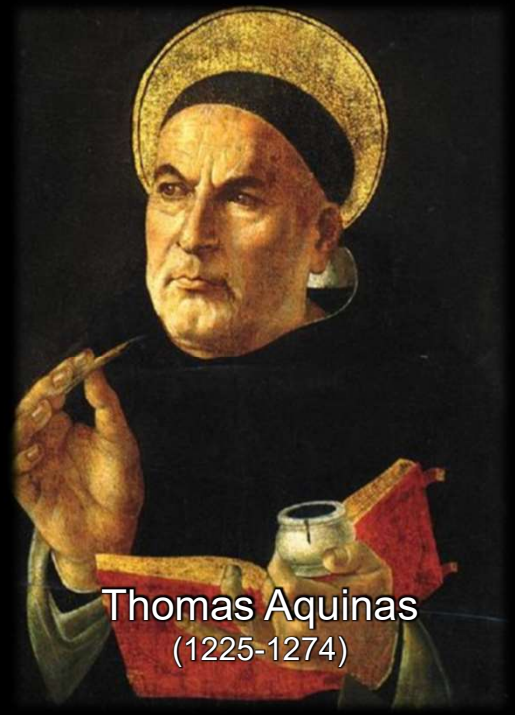
Psalm 97:6



By observing the wonders of God's creation, people have been and still are able to come to a basic and relatively sound understanding of God's existence and attributes.

***"Now, what we have said  
sets aside the error of  
certain Jews who attributed  
anger, sadness,  
repentance, and all such  
passions in their proper  
sense to God, failing to  
distinguish what in Sacred  
Scripture is said properly  
and what metaphorically."***

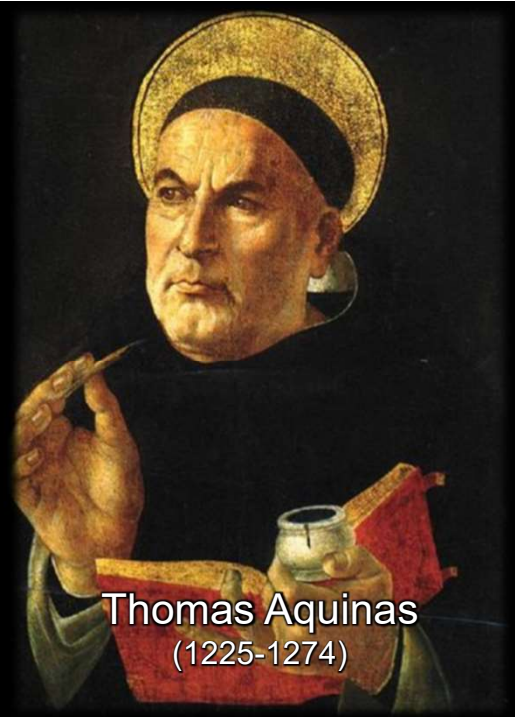
[SCG, I, 91, §18]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"... failing to distinguish  
what in Sacred Scripture  
is said properly and  
what metaphorically."***

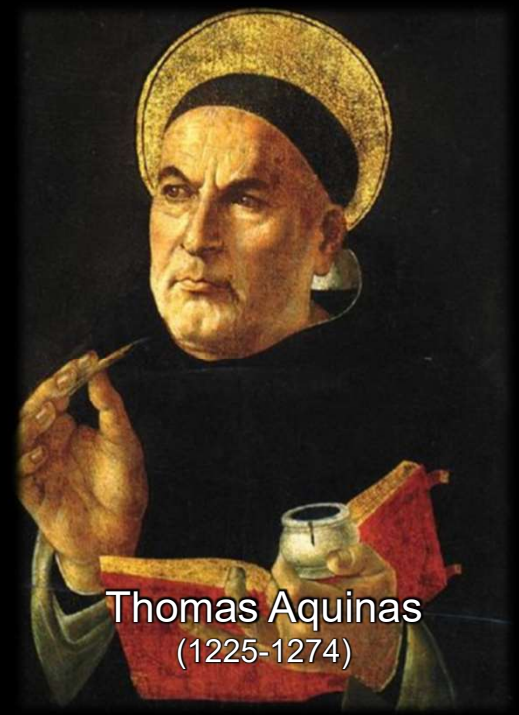
[SCG, I, 91, §18]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"Even though revelation elevates us to know something of which we should otherwise be ignorant, it does not elevate us to know in any other way than through sensible things."***

[Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius, QVI, art. 3, trans. Armand Maurer, *The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), 84]



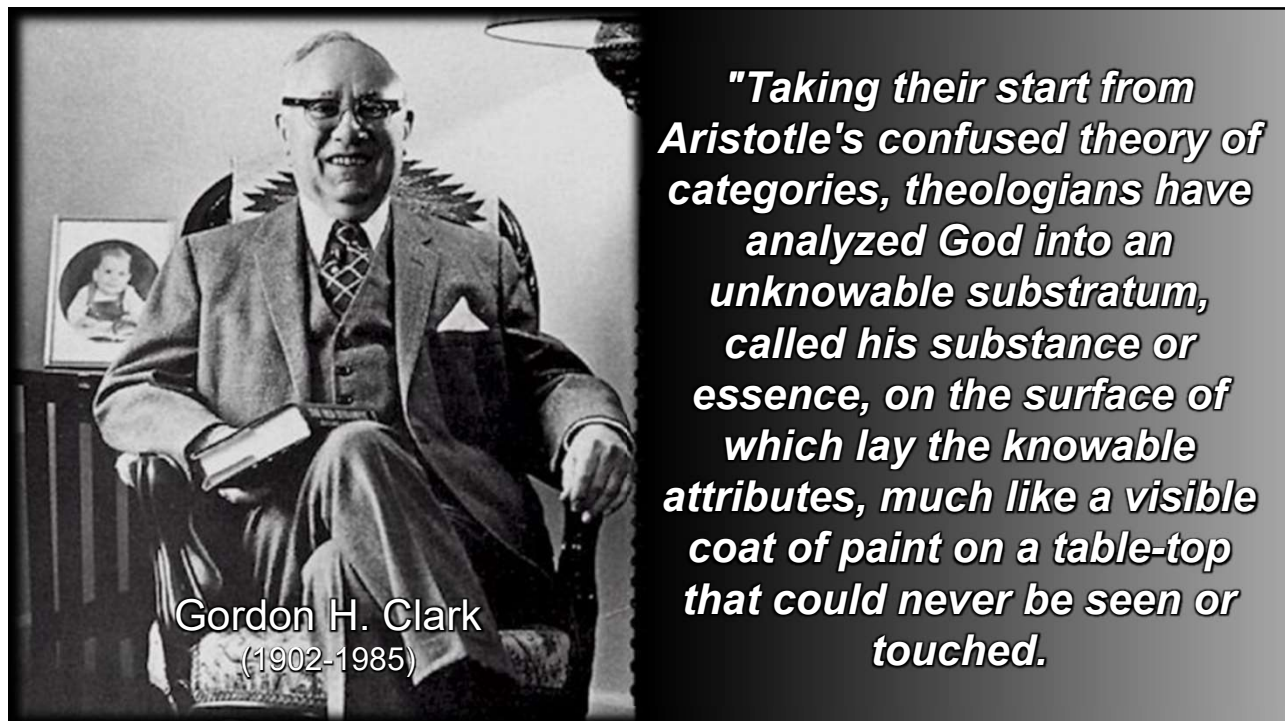
**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

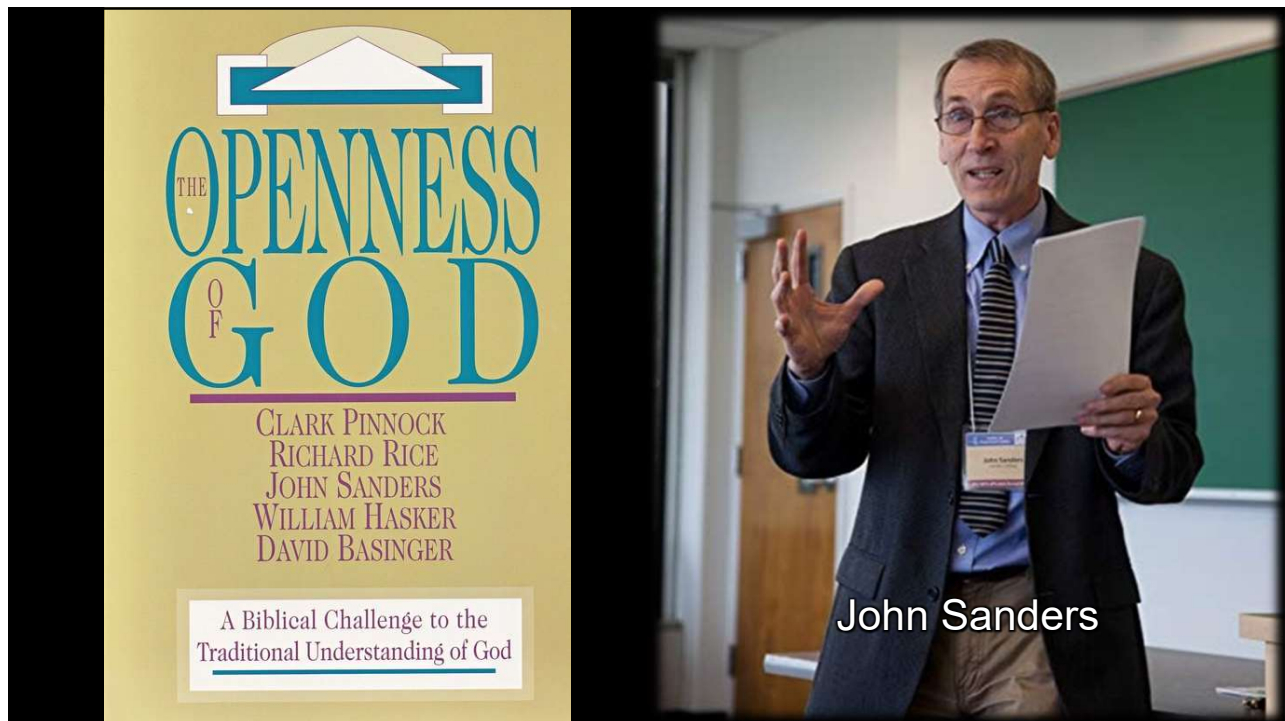
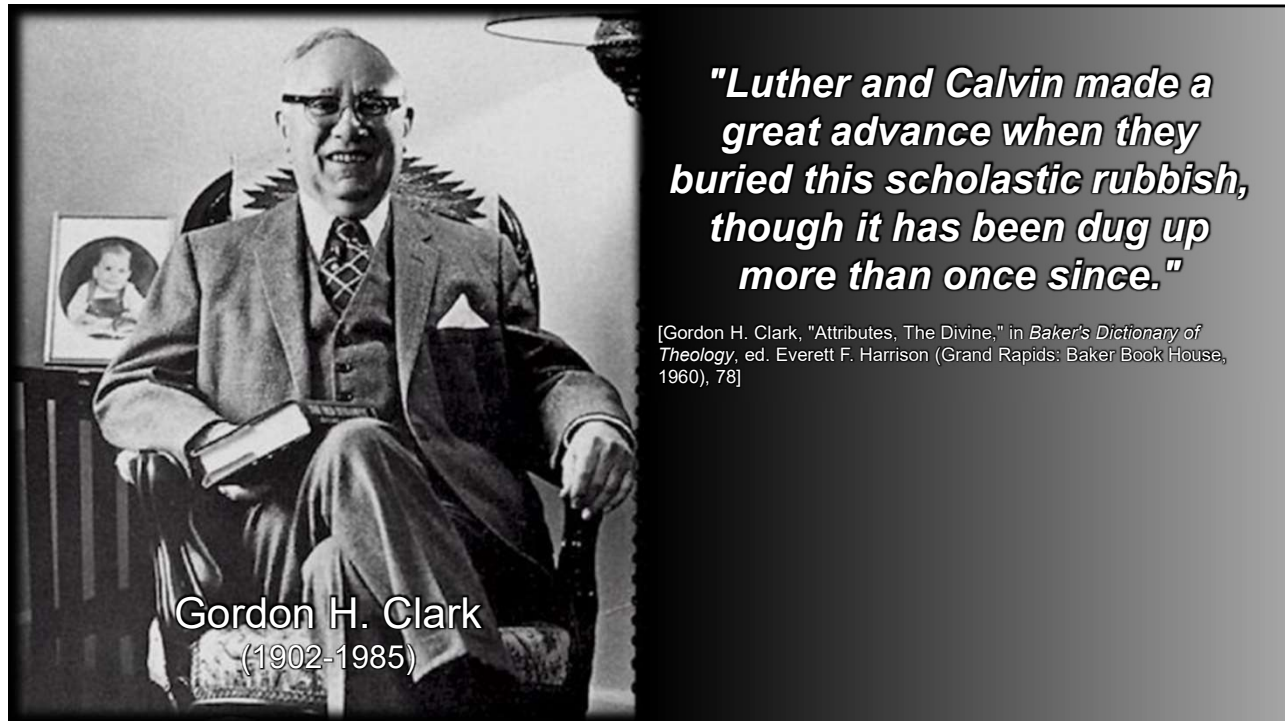
But toxic philosophical voices began to fog the conversation, particularly within Protestantism and particularly since the seventeenth century.

Because of this, there is the need at times to reason from deeper issues in sound philosophy and theology to demonstrate God's attributes given that they are understood "by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20).



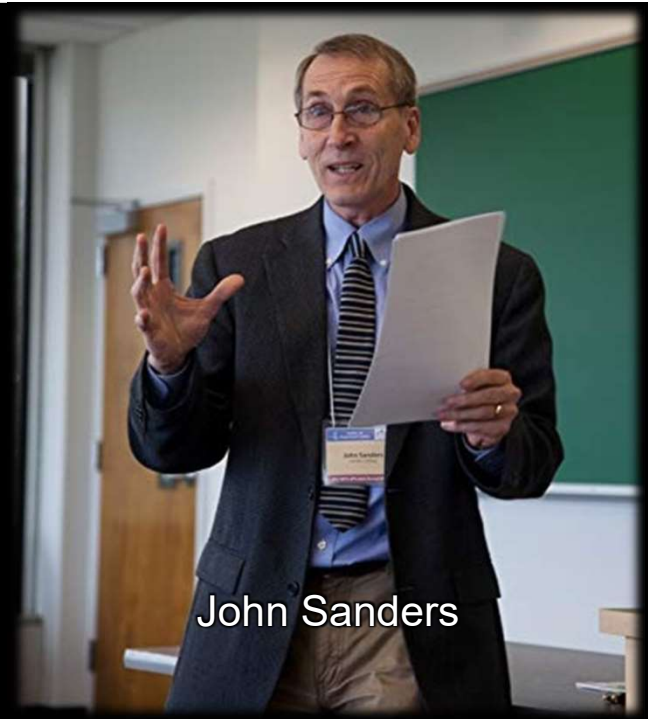
# Classical Philosophy and Its Critics





***"The classical view is so taken for granted that it functions as a preunderstanding that rules out certain interpretations of Scripture that do not 'fit' with the conception of what is 'appropriate' for God to be like, as derived from Greek metaphysics."***

[John Sanders, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 60]

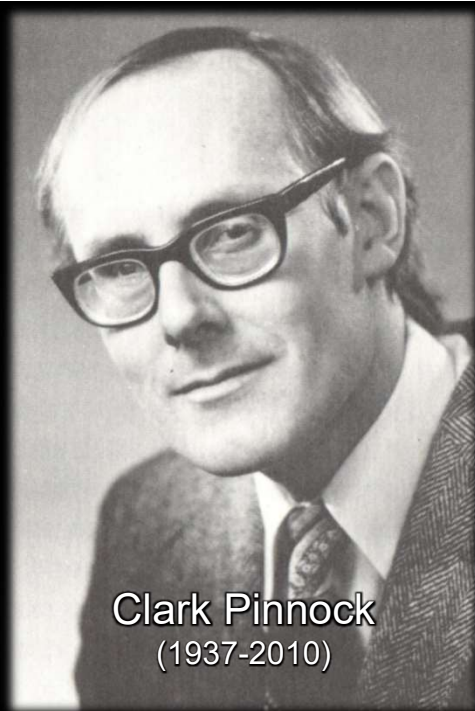


John Sanders

*David Basinger  
Donald G. Bloesch  
W. Norris Clarke  
William Lane Craig  
Bruce Demarest  
Royce Gruenler  
Carl F. H. Henry  
Arthur F. Holmes  
James Mannoia, Jr.  
Thomas V. Morris  
Michael L. Peterson  
Clark H. Pinnock*

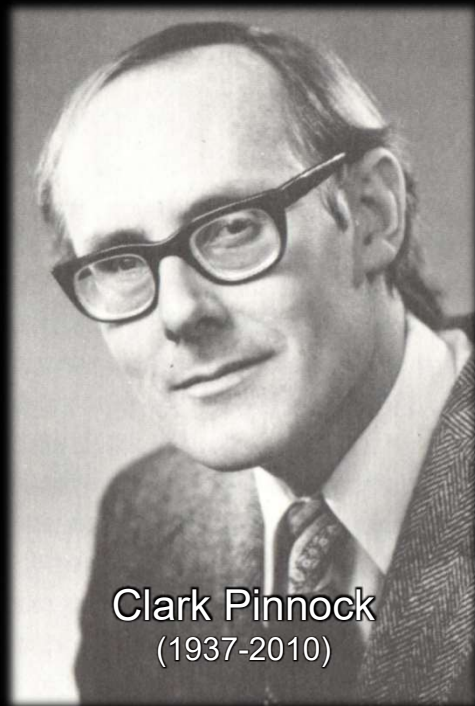
## on Process Theology

*edited by  
Ronald H. Nash*



Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

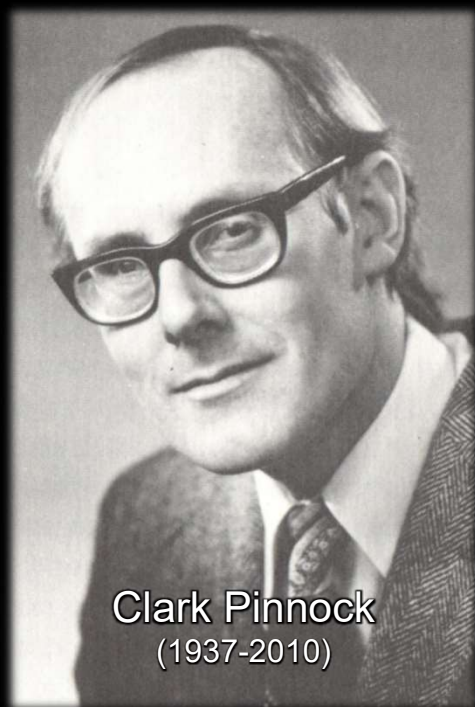
*"When I first thought about what my criticisms of process theism might be, it was not hard to think of several objections to it. But as I continued to ponder the assignment, I came to realize that I could hardly criticize process theism without at the same time objecting to certain features of classical belief in God. ..."*



