

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND ACADEMIC DIALOGUE: A REPLY TO BRUCE WARE

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I want to begin by expressing my utmost respect for the high value placed on academic fairness and integrity by the editor of *JETS*. This is clearly evidenced in his invitation to John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, and myself to offer substantive responses to Ware's essay, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?" I applaud this attitude and hope that it continues to permeate the Evangelical Theological Society.

I shall first offer three preliminary comments in response to Ware's essay and shall then proceed to offer brief responses to seven arguments Ware raises against the openness position.

1. *Exhaustive divine foreknowledge?* Throughout his paper Ware consistently depicts open theists as denying "exhaustive divine foreknowledge." Open theists have usually contrasted their view with the classical view of "exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge," not "exhaustively *divine* foreknowledge."¹ Indeed, the phrase "exhaustively *divine* foreknowledge" seems quite redundant. Is there a *non-divine* form of exhaustive foreknowledge Ware is concerned about?

The difference between "exhaustive divine foreknowledge" and "exhaustively definite foreknowledge" is significant. If one is willing to understand the open view *in terms of its own understanding of reality*, open theists do not deny that God possesses exhaustive knowledge of the future. In our view, as in the classical view, God's knowledge is co-extensive with reality. What we deny is that the future is *exhaustively definite*. In our view, the future is rather partly composed of possibilities. Hence, precisely because we affirm that God's knowledge is perfect, we hold that God knows the future as partly definite and partly indefinite. He possesses exhaustive foreknowledge, for he knows everything about the future there is to know. But he does not possess exhaustively *definite* foreknowledge, for the future he perfectly knows is not exhaustively definite. As we have consistently maintained, the disagreement between open theists and classical theists is not over *the scope* of God's knowledge, but over *the content* of reality that God perfectly knows.

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¹ See my *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) 85–144, where I spend two chapters contrasting the open view with the classical EDF (exhaustively definite foreknowledge) perspective.

By contrasting the open view with exhaustively *divine* foreknowledge, however, Ware makes it look like we are denying the exhaustiveness of God's knowledge. This sounds more alarming and perhaps helps his cause, but it does not engage open theists on their own terms and in their strongest possible light—which is one of the ethical norms academic societies live by.

2. *Should we break fellowship on the basis of perceived implications?* Ware argues that the Evangelical Theological Society should break fellowship with open theists on the grounds that the open view has “seriously unacceptable theological and practical implications.” Among other things, in his view, open theism implies that God cannot do what the Bible says God does, hold false beliefs and possess imperfect wisdom, that God cannot be trusted to guide believers, and that the Bible is not inerrant. Of course, open theists within the Evangelical Theological Society have always denied these accusations. We have reiterated our commitments and responded to these sorts of charges numerous times before in writing—though, unfortunately, one would never surmise this from Ware's essay.

Two things need to be said about this. First, Ware may not find our responses convincing, but it would be nice—to say nothing of displaying more academic integrity—if he had at least interacted somewhat with our responses rather than proceeding as though we had no response. One almost gets the impression from Ware's essay that he is catching open theists totally off guard with new criticisms.

Second, one must be very careful about dismissing a position—to say nothing of breaking fellowship with a group of believers—on the basis of the implications *they* think follow from that position. After all, to many Arminians and open theists, the Calvinism Ware defends seems to deny the glory of God, the universal love of God, the wisdom of God, the urgency of prayer, the realness of God's interactions with us, human moral responsibility, the need for missions, and many other things. Yet, since *Calvinists themselves* do not deny these things, they are accepted as sisters and brothers in Christ. Arminians and open theists may judge them to be (fortunately) logically inconsistent, but we should not ascribe to them conclusions which *we think* follow from their position but which they themselves deny.

