



Richard Rice's *Openness of God* Causes Stir Among Evangelicals

by Gary Chartier

Recent issues of America's two leading Protestant weeklies focused on a provocative new book co-authored by La Sierra University theologian Richard Rice. In May, *The Christian Century*, the voice of the Protestant mainline in America, and in January, *Christianity Today*, an evangelical periodical with the largest circulation of any American Protestant journal, published essays analyzing *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, co-authored by Rice, Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger.

Rice and his colleagues defend the view that God's interaction with and experience of the world are dynamic, that free creatures make a genuine difference in God's ongoing life. According to Rice and his co-authors, God has made human beings and other creatures with genuine freedom and integrity; thus, they are able to frustrate the achievement of God's purposes. Further, while God is aware of all future possibilities, if creaturely choices are genuinely free, then even God cannot know for certain how a free creature will decide in any given situation. Such knowledge is impossible in principle; "having certain knowledge of a future free decision" is, suggest the authors, logically on a par with "drawing a square circle"—a set of words that sound meaningful, but

really are not.

The Christian Century included two extended articles concerned with the issues raised by the *Openness of God*. Roger Olsen, of Bethel College, editor of *Christian Scholar's Review*, examines the move toward the open view with sympathetic reserve. And Andover-Newton Theological Seminary systematic theologian Gabriel Fackre cautions proponents of the open view to attend to the insights of neo-orthodox theology, with its stress on the majesty, transcendence, and incomprehensibility of God. For Fackre, paradox is an unavoidable element in any theology that intends to respond faithfully to the infinite reality of God. Fackre suggests that, in their search for coherence, consistency, clarity, and rationality, proponents of the open view may be too quick to jettison paradox.

Given the dominance of Calvinist perspectives within the evangelical movement, it is not surprising that the reaction from the contributors to the earlier *Christianity Today* discussion was mixed at best. Roger Olsen describes the book as "powerful and persuasive." But the other three discussants are clearly very uncomfortable with its thesis and arguments. Describing them as "afraid of infinity," Douglas F. Kelly argues that the authors are insufficiently familiar with the patristic tradition and its understanding of God, and con-

Evangelicals stimulated by theological proposals from Adventist theologians; rise in Adventist Book Center sales; North American college enrollments; and debate over church authority.

cludes that "all too little . . . in this volume can be taken seriously either by scholars or by ordinary Christian layfolk until its authors rethink their basic approach." For Timothy George, the authors "have devised a user-friendly God who bears an uncanny resemblance to a late-twentieth-century seeker." And Alister McGrath complains that neither Luther nor Charles Wesley is discussed in the book, maintaining that both had something of value to contribute to a discussion of divine suffering and suggesting that their absence highlights modern evangelicalism's "lack of familiarity with its own historical roots and traditions."

The theme receiving so much attention will be familiar to readers of *Spectrum* who recall Rice's first book, also entitled *The Openness of God*. In that book, Rice explored the relationship between God and the world from biblical, theological, and philosophical perspectives. Though many Adventist readers regarded its argument as flawed, reacting angrily to the claim that God's knowledge of the future might be limited, many others found its message liberating and encouraging.

This is not the first time Rice has received scholarly attention from outside the Adventist community. Evangelical New Testament scholar Royce Gordon Gruenler's Calvinist polemic, *The Inexhaustible God*, singled Rice out for criticism as an evangelical who sought to reconcile belief in creaturely freedom with a commitment to divine transcendence. Leading theological ethicist Stanley Hauerwas used a critique of an article by Rice, discussing the problem of suffering as a springboard from which Hauerwas launched an indictment of Christian responses to evil. In turn, Alvin Plantinga, whom *Time* once described as the "leading orthodox

Protestant philosopher of God in America," weighed in on Rice's side in a subsequent critique of Hauerwas.

Pinnock, a Baptist theologian who teaches at Canada's McMaster University, first discovered a reference to Rice in Gruenler's *The Inexhaustible God*. After securing a copy of the original *The Openness of God*, he became acquainted with Rice and other Adventist theologians. After the Review and Herald Publishing Association decided not to reprint *The Openness of God*, Pinnock arranged for Bethany House, an evangelical publisher, to reissue it under the new title, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*. And Pinnock's direct and indirect contributions to dialogue within Adventism have continued: He reviewed Rice's third book, *The Reign of God*, in *Spectrum*; and an Andrews University Ph.D. student, Roy Roenfeldt, chose Pinnock's understanding of the Bible as the focus of his doctoral dissertation.

The Openness of God is the second major Pinnock project enriched by Adventist cooperation. In 1987, Zondervan published *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, a collection edited by Pinnock and defending Arminianism—the view held by Adventists, Methodists, many Anglicans, and a variety of other Christians according to which God's grace does not destroy or obviate human freedom. Fritz Guy, a theo-

logian at La Sierra University, sensitively explored "The Universality of God's Love," while Rice examined the knotty question of the relationship between divine foreknowledge and creaturely freedom. "I haven't seen the will of God yet" regarding a new project, Pinnock says, though he notes that he finds the possibility of exploring the nature of divine providence appealing. He does not know for sure whether Adventist scholars will be involved in his next joint effort, but he is clearly open to their participation. While some Adventist scholars may yearn for greater contacts with the Protestant mainline, Pinnock's generosity and openness to Adventist theologians may prove to be Adventism's most significant link with the wider Christian world.

Until recently, most Protestant and Catholic systematic theologians have been largely inattentive to the question of freedom and foreknowledge. By contrast, Protestant philosophers of religion—including such essentially conservative figures as Keith Ward, Richard Swinburne, Nelson Pike, and Brian Hebblethwaite—have for many years advocated a dynamic, open view of created reality and God's relationship to the world.