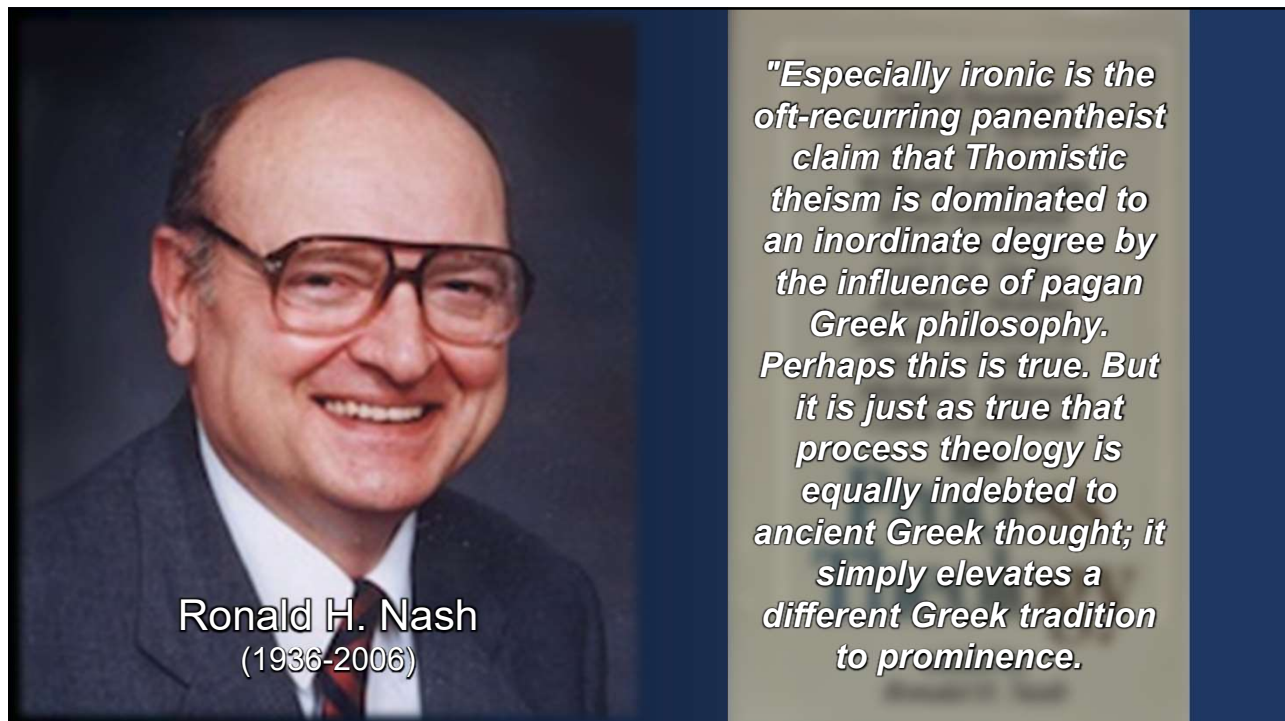
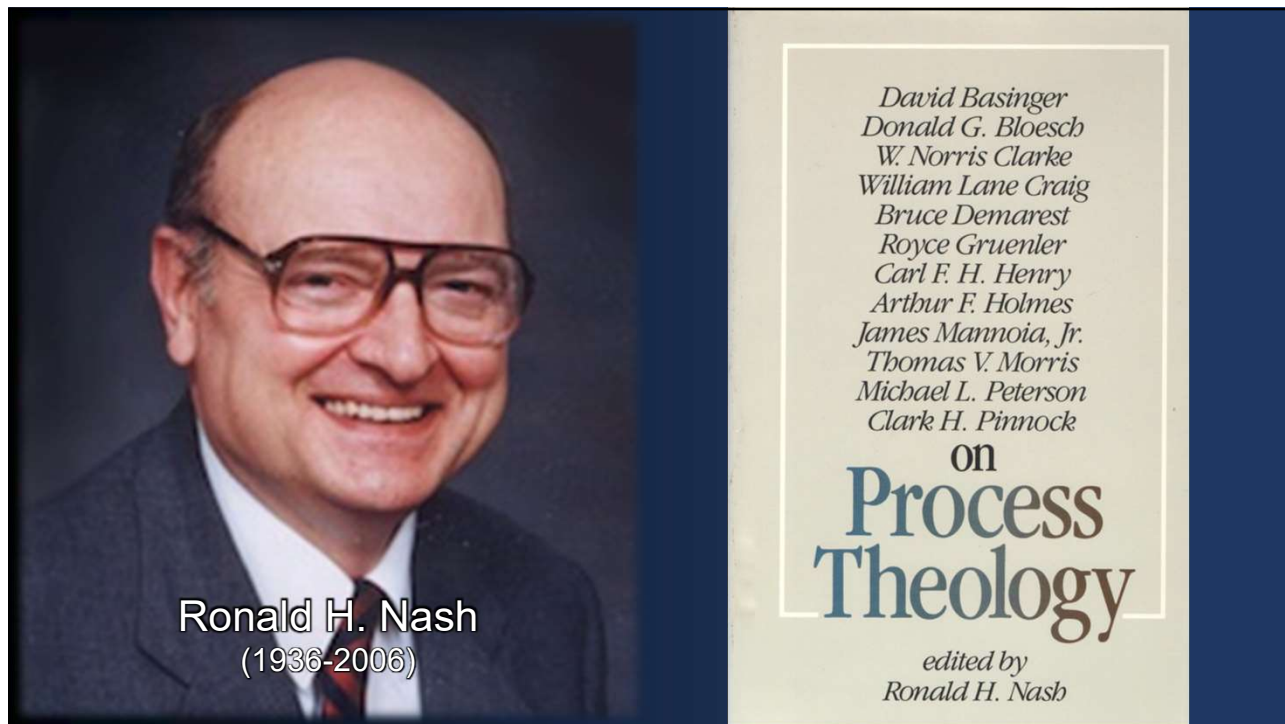
Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

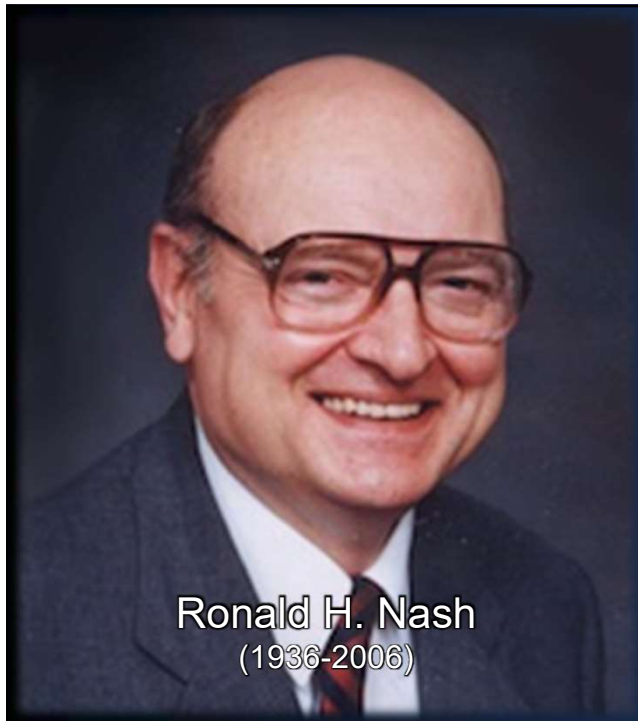
*"Evangelicals are caught in a bind in the matter of their doctrine of God. ... Process theism is correct, in my view, to call attention to the tension and even contradiction which exists between evangelical **biblical theology** and evangelical **systematic theology**."*

[Clark Pinnock, "Between Classical Theism and Process Theism," in Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 313, 314]



Clark Pinnock  
(1937-2010)

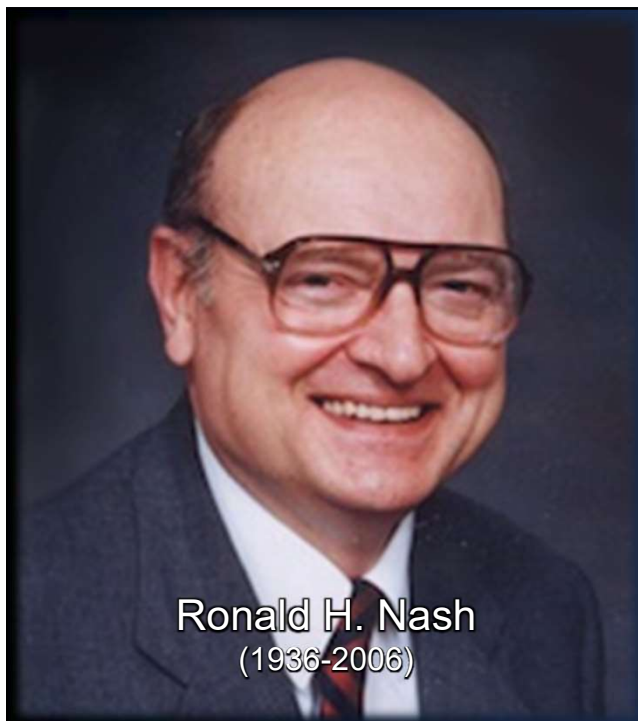




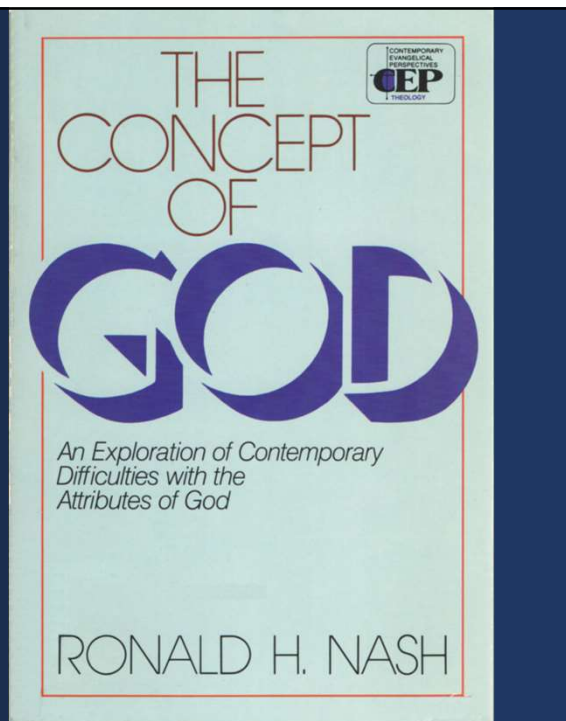
Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

*"The conflict between Thomistic theism and process theology is basically a revival of the struggle between competing schools of Greek philosophy, one emphasizing being, the other stressing the dominance of becoming."*

[Ronald H. Nash, "Process Theology and Classical Theism," in Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 22, emphasis in original]



Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

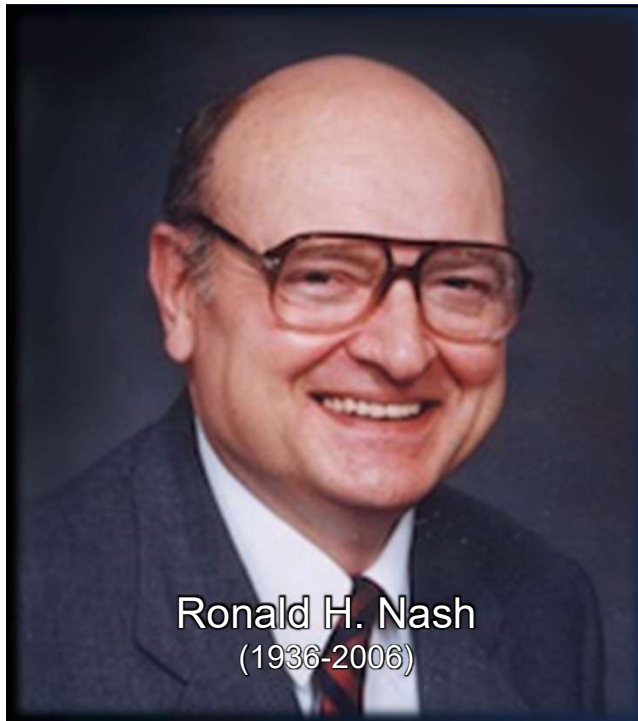


THE CONCEPT OF GOD

CEP  
CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVES  
THEOLOGY

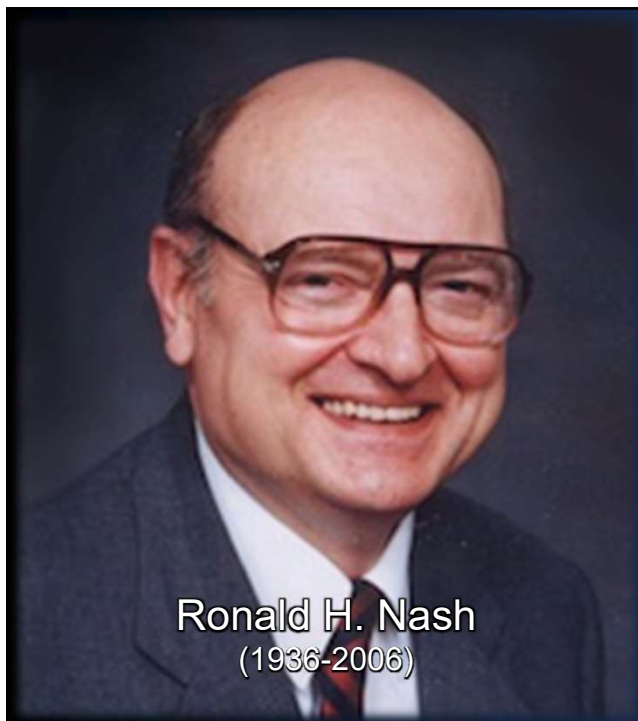
An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God

RONALD H. NASH



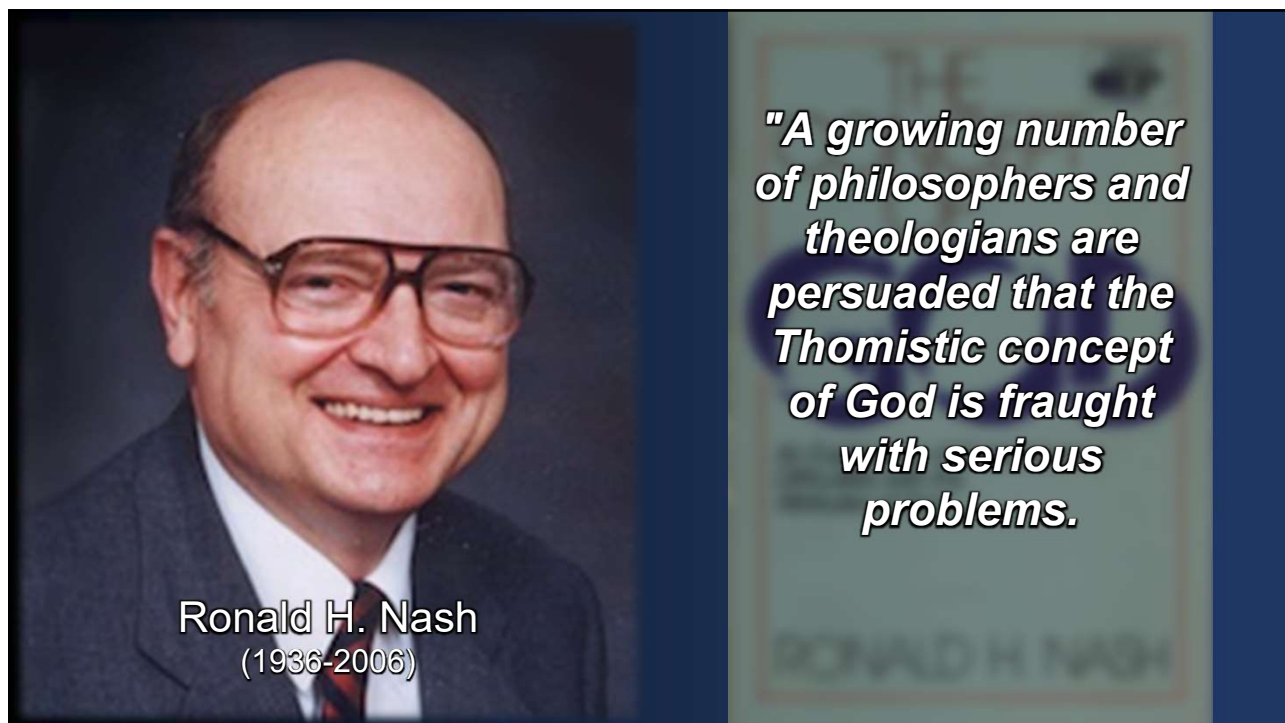
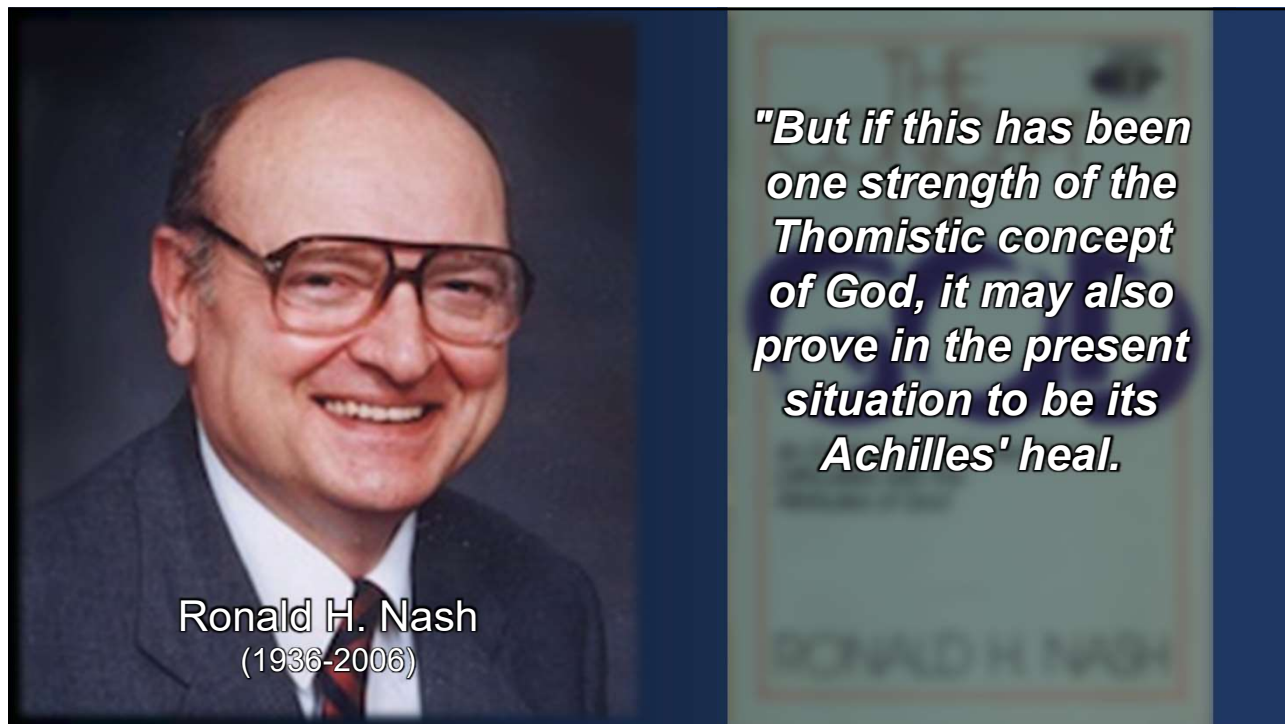
Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