Open theists would simply like this Christian and academic courtesy to be extended to us. Ware obviously cannot understand how we avoid the implications he ascribes to us. Fine, perhaps we are simply logical nincompoops. Or perhaps (as I believe) Ware has difficulty getting inside a system of thought that is radically different from his own. But in either case, it seems misguided and unchristian to move to brand a position as non-evangelical because some cannot understand how they avoid certain negative implications they think their theology implies. Our explicit confessions of faith, not what others think logically follows from our confessions of faith, should be the basis of our fellowship.

3. *The infinite wisdom of God.* A final preliminary word is more fundamental to Ware's essay. The core of Ware's criticism is that a God who lacks

exhaustively definite foreknowledge loses something significant in terms of divine control which a God who possesses exhaustively definite foreknowledge possesses. “A God lacking exhaustive foreknowledge,” he writes, “is intrinsically fallible and faulty in making his future plans.”

As startling as it may sound, I submit that Ware’s entire line of reasoning is rooted in a *denial of God’s infinite intelligence*. It is, indeed, rooted in a thoroughly anthropomorphic view of God.

Ask yourself: Why are we humans less confident considering possibilities than we are certainties? It is only because our intelligence is finite. If I have two possibilities I have to anticipate rather than one certainty, I have to divide my intelligence in half to cover both possibilities. If I have four possibilities to consider, my intelligence has to be divided into fourths, and so on. This is what makes us humans “intrinsically fallible and faulty in making . . . future plans” which involve various possibilities.

But now consider the implications of our shared faith that God possesses *infinite* wisdom. God’s intelligence is not limited. This means that God does not have to “spread out” his intelligence over possibilities. God can consider and anticipate each of trillion billion possibilities as though *each one* was the *only* possibility he had to consider. Since his intelligence does not have to be—*cannot be!*—“divided up” among items, we could say that *all* of God’s intelligence is focused on each and every possibility, and each series of possibilities, *as though there were no alternative possibilities*. In other words, for a God of infinite intelligence, *there is virtually no distinction between knowing a certainty and knowing a possibility*. God thus gains no providential advantage by knowing future events as certain as opposed to knowing them as possible. He anticipates both with equal perfection.

What is crucial for us to note is that we would only assume that being certain of a future event gives God an advantage *if we did not really believe he possessed infinite intelligence!* Only if God is limited like us is knowing a certain future an advantage over knowing a possible future. Only if God is intrinsically limited in intelligence is he “intrinsically fallible and faulty in making his future plans,” because he does not possess exhaustively definite foreknowledge. And only if we assume that God is severely limited in intelligence can we share Ware’s concern that God may not even come through on his eschatological promises—unless, of course, he foresees that he “wins” in the end.

Ware writes, “Open theism’s denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge calls into question the Church’s ultimate eschatological hope that God will surely accomplish all his plans and purposes . . . not even God knows . . . what unexpected turns lay ahead and how severely these may thwart his purposes or cause him to change his plans.”

To Ware’s way of thinking, there are just too many “unexpected turns” in the future for a God who is not certain of everything ahead of time to guarantee the eschatological hope he has promised. But we need to ask, what kind of God is caught off guard by “unexpected” possibilities? What kind of God increases in confidence by facing nothing but certainties rather than possibilities? What kind of God is “intrinsically fallible and faulty” if he

does not face an exhaustively definite future? It is most certainly *not* a God of *infinite* intelligence. So far as I can see, Ware's entire essay is predicated on the assumption that this limited God is the real one.

Whatever else may be said about this, it should be clear, at the very least, that the open view does not ascribe to God less providential control and wisdom than classical Arminianism.² Indeed, it arguably ascribes to God significantly more providential control and wisdom than the simple foreknowledge position, for in the open view God does not simply know what will come to pass (*viz.* what is settled), he also knows (as virtually certain) all that *might* come to pass (all that is open), and thus can intervene and alter what would otherwise come to pass. With Molinism, the God of the open view does not *under-know* the future: he *over-knows* it!³

A final word on the topic of God's intelligence should be said. I do not mean to fault my brother too much for the obvious incredulity that runs throughout his essay over how a God who faces a partly open future could pull off what the Bible ascribes to him. "Imagine the multitude of entailments that flow into human history from the various choices that free creatures make every moment of every day," Ware incredulously writes. Imagine indeed. To perfectly anticipate every possibility, and then each and every possibility that flows from each of those possibilities—and to do this from all eternity and for all of history—it *is* truly mind-boggling. God's intelligence would have to be absolutely infinite! But is this not precisely the sort of amazement we should expect when we are talking about God? We certainly cannot imagine doing it. We limited humans would need to fore-know (or perhaps even predestine) each and every action in order to pull off what the Bible ascribes to God.

