

Title: The Doctrine of Divine Immutability as God's Constancy
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ABSTRACT

A central claim of orthodox Christian theology is that God is immutable. That is, God exists and he is unchangeable. But there are two major problems with this claim: Can a coherent account be given of what it means to say that God is immutable, which affirms God's intimate relatedness to us in our space-time world of change? And, if it can, are there good reasons or arguments to show that God is not immutable? In response to the second problem, I deny that there are good reasons or arguments to show that God is not immutable. I maintain that such arguments as allot immutability to Hellenistic philosophy and claim that immutability is alien to biblical Christian theology emphasize only one side of the origin of this term. I show, on the contrary, that the Christian doctrine of divine immutability issues both from philosophical construction and biblical revelation regarding God. So then we have only one problem, namely, how to state what Christians mean by immutability in a manner that coheres with the relatedness of God to us in our space-time world of change.

This dissertation attempts to give a coherent account of what it means to say that God is immutable and is related to space-time beings. I think that failing to harmonize God's immutability with God's relatedness with us in our changeable states would result in a conceptual dissonance between these doctrines, which would discredit the Christian message for stating contradictory doctrines about God. To promote faith in the Christian God, it is imperative that our explication of the doctrine of immutability agrees with our religious conviction that God is intimately related to us in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So I suggest that the doctrine of immutability signifies that God's existence and identity (that is, God's essence, attributes, and will) are unchangeable, but God's relational properties, which are non-essential or accidental because they do not define God, are changeable. I say that God's relational properties are changeable because on the principle of relationality, when two things are related a change in relative terms of one must be reciprocated by correlative change in the other term. Now, God is related to humans and their changing states in this space-time world. Hence the changes that humans undergo in space-time world must correlate to God's relational properties.

I develop this thesis by stating, in the first chapter, some basic philosophical and theological objections against the classical theistic doctrine of immutability. In the second chapter, I examine the classical doctrine of immutability, specifically St. Thomas Aquinas's claim that God is *altogether* unchangeable. I raise the question of whether the classical or thomistic view of immutability renders God too strict and absolute, such that we cannot meaningful say that God is related to humans in their

changeable states of existence. In chapter three, I enlist Barth's explication of immutability as God's constancy. I endorse Barth's claim that God is self-mobile in his relations with space-time beings. Chapter four matches the Thomistic and the Barthian views of immutability with the Scriptural portrait of God to ascertain whether Aquinas and Barth represent God in a manner that fits the Scriptural portrait and our religious experience of God. In chapter five, I combine Aquinas's two theses that God is unchangeable and unmovable with Barth's claim that God is mobile resulting in a potent synergy that stipulates the constancy of God's existence and identity and change in God's relational properties.