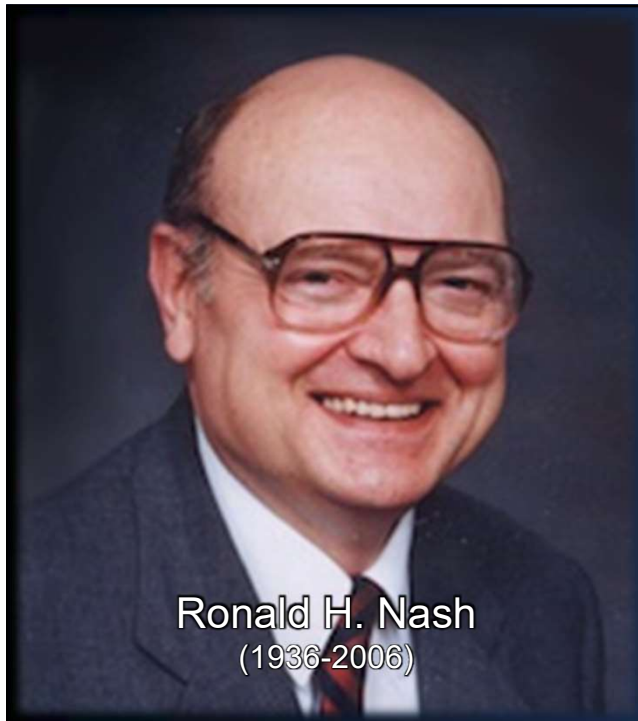
*"[The preceding]  
then is one account  
of the influential  
classical concept of  
God that has played  
such an important  
role in the history of  
Christian theism.*



Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

*"Thomists have  
usually believed that  
acceptance of any  
one attribute  
**logically commits**  
one to accepting the  
entire package.*

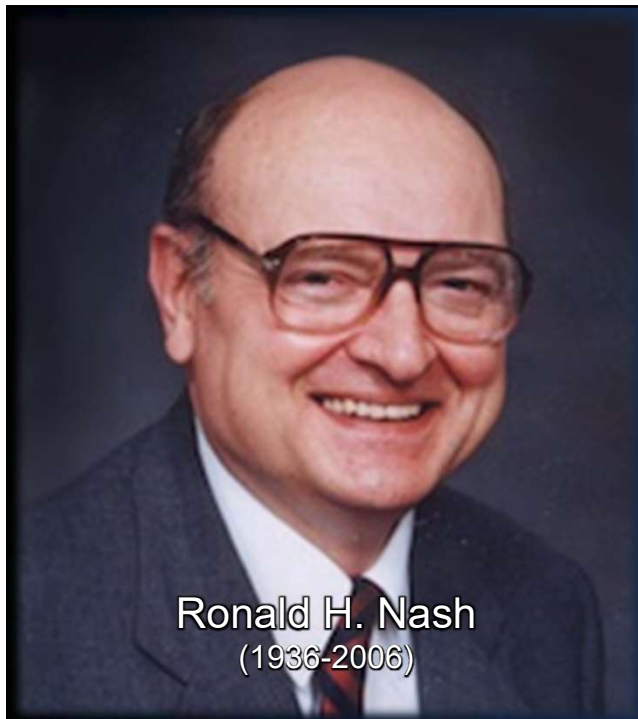




Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

*"Moreover, these critics insist, because of the **logical relationships** among the attributes, no tinkering with the package is possible.*

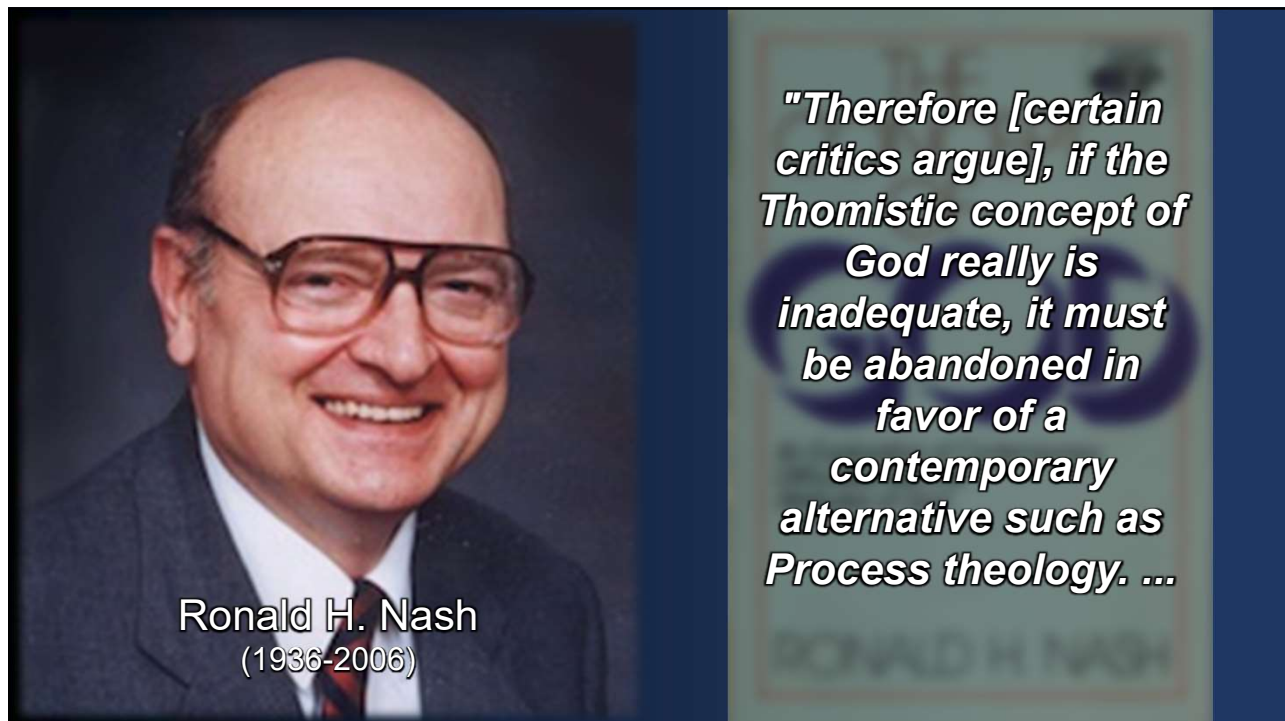
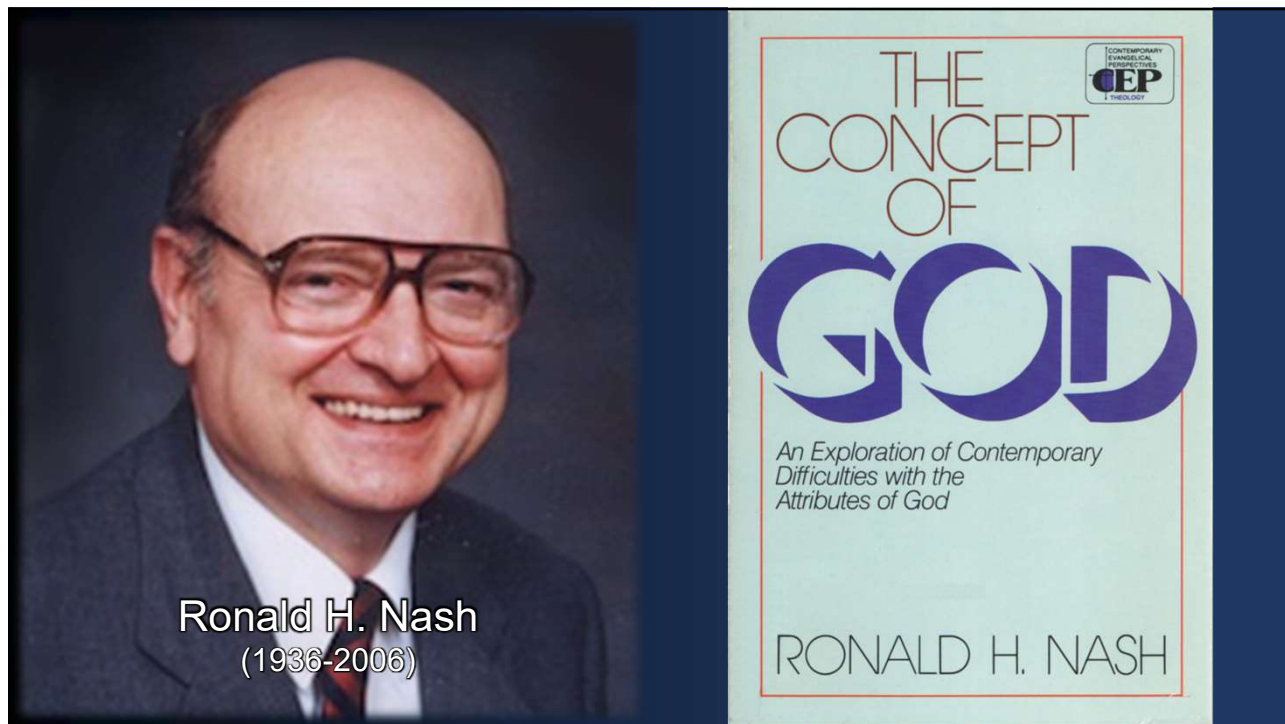
[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 22]

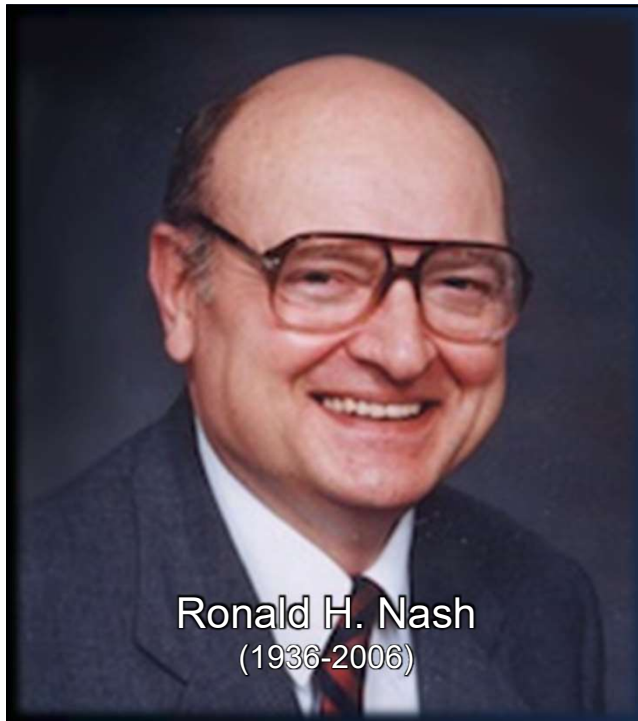


Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

*"Thomists have usually believed that acceptance of any one attribute **logically commits** one to accepting the entire package. ..."*

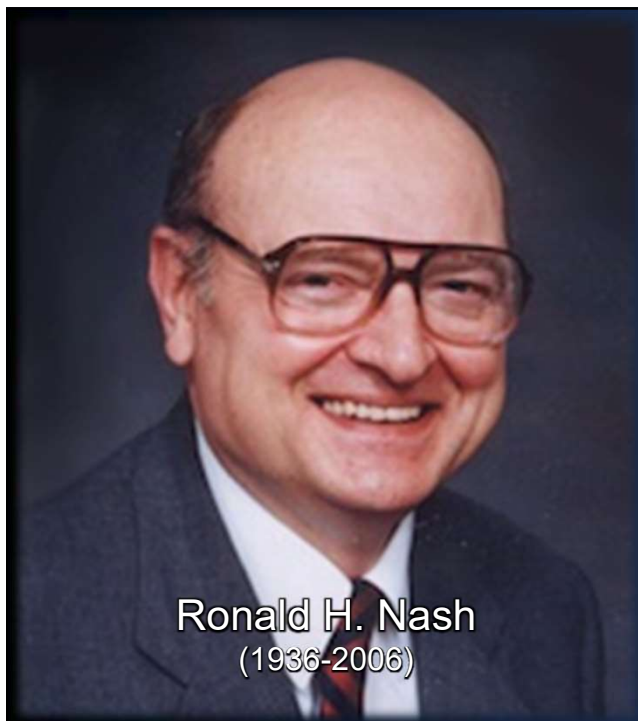
*"Moreover, these critics insist, because of the **logical relationships** among the attributes, no tinkering with the package is possible."*





Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

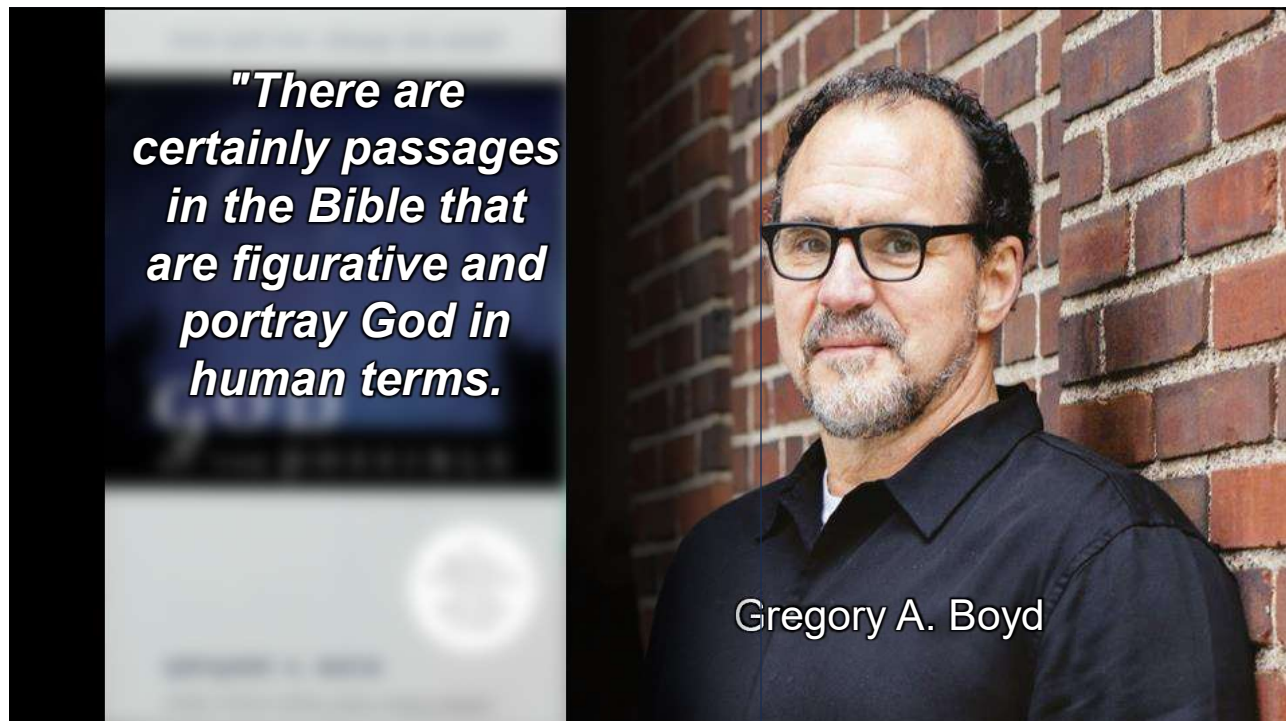
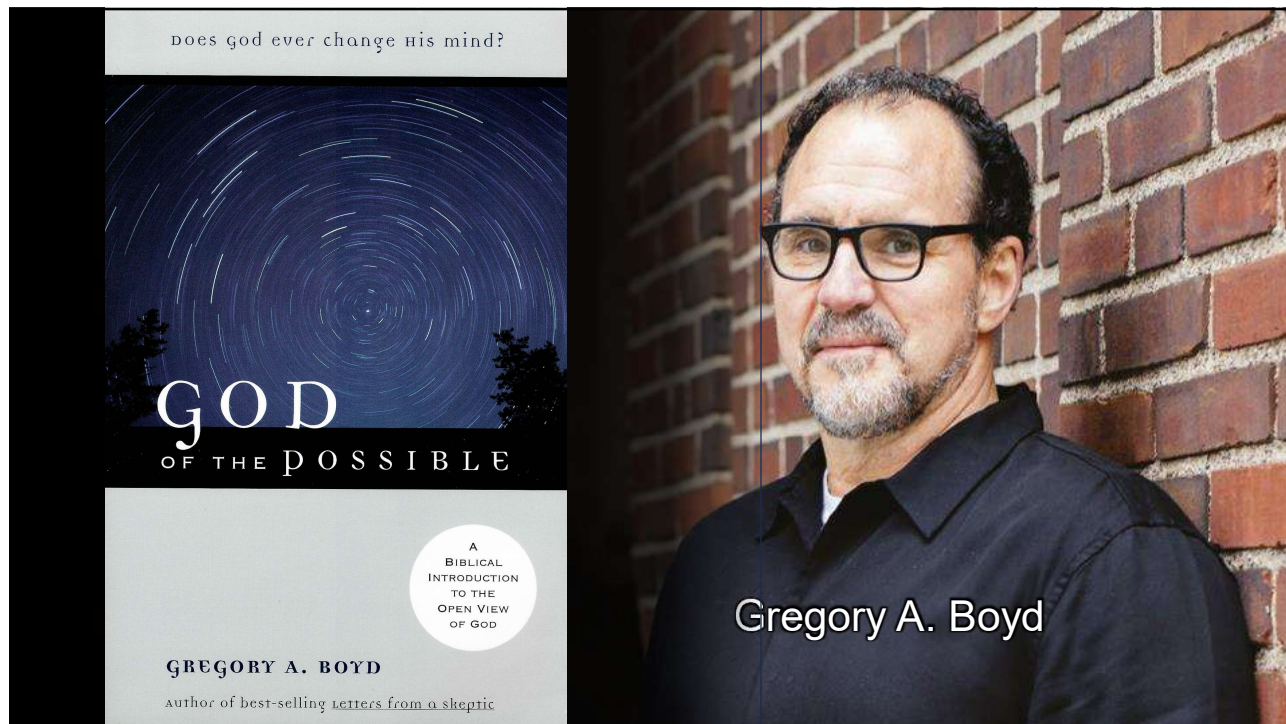
*"But it should be noted here that one is not forced to choose either Thomistic theism or Process theology; the disjunction between their respective theories of God is not exclusive."*