But dare we bring God down to our level? Would it not be better to simply let God be God and bask in the glory of his infinite wisdom? At the very

² It is, of course, true that God *does* gain a providential advantage if he *controls* everything as opposed to knowing and anticipating possibilities. But defending Calvinism is not the stated concern of Ware's essay. As a matter of fact, however, I would argue that most of the (in my view, misguided) concerns Ware raises against open theism apply as much to classical Arminianism and can only be avoided by embracing Ware's own determinism.

³ While some open theists would disagree with me on this point, I have elsewhere argued that open theism can be construed as a variation of Molinism. See J. Beilby and P. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) 144–48, as well as "Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God" (paper presented at the ETS annual meeting, Nov. 2001). In both systems, God knows the truth value of all future-tense statements, including counterfactuals of free acts. The central difference between the two views, I argue, is that the open view distinguishes between "would-counterfactuals" and "might-counterfactuals." While many evangelicals think that the very definition of omniscience rules out all "might-counterfactuals," they actually are logically implied in the affirmation that God knows "would-counterfactuals." The logical antithesis of "agent *x* would do *y* in situation *z*" is not "agent *x* would not do *y* in situation *z*." It is rather, "It is not the case that agent *x* would do *y* in situation *z*" which is logically equivalent to "agent *x* might not do *y* in situation *z*." If "would counterfactuals" have truth value to an omniscient mind, therefore, so *must* "might counterfactuals." Hence there is no logical reason why an omniscient God could not create a world that includes "might counterfactuals" if he wanted to. The distinct claim of openness theology is that it affirms that this is in fact the kind of world God chose to create.

least, should we regard it as accurate to allege that people who actually think God *can* do this are *denying* God's wisdom in doing so?

4. *Does God hold false beliefs?* I turn now to seven specific charges that Ware brings against the open view.

To begin, Ware alleges that in the open view, "God must . . . possess innumerable false beliefs about what will happen in the future." In my opinion, the claim is quite unfounded. It is, of course, true that Scripture reports Yahweh as revealing that at times he "thought" or "expected" something would occur which did not come to pass (e.g. Jer 3:7–8, 19–20; Isa 5:1–5; Ezek 12:2). And it is true that open theists find no compelling reason not to take this language at face value. But only a most unsympathetic reading of Jeremiah's and Isaiah's language—and of the open theists who simply repeat it—would conclude that this language entails that God holds false beliefs.

A more sympathetic explanation is readily available. When God says he "thought" or "expected" something would take place that did not take place, he is simply reflecting his perfect knowledge of probabilities. When the improbable happens, as sometimes is the case with free agents, God genuinely says he "thought" or "expected" the more probable would happen. Because God is infinitely intelligent, we cannot conceive of God being altogether shocked, as though he did not perfectly anticipate and prepare for this very improbability (as much as if it was a certainty from all eternity). But *relative to the probabilities of the situation*, the outcome was surprising [*viz.* improbable].

Jeremiah and Isaiah (and open theists who repeat their language) can only be accused of ascribing false beliefs to God if they claim that God was mistakenly *certain* something would occur which did not occur. But no biblical author, or open theist, has ever said this.

To turn the tables for a moment, if I may, the question Ware must answer regarding such passages is why God reveals that he "thought" or "expected" something was going to occur which did not occur if he knew from all eternity (or predestined from all eternity) that it would *not* occur? If one insists that open theists have difficulties in taking passages like Jeremiah 3, Isaiah 5, and Ezekiel 12 at face value, must we not concede that those who anthropomorphize these passages because they do not square with the doctrine of exhaustively definite foreknowledge face difficulties at least as serious as these?