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Adventist Book Center Sales in U.S. Go Up \$4.5 Million in 1994

by Ralph Martin

When President Bill Clinton wants "Boca Burgers" for vegetarian cuisine at the White House, where does he go? To the Potomac Adventist Book and Health

Food Center, of course. After the FBI checked out the store and employees, we became his supplier. The President joins U.S. senators, the director of the Federal

Aviation Administration, engineers from NASA, and thousands of ordinary citizens who find this store their one-stop center for books and health foods.

This past year was outstanding for Adventist Book Centers in the North American Division. Sales went from \$45.2 million to \$49.7 million. The Columbia Union has 18.5 percent of that total. To give our members the best possible prices on books, managers keep profits very low in our ABCs. The net earnings for 1994 were 1.5 percent.

To bring new customers into the Potomac store, manager Clyde

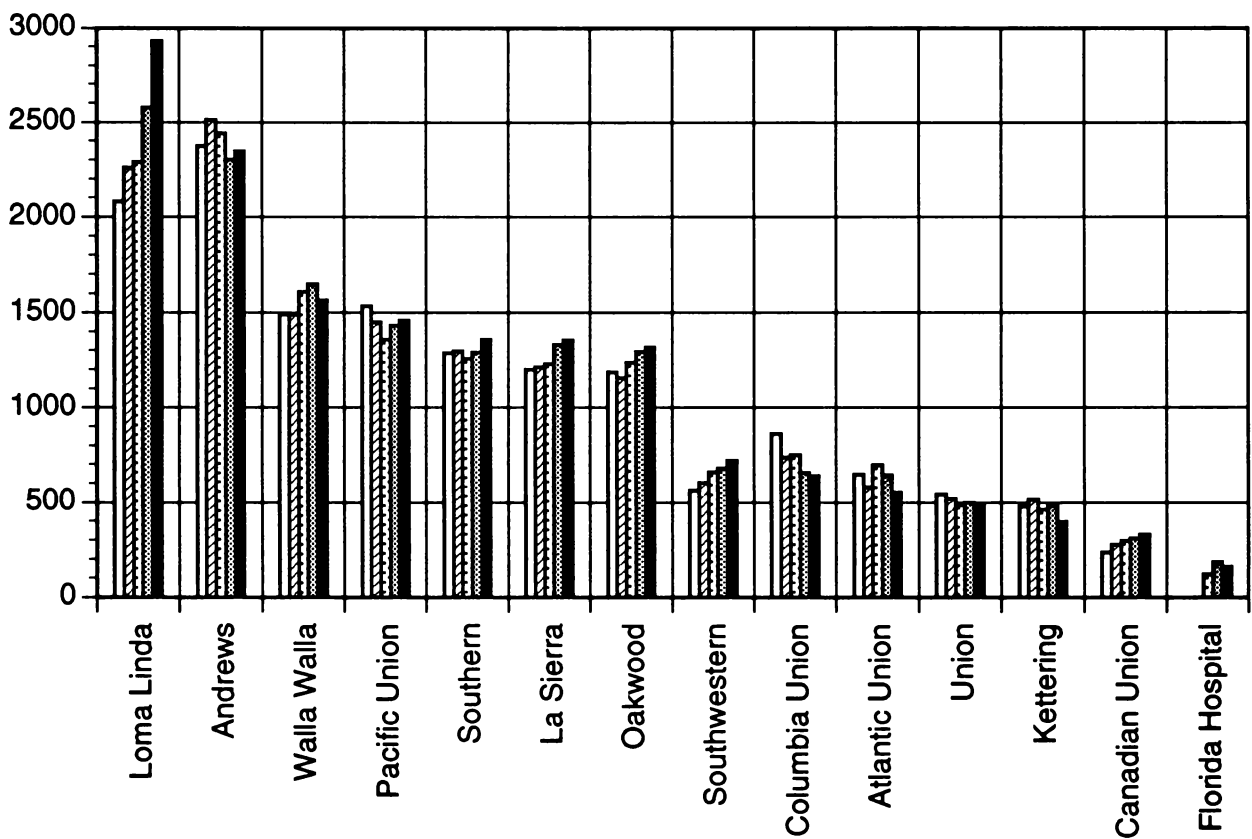
Kinder has used every method possible. The most successful is book signing by well-known writers. Authors such as Ben Carson, Joe Wheeler, Clifford Goldstein, Josh McDowell, Robert Schuller Jr., and Tipper Gore have held successful signings at the Potomac ABC. The most controversial signing was by Ollie North. The crowd was so large it created a traffic tieup. In addition, he was picketed by opponents and the store was in the public news.

How do ABC sales compare to other religious book stores? The average yearly gross sales across the nation is about \$300,000 per

store. In New Jersey, the ABC's Herb Shiroma sold \$2,517,265 in the past four years. Dick Young at the Pennsylvania ABC sold \$1,120,831 this past year. Fred Neigel at the Ohio ABC sold \$933,816 in 1994. Potomac has the largest ABC in the world, with sales of \$6,498,343 last year. Recently three Adventist Book Centers were included in the top 100 religious retailers in the United States.

Ralph W. Martin is president of the Columbia Union. This article is reprinted with permission from the Columbia Union Visitor, May 15, 1995.

Five-Year (1990-1994) Enrollment Trends (Full-time Equivalent) Adventist Colleges and Universities in North America



Figures from the North American Division Data Management Service: Board of Higher Education, December 5, 1994