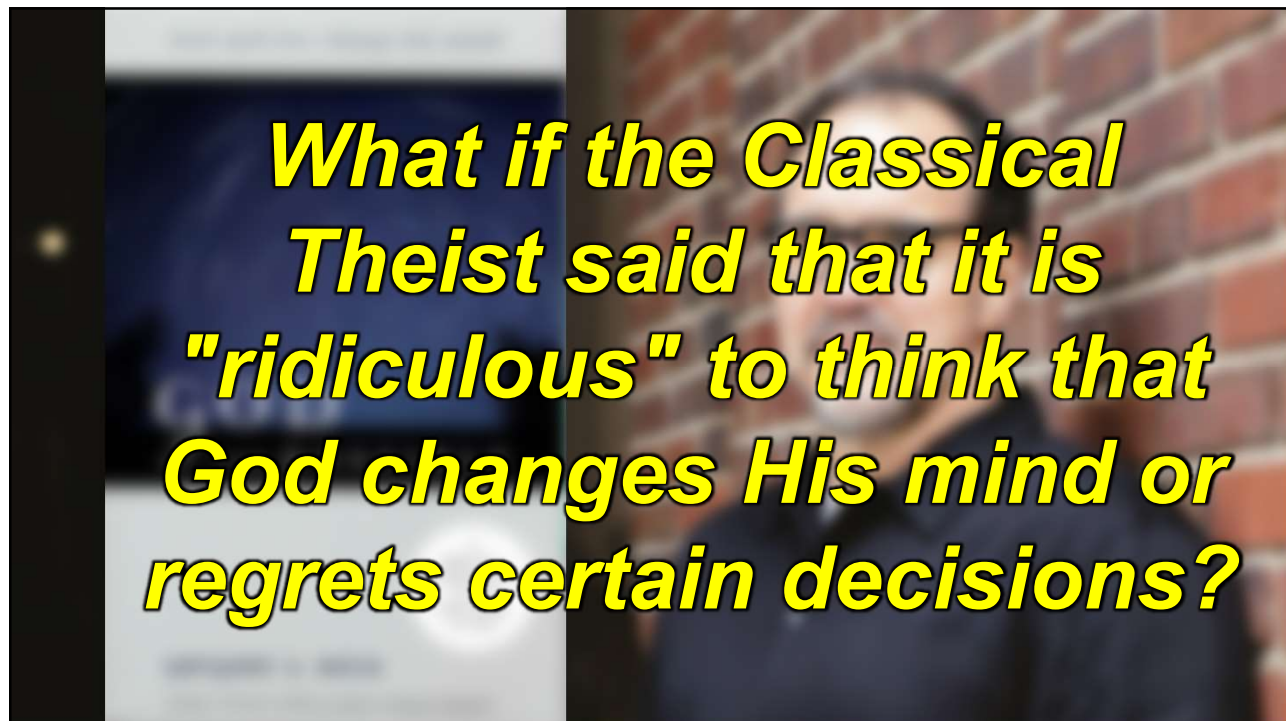
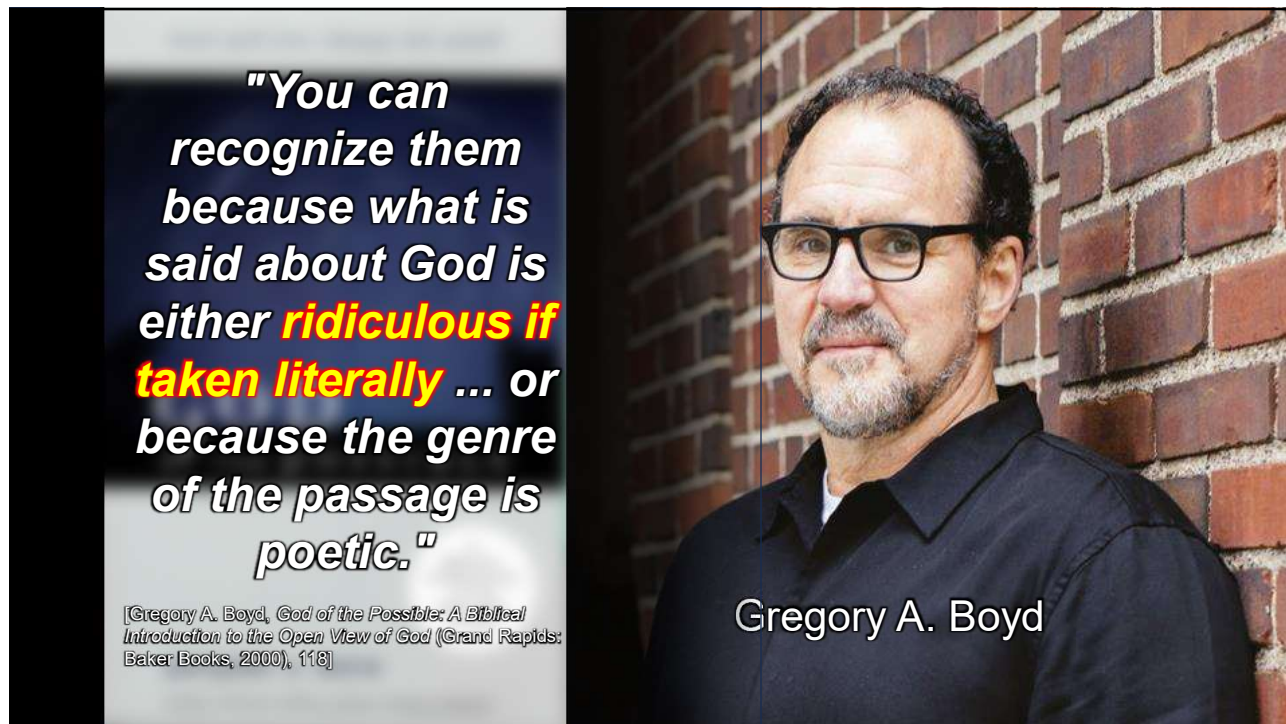


Ronald H. Nash  
(1936-2006)

*"It is possible to develop mediating concepts of God that can avoid the major difficulties of the static God of Thomistic theism and the finite god of Process theology."*

[Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exposition of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 22]





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#### DOES GENRE DETERMINE MEANING?

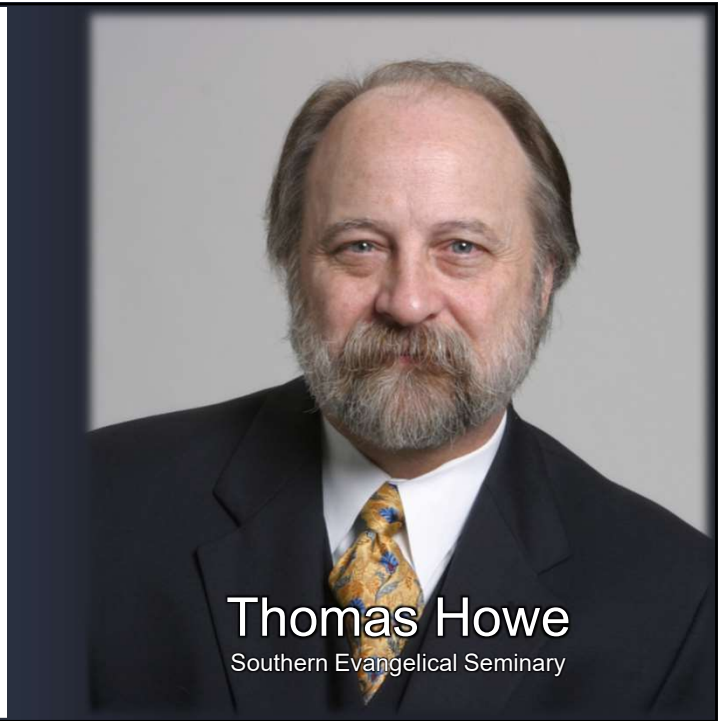
©2007 Thomas A. Howe, Ph.D.

FROM THE BEGINNINGS of the development of the critical methodology, as it was being applied to the study of the Bible, understanding the Bible as literature has become more important and more central to hermeneutics. As Jeffrey Weima remarks, "The past few decades have witnessed a paradigm shift taking place in biblical studies. The old perspective that viewed Scripture as primarily a historical or theological document has been replaced by a new conviction that the Bible is literature and as such ought to be interpreted from a literary perspective."<sup>1</sup> It is notoriously difficult to identify what constitutes literature. After a lengthy consideration of several attempts at developing a definition of "literature," one theorist concluded,

A piece of writing may start off life as history or philosophy and then come to be ranked as literature; or it may start off as literature and then come to be valued for its archaeological significance. Some texts are born literary, some achieve

*Thomas A. Howe is Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, NC.*

1



**Thomas Howe**  
Southern Evangelical Seminary

does god ever change his mind?

**"There is nothing ridiculous or poetic about the way the Bible repeatedly speaks about God changing his mind, regretting decisions, or thinking and speaking about the future in terms of possibilities. These passages usually occur within the historical narrative sections of Scripture."**

INTRODUCTION TO THE OPEN VIEW OF GOD

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118]

Author of best-selling *Letters from a Skeptic*

**Gregory A. Boyd**

*"There is nothing **ridiculous or poetic about the way the Bible repeatedly speaks about God** changing his mind, regretting decisions, or thinking and speaking about the future in terms of possibilities. These passages usually occur **within the historical narrative sections of Scripture.**"*

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118]

Why should one think that the passages occurring "within the historical narrative sections of Scripture" have anything to do whether there is anything "ridiculous or poetic" about how the Bible is speaking about God?

After all, the Genesis 3 and the 2 Samuel 7 passages are both within historical narrative sections of Scripture.

*"They only strike some as ridiculous because these readers **bring to the text a preconception of what God must be like.** Once one is free from this preconception, these passages contribute to the exalted portrait of the lovingly sovereign God in the Bible."*

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118-119, emphasis in original]

*I plead  
GUILTY AS  
CHARGED!*

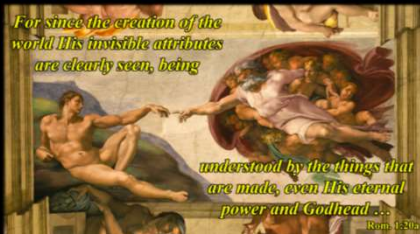
**"They only strike some as ridiculous because these readers *bring to the text a preconception of what God must be like*. Once one is free from this preconception, these passages contribute to the exalted portrait of the lovingly sovereign God in the Bible."**

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118-119, emphasis in original]

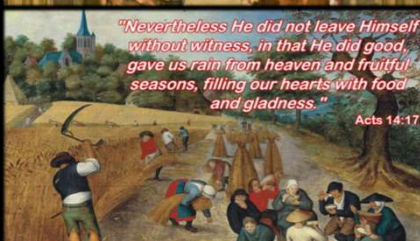
*But, from where might one get such a "preconception of what God must be like" that he could bring to the text?*

**The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.**

Psalms 19:1



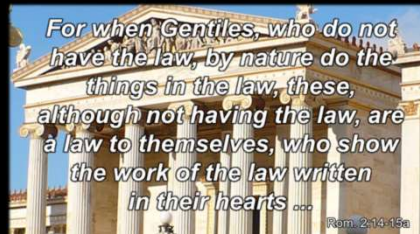
Rom 1:20



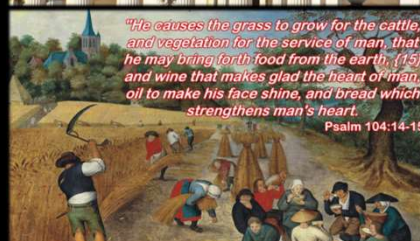
Acts 14:17

**The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory.**

Psalms 97:6



Rom 2:14-15a



Psalms 104:14-15

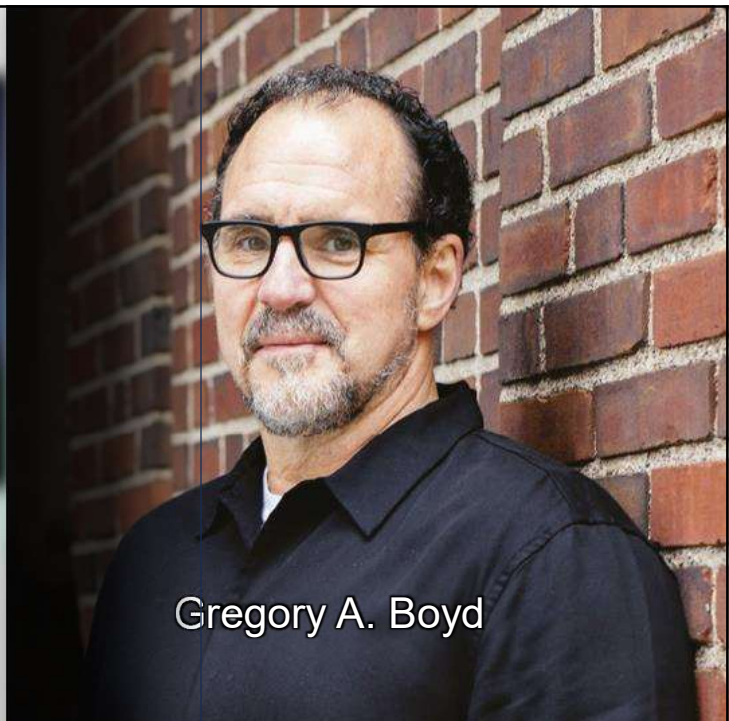
*"They only strike some as ridiculous because these readers bring to the text a preconception of what God must be like. **Once one is free from this preconception**, these passages contribute to the exalted portrait of the lovingly sovereign God in the Bible."*

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118-119, emphasis in original]