5. *Does God make mistakes?* Ware alleges that because of God's "expansive ignorance" and "innumerable mistaken beliefs" about the future, the God of open theism makes many mistakes he later regrets. Two points should be made.

First, Ware's issue is with Scripture before it is with open theists, for, like it or not, the Bible depicts God as regretting the outcome of previous decisions he made (Gen 6:6–7; 1 Sam 15:11, 35). Ware wants to reduce all such language to anthropomorphisms (revealing what?), for it does not

square with his presupposition about what the wisdom of God must be like. But, aside from the fact that there is nothing in the narrative of the text to suggest this language is anthropomorphic, a more humble approach might be to entertain the possibility that our presuppositions about what God's wisdom must be like might be wrong and to allow the face-value meaning of the biblical text to teach us something we perhaps did not expect. What if God really could be just like the authors of Genesis and 1 Samuel suggest? What if God really could regret previous decisions?

Second, it is not difficult to conceive imaginatively of how God could regret previous decisions without implying that he previously made a wrong decision. The wisest decision can go awry if other agents make poor choices, and this does not diminish the wisdom of the decision. An executive who chooses an accountant with a stellar record over an accountant with a poor record to watch over her most important account might regret her decision if her exemplar accountant chooses, quite out of character, to act irresponsibly. But this does not mean her choice at the time was a bad one. It was the best one—but agents are free.

To turn the tables once again, if open theists face any difficulty over how God can regret wise decisions because agents are free, it seems less than what Ware must face in explaining how God can regret decisions which turned out exactly as he predestined them to turn out. If the executive came to regret placing her top accountant in charge of the account, yet foreknew (or predestined) that he would botch the job, we would not be inclined to judge her as supremely wise.

On this matter, Ware chides me for my advice to Suzanne, a woman who had abandoned the faith for a time because God told her to marry a man who turned out to be unfaithful and abusive.⁴ The painful marriage ended in a divorce. Assuming that God foreknew what her husband would do, she concluded that God (if he existed) answered her lifelong prayer for a godly husband in a cruel fashion. In her words, "He set me up for a nightmare."

Appealing to 1 Sam 15:11 and 35, I counseled Suzanne that God did not set her up for the nightmare she endured. Rather, God's guidance was the best guidance at the time she was considering marrying this man. But the man she married was a free moral agent who unfortunately chose to follow a path of sin. I encouraged her to see God as now grieving with her over how things turned. The advice worked in bringing Suzanne back into the Christian faith.

Against this advice, however, Ware asks, "What assurances can [Suzanne] be given that God will do any better in his future leading than he has in the past?" My answer is that, where free agents are involved, there is no infallible guarantee that marriages will turn out as we hoped—and all of us, including Ware, *already know this*. But in the open view, when things go bad it is not about how good or bad God's leading is. It's about how good or bad *people* choose to be. This cannot be said of Ware's own position, however. In his theology, it *is* always about God. So Ware needs to ask himself

⁴ The story is found in my *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 103–6.

the question he asked me: What assurance can *he* give to Suzanne that God's leading would bring better results in the future than it has in the past? And remember, it was Ware's theology that brought Suzanne to despair and disbelief in the first place! The open view is what gave her a "new lease on life" in Christ.

6. *Is open theism worthless idolatry?* Ware points out that in Isaiah 40–48, Yahweh distinguishes himself from idols by proclaiming future events ahead of time. Since open theism does not hold that God knows the future as exhaustively definite, Ware associates open theists with the idolaters Yahweh railed against in this passage. "[O]pen theism is vulnerable to the charge of commending as God one whom the true God declares is false and worthless."