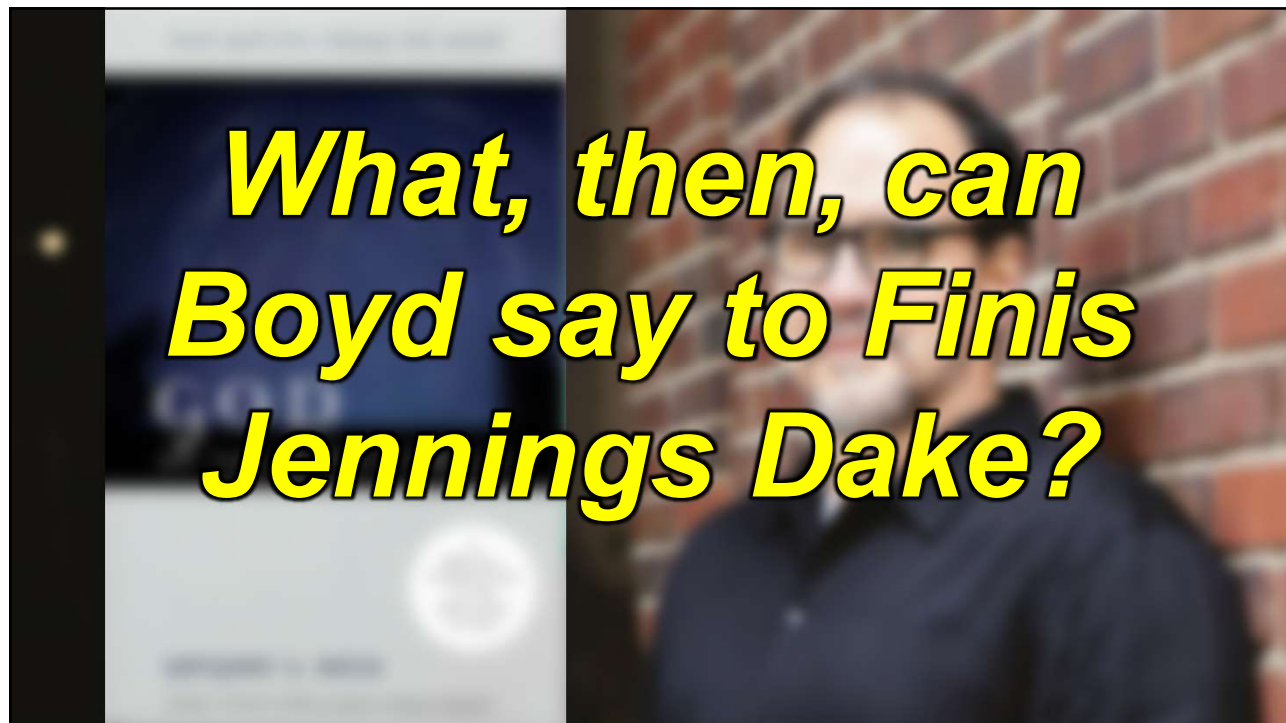
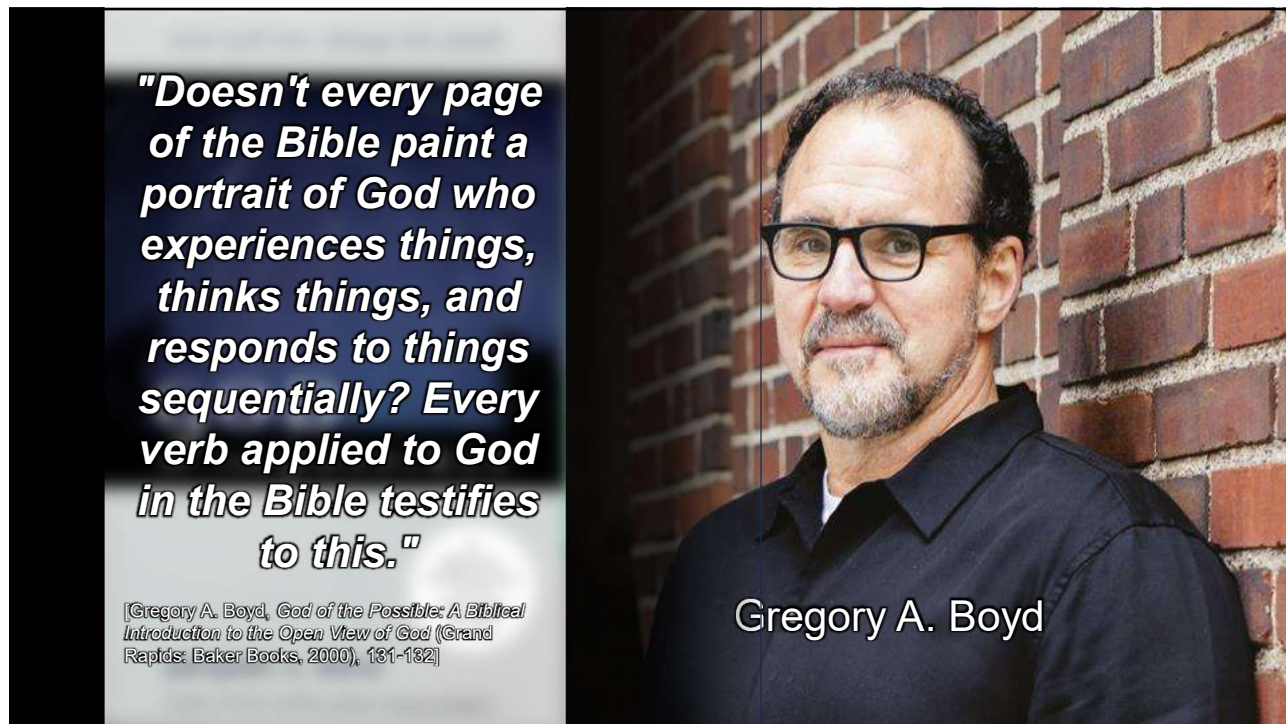
*Given that this "preconception of what God must be like" comes from our encounter with God's creation before we read Scripture, how is it possible for one to get "free from this preconception"?*

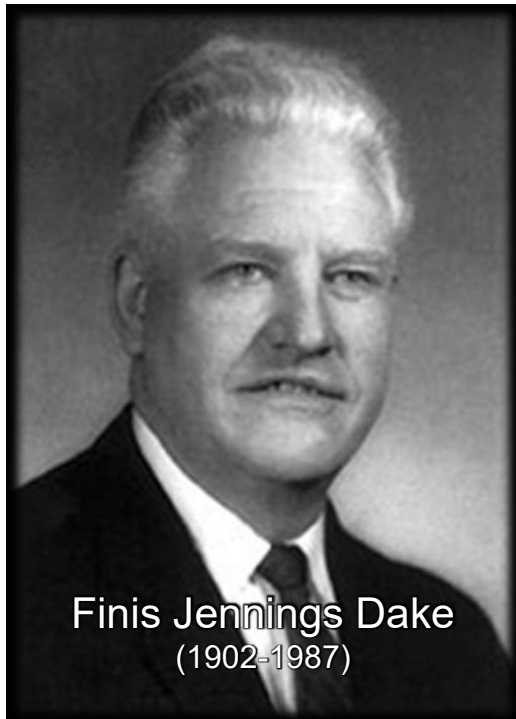
*"My fundamental thesis is that the classical theological tradition became misguided when, under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, it defined God's perfection in static, timeless terms."*

[Gregory a. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 17]



Gregory A. Boyd






Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)

*"Doesn't every page of the Bible paint a portrait of God who **'has a personal spirit body'** and an **'image and likeness of man'** with spirit body parts such as **'hands and fingers ... feet ... head, face arms'**?"*

[Hypothetically attributed to Dake; quotations are directly from Dake, NT, p. 97]

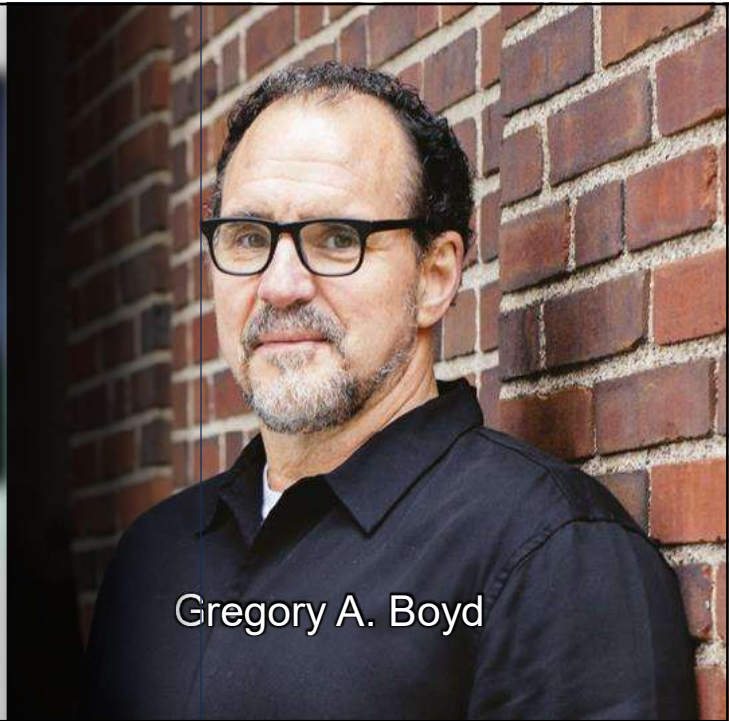
*"He says here [Jer. 18:8, 10] (and many other places), 'I change my mind.' How could he say it any clearer? If this passage doesn't teach us that God can truly change his intentions, what would a passage that did teach this look like?"*



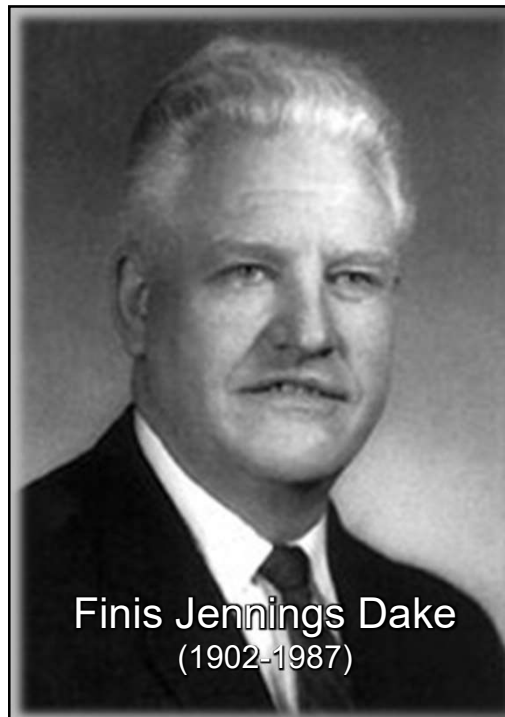
Gregory A. Boyd

"I suggest that if this text isn't enough to convince us that God's mind is not eternally settled, then our philosophical presuppositions are controlling our exegesis to a degree that no text could ever teach us this. People who affirm the divine authority of Scripture do not want to be guilty of this charge."

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: Does God Ever Change His Mind?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 78]



Gregory A. Boyd



Finis Jennings Dake  
(1902-1987)

"God has a personal spirit body (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19); shape (Jn. 5:37); form (Phil. 2:5-7); image and likeness of a man (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). He has bodily parts such as, back parts (Ex. 33:23), heart (Gen. 6:6; 8:21), hands and fingers (Ps. 8:3-6; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7), mouth (Num. 12:8), **lips and tongue (Isa. 30:27)**, feet (Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10), eyes (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18), ears (Ps. 18:6), hair, head, face, arms (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev. 5:1-7; 22:4-6), and other bodily parts."

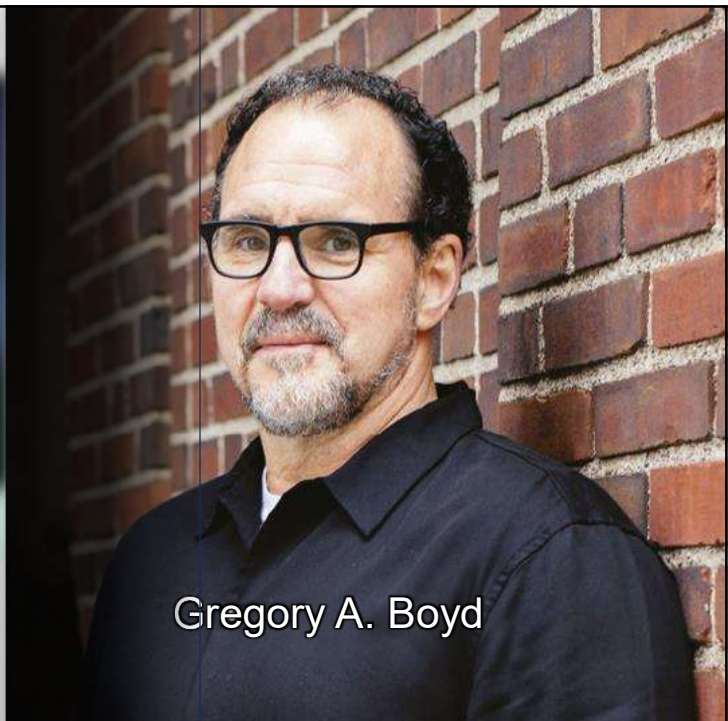
[Dake, NT, p. 97. ]

## ✧ Isa 30:27 ✧

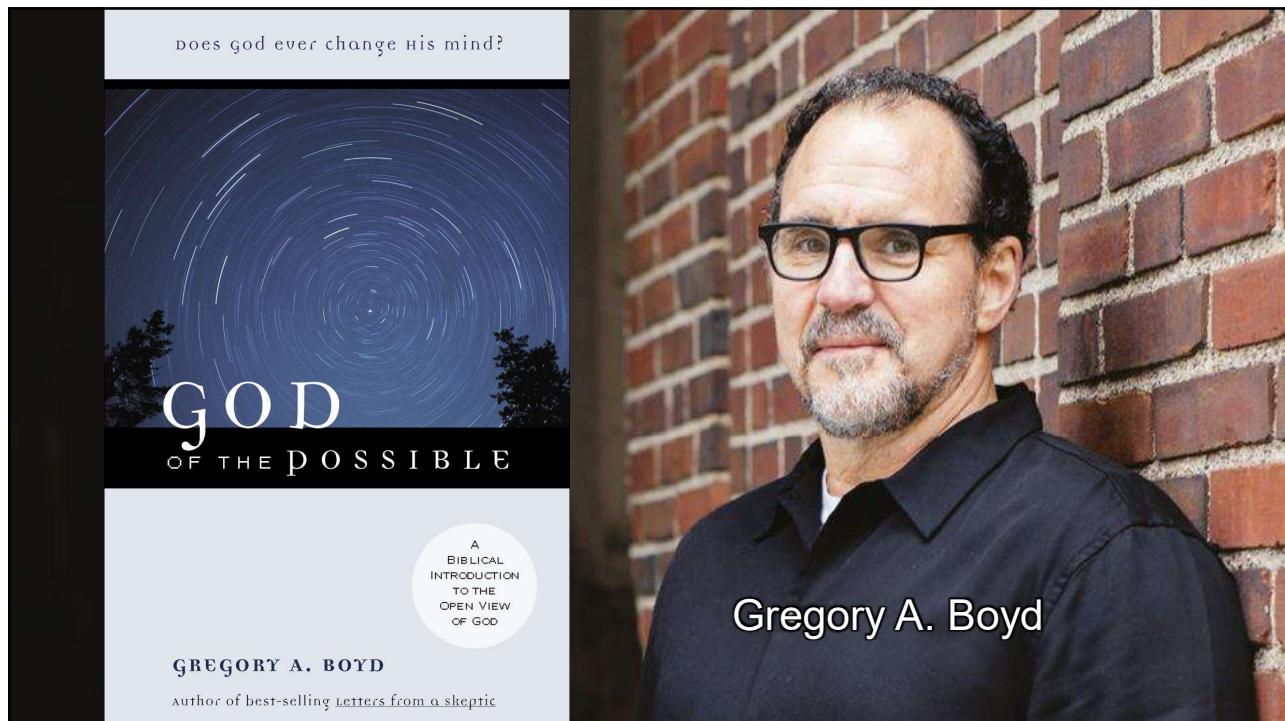
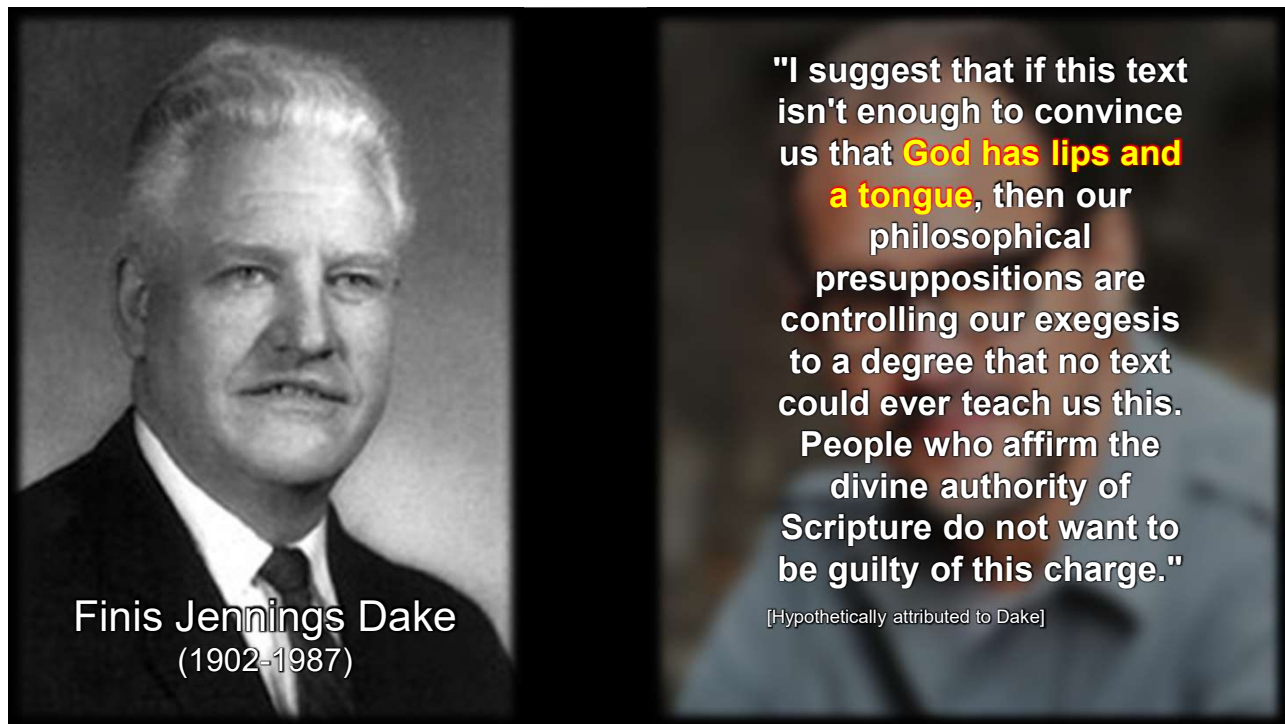
***Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, Burning with His anger, And His burden is heavy; His lips are full of indignation, And His tongue like a devouring fire.***

"I suggest that if this text isn't enough to convince us that **God's mind is not eternally settled**, then our philosophical presuppositions are controlling our exegesis to a degree that no text could ever teach us this. People who affirm the divine authority of Scripture do not want to be guilty of this charge."

[Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: Does God Ever Change His Mind?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 78]



Gregory A. Boyd



***"A fundamental aspect of classical thinking, again revealing the influence of Plato, was that God experiences no 'before' or 'after.' He experiences all of time in a single, changeless, eternal moment.***

Gregory A. Boyd

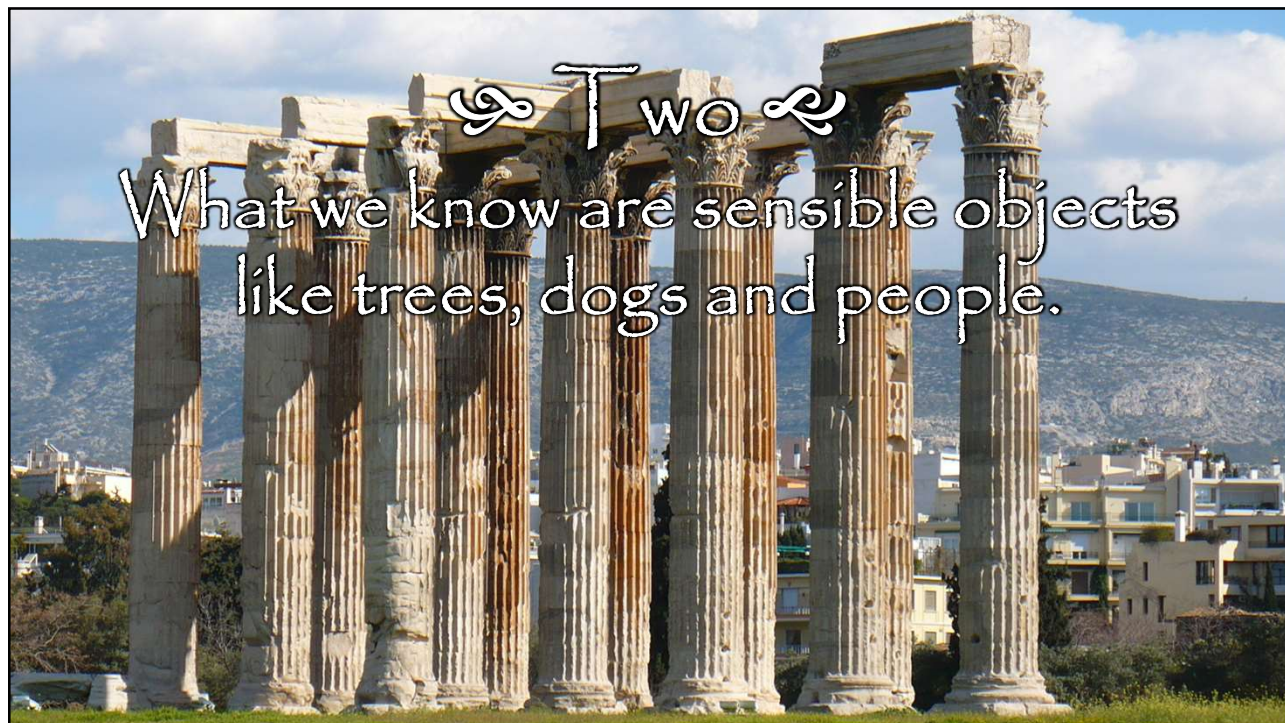
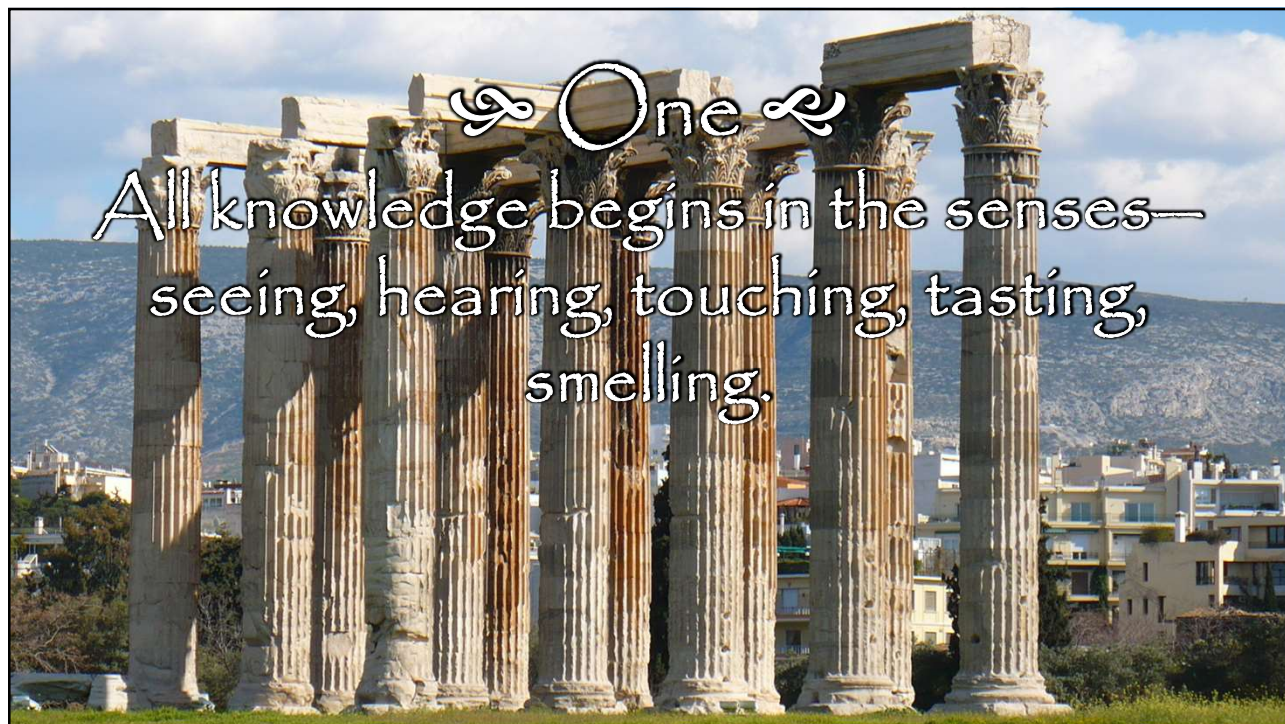
***"We have to ask, however, Where is this notion taught in the Bible? Doesn't every page of the Bible paint a portrait of God who experiences things, thinks things, and responds to things sequentially? Every verb applied to God in the Bible testifies to this."***

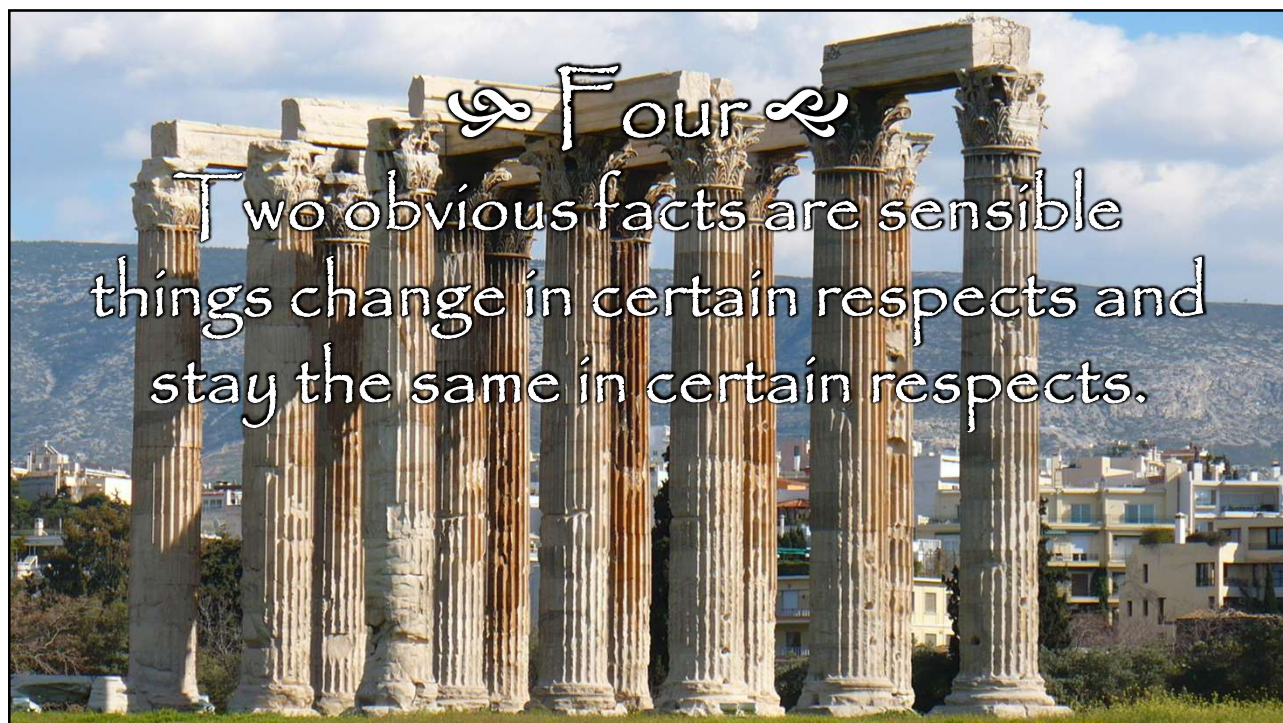
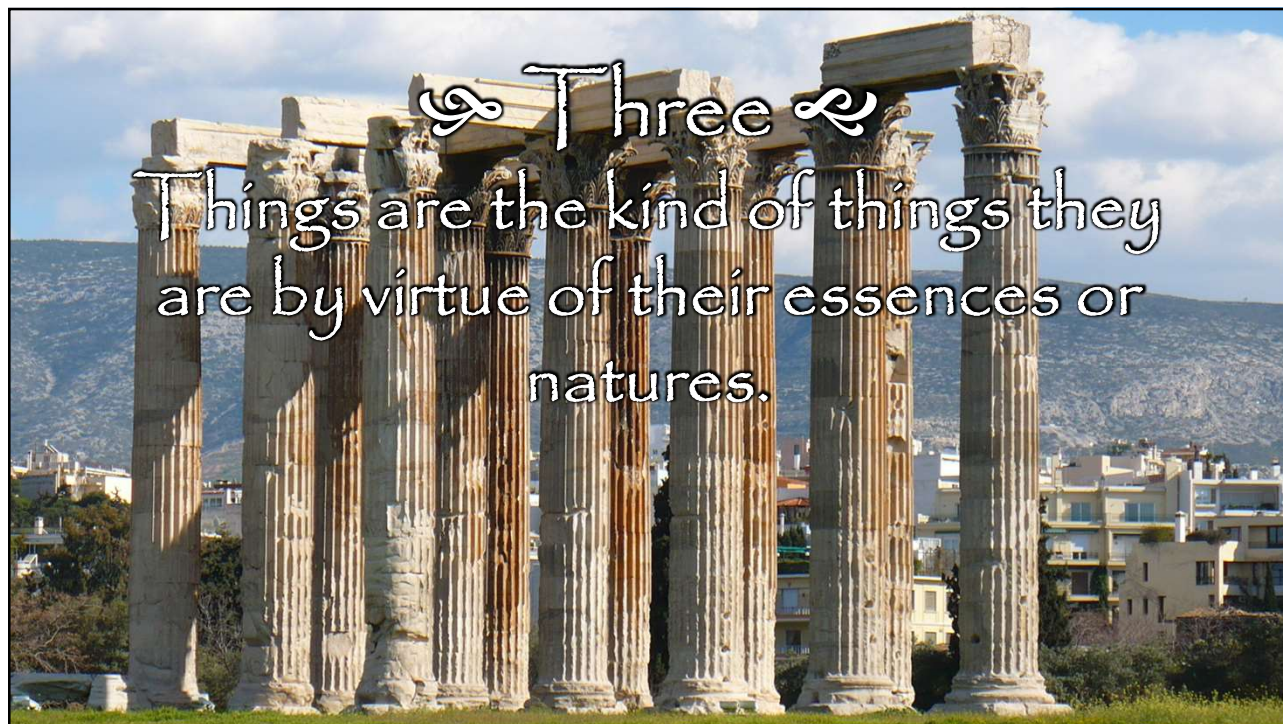
[Gregory a. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 131-132]

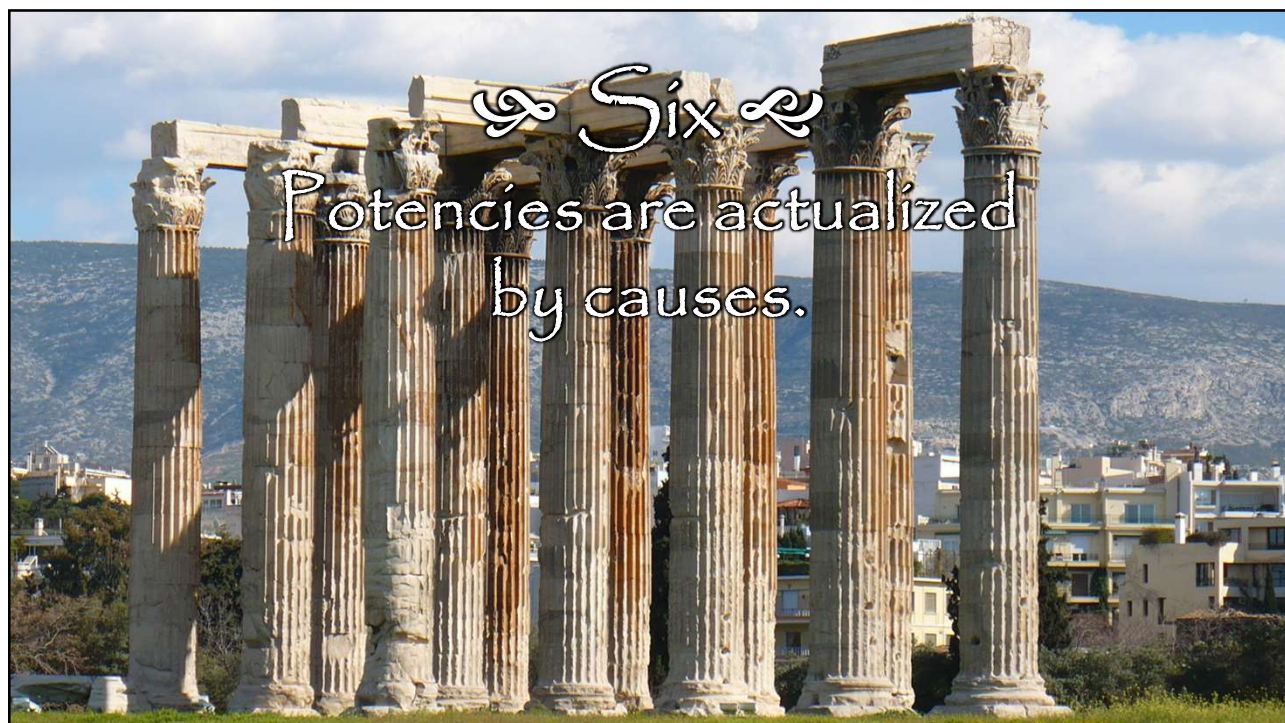
Gregory A. Boyd

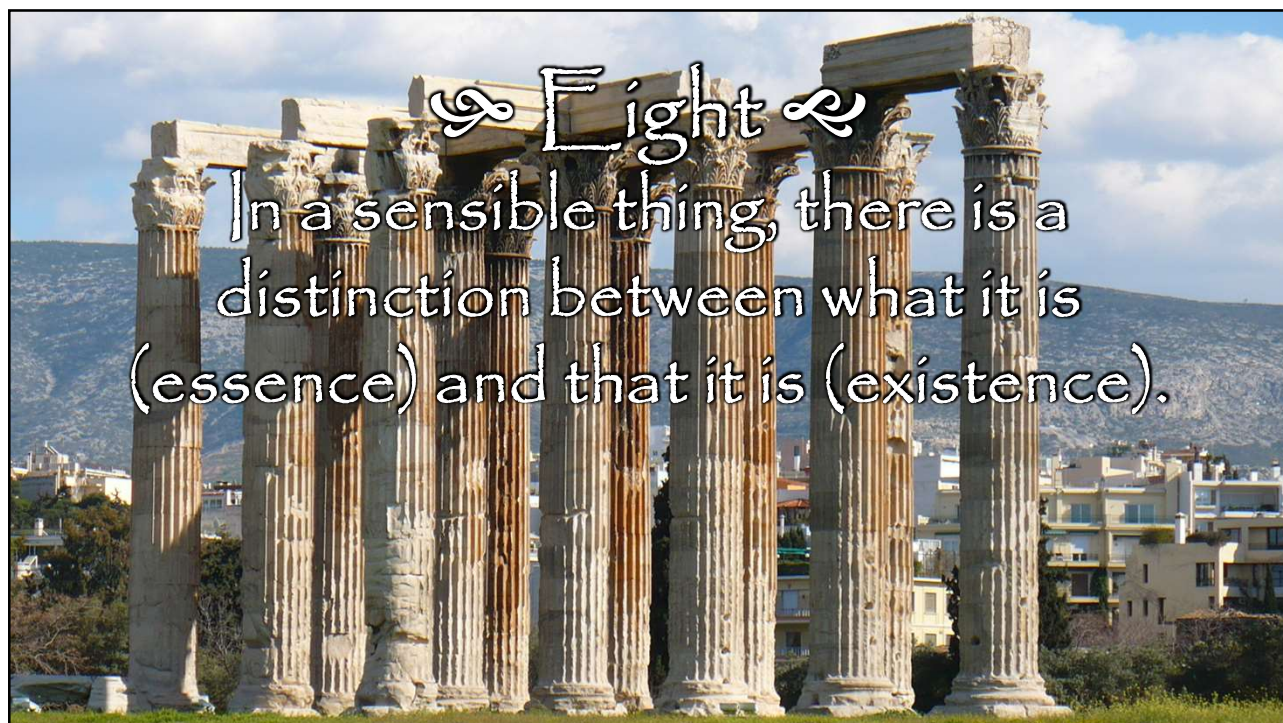
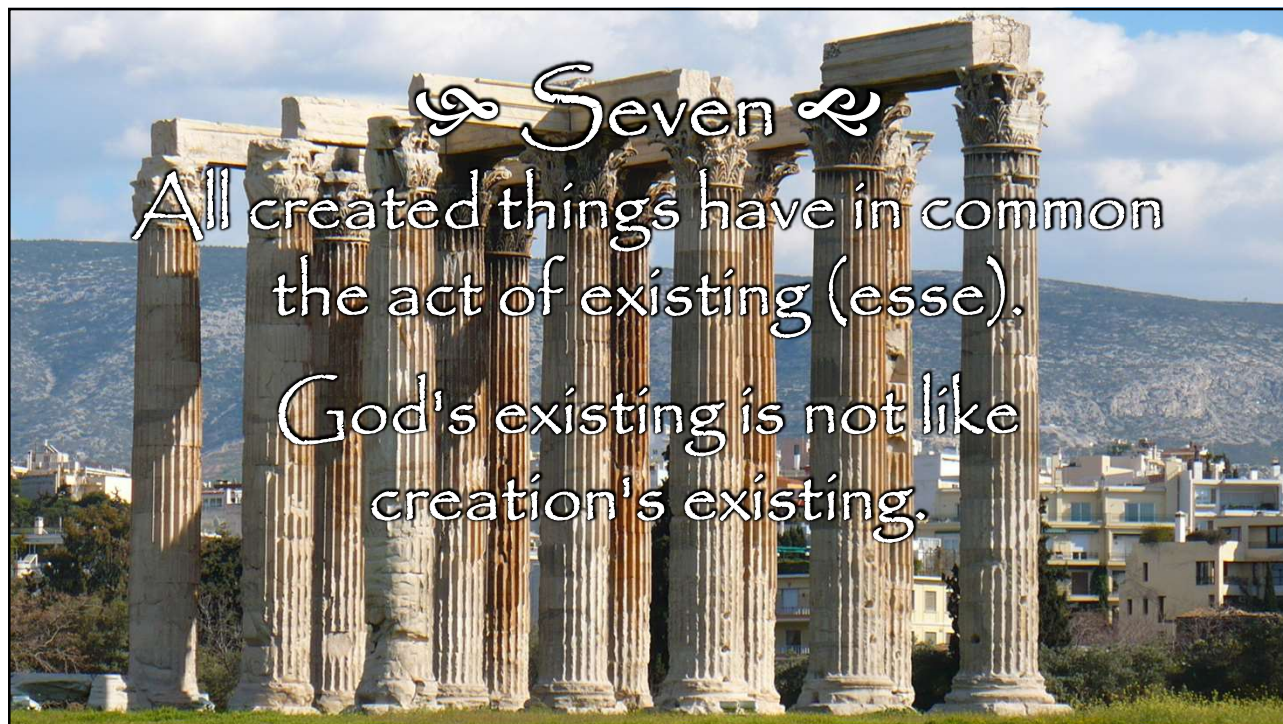
# The Classical Attributes of God, Revisited