As a matter of fact, the proclamations Yahweh makes in Isaiah 40–48 do not put on display a unique knowledge he has—as though he happens to know things idols do not know. They rather put on display a unique power Yahweh has: he is able to bring to pass his intentions in a way idols cannot. The Lord says:

I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, "*My purpose shall stand,*
and *I will fulfill my intention*" (Isa 46:10–11, emphasis added).

God's declarations are rooted in his specific intentions and his knowledge that he can carry them out. Similarly, several chapters later the Lord says,

The former things I declared long ago,
they went out from my mouth and I made them known;
then suddenly *I did them and they came to pass . . .* (Isa 48:3,
emphasis added).

The reason the Lord is declaring his intentions ahead of time is so that, when they came to pass, the Israelites could not say, "My idol *did them*, my carved image and my cast image *commanded them*" (Isa 48:5, emphasis added). The issue, we see, is not "which God *knows* what" but "which God *does* what." Yahweh can do what no idol can do: namely, deliver the Israelites out of captivity.

Three things follow from this. First, the passages do not refute the openness view that God knows future free acts as possible, not definite. What God declares ahead of time are things he himself is going to bring about.

Second, if we wish to follow Ware's exegesis and interpret these passages so as to imply that God has exhaustively definite foreknowledge of the whole of the future, on the terms of the text we can only do so if we also follow Ware and conclude that God knows this *because he meticulously controls the whole of history*. Hence, if Ware's argument counts against open theism, it counts against Arminianism as well.

Third, there is simply no reason to stretch these passages to cover the whole of world history. Throughout Isaiah 40–48, Yahweh specifies what intentions he is talking about. He intends to deliver Israel out of Babylon. He declares the end (the fulfillment) of *this plan* from its very beginning. Stretching this intention (and sovereign control) to cover every event in world history is unwarranted.

7. *A unique “openness hermeneutical theory”?* Ware worries that if we take biblical depictions of God changing his mind, regretting decisions, experiencing surprise, etc., as straightforward depictions, then some might eventually go further and conclude that God has a poor memory, has an uncontrolled temper, has to travel to different locations, etc. “Given openness hermeneutical theory,” he writes, “what would prevent this extension of their beliefs?” Two things may be said in response.

First, it is not clear what Ware is referring to when he speaks of the “openness hermeneutical theory.” Where have we ever espoused a unique hermeneutical theory? Openness theologians utilize the same hermeneutical principles as everyone else. We seek to interpret a passage according to the author’s intended meaning. We simply do not see anything in narratives that describe God as thinking about the future in terms of what may or may not happen (e.g. Exod 4:1–9; 13:17; Jer 26:3; Ezek 12:2) or changing his mind (e.g. Exod 32:10–14; Jer 18:7–10; Jonah 3:10) or expecting something to happen that does not come to pass (Jer 3:6–7; 19–20; Isa 5:1–10) that suggests they are anthropomorphisms. Nor do we see what true meaning such texts could convey if they are taken as anthropomorphisms.

Nor do we think it likely that biblical authors assumed the view of divine foreknowledge that requires taking these passages as anthropomorphisms. For example, after the Lord told Moses in no uncertain terms that the elders of Israel would listen to him and follow him out of Egypt (Exod 3:16–18), Moses asks, “But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me . . .” (Exod 4:1). Moses clearly did not believe God possessed exhaustively definite foreknowledge. (One wonders if Ware would want Moses to leave the ETS!) Hence, we think it unlikely that Moses intended all of his references to God changing his mind or thinking of the future in subjunctive terms as anthropomorphisms.

Second, everybody, including Ware, takes some texts as literal and other texts as figurative.⁵ No evangelical thinks that the incarnation is figurative, for example, but all agree that expressions of God’s “right arm” are. So on this score openness proponents are in the exact same boat as everyone else. The only difference is that there is one category of texts openness theologians take in a straightforward fashion that most others take as figurative.

⁵ When I speak of texts being “literal,” I am not thereby denying that there is a metaphorical element in them. I simply mean they have a similar meaning when applied to God as they have when applied to humans. Hence, for example, to say that passages that speak of God “changing his mind” is “literal,” I mean only that it has a similar meaning as when humans are said to “change their mind.” But, obviously, the very concept of “changing one’s mind” is a metaphor depicting a change of intention. No one *literally* “changes their minds.”