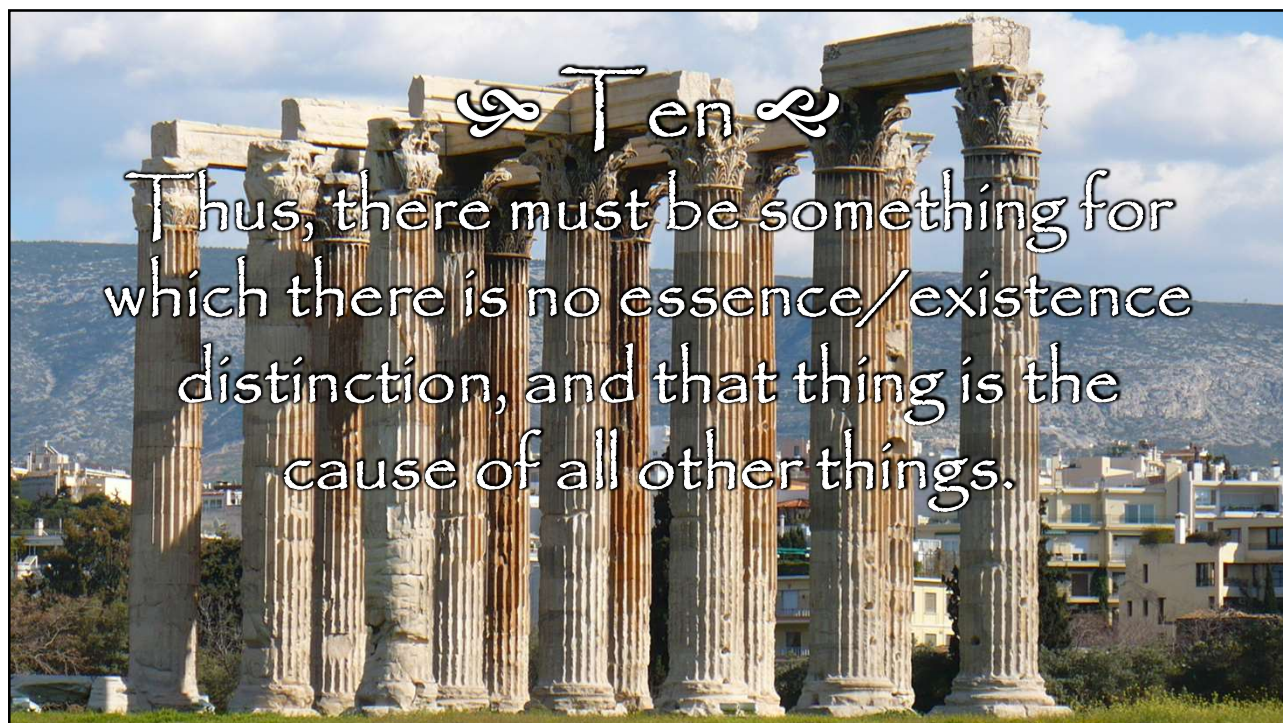
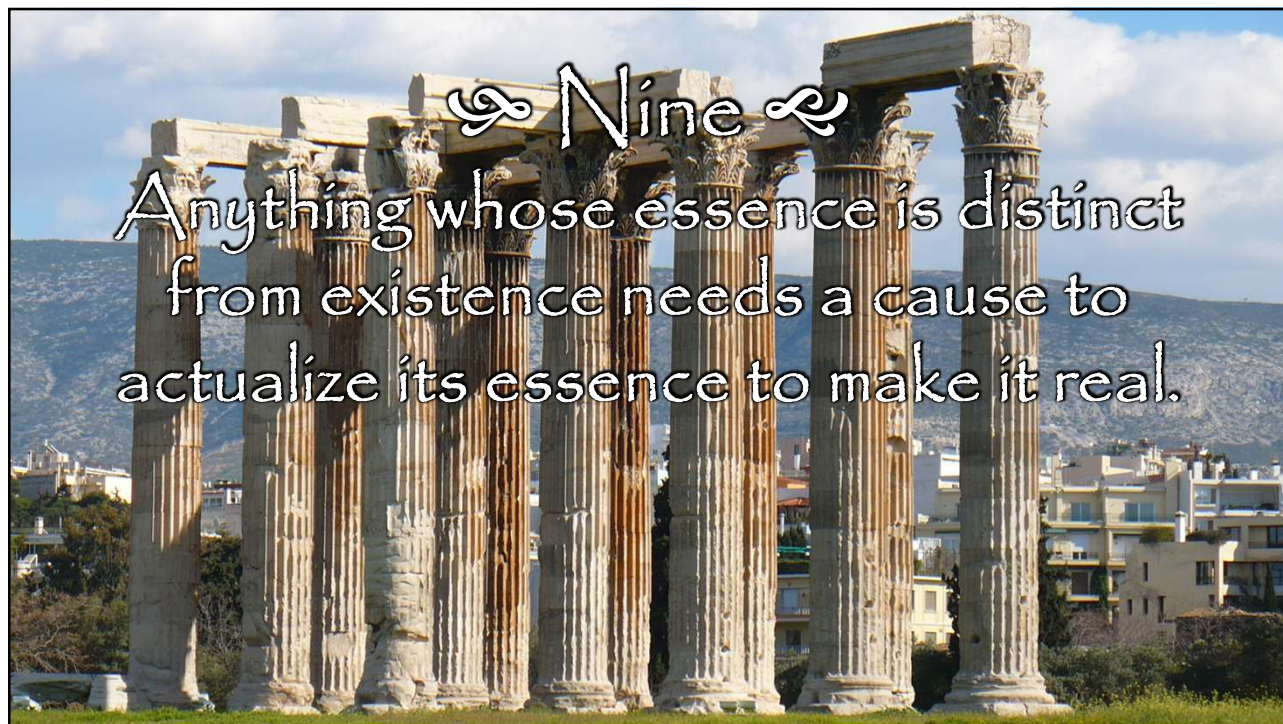


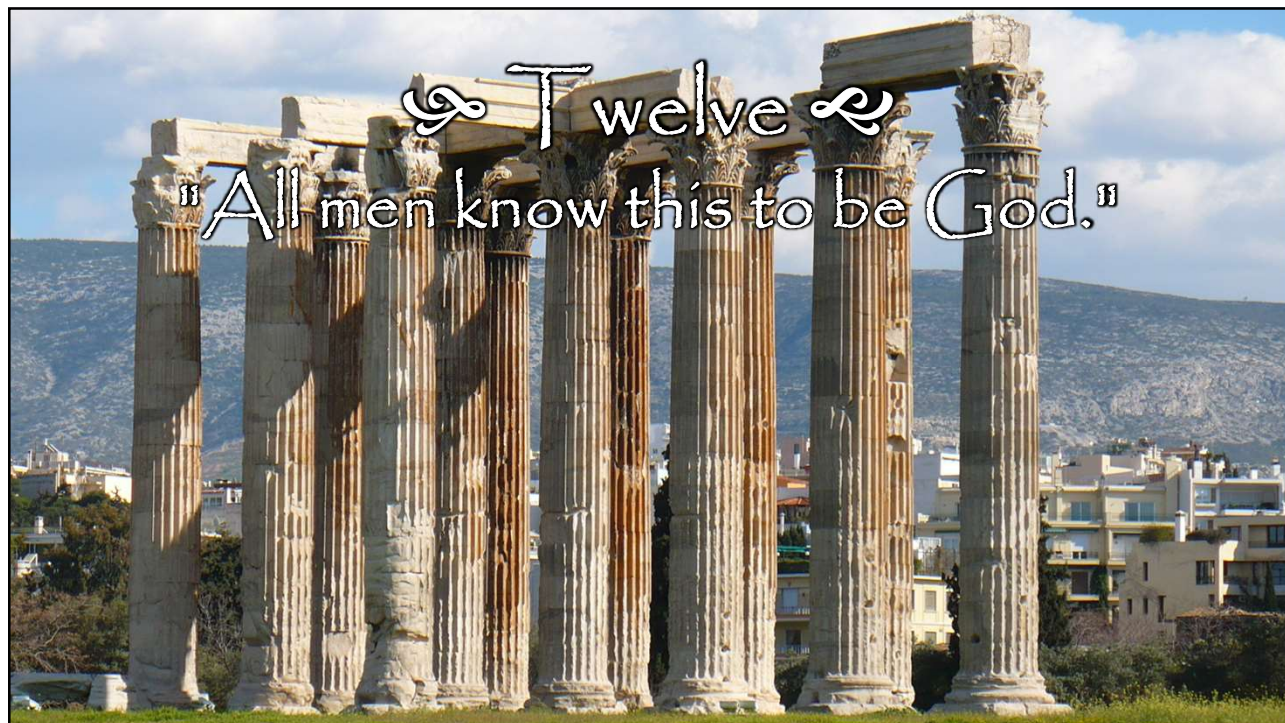
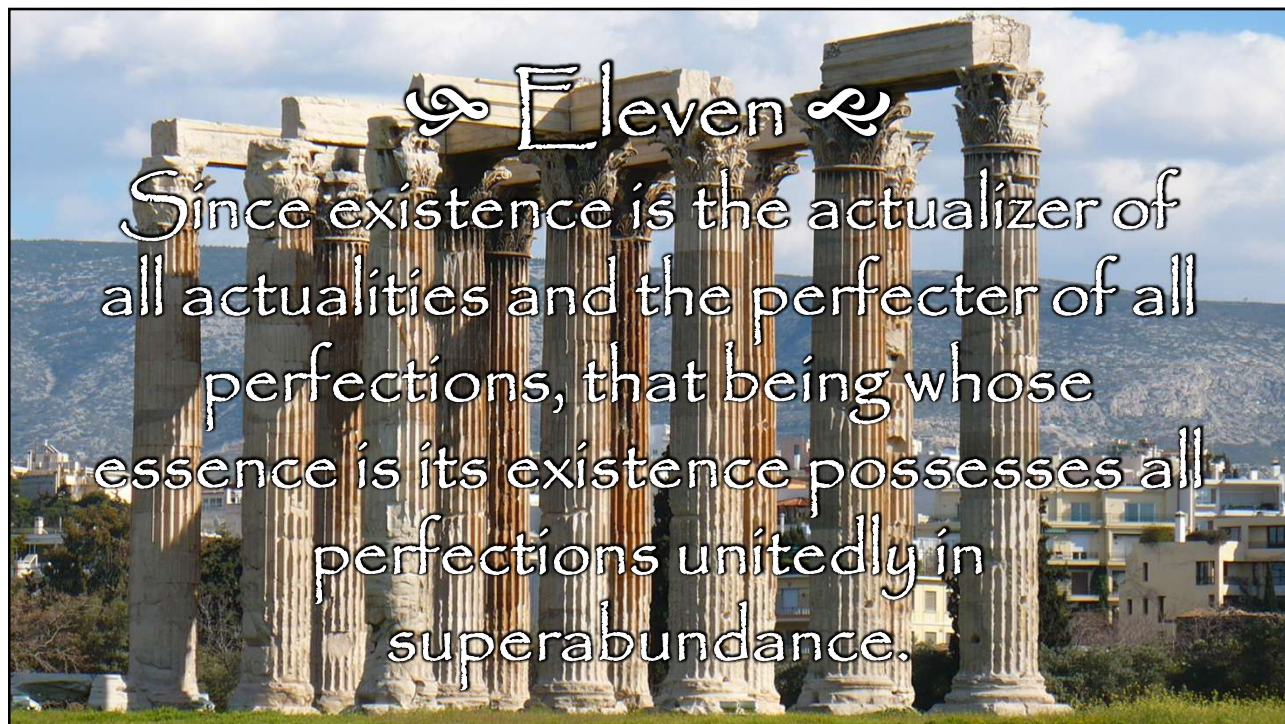


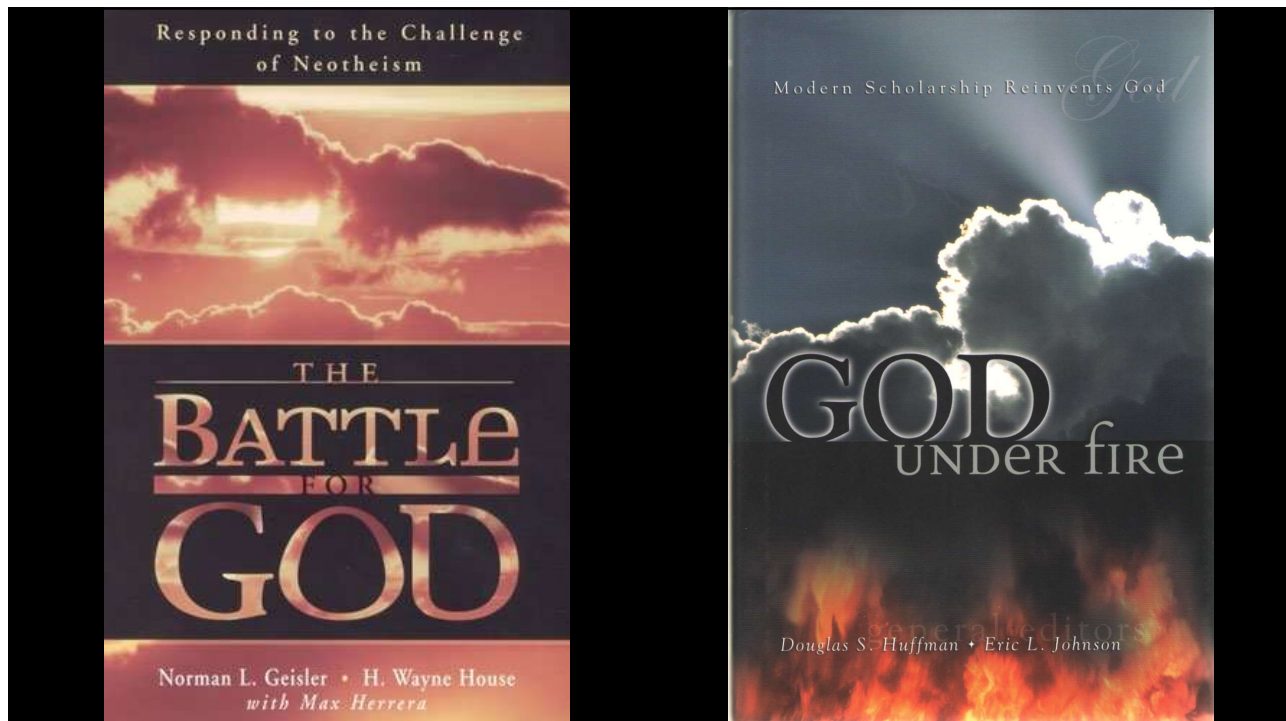
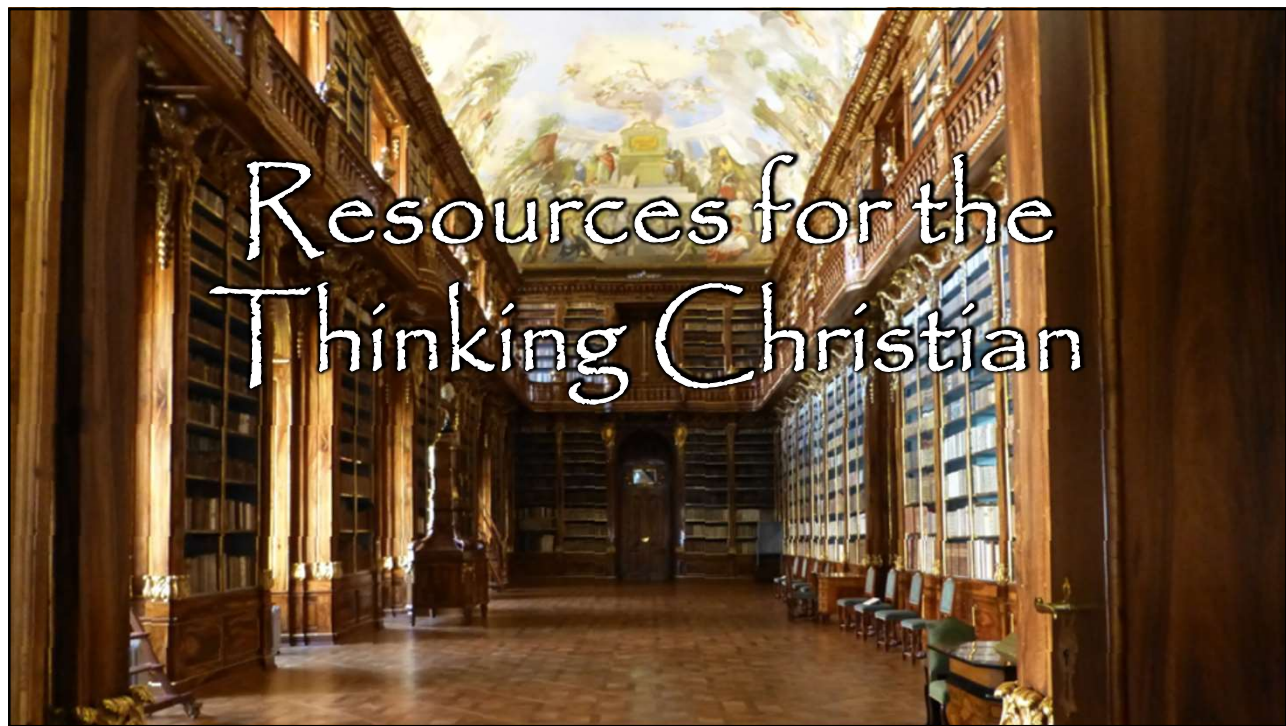