It would, I believe, prove helpful to debate the relative merits of our exegesis on a text-by-text basis. But employing this “domino logic” to warn people about a supposed “openness hermeneutical theory” is not so helpful. Indeed, the same logic could be used (with equal implausibility) against everyone.

8. *Does the open view undermine inerrancy?* Ware is convinced that the open view of the future “makes it impossible to affirm Scripture’s inerrancy unequivocally . . .” This is an important point, since the move to exclude open theists from the Evangelical Theological Society was originally rooted in the claim that our position is inconsistent with the Society’s affirmation of faith that the Bible is inerrant. The basis for Ware’s allegation is that open theists cannot affirm the truth of “inviolable divine predictions that involve future free human decisions and actions . . .” Two things may be said in response.

First, since God has informed us that he reserves the right to alter his plans, even after he has decreed them (Jer 18:6–10), and since Scripture offers us numerous illustrations of God doing just this, even after he has made what seemed to be “inviolable” pronouncements, one wonders how Ware acquired the inerrant insight into what exactly is and is not an “inviolable” prophecy. I say his insight must be “inerrant,” for unless it is so, Ware is not in a position to denounce open theists for denying inerrancy on the grounds that a we deny the inviolability of a decree Ware decrees is inviolable.

Second, since open theists hold that God is able to unilaterally settle as much of the future ahead of time as he desires, there is nothing in principle preventing us from affirming any specific decree of God, even if we were to agree that the decree is inviolable. For example, most open theists agree with those NT scholars who argue that many, if not most, of the specific “fulfillments” cited in the NT are illustrative in nature, not predictive. But even if we are inclined to accept that the OT predicted (say) that Jesus’ clothes had to be divided, that Jesus had to be betrayed, and that Jesus had to be given vinegar for water (but not poison for food, as the first half of the sentence in Ps 69:21 “predicts”?), there’s absolutely nothing in our position that would prevent us from doing so. Nor is there any reason why God could not decree that a certain man would have a certain name and carry out a certain deed (as with Josiah and Cyrus) ahead of time. Our view simply holds that God leaves open whatever aspects of the future he sovereignly chooses to leave open. Hence, the argument that open theism somehow undermines inerrancy is without merit.

9. *Does the Open View Undermine the Substitutionary Atonement?* One of the most remarkable allegations Ware brings against the open view is that, since in the open view God does not foreknow the specific sins future agents will commit, they cannot consistently say that Jesus’ death was a payment for those sins.

I confess that I have difficulty responding to this objection. Jesus’ death is “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the

sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Now I can easily conceive how someone might accuse another of denying this verse if they denied that Jesus died for everyone, as Ware himself believes. But I cannot conceive how someone can be accused of undermining the truth of this verse because they hold that it is not certain from all eternity which *particular* sins Jesus' blood will cover. If I write my daughter a blank check to go out and buy any car she chooses, would Ware argue that I did not really pay for the car because I did not know the exact price of the car ahead of time?

If I felt compelled to do so, I could argue, on the basis of God's infinite intelligence, that Jesus paid the price not just for every future sin that would be committed, but for every *possible* sin which God foreknew (as though it was certain) might be committed. In this case, we might say that Jesus *over-paid* for all the sins of the world; he certainly did not *under-pay* it. But, as a matter of fact, I cannot take this objection seriously enough to develop this option further.

10. *Is the crucifixion uncertain?* Finally, Ware argues that the open view must allow that Jesus may have chosen not to go to the cross, for (he assumes) we all affirm that Jesus possessed libertarian free will. Two things may be said in response.

First, if this argument works against open theists, it must work as well against all Arminians. If Ware's reasoning is correct, all Arminians as well as open theists simply have to say that God (and we sinners) "got lucky." As *it turned out*, Jesus *did* choose to go to the cross. The fact that in the Arminian view, God discovered he "got lucky" ahead of time does not alter the fact that, if Jesus possessed libertarian freedom with regard to this act, he could have chosen otherwise. Hence, if one wants to dismiss a theology on the grounds that it implies that things *could have* gone otherwise, one must dismiss Arminianism along with open theism.

But, as a matter of fact, Ware's conclusions need not be assumed. While space restrictions prevent me from fleshing out my own Christology at this point, let me simply go on record as saying that I, for one, hold that Jesus possessed compatibilistic freedom. In my view, Christ was humanity *eschatologically defined*. He was the "already" entering into the "not-yet." He was what we shall be when perfected. The whole purpose of libertarian freedom, in my view, is to become what the God-man was from the start: humans who are defined *in their essence* by openness to God. Being contingent beings who are semi-autonomous from God, we must go through a probationary period, utilizing libertarian free will, to becoming open (or closed) in our essence toward God. But Jesus, being God, was never on probation and hence did not possess libertarian free will (with regard to his openness to God).

Be that as it may, on the basis of the demeanor exemplified throughout his essay, I do not for a moment hold out the hope that Ware will attempt to sympathetically understand this position.⁶ But perhaps this simple state-

⁶ Indeed, Ware has already pronounced that if I were to ascribe compatibilistic freedom to Jesus, this would mean that the incarnation would constitute "the most egregious act of divine coercion perpetrated in the history of the universe." I, of course, deny this.

ment of my view is enough to suggest that there are avenues available to openness theologians and Arminians to avoid the implications Ware attributes to their position—if they feel the need to avoid these implications. It might once again also serve to demonstrate the need for restraint in moving to brand a theology as “non-evangelical” on the basis of what an outsider to the system thinks are its negative theological and practical consequences.

11. *Closing Word.* I want to close with a few frank words regarding this debate in which we find ourselves. I love Bruce Ware as a brother in Christ, and I know that his fundamental motivation is to advance the kingdom of God as he understands it. Whatever else one takes from my response to his essay, I hope it is clear that my issues are not about him personally, but about his understanding of what he wants to advance, and the means and arguments he uses to advance it. Still, I must frankly confess that I am deeply saddened and frustrated by his essay and by the political agenda that lies behind it.

I enjoy healthy dialogue and robust scholarly debate. But try as I might, I cannot imagine this essay fitting into this category. Among other things, the trademark of academic dialogue is a willingness to sympathetically get on the inside of your “opponent’s” position, understand it from the inside, and critique it in its strongest possible form. Ware’s essay consistently gave openness views their worst possible (and often inaccurate) spin, and his critique rarely engaged seriously with ways openness proponents have already responded to the very criticisms he was raising. Consider, much of what I have written in this essay (and I would wager, much of what is in Sanders’s and Pinnock’s essays) has been written before—and Ware has read it. He undoubtedly finds our responses implausible, as he undoubtedly finds this one. But at least we should be engaged in what we perceive to be our strongest arguments.

Casting a position in its weakest possible form and using alarmist and inflammatory language is not the way to deepen understanding and to further academic and Christian dialogue. But then again, it does not seem that deepening understanding and furthering dialogue was what Ware had in mind in presenting this paper to the ETS. Indeed, its express purpose was to help *bring an end* to dialogue within the ETS with openness proponents. In short, it was, it seems, a political work. And hence, the objective was not understanding and dialogue: the objective was *to win*.

Understood with this objective, the alarmist and inflammatory language of the essay was quite appropriate and masterfully constructed. Undoubtedly, to people who are uninformed and/or deeply unsympathetic to the openness view, it may have had a significant influence. Whether Ware and those who side with him ever succeed in their political objective or not, it deeply saddens me that a Christian academic society was ever brought to this point.

Where politics reign, love and mutually beneficial dialogue are squelched. But love is the most essential thing that qualifies us as Christians, and mutually beneficial dialogue is the most essential thing that qualifies us as academics.