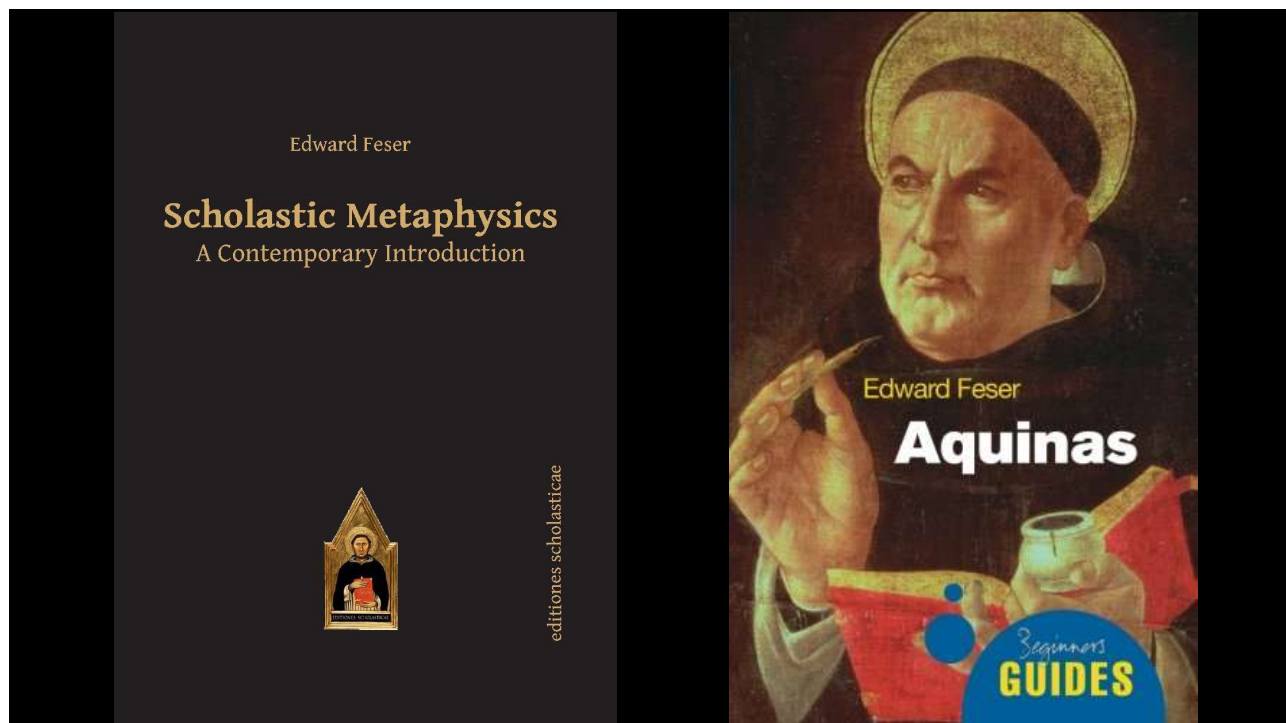
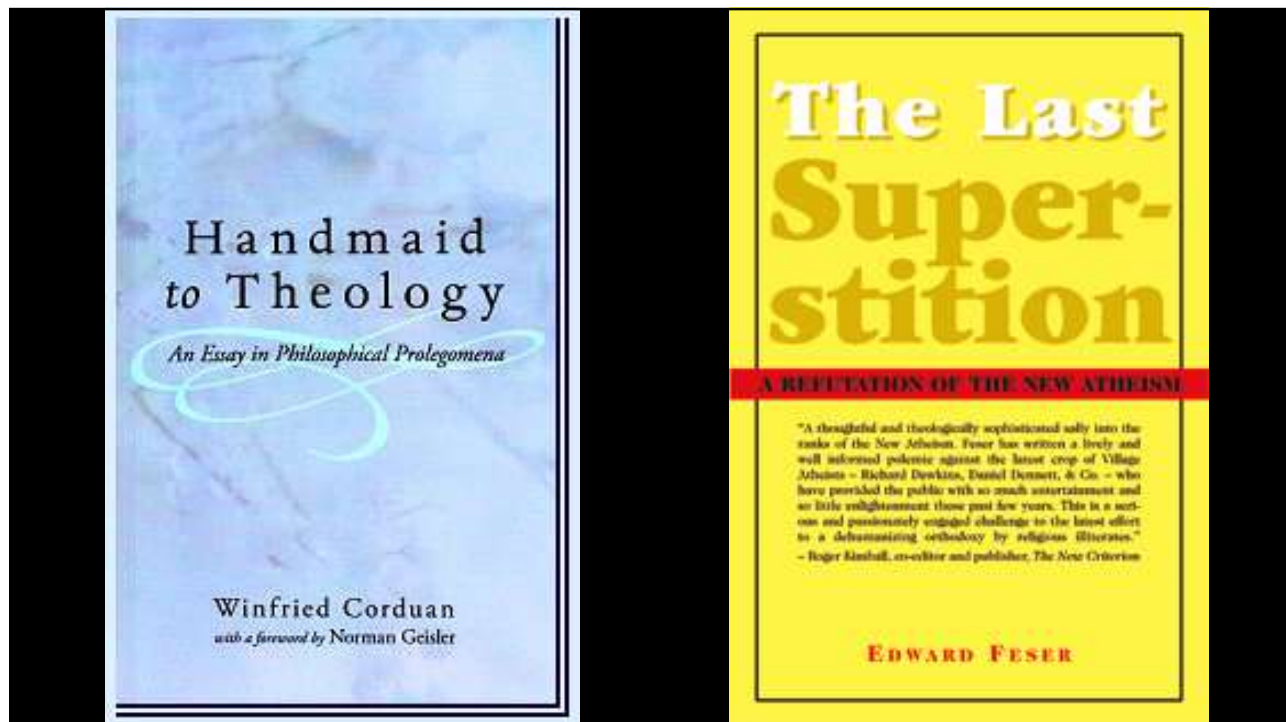


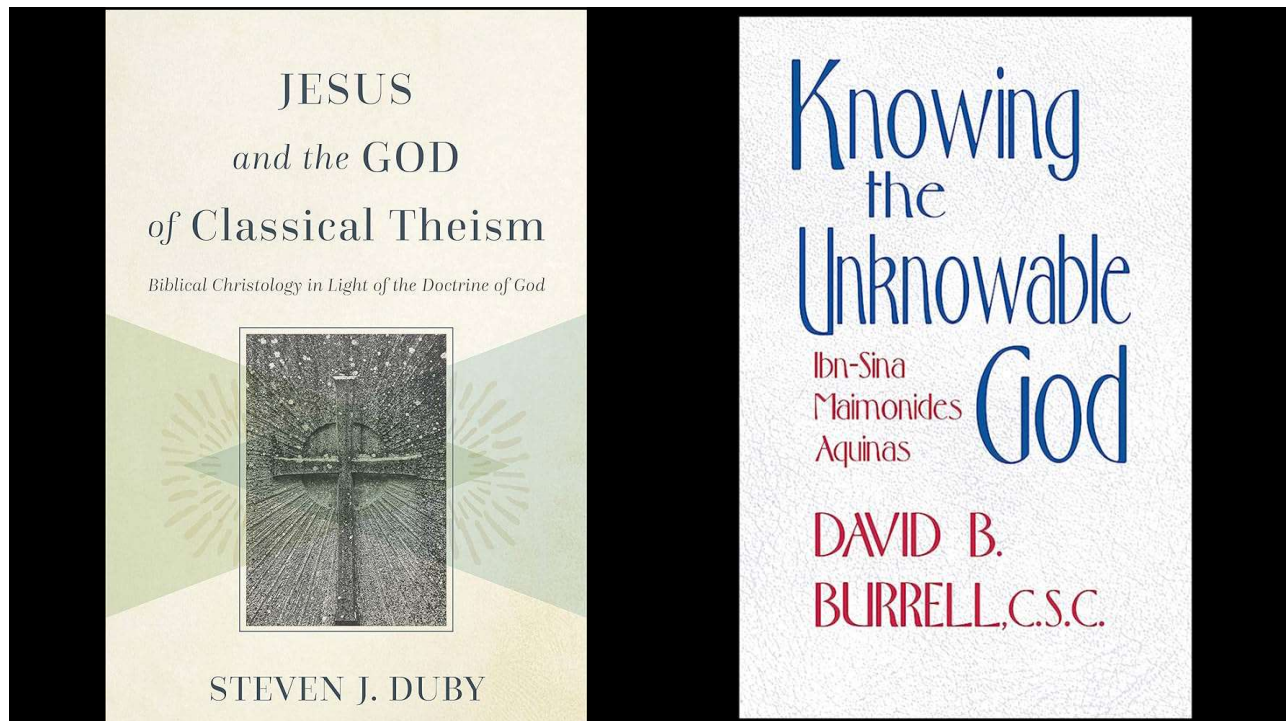
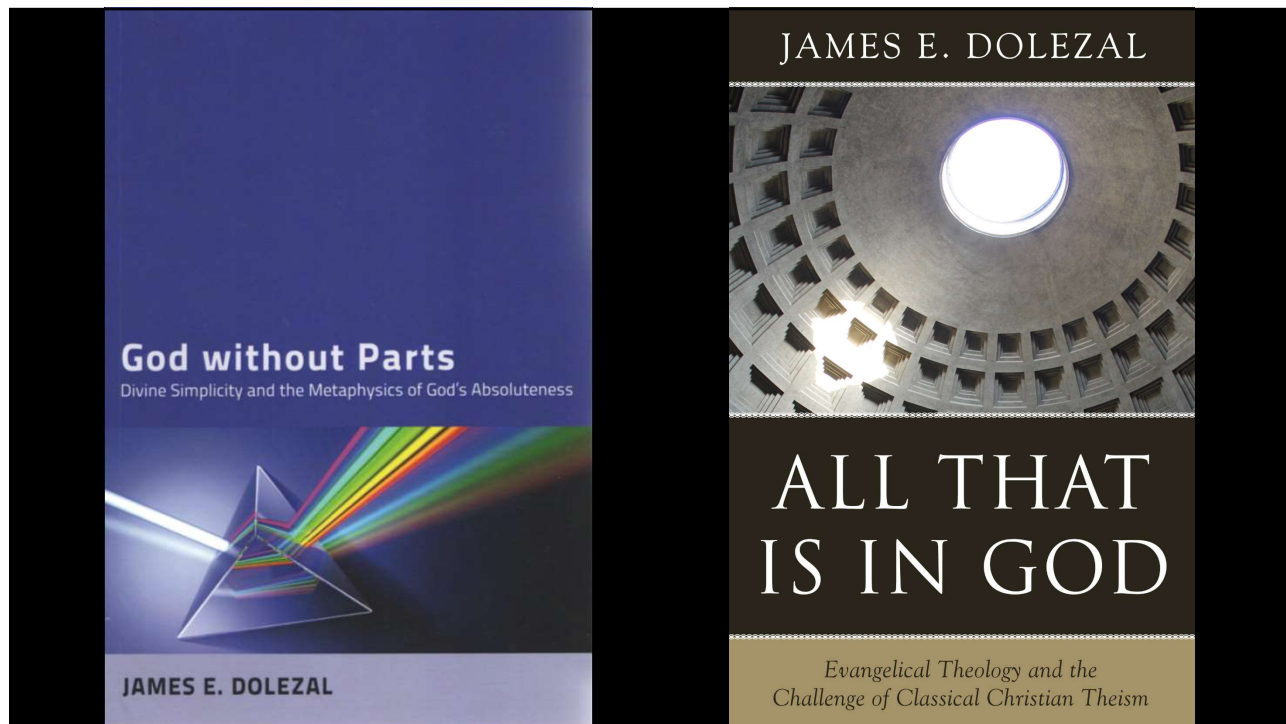


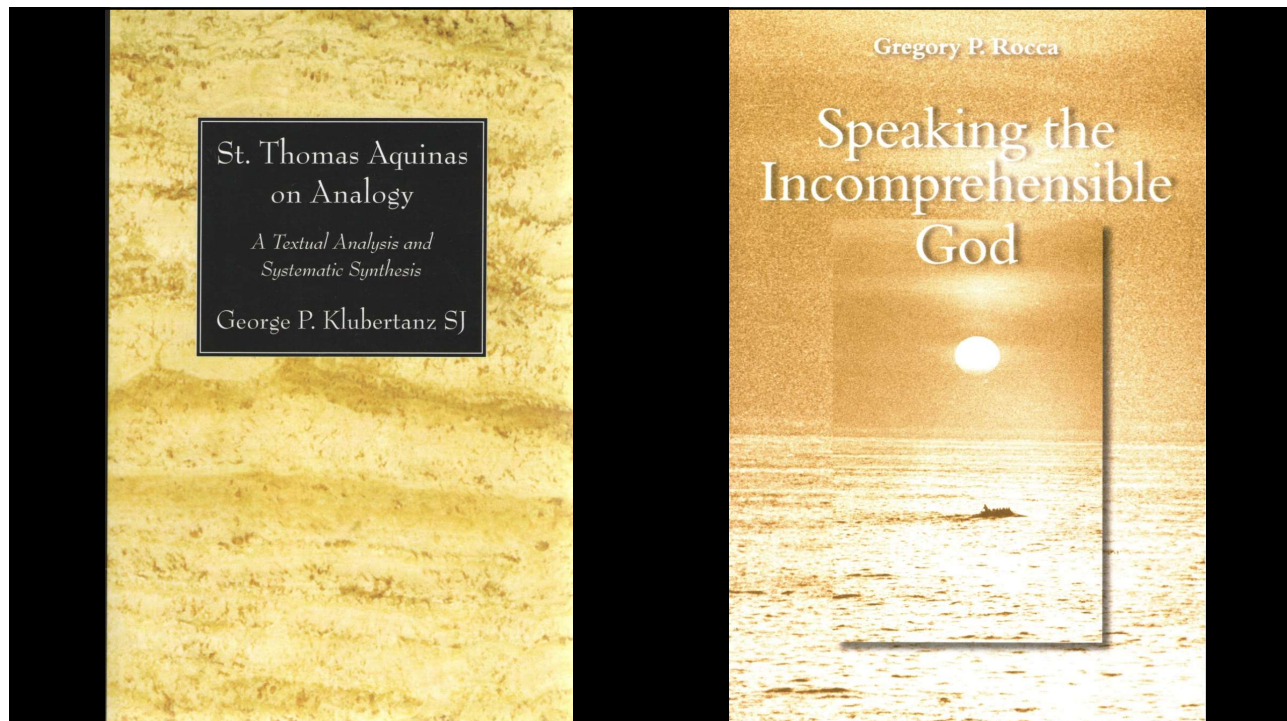
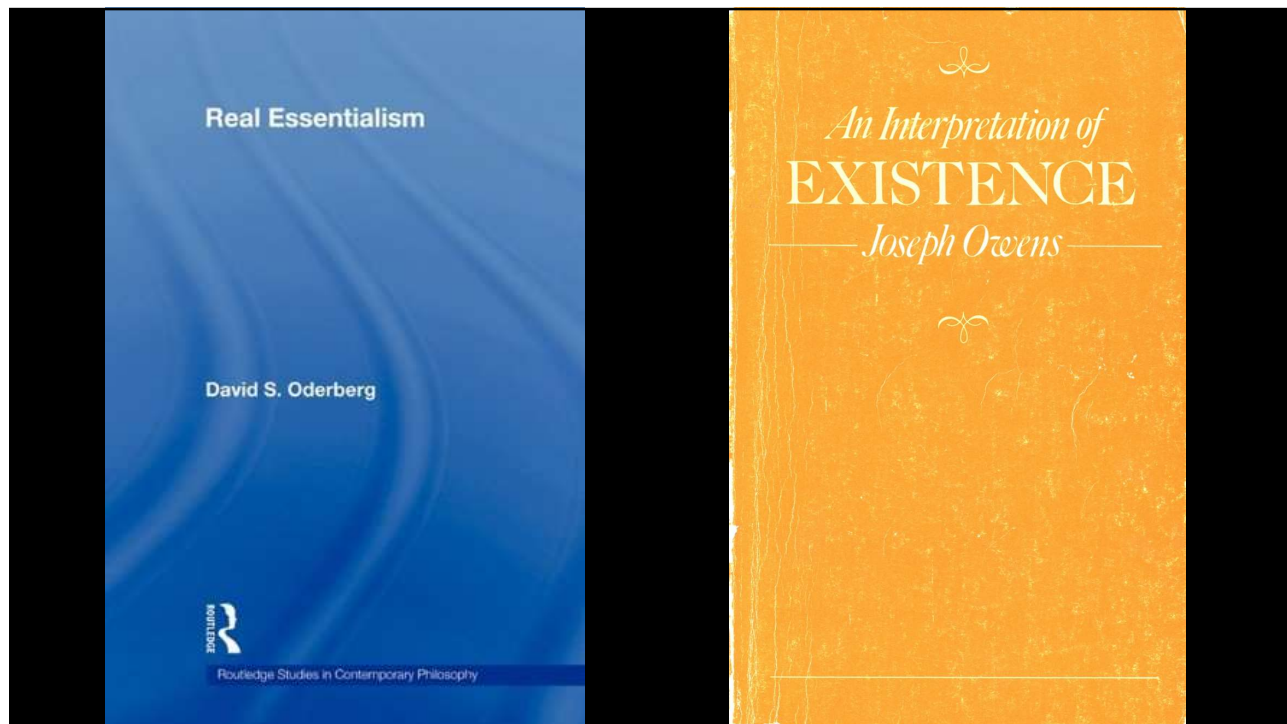














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